

Family participation in school education

Ministry
of Education, Culture
and Sport

Looking ahead



Family participation in school education. Looking ahead

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Summary report



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT

Spanish National Education Council

Published by:

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Sub-Directorate General
Documentation and Publications

DATE OF PUBLICATION: 2014

NIPO 030-14-230-2 line

030-14-229-X paper

ISBN 978-84-369-5615-3

Legal deposit number M-30280-2014

Presentation

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The SPANISH NATIONAL EDUCATION COUNCIL (the CONSEJO ESCOLAR DEL ESTADO, CEE) is the highest national body responsible for consultation and advice in education. It was created in response to the constitutional principle of participation of all sectors affected by the general educational programme, enshrined in Article 27.5 of the 1978 Spanish Constitution. By its very nature then, the CEE is closely linked to the idea of participation, its procedures and its results; consequently, contributing to the debate on some of the important aspects of this question forms a natural part of the institution's potential and actual remit.

Over the course of the first decade of the 21st century, consolidation of the autonomous State in the field of education, through culmination of the process of devolution of powers to the Autonomous Communities, brought with it the creation of the Regional School Councils and their subsequent integration into one of the CEE's specific bodies: the Participatory Board of the Regional School Councils (the JUNTA DE PARTICIPACIÓN DE LOS CONSEJOS ESCOLARES AUTONÓMICOS, JPA). Formed by the presidents of the Regional School Councils and presided over by the president of the National Education Council, this body is, in accordance with its regulations, responsible for regional participation and cooperation. One of the powers conferred upon it by the regulations is that of studying issues of special relevance to the education system.

At its meeting of November 28, 2012, the JPA unanimously agreed to launch a wide-ranging study addressing the question of family participation in schools that would provide the basis for a debate on the nature of this and its impact on academic achievement and school life. Theoretical analyses were to be complemented by solid empirical research in order to be able to make well-founded recommendations to families, schools and the education authorities.

In a context in which the task of improving the quality of the Spanish education system is as necessary as it is complex, where the influencing factors are so varied and there is a risk of becoming sidetracked by vague assumptions and speculation, it is all the more crucial to generate empirical evidence on which to base an exploration of the importance of family participation and formulate pertinent recommendations for enhancing this as a means to contribute substantially to educational success and school improvement. Family participation here is understood in the modern sense as a synonym for parental involvement, and can take various forms and entail different levels of intensity.

Two years of continuous work have culminated in the publication of the book entitled *FAMILY PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL EDUCATION*¹, the essence of which is summarised in this present report. The aim of this collective work was not only to conduct a study of participation, but also the result of participation itself.

Three research teams, led by professors Rosario Reparaz from the University of Navarra, Joaquín Parra from the University of Murcia and María Castro from the Complutense University of Madrid, and coordinated by José Luís Gaviria, also from the Complutense University of Madrid, have been responsible for the scientific core of the book. The project was initiated by the Participatory Board of the Regional School Councils and its Executive Committee for the study, who also monitored its progress and were directly involved in drafting the book.

The first chapter of this summary contains the main conclusions drawn from the theoretical analysis and the six empirical studies specifically carried out for this project. It is on this solid basis that the recommendations have been formulated, and these are addressed to the principal stakeholders in family participation in schools; the education authorities, schools and families themselves. The second chapter provides a series of reflections that look towards the future of participation, its context and its requirements.

The present summary report is intended to provide information, contribute to facilitating dissemination of the book and widen its accessibility, based on the solid conviction that family participation is a phenomenon that without doubt can and should move the quality of Spanish education forward.

1. The complete book is available at www.mecd.gob.es/cee

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Participatory Board of the Regional School Councils

Research team

Conclusions and recommendations

Participatory Board of the Regional School Councils

Spanish National Education Council

This chapter comprises a summary of the most significant findings of the present study on family participation in school education. The aim of this synthesis is to provide the education authorities, the various groups forming the school community, and Spanish society in general, with a summary of those aspects which, because of their empirical importance, should be taken into account by all the parties involved in school improvement and educational success. The ability of the education authorities and schools to provide an informed response in terms of policies and strategies, as well as the individual practice of families and teachers, will be enhanced by this summary of the essential aspects of the research described below.

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1.- Conclusions

Notwithstanding the partial conclusions systematically presented in the different chapters of this study, particularly in part II, this section presents the joint vision of the Participatory Board of the Regional School Councils, the emphases of which have been modulated by the views of the State and Autonomous Community participatory bodies that this Board represents. In accordance with the content of this research and its structure, these conclusions are presented in three different blocks corresponding to the three types of analyses conducted in the study: conceptual and legislative analyses, international empirical analyses and national empirical analyses.

1.1.- Conceptual and legislative analyses

1. Parental participation in school education is a right and, at the same time, a basic obligation in democratic societies. In the case of Spain, the right to participation is expressly provided for in Article 27, paragraphs 5 and 7, of the Spanish Constitution. This right must therefore be guaranteed by the public authorities, promoted by the education authorities and exercised by families.
2. The materialisation of a participatory culture and the attainment of its positive effects on the educational environment both require a climate of trust between people that promotes mutual respect, facilitates cooperation between the different stakeholders and encourages participation. Furthermore, the knowledge and skills of the two main players, teachers and families, are essential in order to put this participation into practice effectively.
3. In the present study, the concept of family participation is understood as parental involvement, which refers to a shared responsibility between family and school that entails three basic areas of collaboration:

- Upbringing, which encompasses attitudes, values and practices, parenting styles and type of supervision of and relationship with adolescents.
- Relationships between home and school, including communication with teachers and participation in events, voluntary activities and decision-making groups at the school.
- Shared responsibility for learning outcomes and home and community activities that promote social and academic growth. This involves monitoring children's academic progress and having reasonable expectations of success.

