RESEARCH BRIEF SERIES

Schools Engaging Parents in Partnership
Supporting Lower-Achieving Students in Schools

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KEY IMPLICATIONS

1. School leaders must personally model commitment to a strong partnership vision and take the lead in building a supportive whole-school partnership culture.
2. A continuing curriculum in parent engagement can strengthen teacher capacity in the area of building social-emotional and relational capital, specifically targeting lower-achieving students and their parents.

BACKGROUND

Lower-achieving students need stronger support for schooling to improve their life chances in a highly-competitive world. Schools can maximise human capital by spotting hidden potential and giving targeted attention to help these students develop learning competencies. Extra effort must thus be put in by schools to connect with less-advantaged parents who lack the interest and/or skills to support their children's learning needs.

FOCUS OF STUDY

This project sought a deeper understanding about the roles school leaders, counsellors and teachers played in structuring and sustaining partnership practices to support student learning, as well as parental responses to these.

KEY FINDINGS

School programmes, structures and most importantly, school culture, form a consistent and supportive environment where even lower-performing students will be afforded chances to experience wider learning opportunities and taste success. Teachers who "have a heart" for students provide the vital sense of care that motivates them to put in the effort to achieve more. When parents see this, they too will want to work with teachers to support their children at home. A school that authentically seeks more positive parent engagement in order to better support their students will take pains to make parents feel welcome, and provide opportunities for interested parents to contribute in myriad ways to the school.

SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

Implications for Practice

Teachers who are in close contact with parents will understand their students more holistically, and can better tailor their teaching and encouragement to target learning needs.

Implications for Policy and Research

Partnerships can be forged more strongly as additional resources for supporting less

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advantaged students, and further research to investigate peer, and teacher-student, dynamics can complement these findings. Students who lack home support may benefit from stronger peer relationships and school resources to compensate for inadequate family capital.

Proposed Follow-up Activities

It is essential for school management to look into strategies to help teachers to cope with stress and burnout effectively to mitigate the effects on turnover intention among teachers.

POPULATION

2 school leaders, 5 key personnel; 26 teachers, 3 counsellors; 16 Secondary 1 & 2 students; 12 parents; in 1 secondary school.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The project investigated the relational dynamics of school-home partnership practices and how beliefs and mind-sets, school structures and cultural practices influenced the school experiences of lower-achieving students and their parents. Students were defined as lower-achievers as they began secondary school in lower streams but were identified by their teachers after the first or second year as having the potential to do academically better, and were selected for promotion into a "higher" stream the following year. The study explored the challenges they faced and how the relationships among key stakeholders around them helped to mitigate these challenges. The research lens interrogated the role of school leaders and staff in engaging parents of lower-achieving students.

In-depth interviews explored the "*whats*", "*whys*" and "*hows*" of interactions between school personnel, parents and students from stakeholders' own points of view as they made sense of conversations around student learning. Specifically, the study was guided by three research questions:

1. What are the key elements of "doing partnership" with parents in a local secondary school?
2. How do school leader/teacher/parent beliefs and mind-sets, interpersonal relationships and communication patterns between school and home contribute to learning support for lower-achieving students?
3. How do family demographics such as parental education, income and occupation influence parental responses to, interactions and relationships with school professionals?

REFERENCES

Sergiovanni, T. (2000). *The lifeworld of leadership: Creating culture, community, and personal meaning in our schools*. CA: Jossey-Bass.

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This brief was based on the project OER 30/12 LK: Schools Taking the Lead in Engaging Parents in Partnership: Supporting Lower-Achieving Students in Singapore Schools.

Request for more details
Please approach the Office of Education Research, National Institute of Education, Singapore to obtain a copy of the final report.

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