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Preface

In 2020, the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) launched a partnership with UNICEF to operationalize its global Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Initiative (FLN) to improve basic skills in low- and middle-income countries, especially given the significant need created by the Covid-19 pandemic. Alongside the other partners, Pratham and Delivery Associates, the FLN Initiative developed tools and training on how to operationalize and deliver evidence-based approaches with the ultimate goal of moving the needle on addressing the global learning crisis.

What is this guidance?
The guide aims to provide decision makers with information on the effectiveness of parental engagement programs based on results from randomized evaluations as well as information on program implementation and contextual considerations. Parental engagement was selected as a topic based on (1) its relevance to UNICEF country office priorities; and (2) the breadth and depth of rigorous research supporting the effectiveness of parental engagement approaches, e.g. consistent impact on learning as well as the variety of contexts in which these types of programs have been found effective through randomized evaluations.

The guide provides both general principles for the key building blocks of evidence-based parental engagement programs as well as three illustrative case studies to demonstrate how the principles within each building block have been operationalized in different contexts and through different programs. This guide also provides excerpts from Delivery Associate’s Implementation Playbook which provides a repository of tools, aligned with the Deliverology® approach, to help education actors address a broad set of implementation needs. Readers can look to those tools and guidelines as outlined by the Deliverology® approach to guide their thinking as they embark on their implementation journey. The examples in those sections are hypothetical, and adapted from the context provided in this guide.

How should this guidance be used?
The information provided in these guides can support education actors with different use cases such as

1. Aligning parental engagement policies or strategies with the evidence-based principles in this guide; and

2. Determining the viability and relevance of parental engagement programs for specific contexts and deciding whether it is worth investing resources to adapt new programs in their context.

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1 As part of the FLN Partnership, Delivery Associates has shared a selection of its proprietary tools in the Implementation Playbook to guide readers on their journey from developing their aspirations around FLN, to delivering impact on the ground. The tools highlighted in this section can be found in the Implementation Playbook, and align with the Deliverology® approach.
In the latter use case, we encourage education actors to connect with implementers of evidence-based approaches to learn the granular details of the program components, gain access to content (e.g. tips shared with parents), and as needed, support on the adaptation process, e.g. from an NGO model to a government-led model, as well as piloting, and implementation.

While the general principles outlined in this guide may be useful independently, in J-PAL’s experience, designing and delivering evidence-based programs at scale requires several key conditions:

- A deep understanding of both global evidence and the specific local context and systems;
- A policy window in which change is possible;
- Political will to change the status quo;
- Adequate funding resources; and
- Capacity to monitor and implement the program well.

However, it is rare that any one entity has the mandate to deliver all of these conditions. As such, education actors reading this guide will likely find it useful to connect with other policymakers, implementers, funders, and/or researchers to adapt and implement evidence-based programs at scale.

While this guide is not meant to serve as an “off-the-shelf” instructional manual, we hope the information provided will enable education actors to draw on evidence-based principles from each of the key building blocks for implementation to adapt programs for implementation, think critically about applying evidence to their specific context, and build coalitions for effective evidence adaptation and use. With thoughtful consideration of context, implementation needs, and evidence of effectiveness, there is a real opportunity to move the needle on foundational literacy and numeracy outcomes around the world.

Motivation

For decades, education systems around the world have sought to ensure inclusive and equitable education for children and youth. Yet despite these efforts, the world has struggled to achieve the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goal for quality education. Pre-pandemic, up to one in five children were out of primary school, and low levels of school quality meant that more than half of all primary-aged children were unable to meet minimum proficiency standards in reading and mathematics.

This global learning crisis has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, which created the largest disruption of education systems in history. At the pandemic’s onset, school closures left 94 percent of students worldwide out of school. Today, as schools slowly reopen, 11 million students are at risk of permanently not returning to the classroom, joining the 258 million children and youth who were already out of school. Based on current projections, the share of children below minimum proficiency levels is expected to increase by 25 percent. Marginalized students are expected to be hardest hit, with the pandemic already exacerbating pre-existing education disparities among students living in poor or rural areas, girls, refugees, and students with disabilities.

In light of the worsening global learning crisis, education policymakers and practitioners must explore innovative, evidence-driven educational solutions to help bridge the gap towards achieving quality learning for students worldwide.
Introduction to Parental Engagement

Parents play an important role in a child’s learning, providing motivation, guidance, and supervision. However, psychological, informational, and time constraints often prevent greater parental engagement. Psychological constraints may lead parents to have biased beliefs where they overestimate their children’s performance in school or misunderstand the benefits of investing in education. Additionally, parents may face stressors that limit their cognitive bandwidth and impede their ability to fully focus and engage in their children’s education. Some examples of stressors that low-income parents may face in particular include uneven income, insecure work, language differences, and other challenges which take attention away from engaging in their child’s education. Evidence from a variety of contexts indicates that programs which address these barriers by providing relevant information about parents’ roles in education, school quality, students’ academic levels, students’ health problems, financial aid, and wage returns to education can increase parent engagement, student motivation, and ultimately, learning.

Evidence

Many programs from empowering parents to increasing community engagement to deploying awareness campaigns attempt to increase parental involvement as a way to increase child learning. While rigorous research on parental engagement approaches is still emerging, education actors interested in improving parental involvement can rely on existing lessons from community engagement programs and informational provision approaches. For example, school management committees consisting of parents, community members, school leaders, and teachers may be provided with training on how to support school management, grants to allocate towards needs in the school, or both. However, research of such programs from randomized evaluations have shown highly variable impacts on learning based on contextual barriers such as parental literacy, bandwidth to engage, and the practical amount of power or influence school committees have to enact change.

In contrast, programs providing information directly to parents and students have shown more consistent impacts on parental engagement and student learning. Numerous randomized evaluations have shown that programs which provide parents with clear, actionable guidance on how to be more involved in children’s education, as well as programs which provide information on children’s school performance have a positive impact on learning. These are generally low-cost programs which deliver information through contextually relevant vehicles such as SMS messages, phone calls, emails, or take-home report cards. Research has found that such interventions can be effective in improving parents’ knowledge of their child’s performance and increasing parental involvement, as well as children’s motivation and educational outcomes.

Existing evidence reviewed by Bergman (2019) and J-PAL (2019) points to the effectiveness of low-cost behaviorally-motivated interventions that create actionable and quick ways for parents to engage with their children on learning. These interventions may be delivered to diverse age groups, and evidence has shown effectiveness from preschool through high school and beyond, although there is a much larger evidence base for programs delivered to parents of kindergarten through middle school children. For example, a randomized evaluation of a program in rural Nicaragua which sent text messages to improve parenting practices and early childhood development found no impacts on children’s cognition or socio-emotional skills (Barrera et al. 2020) suggesting more research will be useful in understanding the impact of parental engagement programs for younger children.

For more details on the evidence of parental engagement programs as well as key equity considerations, please see the Education Menu on the FLN Hub.
Research also suggests that program content and learning activities tailored to the learning level of the student, either by targeting at the outset or through adaptive content that changes in complexity in response to student performance throughout the intervention, are promising for improving learning.

Case Studies: Young 1ove, Papás al Día, and Tips by Text

This guide aims to provide an overview of the general principles of the key building blocks of evidence-based parental engagement programs and provides three case studies, introduced below, to illustrate how these building blocks have been addressed through different programs. The case studies, along with the broader body of evidence, informed the general principles for each section. J-PAL selected the following case studies based on whether the program is supported by at least one randomized evaluation while keeping in mind the importance of having balance across geographies, the variation in program elements to showcase different principles, and where J-PAL has relationships with partners willing to both discuss their approach and engage with new actors. The J-PAL team gathered details for the case studies by interviewing staff at each organization, reviewing program materials shared by each of the organizations, and reading research papers on each programs’ evaluations.

