

Six Global Lessons

on How Family, School, and Community Engagement Can Transform Education

By **Emily Markovich Morris** and **Laura Nóra**

With **Richaa Hoysala**, **Max Lieblich**, **Sophie Partington**, and **Rebecca Winthrop**

June 2024



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Key Terms

Basic education	The compulsory grades and activities determined by each education system and policy. Basic education includes the “whole range of educational activities, taking place in various settings, that aim to meet basic learning needs as defined in the World Declaration on Education for All” (UNESCO, n.d.). Although basic education can cover a range of educational activities (formal, nonformal, and informal), in the context of this study it is used to capture the minimum policy requirement for formal schooling determined by the collaborating countries.
Community	Individuals, groups, organizations, and other public and private entities that support schools, students, and/or families.
Conversation Starter Tool (CST) team	Families, educators, and community members working together to use the Conversation Starter Tools (CSTs) and further family, school, and community engagement partnerships.
Educators	In the case of this report, we are referring to school educators. All personnel working in a school or learning institution (including nonformal settings) helping children to learn, including teachers, teaching assistants, administrators, staff, and specialists. Although families are also educators, in this report this term is specific to those who have a specialized role in a school or learning institution, for purposes of translation and simplicity. Teachers are individuals whose vocation is to instruct and guide children in the classroom or learning center. School leaders are individuals responsible for the welfare and operations of schools, including principals, head teachers, headmasters, chancellors, school directors, and assistant leaders.
Education systems	The structure of governance, resources, information and communication technology, and other components that guide learning institutions and opportunities in a given country or context (World Bank, n.d.; Barton et al., 2021). Education systems are comprised of a broad ecosystem of actors from the government, civil society, private sector, and family and community spheres engaged in a particular context to support an intentional learning pathway for children and youth (Robinson & Winthrop, 2016). An education system can be a national or subnational education system, a network of schools, or a classroom (Faul & Savage, 2023; Robinson & Winthrop, 2016) and includes beliefs, values, and perspectives of the different ecosystem actors (Midgley, 2006).

Education systems transformation	An approach to education system change that goes beyond seeking to change the concrete or visible elements of an education system (e.g., budgets, staffing, curriculum, schedules) to also seeking to shift the invisible elements such as the mindsets, values, and beliefs that guide it (Meadows, 2008; Munro et al., 2002; Winthrop et al., 2021b). This approach is distinct from an education system strengthening approach, which seeks to make the existing system work better. An education systems transformation approach seeks to reflect on such things as the purpose and goals of the system, which should be a process that involves a wide range of voices, especially those within the system itself, from families and communities to educators and students (Fuller & Kim, 2022; Meadows, 2008; Sengeh & Winthrop, 2022).
Families	Individuals who play a leading role in caregiving and educating their children, including caregivers, guardians, and extended family members—from grandparents to aunts, uncles, or cousins. Family includes those who participate in the caregiving of a child beyond biological relationships.
Family involvement	The different ways that families participate in students' learning and development, such as through school activities or communication with schools. Unlike family engagement, involvement is not necessarily focused on developing sustained partnerships between families, schools, and communities and is often initiated from the side of the school, such as sharing information with families.
Family, school, and community engagement	The many ways that families, educators, and community groups work together to promote student learning and development and to support schools to thrive. Family, school, and community engagement varies depending on the context, but the intention is to support greater collaborations and partnerships that ensure teaching and learning is equitable, inclusive, high-quality, and relevant.
Schools	Structured settings of teaching and learning. School is used throughout this document to mean learning institutions, both formal and nonformal. In different jurisdictions around the world, the terms for learning institutions will vary.
Students	Children, youth, and/or adult learners of all levels and ages who are studying in schools or learning institutions.

Overview

“Schools do not stand by themselves. They belong to the community; they are the community.”

