

Community Involvement in School Management

State of the Evidence

Description of the Evidence

Programs to increase community participation in school management or implement school management reforms have had inconsistent effects on learning. When community programmes have been effective, they often improved both learning and participation; when they were not effective, they usually improved neither. Community involvement interventions have been successful when they go beyond simply providing information to parents on their roles and are empowered to hold schools accountable and given concrete tools to make informed decisions. Evaluated programs have included:

- Providing **information** to community members on their role in school management, as in India (Pandey et al. 2009), which had mixed effects on learning, including some positive effects and some null effects (a 14 to 27 percent increase in skills including reading, writing, or mathematics, depending on the state, but no detectable effects on some of these skills in some states); or as in another example in India (Banerjee et al. 2010), which had no effect on learning
- Providing **training** to community members to involve them more in assessment or school management, as in India (Banerjee et al. 2010), where training on community-led assessment had no effect on learning, but training on how to teach children to read improved literacy across various measures; and Kenya (Duflo et al. 2014), where training of parents in school committees combined with hiring of additional contract teachers had a positive effect on learning (0.20 standard deviations) but was not tested independently of the additional contract teachers
- Providing **money** to school management committees as in Niger (Beasley and Huillery 2017) or The Gambia (Blimpo et al. 2015), neither of which had any significant effects on learning

Some programs combine these elements, but with mixed results. For example, combining training and grants in The Gambia (Blimpo et al. 2015) did not improve learning. However, a study in Indonesia (Pradhan et al. 2014) compared various



versions of a program that included grants, training, elections for committee members, and facilitated connections between school committees and village councils, and found that while the grants and training did not increase learning, elections and facilitated connections did, by 0.17 to 0.23 standard deviations on Indonesian language tests.

The evidence on community involvement in school management is inconsistent and is likely highly dependent on context and other design features.

Notes on Context

In some cases where levels of adult education or literacy are low, involving parents in school management may not be effective if parents don't have the tools, capacity, experience, or information to make informed decisions about educational policies or practices. If parents don't have time to be involved in school management effectively, these types of programs may also not be effective.

Another key constraint to the effectiveness of community involvement programs is the power asymmetry between the communities and teachers, since communities often do not have any effective ways of holding teachers accountable. The evidence from [Pradhan et al \(2014\)](#) in Indonesia is suggestive in this regard because community training and grants by themselves had no effect, but did have a positive effect when combined with linkages with locally elected leaders who may have had more authority to act. Similarly, [Duflo et al 2014](#) found that training school management committees led to improved performance of contract teachers (who the school committees had direct authority over), but not that of regular civil service teachers (over whom the school committees had no direct authority).

If the barriers to affecting government or even local policies about schools are too high, providing pathways for direct individual action from community members may be more effective than informing communities of how they could in theory affect school policies.

Equity Considerations

Providing pathways for parents from a variety of types of communities all served by the school is important if implementing a community engagement program. For example, if a school serves two ethnic groups and a community engagement program facilitates involvement from one ethnic group but not the other (for any number of reasons), this may exacerbate inequalities in learning between the two groups. It is therefore important to understand the different profiles of families served by a school to ensure that community engagement is encouraged equitably. Some community members may be more able to be engaged in school management than others, due to higher levels of literacy, more free time not spent working, or more past experiences with formal education. It is important to consider these differences when designing a community engagement program.

Operationalization

Generalizability

Drawing on [J-PAL's Generalizability Framework](#), below are questions that will help you determine if a community involvement program might increase learning outcomes in your context. The below questions are not meant to be an exhaustive list of questions you will need to answer to determine if this type of program is appropriate for your context. They can, however, provide a starting point for applying the global evidence on this type of program to your specific context.

Local Conditions

- What is the adult literacy level in your context? What is the typical level of education adults have received? This will be important to help you understand the capacity of parents to be involved in school management.

Does the above differ significantly among different ethnic groups, socioeconomic groups, language groups, or other groups? This is important to help you avoid strengthening existing disparities across groups.

- How busy do adults tend to be with work in the community? Do women often hold jobs? If adults tend to be very busy with work, they may be less available to participate in community management programs.

Generalized Lessons on Behavior

- The evidence on community engagement in school management is inconsistent.
- Some evidence suggests that programs which aimed to empower schools or communities to take direct action or raised their social status were more effective at improving learning.

Local Implementation

- Are schools willing to involve communities in management decisions? Has this kind of idea been discussed previously? Has a previous community management program been tried in your context, or does one currently exist? It is important to understand if groundwork has been established both from the perspective of the community and from the perspective of the school. Some communities may be more willing or interested in engaging with school management than others, and some school systems may be more willing than others to provide training, money, or decision-making power to communities.
- Does your context typically have large schools that serve many children, or small schools that serve smaller communities? This may affect the way a community-based school management program is designed and implemented, or if one is feasible in the first place.

Successful Examples

- Information and training for community members in India ([Banerjee et al. 2010](#))
- Community participation in public schools in India ([Pandey et al. 2009](#))

Further Action Options

For approaches with mixed evidence or high variation of effectiveness in the literature, more evidence generation is recommended to close evidence gaps. Based on the evidence for this category, potential next steps might include:

- Connecting with implementers to learn more about evidence-based programs in this category;
- Connecting with researchers to identify relevant open questions that would benefit from further research;
- Other activities to think through the policy implications and/or research needs of this evidence in your context

If you are interested in exploring these or other options, please contact the [J-PAL Education team](#) at, JPAL_Education@povertyactionlab.org, to set up an initial exploratory meeting. The team will be happy to brainstorm potential next steps.