Case Study 1: Young 1ove’s Phone-Based program

Young 1ove’s Phone-Based Education Programming intervention is a low-tech text message and phone-based program aimed at supporting learning, including during long periods of school closure. The program can support parents in engaging with children on their education amid diverse other commitments. In addition to the physical barriers to learning posed by school closures, the program can also address the physical communication barriers caused by parents/caregivers being unable to visit schools and speak to teachers regularly, bringing both learning and parental engagement into the household where the caregiver and child are simultaneously present. The program provides several simple math problems through weekly SMS messages for parents to engage their children and provides phone-based support in understanding the week’s concepts.

An evaluation of Young 1ove’s Phone-Based Education Programming intervention in Botswana in 2020 found that SMS messages combined with phone calls had large impacts on students’ learning and reduced learning gaps between higher- and lower-performing students. Students assigned to receive SMS messages and phone calls saw a reduction in innumeracy of 31 percent after 12 weeks. Practically, this meant improvements in students’ abilities to complete numerical operations and higher-order functions such as solving fractions. In households that received SMS-only and SMS + phone calls, parents were 7 and 12 percentage points more likely, respectively, to spend time engaging with their child on educational activities after four weeks. After 12 weeks, parents in both groups reported higher self-efficacy in supporting their children’s learning, but only parents in the SMS + phone calls group accurately reported their children’s learning level. A subset of participants also received SMS messages that targeted content to students learning levels with promising results on learning. The program experienced high demand: 98 percent of households wanted to continue with either of the interventions (text-only or text-and-phone) after four weeks.
Case Study 2: Papás al Día

Designed and implemented with the goal of generating research, Papás al Día was an information-based text message program that allowed parents to gain a more accurate and timely understanding of how their children were performing in school. The program aimed to close information gaps for parents who were interested in engaging with their children’s education but who did not know the areas in which their children would benefit from additional support or parental encouragement. Papás al Día sent one text per week to parents of middle school students in Santiago, Chile with a report of their child’s attendance, and also sent one text per month to the same parents with a summary of their child’s math grades and classroom behavior. Although the program did not teach parents how to interpret or use the information, it closed an important gap in their knowledge by making their understanding of their children’s performance in school more accurate.

An evaluation of the Papás al Día program in Santiago, Chile in 2014 and 2015 found that the program increased students’ math grades by 0.09 standard deviations and increased the percentage of students meeting the requirements to progress to the next grade by 4.5 percentage points after 18 months. These effects were substantially larger for lower-performing students. These changes were likely driven by parents’ ability to “correct” misunderstandings about their children’s current academic performance and needs, and their ability to change their behavior based on this updated information: students whose parents received the text messages reported receiving more academic support from their parents.
Case Study 3: Tips by Text

Tips by Text is an innovative text message program designed to provide parents and caregivers with quick, easy-to-implement educational activities to do with their preschool children (ages 0-5) to help them develop literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional skills necessary for school success. The program helps parents best utilize the one-on-one time they have with their children outside of school, making that time more beneficial for children and satisfying for parents. Parents may find it difficult to sort through all the available information on how to support their children’s early learning, choose a strategy, and remember to execute it. Tips by Text makes this process easier by sending parents text messages with activity advice, information, and reminders. The activities suggested by the program are always quick, actionable, and easy to build into everyday life. Each week, the program sends a ‘tip’ message to parents with a suggestion for an activity to do with their child, a ‘fact’ message with a piece of information about their child’s academic development, and a ‘growth’ message with encouragement on how to build on the activity of the week. Informational messages included the student’s and classroom grade averages, student behavior, attendance, and information on school holidays and parent-teacher meetings. The text messages provide default options for parents that can be repeated many times throughout the year, rather than suggesting that parents make big or time-intensive changes to existing routines.

An evaluation of the Tips by Text program implemented in the United States between 2013 and 2016 found that the program increased parental involvement (including telling children stories, reciting nursery rhymes, showing children books, and more) and led children to score higher on a literacy test. Practical skills that improved include identifying letters, understanding letter sounds, and writing their own names. A further evaluation, also conducted in the United States, found that the effect of these texts was strengthened by personalizing them to match students’ skill level, which aligns with a broader body of evidence on tailoring instruction to improve learning. Parents who received the targeted texts reported engaging more in literacy activities, and consequently, their children were 1.47 times more likely to move up a reading level compared to students whose parents did not receive any messages. The body of research on Tips by Text suggests the program may be more effective for students who start with lower baseline levels of school readiness.

Timing of texts is an important design element: An evaluation of another version of the Tips by Text program in the United States found that the program was less effective when parents received texts either too frequently or too infrequently. Three texts per week, rather than one or five, was found to be the most effective. Additionally, another evaluation in Dallas found that sending texts during the weekend was more effective than sending texts during the week, as working parents may be too busy during the week to fully engage with the suggestions.
Navigating This Guide

The guide is organized around six interconnected sections which serve as key building blocks for parental engagement program design and implementation. Each section provides general principles for education actors to keep top of mind along with illustrative case studies showcasing how these principles have been applied in practice. While we outline these building blocks sequentially, we recognize that the program design process is far from linear. In reality, education actors may go between sections as decisions in one aspect of program design may change how to approach decisions in another.

**Section 1**
Discusses the importance of starting with a strong Theory of Change (ToC) which influences all program and implementation decisions as outlined in the remaining sections.

**Section 2**
Discusses the target participants for the program and ways to identify them. While the ToC outlines the key challenges to be addressed, appropriate targeting can help ensure those most likely to need and benefit from the program are reached.

**Section 3**
Discusses key parental engagement program components to allow education actors to design evidence-based approaches that consider the contextual realities and also appropriately meet the needs of the target participants.

**Section 4**
Discusses practical and contextual requirements to ensure the program design using principles in Section 3 can be implemented with fidelity in the given context.

**Section 5**
Brings these pieces together by providing guidance on how to monitor and evaluate progress towards the objective defined through the ToC as well as implementation fidelity based on the program components (Section 3) and implementation factors (Section 5).

**Section 6**
Underlying all of these building block is cost. This section discusses key cost considerations associated with evidence-based parental engagement programs to help guide decision-making for program design and implementation.
Section 1: Theory of Change

A theory of change describes a strategy or blueprint for achieving a goal and developing one is the first step in the design and implementation process. A strong theory of change identifies the preconditions, pathways, and interventions necessary for success. In practical terms, a theory of change maps the expected pathway from inputs and activities to the desired outcomes, including the assumptions and implementation risks involved. In other words, a theory of change maps how we envision a program to lead to a change in outcomes. As such, determining a strong theory of change is a critical first step because it influences program design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.

Often, a theory of change is represented in a diagram or in a logical framework. When exploring parental engagement programs, it’s important to understand the overall theory of change from inputs and program activities to outputs and ultimately to the overall objective of improving learning outcomes. Most evidence-based parental engagement programs assume that parents want their children to succeed and learn, and they are typically not only willing but eager to play a role in making that happen. However, if a parent already has many things distracting her and competing for her time and mental energy, it can be hard to focus on making the best parenting choices for cognitive and educational development. Many of these programs recognize the importance of informational gaps, cognitive load, low parental recognition of and attention to their role in their child’s education as key barriers to greater involvement. Additionally, parents may face difficulty in monitoring student progress due to a lack of proactive, regular information from schools.