Foday Kalokoh, Lead Researcher with EducAid, Sierra Leone

Six Global Lessons on How Family, School, and Community Engagement Can Transform Education (“Six Global Lessons”) is the result of the participation of hundreds of students, families, school educators, and researchers who dedicated their time and energy to investigating the critical role that families and communities play in ensuring students and schools can flourish. It is a culmination of over two years of collaborative research and hundreds of conversations on six continents. While there were unique findings in each school, district, and country, six powerful lessons stand out across geographies and contexts. This research report delves into these lessons and how to build greater family, school, and community partnerships as seen through the eyes of families, educators, and students who shared their beliefs on, experiences with, and trust in schools.

After venturing into government schools across rural and urban districts in Sierra Leone to facilitate conversations with families and communities, one of the lead researchers, Foday Kalokoh, noted that there is a crucial and symbiotic relationship between schools, families, and communities that we often overlook. Schools are both a reflection of our communities and a fundamental pillar to the development of our communities (Dewey, 1953; Freire, 1974; Perry, 2020; Serpell, 1993; Strike, 2004)—a thread throughout this research report. One thing that the global COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing crises around the world has taught the education sector is that schools, families, and communities depend on each other to support students’ learning and well-being, and that education systems transformation must involve families. The purpose of this community-driven research is to further global evidence about family, school, and community engagement with the intention of supporting greater collaborations and partnerships to ensure students have an equitable, inclusive, high-quality, and relevant education. The intended audience is education leaders, policymakers,

educators, family and community organizations, researchers, and others invested in supporting education systems transformation.

The Link Between Families and Communities and Education Systems Transformation

Family, school, and community engagement encompasses the many ways that families, educators, and community groups work together to promote student learning and development and to support schools to thrive. Although types of parental/caregiver engagement vary depending on the context, families support caregiving and learning at home, communicate with schools and educators, participate in school activities, and support decision making, to name a few examples (Epstein et al., 2018). Stronger family, school, and community partnerships help ensure relational trust is at the foundation of schools, and that all the actors can work together toward a shared vision of education in their communities.

Family, school, and community engagement is critical to education systems transformation, as families are critical actors in education systems—from the school and district levels to the regional, state, and national levels. Education systems transformation includes all the ways that key actors—including families, students, teachers, education leaders, decision makers, and community entities—work together to build a shared vision around the purpose of education and position all the components in an education system to support this vision (Sengeh & Winthrop, 2022). Some components of education systems are visible to all actors, such as the school's official curricula used to facilitate learning, but there are also less visible components, such as support for learning that takes place in the home. Highly visible components can be easier to change, such as shifting resources in budgets, changing staffing and hiring practices, and adopting new ways to measure progress. The less visible components are often more difficult to change and, when not intentionally addressed, can slow or inhibit education systems transformation efforts. These less visible components vary by context but include the different beliefs and values held by actors within the system, their respective visions of what the purpose of school is, and prevailing mindsets on what should change in education systems (Gersick, 1991; Heracleous & Barrett, 2001; Munro et al., 2002). As this research report explores in depth, the work of families in supporting education is often less visible, yet essential, to education systems transformation. Also essential is intentionally exploring and mapping beliefs about education in the process of determining what needs to change in a system. Mapping beliefs and making families' contributions to education systems visible is another thread throughout this research report.

The need for education systems transformation is urgent. Schools must respond to the demands of society and how to prepare students for their futures in an

evolving world. They are also struggling to keep up with the myriad of shocks and challenges communities are experiencing, from the impacts of climate change and natural disasters to human conflict, increased migration, and the rise in economic inequalities. These shocks and challenges are impacting students and their families, and affecting their learning as well as well-being (Burns & Köster, 2016). Students and youth are calling for education systems transformation—as they did in the *Youth Declaration* at the 2022 United Nations Transforming Education Summit—demanding that education be more relevant to their lives and changing ecosystems (United Nations, 2022). A global survey on youth perspectives in 150 countries found that when students have the skills and space needed to contribute to improving their education systems, they have a greater sense of agency in making changes in their schools (World’s Largest Lesson, 2023). As one young person involved in this research in South Africa noted, the purpose of school is “to upkeep necessary skills to keep up with the change that’s happening in the world.”