In a narrower sense, five types of family participation in schools can be distinguished, as established in the European Commission's INCLUD-ED project::

- Informative participation, which entails the simple transmission of information from the school to the families, who receive it via various channels without further opportunities for participation.
 - Consultative participation, which involves a higher level of participation since parents can form part of the school's governing bodies, although only in a purely advisory role.
 - Decisive participation, in which parents can participate in decision-making relative to teaching content and evaluation.
 - Evaluative participation, which increases parental involvement in the evaluation of students and of the school itself.
 - Educative participation, which entails parental involvement in their children's learning processes and in their own education.
4. A very traditional view of the relationships between parents and the school still prevails in school systems, whereby a very precise distinction is made between the roles of both and scant attention is paid to the possibility of any productive interaction between them. In the case of Spain, the right of parents to participate

has gradually been incorporated into educational legislation, as evidenced both by the recognition of their right of association and their capacity to intervene in school councils.

5. In accordance with their regulatory frameworks, school councils in most European Union countries are usually involved in the definition of the schools' guiding principles and in extracurricular and complementary activities. However, they do not normally have the authority to make decisions regarding teaching content and methods nor the recruitment of teachers or head teachers, since these are considered areas for qualified professionals. The situation is more variable as regards the school budget; in some countries, school councils participate in approval of the same, whereas in others, they are merely informed about economic matters.
6. Should parents and schools desire a greater degree of collaboration, not only are legal provisions required, but also the necessary structures must be created. However, in this context, each school must develop its own specific methods and procedures, in accordance with its sociogeographic characteristics and type of student.
7. Even though traditional approaches to participation are provided for in the legislation of most developed countries, they have enjoyed little success. However, little by little, these approaches are giving way to a more contemporary vision that emphasises the importance of collaboration between family and school, a change that may have been spurred by the growing number of studies that have related this collaboration to improved learning outcomes for students.
8. Legal provisions do not of themselves create the atmosphere of openness and acceptance that is indispensable for effective cooperation. It is therefore necessary to generate strategies in educational systems that encourage participation. Dialogue, transparency and the perception of parents as vital partners to achieve school success are essential requirements for this.
9. In Spain, legislation relative to parental participation first emerged in the 19th century but did not coalesce into its present day representative nature until the adoption of the 1978 Constitution. Consistent with the constitutional principle of citizen participation in political, economic, cultural and social life, families have access to the educational system in a representational capacity through their participation in institutional bodies responsible for consultation and participation in the general educational programme, and others responsible for the administration and management of schools.
10. In accordance with Spanish legislation –considered in a wider sense– parental participation in the education system is not limited to their formal presence on specific advisory bodies related to the general educational programme or the administration and management of schools. Rather, their participation extends to a wide range of aspects, including: the exercise of the right to choice of school and for their children to receive a religious and moral education in accordance with their convictions, the right to association, the exchange of information between family and school, extracurricular services, academic support in the family environment and educational commitments between school and family.

1.2.- International empirical analyses

Meta-analytical synthesis

11. A review of the results of quantitative research, which constituted the meta-analytical synthesis conducted in the present study, indicates that the strongest positive relationships between parental participation and academic achievement were clustered around three main areas: high academic expectations of their children, good communication with them –focused on academic tasks and activities and the development of reading habits– and assistance with and supervision of school-related tasks, principally studying and learning.
12. As children progress through the different stages of schooling, the forms of family participation and its effects on learning outcomes diversify: participation does not appear to be related to achievement in pre-school education, but does have an important influence in primary education which is heightened still further in compulsory secondary education.
13. The most successful form of parental participation in terms of their children's performance corresponds to a pattern of family involvement which pursues academic achievement, encourages the development of basic skills such as reading and is characterised by the high academic expectations that the families have of their children.

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Study of PISA 2012 data

14. According to the research on PISA 2012 data conducted for this study, the factors that have consistently been shown to exert a strong positive influence on achievement in mathematics in the countries studied include parental provision of educational support for their children in this subject and doing things together as a family, in particular spending time talking together nearly every day and eating the main meal of the day together
15. There is an intermediate level of parental involvement which could be considered optimal as regards its impact on learning outcomes in mathematics. Low or very low values that move away from this intermediate level, have a negative effect on achievement in mathematics.

On the other hand, when such levels are above the optimum, the relationship is reversed in such a way that these high levels of involvement may be associated with low levels of achievement, which would explain the high frequency of meetings with teachers or long hours spent helping with homework and assignments at home. This would be due to the greater educational needs presented by students experiencing difficulties in this subject.

1.3.- National empirical analyses

Parental participation profiles

16. An analysis of the two profiles of parental participation obtained empirically in the present study from a large sample of Spanish families and schools revealed a diverse pattern of family participation with different levels of intensity depending on the basic cultural, socioeconomic and sociodemographic characteristics of the families themselves.
17. The first of the profiles that emerged from the empirical analysis corresponded to the following pattern: families that showed high levels of involvement with the school, participated effectively, engaged in frequent and satisfying communication with the school, were actively involved in school activities, experienced a greater sense of belonging to and identification with the school, showed greater interest in information about their children, and enriched the family environment by carrying out cultural activities.
18. The second participation profile was the polar opposite: families that showed less involvement and whose participation was a pure formality, with more knowledge about and sense of belonging to the parents' association, and membership of and participation in the school council. The families that corresponded to this profile showed less sense of belonging to the school, had less satisfactory communication with their children about their academic activities and carried out fewer cultural activities in support of the school's objectives.
19. The cultural and socioeconomic characteristics of families presenting the first parental participation profile were as follows: the parents, and especially the mother, had a higher educational level, there were more books and resources at home that facilitated school learning, and the parents devoted more economic resources to their children's education.
20. The sociodemographic characteristics of families presenting this profile of more intense and effective parental participation were as follows: they were older and their nationality of origin was Spanish.
21. Families presenting the profile of lower parental participation were characterised by having a lower educational level and fewer economic resources, by devoting fewer resources to their children's education and by being younger parents whose nationality of origin was not Spanish.
22. While not a feature exclusive to families with a higher educational level, these tended to see their children's education as something in which they should be involved in terms of support, monitoring and collaboration. In contrast, families with a lower level of education interacted to a lesser extent with schools.
23. The frequency of parental participation varied depending on their children's educational stage. Thus, families' interactions with the school and its teaching staff declined substantially during the stage of compulsory secondary education.

