

GUIDE 1: GETTING PARENTS INVOLVED

Program Theory and Measuring Outcomes



This case study is based on “Getting Parents Involved: A field Experiment in Deprived Schools” by Francesco Avvisati, Marc Gurgand, Nina Guyon, and Eric Maurin, CEPR Discussion Paper 8020, 2010.

J-PAL thanks the authors for allowing us to use their paper.

DESCRIPTION

Increasing parental involvement has been widely touted as a means of overcoming difficulties in child learning and behavior. The program called “La mallette des parents” was designed to foster parental involvement through a series of monthly debates with the school staff on how to successfully manage the transition from primary school to middle school. These debates provided parents of sixth graders with information on the French school system and guidelines on how to assist children with homework. Can parental involvement be used as a lever to improve educational outcomes in France? Does greater engagement by parents improve discipline and behavior? Do classroom interactions also result in positive effects for children whose parents don’t attend the meetings?

Learning Objectives

To explore the issues that need to be resolved when deciding what questions to ask and what data to collect. Consider the need and purpose of a policy. Use that discussion to drive the evaluation (rather than the reverse).

Subjects Covered

Measuring a program or policy, logical framework, defining a hypothesis, selecting indicators

General Guidance

The outputs/outcomes and their corresponding indicators provided in these teaching notes may not include all possibilities, so feel free to list others in your group’s logical model if they come up in discussion. In case the participants are having difficulty coming up with all the outcomes, you could make suggestions, but be sure to not do the work for them.

Allow participants to read for 10 minutes before Discussion Topic 1.

Discussion Topic 1 Needs

1. Who is the Target Population?

Answer

- The Parents
2. What are the problems faced by the students?

Answer

- They don't receive much attention at home
- French is not their native language
- They live in one of the educationally deprived regions of France
- Children are not well-disciplined and well-behaved
- They are absent from school a lot

3. What characteristics of the French educational system make it particularly challenging for these students?

Answer

- The classrooms are varied in ability, so all students are not able to keep up with the curriculum; teachers are not able to pay more attention to slower learners.
- The system is highly centralized and schools tailor their curriculum based on the students they get
- Parents are not able to decide which school is best for their children- Can make parents less interested in their children's education

- Foreign parents are not able to understand the complicated system and are thus shy to get involved

4. What features of the home environment make it challenging?

Answer

- The children's parents don't speak the language of instruction – they are unable to help them with homework
- Parents are not well-educated - can't teach their kids
- Parents don't understand the importance of education
- Not much is done at home to make sure that children attend school regularly
- There are social barriers because the children's families belong to lower class

5. What might we see different in household of high-performing students?

Answer

- Parents are more involved in their children's education – they go to school often and talk to teachers about their kid's performance
- Teachers are more involved motivated – feel more accountable due to parents involvement
- Children don't have discipline issues and attend school regularly
- People value education more
- There is atmosphere or overachieving
- Parents are literate and can effectively help their kids with homework

Discussion Topic 2

Program Theory

1. What are the main characteristics of these informational meetings?

a. Purpose

- To help parents of sixth graders to transition from primary school to middle school

b. Schedule

- Three meetings carried out initially over a course of two months
- Followed by, the choice of attending more intense meetings either monthly or biweekly

c. Agenda

- To explain the functioning of the French school system and the responsibilities of different actors
- To give parents tips on how to help children with homework
- To help parents adapt to the report card results and assist their children accordingly
- Advanced meetings – provide training for parents to improve their literacy and computer skills

d. Features

- They are very interactive and encourage asking questions
- Advanced meetings – Parents and schools can bring external experts to these meetings
- They provide a learning opportunity for parents

2. How might these meetings encourage parents to pay more attention to their children's education?

Answer

- They provide parents with an opportunity to come to their children's school and interact with teachers.
- They help parents understand how the school works- who's accountable for what, who to approach for which problem if and when they encounter any
- They improve parent's literacy directly equipping parents with ability to help children with homework
- They help parents understand how to assess how well or bad badly their children are doing in school, giving parents a guideline to go on
- They help raise awareness about the importance of education among parents, making it easier for children to talk about school with their parents more often
- Just inviting parents to such meeting sends a signal to parents about the importance of involvement of parents in their children's education
- Parents get an opportunity to talk to other parents in their children's class in these meetings- can discuss the problems they commonly face, how often parents tackle them

3. What are the potential challenges? Why might the program fail?

Answer

- The already uninterested parents might not understand the importance of these meetings and not register for them
- Parents logistical constrains might prevent them from showing up for these meeting
- The meetings might not as productive as promised ,due to linguistic barriers for foreign parents and cognitive ability for illiterate parents

- When parents find out, from the reports cards, that their kids are not doing well in school, it might discourage parents from helping them altogether
- Some parents might take their children's performance too seriously and become so competitive that the child might loss interest in studies altogether

Discussion Topic 3

Out comes and Indicators

1. What are the possible positive, negative and null effects of the parental involvement intervention on child development and learning?

Answer

- a. Positive Effects:
 - More concerned and involved parents
 - More motivated teachers (greater accountability)
 - Improved child behavior
 - Improved discipline in classes
 - Improved learning outcomes
- b. Negative Effects:
 - Too much prsure from parents on children to perform well – might discourage kids
 - Report of their kids' low-performance might make parents think they can't do much to help and give-up all together
- c. Null Effects:
 - Parents attend meetings but don't get much out of them to be able to get more involved in their kid's education
 - Parents get more involved with their kids but are not able to bring about the desired outcomes

- Please list all the indicators you would use to measure each of these potential outcomes.
- d. Parent involvement
 - School-based involvement (participation in school meetings, participation in school meetings, setting up appointments with teachers)
 - Home-based involvement (hours spent helping with homework, knowledge of grades, control over time spent watching TV/ playing games)
 - General perception and understanding (knowledge of available optional courses, plan's about child's future, satisfaction with school, anxiety about violence)
 - e. Kids' behavior
 - School attendance
 - Instances of violent behavior
 - Temporary exclusions
 - Disciplinary warnings
 - f. Learning outcomes
 - Teacher marks
 - Externally administered examinations
 - Language development

Discussion Topic 4

Defining the Hypot hesis

1. What might be some examples of key hypotheses you would test? Pick one.

Examples of possible hypotheses:

A, Informational campaigns will encourage parents to take more interest in their children's education/ teach them and thus improve learning outcomes

B, Informational campaigns will make parents more concerned about their children's behavior and take steps to discipline children at home

C, Informational campaigns will teach parents the importance of schooling and education and make them send their kids to school more regularly

2. Which indicators would you use to test your primary hypothesis?

See d,e and f above, for possible indicators relating to parental involvement, child behavior and learning outcomes

Discussion Topic 5

Formalizing the Theory of Change

1. What are the steps or conditions that link the informational campaign for parents to the final outcomes?

See chart below

2. What indicators should you measure at each of these steps?

See chart below

3. Using the outcomes and conditions, draw a possible logical framework, linking the intervention to the final outcomes.

See chart below

TABLE 1: LOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Needs	Input	Output	Outcome	Impact	Long-term Goal
There are high rates of truancy, violence and indiscipline among children and learning outcomes are poor	Informational campaigns for parents with school staff	Parents attend these meetings and learn about the school system and how to help their children will homework	Parents get more involved in their children's education at home	Children get more disciplined, less violent and get better grades	Fewer children dropout of school, more go on to complete secondary education and have better job outcomes
Indicators					
		Attendance at school meetings	Hours spent helping with homework, control over children's activities, knowledge about grades	School attendance, disciplinary warnings, temporary exclusions	Literacy level, crime rates, incomes