Six Global Lessons responds to this call and urgency and helps raise the question whether education systems are fulfilling the intended purposes and vision of school and are meeting the breadth and depth of students’ and schools’ needs today. More specifically, this research report looks at how families and communities must be at the center and not the periphery of building and implementing a shared vision of education systems transformation; their contributions must be both visible and intentional. Developing a shared vision makes forging common steps forward toward educational change and transformation possible, and it shifts the power of making decisions from education leaders alone to the larger collective of educators, families, and students. The *Six Global Lessons* research shows that intention, commitment, and resources invested in family, school, and community partnerships help students and schools grow and transform. This research also contributes to the efforts of the Center for Universal Education (CUE) to give families and communities an intentional role in shaping education systems transformation (Sengeh & Winthrop, 2022; Winthrop et al., 2021a).

Foundations of Family, School, and Community Partnerships

In addition to centering families in education systems transformation efforts, *Six Global Lessons* advances knowledge and learning on the critical elements for building family, school, and community partnerships to support students in their learning journey. For strong family, school, and community partnerships to be developed and sustained, there are a number of critical foundations, which are framed in this report as the four C’s: coherence, cohesion, care (relational trust), and contact (drawing from Strike, 2004). **Coherence** is shared vision and language about the larger educational project; it is a common understanding of the role and purpose of school even when beliefs about and experiences with

education differ. For example, a school community may have a shared vision that the main purpose of school is to prepare young people to flourish socially and emotionally, while also recognizing and honoring the role of school in building active community members. **Cohesion** is the sense of community developed as families, educators, and students pursue a shared vision, and the way that is reflected in different activities and practices they engage in along the way. This includes not only curriculum and instruction in classrooms but also activities in and outside of school. Cohesion is built through **care**, which in this research is a component of relational trust. Relational trust is the regard and respect for others in the school community shown through treating each other inclusively, with integrity, and as competent and equally important members of the collective (the addition of relational trust in this framework comes from Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Community is also facilitated through **contact**, everyday interactions and communication between families, students, and educators as they engage with each other and develop partnerships.

Figure 1

The Four C's for Family, School, and Community Partnerships



Note. Adapted from Strike (2004).

Despite strides made in putting family, school, and community engagement on the global research and policy-making agenda, developing and sustaining a shared vision for partnerships remains a deep challenge and need. Schools often lack sufficient **data, dialogues, and directions** to implement responsive, inclusive, and equity-focused family, school, and community engagement practices and policies. The Conversation Starter Tools (CSTs) and this accompanying research are in response to this need.

The [Conversation Starter methodology](#) is a participatory approach designed to be used by schools and community organizations to understand beliefs on education, to identify types of family, school, and community engagement as well as barriers, and to gauge relational trust between families, educators, and students (Morris et al., 2024b). Through surveys and conversations, schools and communities examine the Four C's in practice. By moving through disagreements and tensions as well as finding points of alignment, they can develop coherent language and a shared vision for the purpose of school.

The Goals of the Research

There are three main goals of *Six Global Lessons*:

1. **Furthering research.** To expand global family, school, and community data and research in communities experiencing some of the greatest inequities and where there is a lack of comprehensive research, especially in the Global South,¹ which demands more research funds and attention.
2. **Informing practice.** To present and discuss key lessons that support education leaders, educators, family and community groups and organizations, international institutions, and policymakers in developing more evidence-based and equity-focused family, school, and community engagement strategies.
3. **Elevating community perspectives and strategies.** To demonstrate how to center families', school educators', and students' perspectives on education and elevate their strategies and solutions through a participatory research approach driven by the communities.

More responsive and community-driven research helps advance the larger field of family, school, and community engagement and fosters greater collaboration and learning across education systems and communities. More equitable and inclusive research on family, school, and community engagement also ensures that schools, civil society organizations, and decision-making bodies have access to evidence that furthers their efforts and deepens relational trust and partnerships between families and schools.