Parents were less participatory in this educational stage, a time when their children had become less dependent, and they tended to delegate to professionals.

Participation in elections to school councils

24. An empirical analysis of official figures revealed a low or very low rate of family participation in elections for representatives to the school councils. Specific special education schools presented the highest figures, followed by pre-school centres and primary schools, while secondary schools lagged considerably further behind in last position. The figures available for State-funded private schools were similar to those for public schools.
25. When these analyses focused not on information from the education authorities but on families' perceptions of their participation in the school council, they revealed that parents perceived a poor relationship with their representatives on this body and consequently, a low level of involvement in the running of the school through its school council. This was true in pre-school, primary and compulsory secondary education, with such involvement being even lower in the latter.
26. When families were asked about their participation in the election of their representatives to the school council, the respondents' answers referring to pre-school, primary and compulsory secondary education showed that they highly overestimated their participation in comparison with the official figures, even though they coincided with these in terms of the intensity of involvement according to educational stage.
27. In pre-school and primary education, about half the families considered that they received sufficient information on the processes of election to the school council and about the election candidates and the functions of parent representatives on the council. However, only slightly more than a third of the families reported knowing their representatives on the school council, and only a quarter stated that they would be willing to become a member of this participatory body.
28. Although families with children in compulsory secondary education received similar information to that provided in pre-school and primary education, their opinions were significantly worse as regards the rest of the variables analysed.

Thus, only a quarter of the families with children in these schools reported knowing the parent representatives on the school council. This proportion fell to less than a fifth when indicating their willingness to serve on the school council.
29. In terms of the barriers that families of children in pre-school and primary education encountered to their involvement in the school through its school council which could explain the low figures for participation, around one third of the interviewees indicated a lack of interest in participating in the elections as a representative on the school council. A smaller percentage –around a fifth– attributed difficulty in becoming involved to the lack of provision of information in general (dates of the elections, lack of information about candidates, etc.).

30. In compulsory secondary education, the families' opinions were similar to those expressed for pre-school and primary education. Furthermore, 4.4% more families with children in compulsory secondary education (34.9%) reported a lack of interest in participating in the elections as representative on the school council.
31. The picture that emerges from the above empirical data is one in which indirect family involvement in schools through their participation on the school council was very limited in all the different educational stages analysed. Of particular note was the low level of family participation in elections for representatives to the school council and their unwillingness to be candidates. In practice, this reflects a weak sense of identification with this channel for participation in the school.

Relationship between family participation and academic achievement

32. The empirical analyses of the relationship between family participation and academic achievement conducted for this study of Spanish students in pre-school, primary and compulsory secondary education revealed the existence of a strong connection between family participation in school life and students' academic achievement.
33. In pre-school education, the factors associated with family involvement in the school that appeared to have a positive effect on academic performance were the following, in descending order of importance:
 - A sense of belonging to the school.
 - Parents' high academic expectations.
 - A climate conducive to study in the home and parental supervision.
 - A perception of access to communication with the different members of the school.

Thus, a sense of belonging and academic expectations were the two predictors that exerted most impact on achievement in this stage.

34. In primary education, the family involvement factors that were associated positively with students' academic achievement were the following, in descending order of importance:
 - Parents' educational aspirations regarding their children's education.
 - A sense of belonging to the school.
 - The lack of a need to help children when doing homework.
 - Membership of the parents' association.
 - Participation in elections to the school council.
 - A climate conducive to study in the home and parental supervision.
 - Participation in school activities.

As with pre-school education, parents' academic aspirations for their children and a sense of belonging to the school were the most important factors. In this case, factors related to the families' sociocultural level were statistically significant.

35. The same factors were identified in compulsory secondary education, although with different coefficients, with the exception of membership of the parents' association, which was not significant in this stage. The factors which were positively associated with school achievement were as follows, in descending order of importance:
 - Parents' educational aspirations for their children.
 - A sense of belonging to the school.
 - The lack of a need to help children when doing homework.
 - Participation in elections to the school council.
 - A climate conducive to study in the home and parental supervision.
 - Participation in school activities
36. Factors related to sociocultural level not only continued to be statistically significant in compulsory secondary education, but exerted a stronger impact on achievement as children progressed through their schooling. In addition, a negative impact was observed at this stage, associated with being a first-generation immigrant.
37. The magnitude of the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement increased with educational stage, attaining its highest value in compulsory secondary education.
38. Thus, the complexity of the explanatory model and the number of factors related to academic achievement increased as schooling advanced; there were more statistically significant explanatory factors in compulsory secondary education than in pre-school or primary education.
39. In all the three educational stages analysed, the factor which exerted a strong positive influence on achievement was a sense of belonging to the school. Likewise, the perception of a climate conducive to study in the home and family supervision exerted a similar influence, although to a lesser extent than a sense of belonging and to a varying degree depending on educational stage, being especially important in pre-school education. The clearly positive influence of help with homework at home, which had a strong impact in primary education and even more so in compulsory secondary education, can also be linked to family supervision.
40. Also of note was the markedly positive influence that families' academic aspirations for their children had on their children's performance. This exerted a clearly stronger influence than that of the family's sociocultural level (not significant in pre-school education) or the negative impact of being a first-generation immigrant in primary or secondary education.