The presence of these behavioral factors may suggest an important role for programs focused on the provision of timely and actionable information to parents along with tips for easy-to-implement activities for parents to engage with their children. As such, most parental engagement approaches include the following components in their theories of change:

- **Problem:** Parents face diverse demands on their time and are uninformed about their children’s performance in school and unable to adequately participate in their learning
- **Input:** Text messages and/or phone calls to share information on school progress and tips on learning activities they can perform with their child text messages, with content adapted to learning level of the child
- **Output:** Parents gain awareness of their child’s progress and are involved in the learning process; children perform better in school
- **Outcome:** Parents gain agency and can more confidently support their child’s learning; children’s learning levels are increased

**Young 1ove’s Phone-Based Program**

Parents, while keen to support their children’s learning, have diverse commitments and rely heavily on schools and teachers to monitor the learning of students on a regular basis. Yet parents often struggle to gain a full understanding of their child’s educational needs. This is especially true during extensive periods of school closure, requiring greater parental involvement to stem learning losses.

Young 1ove’s Phone-Based Education Programming intervention provides parents with a tool to effectively engage in and support their child’s learning and aims to increase parental motivation and accountability. Through one-way text messages and/or a phone call once a week, the tool provided several simple math problems that parents could read out to their children. The intervention has very low
technological requirements, requiring only a phone that could receive phone calls and text messages, which most households in Botswana have.

- **Problem:** Parents are not engaged and are uninformed about children’s performance in school
- **Input:** Sending text messages and making phone calls to parents and children containing simple math problems, with content adapted to learning level of the child
- **Output:** Parents are involved in learning process and are aware of child’s progress
- **Outcome:** Parents can more confidently support their child’s learning

**Papás al Día**

Attendance, grades, and behavior are pieces of information that can help parents understand a student’s progression in school, how they are learning, and if they are at risk of dropping out. And yet many parents do not have access to this information about their children. Papás al Día aimed to close this information gap by providing parents with a picture of how their child was performing in school. For parents who were already interested in engaging with their children but did not have the information to do so, this program helped give them that necessary information. Rather than parents waiting until the end of the school year or semester to receive a report card, when it’s too late to intervene, parents in Papás al Día received this information weekly (for attendance) or monthly (for grades and behavior), when there was still time and opportunity to intervene where necessary.

- **Problem:** Parents don’t have up-to-date information on how their children are performing in school
- **Input:** Sending texts to parents with information about how their child is doing in school
- **Output:** Parents know where their children are struggling or performing well
- **Outcome:** Parents can engage more effectively with their children in the areas where they are excelling or need support.

**Tips by Text**

Tips by Text’s theory of change anchors on the cognitive load placed on parents. In addition, parents may not know what learning content is most appropriate and how to support children in this learning through activities. If text messages can both provide them with tips and activities to do with their children, and also give them a nudge to remember these activities, the cognitive load of parenting can be lessened, and parents may be more likely to find the time to support their children’s emerging literacy and numeracy at home.

- **Problem:** The cognitive load of finding information about how to best support your child’s cognitive development, deciding which strategies to use, and taking the initiative to do those activities is high
- **Input:** Sending texts to parents with information about how to support their child’s cognitive development through easy to implement, quick activities that can be incorporated into daily activities
- **Output:** Parents don’t have to spend extra time searching for age-appropriate activities or remembering to do them, because they’re given suggestions and reminders via text
- **Outcome:** Children spend more time doing activities that support literacy and numeracy skills, in turn better developing these skills.
The Implementation Journey: Logic Models

A logic model provides a starting point to help translate the theory of change into inputs required to implement a caregiver engagement program, outputs which can be used to monitor progress in the short to medium term, and outcomes which will advance progress on FLN goals. The inputs should produce the outputs, the outputs the outcomes, and the outcomes the ultimate impact on the FLN goals. Broadly, a logic model for such a program that borrows from the Theory of Change section in this guide could look like this:

**INPUTS**
- Locally contextualized messaging on student learning and child development
- Updates and data on student progress from schools
- Partnerships with governments or local organizations trusted by caregivers

**OUTPUTS**
- Direct, frequent outreach to caregivers with messaging customized to their child’s needs and performance

**OUTCOMES**
- Caregivers maintain awareness of student performance
- Caregivers are more informed on how to support children academically
- Caregivers enact at home activities to support learning
- Students feel more support by caregivers

**IMPACT**
- Children make gains in literacy and numeracy
- Caregivers increased self efficacy and engagement in their child’s education

It is important to note that this is an illustrative logic model. Practitioners will need to develop their own model based on the theory of change for their respective program. While the ultimate impact or moral purpose of most parent/caregiver engagement programs is improving student learning outcomes, the different inputs, outputs and outcomes that can be utilized to achieve this may vary. For example, Tips By Text offloaded parents’ cognitive load by providing helpful instructions on activities they could perform with their children at home; Papás al Día focused on providing information on student attendance, performance and behavior to keep parents informed. While the details will vary by program, it is critical for programs to have a strong theory of change which can help practitioners identify the unique needs of the caregivers and students they wish to serve and consider if their approach will meet those needs.

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2 As part of the FLN Partnership, Delivery Associates has shared a selection of its proprietary tools in the Implementation Playbook to guide readers on their journey from developing their aspirations around FLN, to delivering impact on the ground. The tools highlighted in this section can be found in the Implementation Playbook, and align with the Deliverology® approach.
Section 2: Targeting and Participant Selection

While developing a theory of change can provide clarity on the overall outcomes and challenges to be addressed, identifying the target group of program participants based on need is an important step in adapting or designing any program for a new context. This step aims to understand who the target population is, what conditions make them the right group, and how to identify them. For parental engagement programs, participants can be enrolled in programs in numerous ways, including during children’s school enrollment and through proactively reaching out to families whose children are already enrolled in school. Several factors standout when looking across evidence-based programs.

- **Building Trust:**
  - Engaging in credibility and trust-building activities before program rollout (e.g. hosting information sessions with enrolled participants);
  - Sensitizing participants to the program in advance to encourage consent and engagement and decrease dropout;
  - Understanding how enrolled participants might perceive the messages based on their trust for the sender (e.g. government, school, independent implementer, etc.) and adapt accordingly to encourage program take-up.

- **Enrollment:**
  - Maximizing program participation through government-led implementation by enrolling families systematically and maintaining accurate contact information;
  - Choosing an enrollment strategy that includes collecting phone numbers and additional backup communication channels should phone numbers change.

- **Targeting:**
  - Prioritizing the lowest-performing children, whose parents are likely to be least informed about their learning outcomes. Targeting these children may be particularly difficult if families are not invited to participate at the point of school enrollment when parents/caregivers accompany children to school;
  - Interventions based on standardized learning content may be less useful for children who are either well behind or ahead of their grade level, or of the planned pedagogical content of the intervention, in terms of the literacy and numeracy skills they have mastered. If there is greater variance among students, evidence suggests tailored or adaptive content may be more relevant.

- **Participant:** Identifying which caregiver is best positioned to actively participate in the child’s learning outside of school. Given diverse constraints on parents’ time, older siblings, grandparents, or others in the household that play a caregiving role may be more able to engage with the child.
**Young 1ove’s Phone-Based Program**

The Young 1ove program team had existing credibility with schools and parents given its active presence in schools through its pre-existing educational programming in partnership with the Ministry of Basic Education of Botswana. To support program enrollment, prior to the government announcement of school closures, the program team collected phone numbers of parents interested in remote learning support for their children. Facilitators called all numbers to provide information on and gauge interest in receiving remote learning support via phone. The team was further able to build trust with parents by hosting preliminary calls to households prior to sending learning materials to sensitize them to the program, obtain consent, gather baseline demographic and outcome measurements to appropriately target the program, identify the caregiver who would be both reachable and invested in engaging in the child’s learning, and to reduce the likelihood of dropout.

