



# Parent'R'Us Awareness Raising Tool for Policy makers

## Key messages:

- Children from disadvantaged families are often at risk of school failure and the disengagement of their families in school life is a major factor in it;
- Policies supporting the engagement of all parents are directly impacting school success and children well-being at school;
- As a result, such policies are also taking burden off teachers and result in lower costs in the education system.

## What is parental engagement at school?

To a certain extent parents are involved at school or at least they are supposed to be involved. Research around parental involvement and parental engagement defines these two notions differently, the first being an invitation for taking part in something that is already in place and the latter one being a **co-creation procedure between partners – namely school and home – mutually recognizing each other’s role and impact and working in partnership around learning**. It is also clear from research that parental engagement has a number of benefits for children.

The difference between involving and engaging parents

## Policies supporting parental engagement

Education policy can support parental engagement directly and indirectly in the following ways:

By **establishing a policy environment that obliges schools to engage representatives of parents in decision making**, giving parents’ representation (parents’ organisations or committees) specific rights and obligations;

- By empowering and supporting organisations of parents to ensure equitable participation of parents from diverse backgrounds and to avoid tokenism;
- By building parent representation in a bottom-up way and actively engaging parent representatives in decision making at local, regional and national level, in all questions related to education;
- By offering teacher and school leader training, coaching and mentoring in parental engagement, and incentivising their participation as part of the compulsory continuous professional development (CPD);
- By supporting the exchange of inspiring practices and engaging community organisations in parental engagement support.

Involvement	Engagement
Who is involved/engaged?	
Parents	Parents and children + family and community
What is in the focus?	
School with teaching in centre	School, parents, learner with learning in centre
How it is done	
School initiative, formal meetings	Flexibility of form and timing
Communication is	
One-way school to home	Two-way, use of technology is dominant

## Parent'r'us

### School parent involvement to increase student achievement

#### Teacher professional development needs

Research clearly shows that in the majority of European countries the profile of teachers is closest to white, middle class, middle aged, female with a low level of diversity. Migrant and Roma communities are especially under-represented in the teaching professions while their children are the most vulnerable and at risk of school failure. Motivation research also shows that those choosing teaching as a profession are relatively risk-averse and opt for the school as a workplace being closest to values, behaviours and practices they consider their own. However, **parent engagement is only possible if it is based on mutual respect and equal partnerships**. Thus, teacher training needs to accompany administrative measures that focus on

- Widening teachers' knowledge and understanding of diverse social and ethnic groups;
- Identifying and overcoming prejudices;
- Offering tools for partnership with people whose social and cultural background differ from those of the teachers' in general;
- Specific needs of vulnerable families.

When designing policies that are especially supportive of the engagement of vulnerable, disadvantaged parents, the following factors are to be considered:

- A high percentage of these parents have bad schooling experiences that have a direct impact on their attitude towards teachers and schools;
- Many of these parents don't feel comfortable in the school as a physical space, thus policy needs to encourage school-related discourse to happen at safe third places (with the possible engagement of community organisations);
- A high percentage of these families need information as well as active support during engagement opportunities in languages other than the language of instruction.

#### Benefits of offering policy support to the Parent'R'Us mentoring approach

Supporting vulnerable families is only successful if it is built on trust. At the same time, **it is also important to boost the self-esteem of vulnerable parents and help them become conscious, equal partners at school**. The Parent'R'Us mentoring model is an exceptionally good tool for achieving this, while it can also be a successful and affordable policy tool. By training teachers and community organisation representatives to act as mentor managers, and subsequently trainers of parent mentors, the approach provides a low-cost, but very effective approach to renewing a mentor pool of upcoming generations of parents.

The Parent'R'Us mentoring model foresees peer mentoring from parent to parent that supports an equitable parent engagement policy in two ways. On the one hand, mentors – who are parents coming from the same disadvantaged background as mentees – are acknowledged and rewarded as successful role models for their community when they choose to become mentors. On the other hand, mentees see a role model in the mentor parent who is very similar to them, offering them an easy role model to follow. As vulnerable parents often do not trust authority, including teachers for various reasons, this approach is especially suitable for reaching out and engaging them by building back trust via a peer they trust and can easily identify with.



[www.parentrus.eu](http://www.parentrus.eu)

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