41. In light of the evidence generated by this study, it seems clear that parents' aspirations regarding their children's education and family involvement in terms of help with and supervision of their children's school activities are both essential to achieve positive levels of academic performance. The above is coupled with a sense of connection and belonging to the school, which represents a means of sharing the educational model implemented in the school. There is, therefore, a high level of consistency between these results and those obtained from the meta-analytical synthesis referred to in conclusion 11.

Relationship between family participation and school climate

42. Empirical analyses of the relationship between family participation and school climate at pre-school, primary and compulsory secondary education level revealed that on average, the climate in Spanish schools is positive. Public compulsory secondary education schools presented the lowest value.
43. The results obtained for the full sample (pre-school, primary and compulsory secondary education) showed that the factors «families' sense of belonging to the school», «immigrant status», «attendance of meetings at the school», «ratio» and «membership of the parents' association» played a prominent role in school climate, but the most important factor was the families' sense of belonging to the school.
44. The first aspect to highlight in pre-school education is that this stage was usually characterised by a good school climate. Irrespective of whether they were public or private institutions, schools with a more orderly climate were also those whose head teachers gave a very positive assessment of the students.
45. In primary education, the variables which influenced school climate were the following, given in order of importance: family participation in elections to the school council, meetings with members of the teaching staff and families' perception of access to communication.
46. In compulsory secondary education, schools with a good school climate were characterised by having fewer first-generation immigrants and for higher levels of family attendance at school meetings.
47. Overall, variables such as «public or private nature of the school» or «families' socioeconomic level» did not exert a decisive influence on school climate in any of the analyses carried out. First-generation immigrant status only appeared to be relevant in compulsory secondary education.
48. There is a certain degree of consensus in the international literature as regards the positive effect of school climate on the teaching and learning process. However, besides confirming this effect in the case of Spain, the results of this study also suggest ways of improving the school climate based on an analysis of the most influential variables that are susceptible to intervention. Thus, most of the factors considered offer possibilities for actions that would improve the school climate. Such is the case, for example, of the sense of belonging to the school, of meetings between teaching staff and parents with children in primary education or attendance at meetings with tutors in secondary education.

2.- Recommendations

Despite legislative progress and recognition of the rights of parents to participate in their children's education –established in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the national legislation of developed countries– this study tends to confirm that relationships between families and schools are characterised on many occasions by a lack of engagement, by the pursuit of goals that to some extent are divergent, and by scant communication. On the other hand, this study has revealed that family participation understood in the broad sense of «parental involvement» is a complex factor that has a significant impact on the quality of school life and learning outcomes, both in strictly academic and overall educational terms. All this suggests that improving this relationship should be considered an important educational goal.

In the previous section on conclusions, priority was given to those findings that, by their nature, concern aspects of education that can be modified. This empirical basis has enabled us to formulate the recommendations presented below. The following proposals are addressed separately to each of the three principal groups of stakeholders whose respective actions will determine the magnitude and degree of success of family participation as a means to improve the Spanish educational system.

2.1.- Recommendations for families

1. The idea of family participation goes far beyond mere formalities or the exercise of rights guaranteed by law; it also includes a series of elements related to certain aspects of family and school life, and above all, to the interaction of these. Consequently, we recommend that families explore the meaning of parental involvement in greater depth, so that they can act in an informed and systematic manner on all of its components.
2. The data obtained from an analysis of PISA 2012 highlight the importance of family activities due to the positive influence of these on performance; in particular, spending time talking together nearly every day and eating the main meal of the day together. One advantage of these family habits is that they do not necessarily depend on socioeconomic or cultural level, but are nevertheless effective. Therefore, we recommend that families ensure they make time for these simple, low-cost activities.
3. Communication between families and teachers is not only a sign of educational quality but also of educational coherence. Dialogue between the two is essential to further complementary interventions aimed at the same educational project. It is only thus that students will perceive what is really important in their lives. Therefore, dialogue should not be limited to early ages nor focus exclusively on transmitting information from one player to another. It has become increasingly necessary for communication to flow between them.
4. In accordance with the above, successful development of family participation requires training by skilled professionals or experienced parents to ensure effective knowledge, attitude and skills transfer to families. Consequently, we recommend that parents associations which organise this kind of activity ensure the proven quality of the trainers. There is sufficient evidence-based knowledge available to ensure that only suitably qualified trainers are selected.

5. The empirical evidence obtained in this research repeatedly indicates the important role played by the family's sense of belonging to the school their children attend. Since this is the aspect of parental involvement which has the greatest impact, it merits particular attention from families. A sense of belonging encourages participation; in turn, participation tends to promote a sense of belonging. This virtuous circle should mainly be propelled by families through personal willingness, involvement in the school's educational project and, where possible, an informed choice of school.
6. The results of the international analyses coincide with those at national level in so far as they also highlight the substantial influence on academic achievement exerted by the importance parents give to the same. This is expressed through parents' high expectations and the support and help given at home in terms of sharing and supervising their children's school life. Therefore, all families, regardless of their socioeconomic and sociocultural level, should hold high academic aspirations for their children. This «upwards» pressure with respect to their children's academic possibilities, which all parents can provide, must become part of the families' educational beliefs and practices, and an aspect of the training activities promoted by parents' associations, particularly among disadvantaged families.
7. Contributing to a positive school climate is not only one of the family's civic duties but also a means to influence their children's education and promote successful learning outcomes. The results of this research indicate that irrespective of their socioeconomic status or the public or private nature of their children's schools, families should become more involved in school life, particularly with regard to meetings with teaching staff and the mechanisms for representation and influence in the school's activities.
8. Given the important role played by a climate of trust between family and school in the creation of an effective culture of parental participation in schools, families should contribute to the establishment of such a climate through adopting attitudes of consideration towards teachers, as well by being willing to embrace joint educational objectives and seek mutual agreement. This involves sharing information, responsibilities, decisions and outcomes.
9. Another aspect that has emerged from the research is the growing importance of participation as children progress through the stages of education analysed. Thus, once compulsory secondary education is reached, there is substantially less parental participation, and yet this is the stage where its impact on school performance is highest. This finding suggests that in the compulsory secondary education stage, families should modify their forms of participation in their children's schools rather than reducing their levels of engagement under the mistaken belief that, as a consequence of age, it has become less necessary. It is true that parental participation often takes on a different form, but vigilance is necessary to ensure that such modification, which often involves a distancing, remains effective.