**Papás al Día**

To build trust with schools and parents and identify the target group of participants, the Papás al Día program held initial meetings at schools alongside regular parent-teacher meetings to explain the program and invite all parents of students in grades 4 or above to participate in the meetings. At the meeting itself, the program team handed out consent forms requiring that parents include several forms of contact (Facebook, various cell phone options within the family, etc.) so that if one method of contact changed, the program would still have another available. The meeting and consent forms were crucial in identifying and enrolling participants for the program. Parents who did not attend the meeting were invited through their children and consent forms were distributed through them. Collaboration from the teachers was crucial in this step. Ideally, the program would enroll participants during the school enrollment process, to maximize the likelihood of obtaining accurate phone numbers.

**Tips by Text**

Tips by Text has used several enrollment strategies. One is simply adding a checkbox to forms that parents are already filling out to enroll their children in preschool, asking if they consent to receive text messages. They have used both an “opt in” checkbox (check this box if you want to receive the text messages) and an “opt out” checkbox (check this box if you do not want to receive the text messages) strategy. Tips by Text has found that using the existing enrollment processes of preschools supports their credibility because they are part of the formal process and tends to result in higher program participation (typically more than 90% of families opted into the program). The second enrollment option is to reach out directly to families and provide them with a form to enroll in the program. This method has been less successful at achieving a high enrollment rate.

Tips by Text has found it important to identify the caregiver that is most likely to spend time with the child for educational development. This is important so that Tips by Text can target the right adult for the text messages. For example, if the culture typically entrusts large portions of the child’s time to grandparents rather than parents, this would be useful to know at the outset. Once the typical recipient is identified, it is also important to identify what a trusted source would be for that profile of adult. For example, in the United States, schools are typically a trusted source, so tying the text messages to schools may help build trust and credibility. If a certain portion of the recipients don’t tend to trust the government or a specific school or other institution, it may be important to avoid associating the texts with that institution.
Section 3: Program Components

In addition to identifying who the program should target, education actors will also need to consider what the program will entail so it can best meet the needs and challenges of the target group. While the details of parental engagement programs vary by implementer and context, several program components appear across most programs for successful implementation. Many deliver information and engagement tools to parents and children via text messages, while some also include phone calls to reinforce learning material and/or provide additional pedagogical support. However, programs vary in terms of content, using either standardized text message and phone call content or tailored or adaptive content that is targeted to the student’s current ability. While the former ensures consistency and may facilitate easier training for staff members involved in intervention delivery, a body of evidence shows that in contexts where children are behind grade-level expectations, delivering pedagogical material adapted to the learning level of the child can improve program effectiveness. With these differences in mind, four general principles appear across most evidence-based approaches.

1. **Standardized versus tailored content:** Standardizing content streamlines staff training, generally requires fewer technological inputs, and less staff time to implement. However, evidence suggests that adaptive or tailored pedagogy may increase program effectiveness so implementers should consider their overall objectives, the needs in their context, and available resources and other trade-offs in choosing between standardized and targeted content.

2. **Materials/Resources:**
   a. Information and engagement tools can be delivered to parents and children via text messages, but two-way text messaging and/or phone calls can potentially help to reinforce learning material and/or provide additional pedagogical support.
   
   b. Consider what technological platform to use based on available resources, contextual realities (e.g. adult literacy rates), and alignment with the program’s goals, such as using a one-way messaging platform versus two-way messaging or phone calls.

3. **Timing:**
   a. Some evidence suggests that evenings and weekends may be good times to send messages to parents because they will have free time to engage with the content. However, the best timing will likely vary by the realities that parents face in each context. As such, implementers may want to use insights from a pilot implementation phase or through routine participant feedback to identify the frequency and times of day and days of the week in the local context that maximize likelihood of parents and children being available to engage with learning content.
   
   b. Some evidence-based programs schedule calls 3-4 days in advance, as well as identify a backup time and day of the week on which to reach participants in case they are unavailable. Implementers and facilitators may need to be flexible, recognizing that the program reaches beneficiaries in their own households.

4. **Languages:** As with many education programs, evidence indicates that providing intervention content in the broadest range of languages that beneficiaries may be most comfortable in (e.g. mother tongue) may be most useful.

The table below compares the key program components associated with Young 1ove’s program, Papás al Día, and Tips by Text.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Component</th>
<th>Young Love’s Phone-Based Program</th>
<th>Papás al Día</th>
<th>Tips by Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grades</strong></td>
<td>• Grades 3-5 (also 1-2)</td>
<td>• Middle-school aged children</td>
<td>• Programs for children ages 0-5, with robust evidence from randomized evaluations for children ages 3-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subjects covered</strong></td>
<td>• Math (basic numeracy)</td>
<td>• Math</td>
<td>• Literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional skills (texts rotate across the three subjects).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Languages</strong></td>
<td>• English, Tswana, and participant’s mother tongue</td>
<td>• Spanish</td>
<td>• English, Spanish, Chinese, Haitian Creole, and Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Materials/resources</strong></td>
<td>• A sensitization script (to secure consent, establish baseline levels), survey tools, and curriculum with a list of SMS messages and calling guidelines for weekly phone calls</td>
<td>• Teacher to record attendance, grades, and behavior; • Staff to transfer this data to an online platform from which to automatically send customized messages to each parent about their child.</td>
<td>• Text messages, which contain tips and suggested learning activities; • Platform on which to send the text messages, and a program to send the messages out en masse to the intended recipients, and at the intended times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Delivery/dosage</strong></td>
<td>• Weekly set of SMS messages at the start of the week containing simple math problems; • Either a weekly 20-minute or biweekly 40-minute phone call to answer questions and provide additional practice questions.</td>
<td>• One text per week for attendance; • One text per month for grades and behavior.</td>
<td>• Three texts per week has been found to be the most effective dosage for Tips by Text—specifically, this has been found to be more effective than one or five text messages per week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Timing</strong></td>
<td>• Botswana: Weekdays, 6-8pm • India/Nepal: Weekends</td>
<td>• Weekdays (school days), starting with Mondays and varying dynamically</td>
<td>• Weekends to maximize participation of parents working during the week, especially those with longer working hours/multiple jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Program duration</strong></td>
<td>• 1-3 months</td>
<td>• 18 months</td>
<td>• 8 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Program Component**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Component</th>
<th>Young 1ove’s Phone-Based Program</th>
<th>Papás al Día</th>
<th>Tips by Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructors</td>
<td>• Youth facilitators working full or half-time; • Government-employed teachers; • Other government employees and/or community volunteers. (teachers-in-waiting, teaching aids)</td>
<td>• Parents, without any required training.</td>
<td>• Parents because the program typically runs independently from in-school content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>• Four-hour training of trainers; and 6-8-hour training for implementers; • Training sessions were delivered via WhatsApp where voice notes and short briefing scripts were shared on how to conduct the phone calls.</td>
<td>• Initial video during parent-teacher meetings to orient teachers and parents to the program.</td>
<td>• No training is required for parents to engage with the Tips by Text program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Example Text Messages**

**Young 1ove’s Phone-Based Program** (From Angrist et al. 2021)

Welcome to Week 2! Here are some problems you can try with your children:

**PLACE VALUE:**
Three Hundred Twenty – 320
_____________ _________ – 325
879 – ______________
_____________ _________ – 267

242 – ?(hundreds)?(tens)?(units)
106 – ?(hundreds)?(tens)?(units)
485 – ???

Kamogelo has p257. How many groups of HUNDREDS are there? TENS? How many UNITS?

**Papás al Día** (From Berlinski et al. 2021)

**Behavioral text message**
{Name parent}, according the school’s record of {month}, {Name student} had {Number} positive notes and {Number} negative notes. Papás al Día

**Attendance text message**
{Name parent}, according the school’s record, {Name student} attended to school {week attendance days} of {week total days}. Papás al Día

**Math score text message**
{Name parent}, the math scores of {Name student} are {List of student’s grade} and his/her average now is {Current GPA}. The average in the class is {Average class GPA}. Papás al Día
Section 4: Implementation Conditions

Implementation conditions are closely linked to program components as they allow for the strong implementation of the selected program design. Enabling conditions for program implementation will vary by context, who the lead implementer is (e.g., NGO versus government-led), the resources available, and many other factors. However, several common factors appear across programs that aim to create a strong foundation for successful implementation, and ultimately, student learning improvements.

1. **Family and societal context:** As found in the evidence review by Bergman (2019), parental engagement programs have been found to be most effective in contexts where families are facing stressful circumstances or where parents have severe bandwidth constraints. These could include socioeconomic factors, low-resource settings, and broader contextual factors such as pandemic, conflict, and extreme weather stressors.

2. **Data availability:** Programs that involve providing parents information on student progress depend on metrics collected through report cards, attendance books, and student behavior records. Implementers should consider the availability of this data or plan for creating systems to track student progress metrics.

3. **Implementation staff:** Feasibility, staffing levels, and effectiveness of the intervention can vary depending on the staff engaged (e.g., government teachers vs. contract teachers vs. youth facilitators/volunteers) depending on the incremental demands placed on their time.

4. **Cultural factors:** Consider cultural factors, including the potential for children to face physical or other severe punishment, based on information provided to parents about their poor grades or attendance.

**Young1ove’s Phone-Based Program**

While the program was initially conducted in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic it may also be relevant in diverse settings of learning loss and limited parental engagement such as summer and winter breaks; refugee and conflict settings, and weather situations that prevent physical school attendance. Data collected in Botswana also showed that the program was effective as well as valued by caregivers as a supplement to regular, non-disrupted, schooling.

For the subset of participants who received targeted content in the SMS messages and calls, the team had to deploy phone-based learning assessments, adapted from the ASER test, to measure learning levels. They used the student-level information to send tailored content.

The Young1ove program was implemented by different cadres depending on the location of the implementation, including youth facilitators working full or half-time employed by Young1ove; government-employed or NGO teachers; other government employees and/or community volunteers (teachers-in-waiting, teaching aids).
A critical consideration was to accurately estimate the required staffing levels, which differed by type of implementer. Government teachers were found to be more effective (in Nepal) contrary to expectations. This was particularly true because they were more realistic about the number of households they could reach per week. The ideal ratio for full-time Young 1ove staff in the Botswana implementation was 15 households per staff person per week, whereas teachers in Nepal who were splitting time between classroom duties and phone calls were able to reach 6-7 households each. These ratios were critical, but needed to be identified early in the design and feasibility assessment (pilot) process.

For child safeguarding, Young 1ove intentionally develops an environment of support for children around education. They also provide instructors with training and support mechanisms on how to manage and report on potentially harmful situations if they arise. To date, such situations have not occurred during the implementation of this program.

**Papás al Día**

About 25 percent of parents in the program started with incorrect information or perceptions about their child’s schooling with less-educated parents being least likely to have correct information. The team also monitored potential violence against children as parents received updated information on their schooling and behavior but did not find negative consequences for children in this case.

The Papás al Día program was delivered by the research team, who visited each school every week to take pictures of the attendance book, grades book, and behavior book, enter the data into a computer program, and then send the information to parents. To implement this program, this data needs to be collected, stored, and sent out. This type of program would not work in a context where this information was not collected and stored. Transferring data from the classroom to the texting program could be done manually by a program team or could be done by the school itself, depending on implementation capacity of the school and/or another implementing group. Ideally, the school would track this information digitally to make for easier transfer of information from the teacher/classroom to the texting platform.

**Tips by Text**

Tips by Text will be most useful in contexts where the skills the program helps children to develop are skills they don’t currently possess. For that reason, it may be less useful in contexts where children are ahead of schedule in terms of the literacy and numeracy skills they have mastered. It likely is more effective in more stressful environments where parents can benefit the most from clear, quick tips and nudges to support their children’s cognitive development. In some contexts, parents may be more willing to be involved in literacy or numeracy activities and less willing to be involved in the other. For example, in the United States some parents are more comfortable with literacy activities but less comfortable with numeracy activities, as they perceive their own math skills to be low and do not feel comfortable supporting their children with math. One approach by Tips by Text is to highlight a combination program of literacy and numeracy together.
The Implementation Journey: Is parental engagement right for my context?

Drawing on a tool called the Generalizability Framework, below are questions that provide a starting point for operationalizing the general principles in this guide to apply the global evidence on parental engagement to your specific context.

Local Conditions

- Do parents know how their children are performing in school?
  - Parents may think they are aware of how their children are performing in school, but their perceptions may be inaccurate. A survey of parents, compared with children’s grades or test scores, can determine if parent perceptions tend to be accurate.
  - Is there already a system in place that informs parents of children’s grades, exam scores, attendance records, etc.?

- Is it typical for parents in your context to be engaged with their children’s education? In some contexts, it may be more or less common for parents to help with homework, ask questions about school, meet with teachers, etc.

- Is it feasible for parents to become more involved in their child’s education if they have more information about their child’s performance and specific needs?
  - Working parents may have less time to help their children with schoolwork.
  - Parents with lower levels of literacy may have a harder time helping their children with schoolwork.
  - The above factors don’t necessarily mean that these types of programs won’t help parents engage more with their children. They are simply factors to consider as you determine the best approach for your context.
Local Implementation

- Is there a realistic way that you could measure parent perception of how their children are performing in school to see if there is a gap between their perceptions and reality?

- Will all parents be able to understand the communication methods you use to inform them of their children’s performance?
  - What languages do the parents and students in the prospective implementation areas speak? Can you send messages in all languages likely to be spoken?
  - What are the literacy rates for adults in your area? Will parents be able to read a written message about their child’s performance in school? If not, calls or in-person meetings might be preferable over texts or take-home report cards.

- In addition to literacy rates, consider questions of electricity access, phone coverage, internet access, etc. when deciding how to disseminate this information.

- Who will disseminate this information? Will teachers be in charge of doing so, or another school administrator, or a partner from outside the school?

- This type of information program is typically very low cost since the data is already being collected on student performance and most channels of information sharing are free or very inexpensive, but there would need to be some time budgeted for the program to keep records of who was reached, when, and with what information.

- Is there a culture of corporal punishment in your area between parents and children? Does this punishment tend to correlate with school performance? One concern with this type of program is that if parents have previously overestimated how their child is performing in school, a worse performance might prompt punishment. This is important to consider when determining if this type of program is appropriate for your context.
Section 5: Monitoring and Evaluation

As with any program, monitoring and evaluation should collect data along the program’s theory of change to ensure strong implementation fidelity as well as progress towards overall outcomes. Practically, monitoring and evaluation plans bring together the other sections in this guide through measurement and accountability. In most programs, child learning outcomes are considered the key metric of success. This might include how many questions are answered correctly in the program or school test performance. Along the path to reach this objective, greater parental engagement could be an important outcome and implementers may want to track parents’ knowledge about their children’s educational outcomes and changes in their behavior. Programs may also monitor the delivery of the program using metrics such as call success rates or number of call attempts made by staff as well as participant satisfaction with the program to ensure program sustainability.

- **Parental information/engagement**: Monitor completion rate of calls with both parent and child present and/or whether parents engage with and/or respond to text messages. Consider also surveying parents on whether they have greater knowledge about their child’s learning and/or feel empowered to support their child’s learning.

- **Parent/child satisfaction**: Consider monitoring dropout rates and satisfaction of the parent and/or child with the program by inviting anonymous feedback from participants.

- **Implementation fidelity**: Identify key metrics of implementation fidelity that align with the technological capabilities of the platform. These can include success rate of calls, response rate to text messages, or number of text messages delivered or opened/read, depending on the capabilities of the chosen platform.