2.2.- Recommendations for schools

10. Considering the important role that quality training for families can play in the development of knowledge and attitudes favourable to parental involvement, schools should encourage this type of action by providing parents' associations with suitable spaces, support and guidance for this purpose.
11. Quality family participation training is as important for teaching staff as it is for families. The development of attitudes and knowledge concerning the impact of participation on academic achievement and school climate should form part of the professional development programme of the school's teaching staff. Consequently, the results of this training should be taken into account when planning educational projects.
12. Schools and their teaching and non-teaching staff, as the families' partners in parental involvement, should contribute to the creation of a cooperative climate that encourages an effective commitment to partnership between family and school. This should be based on informed knowledge, a professional attitude of openness and generosity and a firm belief in the utility of parental participation in benefit of the students.
13. Empirical research has revealed the considerable importance of a sense of belonging as the factor associated with parental participation which has the greatest impact on academic achievement; therefore, schools should formulate and implement strategies to encourage the development of this feeling in families.
14. Schools should adapt these recommendations of a general nature to their specific context, as it is the teaching staff and school management who best know the characteristics of their students' families, their socioeconomic and sociocultural level and their willingness to participate. The results of the present research suggest that schools located in socially disadvantaged areas should pay special attention to parental involvement in order to make a significant contribution to improving the school's climate and the academic achievement of all students.
15. The traditional regulation of parental participation through the mechanism of the school council is not sufficient to promote effective family participation, nor the educational and academic outcomes that such participation may generate. Therefore, schools should not limit themselves to a purely bureaucratic or formal approach and should have the capacity to leverage the full potential for improvement entailed in effective parental involvement.
16. The growing number of variables associated with family participation and the variations in parental involvement profiles and intensity, from pre-school to compulsory secondary education, also has an impact on schools. Given that its impact on academic performance increases throughout schooling, especially in the last stage, secondary education schools should take this factor into account and encourage family involvement through suitable strategies and instruments.
17. Due to its proven utility, and in order to achieve the above recommendations, the following lines of action merit particular attention: establishing efficient mechanisms of information, facilitating family consultation and meetings with tutors in

an atmosphere of mutual trust, and even the formal signing of contracts between family and school providing a written record of both parties' commitments in benefit of students' academic achievement.

2.3.- Recommendations for the education authorities

18. In view of the results obtained from empirical research, the education authorities should enhance legislation on family participation in school education and formulate policies that promote genuine parental involvement through school-based actions. The need for family involvement in schools should also be taken into account by the employment authorities and by businesses themselves.
19. A low level of social participation leads to little use being made by families of the legally established mechanisms for representative participation. Therefore, the education authorities should adopt approaches aimed at encouraging family involvement in school education that take all the major intervening factors and their relationships into account.
20. They should also promote participation training actions aimed both at families and teachers. In the case of teaching staff and management teams, such actions should be systematically included in both initial and continuing training. As regards families, their organisations should be given financial support for this training. In all cases, the degree of effectiveness of these actions should be evaluated.
21. Education authorities should promote research on family participation. Similarly, they should promote the development of «best school practices» in parental involvement, facilitate their systematic implementation and ensure evaluation and subsequent dissemination of the best ones from the point of view of establishing them, their practical relevance, their impact and their reproducibility.
22. Within their sphere of responsibility, the education authorities should intervene in all the intangible aspects that comprise an atmosphere of collaboration between school and family; an atmosphere that is both based on and in turn generates a relationship of mutual trust. Prizes and different forms of recognition specifically aimed at rewarding the quality of relationships between family and school constitute essential elements of the pertinent policies.
23. The available evidence on managing change and institutional innovation indicates that without the genuine and enthusiastic involvement of management, no change in direction is possible. Therefore, to achieve a climate of cooperation between family and school, the education authorities should provide head teachers with the necessary support and encouragement.
24. The empirical information provided by this research indicates that schools located in socially disadvantaged areas which also provide schooling to a high proportion of immigrant students at risk of social exclusion should receive priority support from the education authorities.

25. This research has revealed that the support and help provided by families at home as well as their actions aimed at sharing and supervising their children's school life constitute a supremely important aspect of parental involvement; nevertheless, it must be recognised that as students progress through the educational stages, more and more families find themselves unable to provide such support and help. Therefore, the education authorities should formulate, implement and maintain, on an ongoing basis, policies and programmes that compensate for this handicap among those segments of the population with fewer economic possibilities and a lower educational level.

The future of participation

Participatory Board of the Regional School Councils

Spanish National Education Council

1.- Introduction

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The second half of the 20th century witnessed the consolidation of education systems regulated and financed by the public authorities in compliance with regulatory frameworks that established the compulsory and free nature of education during childhood and adolescence, thus ensuring universal education. This commitment is based on the view that only the effective exercise by the entire population of the right to education will permit the exercise of all other rights and freedoms. The political, social and economic future of a country depends on the effectiveness of its educational system. Education is the basis of social equality and an essential tool to combat inequalities of origin. Education is also an indispensable instrument for progress towards the ideals of peace, freedom and social justice.

Rapid social, economic and technological change presents new challenges and more ambitious goals for society, and consequently, new and greater demands on its education system. Education is a service of public interest since it equips people with the capacity for life-long learning and active participation in democratic society, and with a critical spirit and solid values. From this perspective, family participation in schools is an undeniable quality factor, since the results of this study indicate that this has positive impact on academic achievement and improving school climate.