- **Learning outcomes**: Measure student learning as the key outcome, including through measuring performance on math problems and reading level assessments. These assessments should be adapted for the mode of implementation (text messages, phone calls).

**Young Love’s Phone-Based Program**

**Evaluating outcomes**: Student learning outcomes are the most important outcome to measure, since the intervention was designed to stem learning losses during school closures. The checkpoint data (problem-of-the-day questions used to test understanding of the week’s concepts at the end of a phone call) were the key metric used to monitor learning progress from week-to-week. A phone-adapted ASER assessment is delivered during an initial sensitization period and at endline to measure the program’s overall impact on student learning. The intervention and outcomes measured focused on numeracy, though the team is exploring the potential to include literacy.

**Monitoring implementation fidelity**: A key metric is the percentage of calls made per week resulting in teacher or implementer speaking directly with the child (note that this assumed that the parent/caregiver was also on the call/listening and receiving instruction). Implementers submitted weekly data on call completion and how the call went. The team considered a benchmark rate of implementers being able to reach children 60-80% of the time as a good indicator of success.

**Monitoring dropouts**: Drop-offs and revocation of consent was monitored on a weekly basis. This was important to ensure that the program did not bother households that no longer wanted to participate since the team was keen to distance the program from the widespread cold-calling programs that included solicitations.
**Papás al Día**

**Evaluating outcomes:** The most important outcomes were student attendance, behavior, and grades as well as parents’ involvement. At the end of the school year, researchers used school, parent and student surveys as well as administrative records from the schools to measure impacts. Researchers were able to access monthly attendance data and grades for all subjects.

**Monitoring implementation fidelity:** One challenge encountered was that parents’ phone numbers changed frequently, especially in the most vulnerable groups. The Papás al Día group did its best to keep up with these changes in phone numbers and to follow up if it seemed that parents were consistently not receiving the messages several weeks in a row (as reported by the texting software). School administrators or teachers often knew a new phone number for these parents, but some parents inevitably became unreachable. Attempting to track down parents whose phone numbers changed was a difficult aspect of the program, but crucial for monitoring implementation fidelity. Another implementation challenge was network speed. Originally, text messages were sent on Fridays. However, the team discovered that the network was too busy for this day of the week, so the sending day was changed to Mondays. Monitoring for this program should ideally include some way of determining if parents are receiving the messages or not, and a plan for how to address issues as they arise if parents are not receiving the texts.

**Monitoring participant experience:** Papás al Día included an option for parents to text back, and these texts were monitored. Throughout the evaluation, parents only sent positive messages back to the program.

**Tips by Text**

**Evaluating outcomes:** The most important outcome to measure is child outcome measures. For this program, this may include scores on tests already administered by the school or school district for children who are old enough to be in formal schooling. In other cases, Tips by Text administered assessments itself to measure progress on outcomes for the relevant age groups. The latter option of course incurs more cost. One challenge to keep in mind is that the texts are generally geared toward encouraging literacy, numeracy, and socioemotional development, but are not specifically designed with an exam in mind for children who are old enough to be in formal schooling. As such, different assessments designed by different school districts will measure different outcomes that may or may not perfectly correspond to the skills encouraged through Tips by Text. Still, both the text messages and the assessments will likely focus on general literacy and numeracy skills relevant for the age group, and should still be able to detect relevant outcomes.

**Monitoring implementation fidelity:** The most important implementation feature to track is whether the text messages are successfully delivered to parents’ phone numbers (this is tracked through the mass texting software, and also measured through a post-program survey asking if parents received texts). Additional monitoring can determine if parents enjoy the program: parents have typically reported finding the program helpful and have reported that it makes their jobs as parents easier, which aligns well with the program’s stated theory of change.
The Implementation Journey: Identifying Indicators

The logic model can also support practitioners in determining how they will monitor and track progress at each stage of implementation by providing a first step to identifying potential indicators and targets. The nature of indicators practitioners can track are highlighted in the Monitoring & Evaluation section of this guide. In addition to these guidelines, users can consult the 3M’s Framework in the Delivery Associates Implementation Playbook³ to guide their thinking on how to identify and select indicators.

The framework is guided by three core questions, which can support practitioners when determining which indicators are the most useful to monitor during implementation:

### The 3M Framework

1. **Meaningful**
   - Will improving this target deliver **real benefit** to students?

2. **Movable**
   - Can we realistically **move the numbers** on this target with the **tools at our disposal** and in the **time available**?

3. **Measureable**
   - Do we already collect **useful data** on this target OR are we willing to invest to get that data within the next 3 months?

Indicators may vary significantly between even similar programs depending on the goal. Tips by Text, for example, provided texts to parents with information about how to support their child’s cognitive development through easy to implement, quick activities that can be incorporated into daily life. Young 1ove’s approach focused on specifically building students’ basic numeracy competencies through both text messages and phone calls to parents with simple math problems and guidance. Both programs could find tracking the number of text messages sent or received useful to monitor the successful implementation of their desired inputs, but Young 1ove would likely also want to track phone calls. Monitoring outputs and outcomes would differ further, because of the differing focus of Tips by Text on broader child cognitive development and Young 1ove’s focus on numeracy specifically.

³ As part of the FLN Partnership, Delivery Associates has shared a selection of its proprietary tools in the Implementation Playbook to guide readers on their journey from developing their aspirations around FLN, to delivering impact on the ground. The tools highlighted in this section can be found in the Implementation Playbook, and align with the Deliverology® approach.
For the logic model illustrated above, the following monitoring indicators could be used by practitioners to track progress:

### INPUTS
- % of literacy/numeracy curriculum incorporated in program
- # of grade levels served by program
- # of participating schools
- # of caregivers available in local networks

### OUTPUTS
- # of caregivers reached with messages
- # of messages opened

### OUTCOMES
- % of caregivers who know child’s academic standing
- % of caregivers who know tactics to support learning at home
- % of caregivers who report enacting at home activities to support learning

### IMPACT
- % of students learning at grade level in literacy and/or numeracy
- Student attendance rate

Once practitioners have developed possible indicators, it is important that they evaluate their utility using the 3M’s Framework mentioned above. For example, a sample evaluation for some of these indicators using the tool provided in the Implementation Playbook may look like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Meaningful</th>
<th>Measurable</th>
<th>Movable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># of caregivers reached with messages</td>
<td>Output</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of caregivers who know tactics to support learning at home</td>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of caregivers who enact at home activities to support learning</td>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using the above example, a practitioner may decide that while it would be very meaningful to measure if caregivers are enacting at home activities, it is likely to be difficult to measure; more difficult than tracking the change in caregiver knowledge, for example, which could be a more suitable indicator. This does not mean that it would not be important or meaningful for the practitioner to evaluate if caregivers enact activities at home, but it may not be a practical indicator for monitoring implementation progress.

Defining the logic model and monitoring indicators is a critical exercise for practitioners to take during the early stages of planning and implementation. These tools should be used as early as goal-setting, to guide teams in setting up data systems and developing strategies.
Section 6: Cost Considerations

The sections above cannot be possible without sufficient budget to cover the program design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation costs. Parental engagement programs can be low cost, regardless of implementer (e.g. NGO-led or government-led) because of inexpensive delivery methods including phone calls, text messages, or take-home report cards, particularly when implementers are able to leverage any existing government, school system-wide, or school-specific platforms that are set up to send out text messages or calls to parents. However, program costs may vary based on context, existing resources, and the delivery model selected.

- **Technology:** Platforms that automate sending text messages can vary in cost across countries. Although likely to achieve low per-participant costs at scale, this may be a large one-time cost item for many such programs. Some programs have leveraged existing and widespread platforms like WhatsApp and WeChat if penetration and usage of those platforms is high in the context. Platform costs are likely to affect implementation, regardless of who is leading the program in cases where these have to be purchased.