There are many challenges that education must address in the 21st century, and this requires the involvement of all sectors of the educational community. Relevant aspects specific to families include the influence they exert through parenting style, care and upbringing of children at home, and the connection they establish with the

school and other informal educational environments. Parenting style is affected by the socioeconomic and cultural characteristics of the population.

The various studies and research contained in this publication locate family participation in school education at the forefront of the educational debate and identify it as a subject of great importance in management aimed at improving the quality of school systems. The goal of this final chapter is to conduct a prospective exercise and reflect on the future of participation, considering some of the changes in the context and transformations of the main institutions involved that will determine, in both positive and negative terms, this future. Policies related to family involvement as an indispensable contribution to school improvement are also highlighted. Lastly, cooperation between families and schools is proposed as the best future strategy for participation in the school environment.

2.- Changes in the context and the future of participation

Any analysis of the future of family participation in education must necessarily consider changes in the context. These changes will –and indeed have already begun to– affect the main players in school education, and will influence their mutual relations. Family participation is understood here in the modern sense that has been adhered to throughout this research, and is equivalent to ‘parental involvement’. Beyond the details or aspects that characterise this notion, the truth is, as Morgan et al. (1992) have indicated, that it is essentially based on the idea that «parents and teachers have something to learn from each other».

2.1.- Changes in the context

The dynamics of social progress which, in general terms, is common to all developed countries has led to a sustained increase in the proportion of the population that enters higher education (OECD, 2014). This dynamic is based in part on the transmission from parent to child of a push towards increased education and upward social mobility, and is reinforced by the need in an increasingly knowledge-based economy for future employees to be trained and qualified. This joint impetus will give rise to successive generations of more highly educated parents better equipped to understand the positive consequences that parental involvement has on their children’s education and academic achievement, and with higher expectations regarding their academic future.

It is appropriate at this point to make special mention of the marked leap, in statistical terms, in women’s educational level with respect to men, as revealed by the available studies based on outcome indicators (Spanish National Education Council, 2014). Moreover, an argument propounded from within the sociology of education on the important role women play in education, which asserts that «the best ministers of education are parents, usually the mothers» (Ballion, 1991), is illuminating as regards the nature of parents’ rising educational level and the impact of this on family involvement.

All this will generate a new willingness to establish constructive relationships between the family and school which are both more open and more demanding, based on renewed foundations that move away from either undervaluing or distrusting schools.

This progressive change in the social context, which will directly affect the nature and intensity of family participation in school education, will also have an impact on the political context, to the point that the political powers will be obliged to formulate and implement actions aimed at satisfying parental expectations in terms of participation. This increase in parents' educational level will be accompanied by a greater capacity to exert influence, a willingness to participate in associations with a clearly defined objective, and indirect participation in the political sphere –in defence of their interests– in a context in which the social and economic role of education and its outcomes will become increasingly important. Looking ahead, it is probable that political parties will become increasingly aware in the coming decades of the question of parental involvement, and this will constitute a powerful vertical factor for change –propelled by the public authorities– that will provide an impetus to others of a more horizontal nature –in the heart of society itself– and lead to a more central role for families in schools.

Information and communication technologies have become of fundamental importance in the acquisition and reformulation of knowledge, and will therefore exert an increasing influence on the development of education, both in the school and in the family. Moreover, technological change and its impact on the ease of personalised communication constitute another aspect of contextual change which will influence the relationship between family and school, with the consequent implications for parental involvement. The digital revolution embodied by smartphones, which have had such a profound impact on social behaviour, is just one indication of how digital technologies will have a marked effect on the forms of parental involvement. The development of specific communication applications will only strengthen interaction between the family and school; first on one side, then on the other and eventually both together.

Therefore, change in the social context –in the sense of more highly educated parents, especially mothers– combined with change in the political context –greater awareness among the political powers of family participation– and technological change –enhancing communication and facilitating information– will directly or indirectly generate knowledge about the positive effects of parental involvement. These three types of contextual developments come together when promoting parental training about their children's education and the influencing factors: the first and third elements as enablers of understanding and access to specialised information on parental involvement, and the second as a driver and motivator of training for families. Research such as the present study will continue to delve further into the educational impact of participation, providing the empirical basis required to mobilise action and demonstrate its importance. This complex series of influences will accelerate the process of parental involvement, as soon as each exceeds its critical level.

Besides these positive contextual aspects, which will tend to intensify parental involvement, there are others that will highlight even more clearly –if that were possible– the need to consolidate family participation, in the sense of support from schools, regional institutions and the State, in order to compensate, at least partly, other negative aspects. Thus, for example, parents' economic difficulties –linked to the belated but lasting effects of the crisis and long-term unemployment– will increase the risks of social marginalisation and exclusion, which will significantly affect family life and, through various mechanisms, will tend to weaken the relationship between family and school. Similarly, longer working hours, particularly among the immigrant population, will

continue to engender severe difficulties in reconciling work and family life, adversely affecting the relationship with the school and thus weakening parental participation.

There are no signs on the horizon to indicate any future improvement in the economic aspects of the context, and thus the most realistic option would be to take them into account when defining policies to promote support for family participation –understood as cooperation and assistance– at both macro level, i.e. the public and education authorities, and micro level, i.e. schools.

2.2.- Changes in the institution of the family

In addition to changes in the context –or precisely because of them– the family as an institution directly concerned in school participation is experiencing rapid changes in Spain that will no doubt continue in the future and will have consequences in this area that must be taken into consideration.

In recent decades, the progressive incorporation of women into the workplace has had a significant influence on the functions and roles that parents play in relation to their children's education. This poses new challenges for the intensification of family participation in schools, not only as concerns the families themselves in terms of an equal division of responsibilities and coordination within the family in order to render this effective, but also as regards the institutions responsible for facilitating such participation.

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On the basis of the experience of most developed countries, by the end of the 20th century the OECD was already voicing concerns about the following (OECD, 1995): «The emergence of «composite» or «blended» families with children from previous relationships creates complex situations that can only be managed if there are sufficient financial resources and psychological and affective skills. When the family does not have the resources necessary to fund the inevitable adjustments (visits, adequate housing for both parties, etc.), children are affected by the resultant situation of insecurity which does not offer the stability and consistency they need».

Together with this type of situation, various other changes in family structures will have different effects on participation; such is the case of single-parent families and blended families. In many of these situations, especially that of single-parent families, economic difficulties will emerge, and in others, the brunt of parental involvement will fall on one of the parents alone, usually the mother. Recent data indicate that about ninety percent of single-parent families are headed by the mother (Fundación ADECCO, 2014).

The diversity of people from other backgrounds and cultures, together with attention to the problems experienced by families from disadvantaged backgrounds, are other factors in Spain that affect and will continue to affect the institution of the family and the relationship between family and school. It should be borne in mind that the percentage of the population at risk of poverty and social exclusion has not stopped growing since 2008.

Moreover, a weakening in social consensus about certain values of undoubted interest for education, coupled with a loss of the educational relevance of other social

institutions, will leave the family and school increasingly isolated in their task of educating new generations.

This combination of circumstances will lead to a reappraisal of the role of parental involvement, and in many cases will render it more difficult. This will increase the responsibility of all parties involved –the public authorities, family and school– as regards providing support, promoting agreements and reaching commitments whether tacitly or formally that make it possible to harness the full potential for school improvement proffered by the concept of family participation and to achieve satisfactory practical implementation of the same.

2.3.- Changes in schools

The kind of directive, as formulated by McClure (1988), which reads: «Leave schools as they have always been» has lost its validity, with the exception of a possible metaphorical interpretation referring to the essential core of the aims of school education. Schools are open systems in permanent interaction with the societies of which they form an integral part; they are, in fact, social subsystems which cannot remain aloof from their societies' evolution, needs and requirements. Conversely, and within the scope of their responsibilities, schools influence society, providing an unimaginably valuable service and contributing to society's ability to face the future. This interaction forms the basis of their dynamics, and in practice illustrates their capacity for adaptability.

Particularly in Spain, schools have undergone significant changes associated, among other factors, with a very rapid increase in the size of the school population from economic immigrant families. Besides the support provided for this population by the social services, schools constitute an outstanding environment for integration. Moreover, their daily close contact with children renders them an exceptional tool for child supervision and monitoring, and consequently for the detection of children's needs. Schools are, and will undoubtedly remain, the main social institution with such a close connection.

Commendable efforts have been made to adapt to other changes in the context. Such has been the case, for example, of the response to the necessary use of the information and communication technologies; in some cases this might be considered insufficient while in others, given the speed with which changes in this area have occurred, it can only be described as amazing.

Something similar can be said of the progress achieved by many schools in the field of quality management adapted to the school world, which has led to an increased focus on the recipients of educational services, and the consolidation and improvement of quality educational projects as the focal point of the definition of the school model. This model has been established by inviting the participation of various stakeholders in order to reach mutually accepted decisions and desires, as well as by seeking their commitment to ensure effective implementation. This has fostered an attitude of trust and collaboration between all parties, aimed at continuous school improvement.

There are thus solid grounds for considering that the flexibility of the school institution, as demonstrated in Spain over the past two decades, will facilitate active collaboration in terms of momentum and progress in family participation in school

education as a means of improving the quality of Spanish education. The fact that over two hundred schools agreed to participate in this research, and their subsequent involvement in the study, is just one example of this willingness to collaborate

3.- Family participation. An essential contribution to school improvement

Academic research and studies conducted by international organisations with responsibilities in education have demonstrated the multitude of factors and their interactions that contribute to educational success and school improvement. The complexity of education suggests the need to adopt a systemic approach when formulating and implementing actions (López Rupérez, F., 2001). This implies taking a global or integrated view of many of the factors and their interactions, but giving priority to the relatively small group of variables with a significant impact on improvement.

The research described in the present summary report as well as the other studies mentioned here all conclude that one of the most important factors that influence both the school's academic and strictly educational outcomes is parental involvement. The comprehensive literature review conducted for the meta-analytical synthesis and presented in Chapter 4 shows the extent to which the impact of parental involvement on academic achievement is consistently reiterated in the available international empirical evidence. Therefore, acting on this variable represents an essential action or series of actions in the collective tasks that lie ahead for Spanish society: namely, meeting the new demands of the context and improving the quality of Spanish education.

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In order to face this challenge with a greater possibility of success, it is vital that the three main stakeholders –the family, school and authorities– pull together in the same direction. There is no doubt that parental involvement concerns *prima facie* the family, but the other two main stakeholders must also contribute in order to facilitate, promote and support this task, and to eliminate the existing barriers to effective communication between them.

If greater knowledge gives rise to a better understanding, then it is to be expected that future advances in the knowledge and information society will lead to a better understanding of the phenomenon of parental involvement, its key elements and the influence it exerts on the quality of school education, as well as mobilising action by the parties affected, strengthening their individual effects and promoting useful synergies. Success in guiding and implementing this collective effort will undoubtedly contribute to school improvement and the sought-after advancement of Spanish education.

4.- Family participation as cooperation

As discussed on both a conceptual and empirical level throughout this report, the concept of family participation must not only incorporate an updated notion of parental involvement, but must also involve mature cooperation between family and school if it is to be effective. The OECD, through the CERI (Centre for Educational Research and Innovation), has made a firm commitment to a relationship of association or alliance between both social institutions for the benefit of children, young people and ado-

lescents; and, therefore, for the future of our society. This report reflects that same approach.