- **Delivery model:** Whether implemented is led by governments, NGOs, or schools themselves, costs will vary for one-way versus two-way text messaging platforms. Including a phone-based component could further increase costs but may be important to achieving the effectiveness of the original program.

- **Collecting contact details:** Ideally, this information will be obtained from school records. However, in contexts where this information doesn’t exist, implementers may face additional upfront costs of collecting contact numbers for enrolled participants.

**Young 1ove’s Phone-Based Program**

Both low-tech interventions are relatively low cost and suggest that either delivery model can effectively improve short-term learning during school closures. Based on upper bound estimates that include programmatic costs, personnel time, and fixed costs to collect phone numbers, set up infrastructure, conduct training, and collect routine monitoring data, the SMS-only intervention cost US$2.13 per child reached and the SMS plus Phone Call intervention cost US$14 per child reached.
**Papás al Día**

A major cost for the Papás al Día program was the time cost of visiting schools and transferring information from handwritten attendance and/or grade books to the online platform used to text the parents. This needed to be done each week by the research team and was very time intensive. In Chile, the cost of setting up the platform was about US$1.63 per student. However, if grades and attendance were recorded electronically by the teacher, the resources needed for this step would have been reduced drastically. If this student data were kept electronically, it would likely improve the scalability of the program. Overall, the research team reported that for every 0.01 of a standard deviation increase in math grades as a result of the program, about US$1.18 was spent per student per year. This cost would rise to US$2.00 per student per year for the first year, when fixed set-up costs were included.

**Tips by Text**

The main cost driver for Tips by Text is the program to send out the text messages. The program that Tips by Text has used in the United States cost $18,000 per year up front for the texting platform technology and an additional $0.01 (one cent) per text. With evidence suggesting the ideal number of texts to send is three per week per student, this would cost $0.03 (three cents) per student per week for the duration of the program.

**The Implementation Journey: Developing a Strategy Profile**

Once the logic model and its associated indicators have been determined, they can be used to shape the finer details of a strategy profile that will guide implementation and monitoring on-ground. If we were to visit a country that is tackling challenges related to learning losses and equity, and re-enrollment of students in schools (as many countries globally have undergone such challenges post-pandemic), we can apply the logic model to address a set of challenges that it could face in this scenario. Remember - a logic model is always guided by an overarching goal or moral purpose - and this will ultimately inform the nuances practitioners will have to address when responding to different challenges in their context.

**Let’s visit this country:**

*A country has reopened schools after a period of six months of closures due to an ongoing COVID-19 lockdown.* Efforts were made during this period to provide learning opportunities for students at home through radio and television programming, but there has been no way to monitor the efficacy of these efforts with respect to student learning goals, especially in communities with low television and radio coverage, and for younger students who need guided learning to develop foundational skills. The expected learning time lost in three months may have detrimental effects on students’ abilities to meet grade-level expectations in end-of-year assessments, and teachers alone will not be able to help students catch-up. Prior to the lockdown, teachers were already burdened with heavy workloads in schools where multigrading continues to be a pressing concern, and student learning levels were already lagging behind grade-level expectations.
An ongoing challenge is ensuring that parents or caregivers have the knowledge and information to support their children with learning at home. Pre-pandemic, parents already lacked visibility into their child’s grades and overall performance at school. Household-level stressors such as insecure work and uneven income were exacerbated during the pandemic and post-pandemic period, putting additional strain on families and making it that much more difficult for parents to pay attention to their child’s education. There is thus a recognition of the need for caregivers’ motivation and supervision at home to make up for learning losses that teachers alone cannot support. While there are active school management committees in different communities that have caregiver representation and have been found to be influential and effective in the past, parents generally are unsure of which strategies can help their children’s development at home.

The Ministry of Education has publicly outlined their commitment to strengthen foundational literacy and numeracy to support the future of their students. It has developed a specific goal to “Mitigate post-pandemic learning losses, and ensure that all students in Grade 4 receive a 65% or higher in Math and English assessments at the end of the Academic Year”.

To realize this outcome, it has decided to provide information to caregivers at the household and community level as a strategy to increase their engagement with their child’s education as they return to school. The MoE has thus agreed to partner with a local NGO to develop text-messages that include activities aligned with the national curriculum for building students’ literacy and numeracy skills. MoE has also conducted a preliminary survey of school management committees across different districts to ascertain the appetite and enthusiasm for such a program. After receiving a largely positive response, they have decided to adopt a phased approach to implementation. Their strategy may look like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy Profile Tool</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of Strategy</td>
<td>Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description:</strong></td>
<td>The MoE will launch an at-home program for caregivers to help their students both reinforce and build on foundational literacy and numeracy concepts taught in school. This will require a set of text messages to be sent to parents two messages with different exercises linked to curricular content on Saturday.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal(s):</strong> On which goal (or goals) will the strategy have a significant impact?</td>
<td>Ensure that all students in Grade 4 receive a 65% or higher in Math and English assessments at the end of the Academic Year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rationale:</strong> Why do we believe it will have an impact?</td>
<td>Parental engagement and positive reinforcement at home is an enabler of student learning, particularly in cases where caregivers lack information about their child’s education. As primary caregivers with the most influence on a child’s behavior, having parents supervise and support their children’s return to school and engagement with curriculum content will have a positive effect on regularity and performance. There is existing evidence of this type of reform working successfully.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scale:</strong> At what scale will it be implemented?</td>
<td>The MoE will initiate a phased approach in 20% of total districts to begin with, which will increase every quarter until all districts are covered if the pilot is successful. In this first phase, however, only parents who voluntarily sign up for this activity will be part of the program. The MoE hopes that a successful first phase and positive feedback can create greater encouragement across households at large to opt for this program moving forward.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of Strategy</td>
<td>Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resources required:</strong> What people, time, money, and technology will be needed to implement it?</td>
<td>Implementation may have costs associated with the following resources (software, data collection, human resource) based on the cost considerations outlined in this guide. The MoE will have to allocate funds for their partnership with the NGO prior to the program, and notify Principals to allocate human resources required.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Software:</strong></td>
<td>MoE has previously utilized an SMS platform that was licensed by the government to send messages and updates to citizens during the COVID lockdown. The licensing agreement includes a small fee incurred by the relevant ministry for each new message disseminated. MoE will have to allocate finances for the number of text messages it plans to send during the Academic Year, at the rate of three messages per week.</td>
</tr>
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<td>Beyond this platform, WhatsApp is a popular application that is widely used in the country. School management committees and their respective schools have existing WhatsApp groups for coordination. Schools may consider creating WhatsApp groups with parents to collect feedback and provide additional guidance during this first phase to ascertain its efficacy as a medium for feedback. An alternate option could be to organize bi-weekly or weekly calls or meetings with parents.</td>
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<td><strong>Data Collection and Human Resources:</strong></td>
<td>With the support of school management committees, Principals will conduct brief orientation sessions with parents in their schools during the enrollment period to introduce the program, and teachers will collect contact information for parents who wish to receive messages.</td>
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<td>Each school will allocate two teachers to support the program. Grade 4 English and Math teachers will manage and monitor WhatsApp groups with School Management Committees and parents. Teachers will be trained by the NGO on responding to and supporting parents through these groups. The NGO will conduct one orientation session with teachers, followed by monthly refreshers through a video-call platform such as Zoom.</td>
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<td><strong>Definition of success:</strong> What would success look like for this specific strategy, and by when (at the outcomes level)?</td>
<td>Success at the outcomes level, if aligned with the logic model developed above, would mean that caregivers are enacting the shared activities at home. Assuming that the program adopts a two-way model that would require parents to respond to the messages by typing a simple response to acknowledge receipt (e.g. 1 = “Received” or “Activity Completed” based on the nature of the message), the percentage of responses would be used to calculate this outcome. Alternatively, the MoE can receive data on ‘messages opened’ from the platform on a weekly basis to make this assessment.</td>
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<td><strong>Milestones:</strong> What are the most important milestones between now and then?</td>
<td>The MoE has identified key process milestones and mapped a trajectory, based on previous experiences engaging with caregivers through their School Management Committees. Milestones can look like:</td>
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<td>• M1: MOU signed with SMS Platform for the program</td>
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<td>• M2: Initial sessions with School Management Committees and Principals by MoE Regional/District Coordinators and NGO staff to introduce the program and the role of the field staff</td>
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<td>• M3: Training of Grade 4 teachers, and Principals by NGO facilitators on program and facilitation of caregivers</td>
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<td>• M4: Orientation sessions conducted by SMC’s and caregivers enrolled in the program</td>
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<td>• M5: Six messages shared with parents at the end of the two-week period, with ongoing feedback via WhatsApp groups</td>
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<td>• M6: X% response rate/opening rate of Y messages shared at the end of four weeks of the program</td>
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<td>• M7: XX% response rate/opening rate of Z messages shared at the end of eight weeks of the program</td>
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<td>• M8: XYZ% attendance rate of students at the end of eight weeks of the program</td>
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<td>• M9: XYZ% of students appear for their in-class assessments at the end of the three month period...</td>
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<td><strong>Leadership:</strong> Who is the single person responsible for making sure implementation happens?</td>
<td>At the MoE level, responsibility can be assigned to an official who is directly involved in/responsible for distance learning or primary-grade level outcomes. This could be a Distance Learning Specialist, Primary Level Coordinator, Assistant or Special Secretary (or equivalent) who reports directly to the Secretary of Education/Leader at MoE, and will regularly track progress through the MoE’s IT department and regional/district level coordinators and report back to the MoE during monthly meetings.</td>
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### Name of Strategy | Response
---|---
**Delivery chain:** Who will that person work through to reach the field at scale? What are the risks, and how will we manage them? What feedback loops can we set up to track progress?  
A Delivery Chain maps the stakeholders responsible for implementing a program, starting from the highest authority, to the group being impacted by the program. Detailed guidelines on constructing this chain are available in the Implementation Playbook. Broadly, in this scenario, the MoE has identified the following responsibilities for the first phase:

**At the MoE level:**
- The Secretary of Education will sanction funds for pilot
- The Primary Level Coordinator who is entrusted with management of all matters for students in Grades 1 - 5 is the focal person managing all aspects of implementation and coordination
- The MoE in this country has an IT Department. A focal person at the operational level (say, the Manager of IT Department) will coordinate with the SMS platform on matters of licensing, and data on caregiver response to the text messages sent
- The Regional Coordinator of different regions covered in the first phase will assign responsibility to the Principals of Schools in their areas to oversee implementation of the program in their schools. They will also share aggregated results of student assessment results over time and provide reports to the Primary Level Coordinator at the end of the pilot.

**At the school management level:**
- Principals will have multiple responsibilities, including:
  - Briefing SMC’s on the program and rallying their support
  - Ensuring that their teachers are present and informed of the program
  - Attending - and ensuring the attendance of others - during training sessions with the NGO facilitators
  - Conducting an orientation session with SMC’s and parents regarding the program
  - Overseeing the creation and activity on WhatsApp groups with parents
  - Ensuring that student assessment results data is aggregated and shared as required
- Grade 4 Teachers will:
  - Attend training sessions on the program with the facilitators
  - Conduct in-class assessments at the end of three months to assess student learning outcomes
  - Routinely take attendance and share it with IT teachers
  - Actively monitor and provide feedback to parents through WhatsApp groups

**At the School Management Committee (Community) level:**
- SMC’s will take the primary responsibility for rallying support and encouraging the community to participate in the program. They will:
  - Attend the briefing by the School Principals and NGO to understand the program, and communicate its purpose to parents through door-to-door engagement
  - Lead the enrolment session with School Principals and collect contact information from parents
  - Follow up with parents who drop out of the program and share feedback with Principals

**At the NGO level:**
- The NGO will provide the messages on at-home activities to the MoE for regular dissemination
- They will develop reporting templates for school assessments results and conduct trainings with school staff on the program
- Attend high-level meeting at the MoE, and offer support at the school level as identified during the program (say, for refresher trainings)

**Impact:** What is the estimated impact of this strategy on the goal over time?  
The program will mitigate learning losses incurred by students during the pandemic, and further encourage students to appear and take their upcoming large-scale assessments. A successful first phase of this program will lead to expansion across more schools, thus better encouraging a larger number of students to perform well on their assessments across different socio-economic backgrounds.

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A Strategy Profile is a starting point; there are many tools and guidelines that can help you translate your aspirations and strategic plans to real impact on the ground. If you would like to learn more about this tool, and others that can guide your implementation efforts, you can access them through the Delivery Associates Implementation Playbook, or sign up for access to the Capacity Builder on the FLN Hub for a self-guided implementation journey. For any questions or support, please contact the team at Delivery Associates.
Conclusion

Evidence from a number of contexts points to the promise of parental information and engagement interventions, particularly in stressful environments where parents have limited cognitive bandwidth and children’s education and/or parents’ role in supporting their child’s education is not salient. Studies in numerous contexts, including in high- and low-income countries and implemented by NGOs and governments, have shown that parental engagement programs can be a low-cost approach to supporting learning. These programs are a particularly useful tool to combat learning loss brought about by pandemic-induced school closures but could also be appropriate in other contexts such as summer and winter vacations as well as complex situations such as refugee settings, conflict areas, and during protracted adverse weather events.

Effective implementation is contingent upon proactively enrolling the weakest learners and identifying ideal times of day and days of the week on which to engage parents and children simultaneously with learning content and/or to provide parents with actionable information on their child’s progress.

This guide provides three illustrative case studies to demonstrate how these critical factors vary by program and geography to help education actors think about the adaptations that may be needed in different contexts. While this guide is not intended to provide a step-by-step handbook on how to implement a parental information or engagement program, the general principles presented will be important for consideration in any context.

With information about the evidence and key implementation considerations in mind, readers may now be asking themselves how they can operationalize and act on the principles in this guide. A tool called the Generalizability Framework may provide a useful starting point. The Framework suggests addressing four interrelated categories of questions about a program and the context in which it may be adapted:

1. What is the theory of change behind the original program?
2. Do the local conditions hold in the new context for that theory to apply?
3. How strong is the evidence for the required general behavioral change?
4. What is the evidence that the implementation can be carried out well?

Illustrative examples of questions to consider whether parental engagement programs are right for your context can be found in The Implementation Journey: Is parental engagement right for my context? While deep partnership and iteration with program implementers and context experts will be required to achieve the appropriate level of specificity needed to adapt an evidence-based approach for a new context, we hope this guide provides a useful foundation from which to spur action. For further information about setting up strong systems for implementation, please refer to the Delivery Associates Implementation Playbook.
If you are interested in learning more about the content in this guide, please contact:

- JPAL_Education@povertyactionlab.org to set up an exploratory meeting with J-PAL Education Sector staff. If you are interested in Tips by Text, J-PAL can help facilitate a connection.

- Samuel Berlinski at the Inter-American Development Bank (samuelb@iadb.org) and Claudia Martínez A. at Pontifical Catholic University of Chile (clmartineza@uc.cl) for inquiries specifically related to Papás al Día.

- Colin Crossley at Young 1ove (ccrossley@young1ove.org) for inquiries specifically related to Young 1ove’s Phone-based Educational Programming intervention.

- Hafsa Iqbal at Delivery Associates (hafsa.iqbal@deliveryassociates.com) for inquiries specifically related to the Delivery Associates Implementation Playbook.
References