In order to shed light on the relationships between family and school, the European Parents' Association (EPA, 1992) established a charter of the rights and duties of parents, which is summarised in Table 1. However, as the CERI (1997) has highlighted, one of the obligations identified by the EPA lacks its corresponding right, namely the obligation which considers family participation in school education as cooperation: «Parents have the duty to help each other to improve their skills as prime educators and partners in the home-school relationship».

The relationship between family and school can be cooperative and complementary provided that there is mutual recognition of the educational responsibilities of each, establishing limits for action and valuing and respecting each other's work; this will involve communication between both parties that is based on dialogue and participation in education, seen as an ongoing process that depends not only on the school or family alone, but on both.

Families and their basic obligations form the main point of reference in matters of health and safety; supervision, discipline and guidance, and positive home conditions that support the behaviour appropriate for each educational stage. There is no doubt that teachers need the family's collaboration in these areas for their work to be effective. Mutual trust and the exchange of information and points of view constitute the basis for the design of a common framework in which the objectives are understood and the responsibilities shared.

However, collaboration requires something more; it requires knowing and a priori sharing the essential core: the school selected, its educational project and the structures

Table 1. Rights and duties of parents in education according to the European Parents' Association

| Parents have the right: | Parents have the duty: |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To recognition of their primacy as educators of their children. - To full access to the formal education system for their children on the basis of their needs, talents and merits. - Of access to all information at educational institutions which concerns their children. - To make a choice for the education which is closest to their convictions and to the values they hold dear in raising their children. - To exert influence on the policy which their children's school implements. - To be consulted actively about the policy of public authorities in education at all levels. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To raise children in a responsible way and not to neglect them. - To commit themselves as partners in education to the school of their children. - To give to their children's schools all information relevant for the attainment of the educational goals on which they work together. - To make well-informed and conscientious choices about the education their children should receive. - To be personally committed to their children's school as a vital part of the local community. - To maintain democratic representative organisations at all levels to represent themselves and their interests. |

Source: Compiled from CERI (1997).

and opportunities which promote a sense of belonging and the construction of relationships that encourage a positive climate.

Thus, collaboration must be seen as an educational end in itself. Student's all-round development includes aspects associated with relationships, such as teamwork, involvement and collaboration both in the classroom and in other areas inside or outside the school. A democratic society must promote citizen participation in decision-making at different levels. Family collaboration at school level represents a model not only for their children, but also for the rest of the educational community.

This partnership or cooperation should mark –and eventually will mark– the future of participation in advanced societies. It should do this for various reasons; first, because the work of the school is steadily becoming more difficult and in an increasingly complex social and economic context, schools cannot be left to face the task of educating on their own; second, because parents' increasingly higher educational level provides new possibilities for support, communication and the assumption of shared and agreed responsibilities; third, because schools have demonstrated their capacity to adapt to a changing context and will become aware, whether spontaneously or through training, of the benefits of this partnership with families; and fourth, because in the future, family, social and economic expectations regarding the educational effectiveness of schools will steadily become higher. All these circumstances favourable to parental involvement will converge to promote family participation and cooperation between family and school.

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To complement this essentially spontaneous trend towards a growing closeness between family and school, the public authorities must take actions aimed at sustaining, supporting and, if necessary, promoting the development of a relationship based on cooperation between the two institutions. In general in recent decades, education authorities in developed countries have supported family involvement through regulatory actions focused on securing formal representation on school councils or enhancing parents' freedom of choice of school. However, in a future that is already becoming the present, it will be essential to move beyond formalist rhetoric, and to support and assist families and schools. Notwithstanding the foregoing, these other forms of participation, which are more focused on people - parents and teachers - and cooperation, must be implemented in order to achieve the common objective of improving education.

From a rational perspective of policy formulation and implementation, one can state that as the available evidence becomes more widely known, and as individual and collective processes of reflection are stimulated as a result, it is highly likely that the public authorities will complement existing legislation and adopt initiatives that will reinforce these spontaneous cooperation mechanisms.

5.- Conclusion: participation, a project for the future

One of the greatest difficulties encountered when attempting to define strategic areas in the field of educational policies is the delay in verifying the effectiveness of the decisions adopted. The effects of our work today may only become visible in the coming decades, at best, and forecasts based on the evolution of the social context may not be met, among other reasons because the consequences of the educational policies

adopted may not be those envisaged. Today more than ever, it is necessary to bear in mind that society is in a state of constant change, and that this new social framework requires a response from education and the sectors involved that meets its demands.

In the above-described scenario, in which the relationship between family and school is intertwined, both institutions must understand that parental involvement in schools is not only desirable but also necessary and, in the end, inevitable.

In the light of an analysis of the context, the available empirical evidence, the results of this study and the recommendations of international organisations, parental involvement in school education constitutes one of the most important factors in quality education on which it would be timely, possible and relatively easy to act.

The future of family participation will probably involve achieving progress in models of cooperation between family and school with the support, assistance and encouragement of the public authorities. It is fitting to conclude this chapter by quoting a statement made by J. Bastiani (1993) in this regard:

«You cannot leave the partnership between home and school to evolve at its own pace without help. Nor should teachers and parents be allowed to develop it on their own without support. It represents an essential task which requires not only imagination but also organisation, understanding and support».

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In a context in which the task of improving the quality of the Spanish education system is as necessary as it is complex, where the influencing factors are so varied and there is a risk of being sidetracked by vague assumptions and speculation, it is crucial to generate empirical evidence on which to base an exploration of the importance of family participation and formulate pertinent recommendations for enhancing this as a means to contribute substantially to educational success and school improvement. Family participation here is understood in the modern sense as a synonym for parental involvement, and can take various forms and entail different levels of intensity.

Two years of continuous work have culminated in the publication of the book entitled FAMILY PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL EDUCATION¹, the essence of which is summarised in this present report. The aim of this collective work was not only to conduct a study of participation, but also the result of participation itself.

¹ The complete book is available at: www.mecd.gob.es/cee