¹ The "Global South" and "Global North" are terms that denote global power structures and unequal distribution of trade, wealth, and resources as opposed to geographical locations (Dados & Connell, 2012; Dicken, 2007; Randall, 2004). The Global South refers to places and peoples who experienced colonization and who are at present disproportionately impacted by global processes and challenges (Clarke, 2018).

The Conversation Starter Tools Research

Early in 2022, a diverse group of school, community, and government teams in 16 countries—Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Colombia, Ghana, India (Maharashtra and Tripura), Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kenya, the Netherlands, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania (Zanzibar), Uganda, the United Kingdom (England), and the United States (California)—embarked on a mission to co-develop with CUE a comprehensive participatory and dialogic research approach and toolkit, called the Conversation Starter Tools (CSTs). The CSTs embody a community-driven research process whereby the CST team leading the research works in close collaboration with schools and community organizations.

The CST approach integrates **data**, **dialogues**, and **directions** on how to support stronger partnerships across families, schools, and communities. **Data** on the beliefs and experiences of families, educators, and students in their communities are collected through low-stakes and exploratory surveys. Survey data are not used to generalize or draw conclusions but rather serve as a springboard for dialogues on beliefs and experiences. **Dialogues** not only build trust among families, educators, and students but they also serve as a vital opportunity to generate strategies and new **directions** to support greater family, school, and community engagement.

Between 2022 and 2024, the CST teams gathered viewpoints from 9,473 families, 2,726 educators, and 9,963 students in 235 schools regarding their beliefs on and experience with school, and relational trust. Through these data and dialogues among school communities, six global lessons and accompanying critical takeaways emerged.

Organization of *Six Global Lessons*

This report starts with an overview of the evidence on building stronger partnerships followed by a description of CUE's family, school, and engagement initiative efforts leading up to this research and a discussion of the CST approach. Research sites and participant demographics are then discussed in detail, and subsequently the *Six Global Lessons* with key takeaways gleaned from the survey and conversation data are presented. Case studies follow, revealing how country and civil society organization teams, also known as CST teams, have used the process to enhance their work on family, school, and community engagement. This report then concludes with a discussion on future directions of the research.

The Six Global Lessons



1

Begin with beliefs. Families, educators, and students often have different beliefs about the purpose of school, what makes a quality education, and preferred approaches to teaching and learning. Understanding families', educators', and students' beliefs and experiences in education is critical to building coherence in education systems and a shared vision of education.



2

Position families as partners. Families see themselves as involved and engaged in their children's learning in numerous ways; however, this involvement is not highly visible to educators. The vast majority of families are supporting learning at home, but educators often define family engagement as the level of families' participation in school events, committees, and activities that take place in the school.



3

Collectively break barriers. Families, educators, and students often agree that there are many structural and situational barriers impeding strong partnerships. Yet, educators tend to blame low family engagement on parents/caregivers without fully acknowledging the challenges they experience in trying to engage with schools.



4

Build at the speed of trust. School educators are reporting lower levels of trust with families than families and students are reporting with educators. Families, educators, and students agree that higher levels of trust will promote student and school outcomes and success, but it takes time to build trust. Understanding families', educators', and students' beliefs and experiences in education is critical to building relational trust and developing responsive strategies.



5

Make family, school, and community engagement a must. Many education systems frameworks envision a limited partnership role for families. Consistent and sustainable funding of family, school, and community engagement activities is critical for building strong partnerships.



6

Disrupt power dynamics through community-driven research. Community-driven and participatory research is a powerful way to build relational trust between families and schools, and to disrupt power dynamics. Through collaborative research, families, educators, and students can develop cohesive and coherent strategies to address the needs of their communities.

Evidence on Building Stronger Partnerships

Family, school, and community engagement differs in every context as the needs of children, families, and communities are greatly shaped by sociocultural and historical factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Mapp et al., 2022; Meadows, 1999). Family engagement builds upon families' and communities' strengths and shared values (González et al., 2006). It is important to understand how families and schools around the world define, interpret, and develop their own meanings and practices of family, school, and community engagement.

According to existing literature, family, school, and community engagement is the process by which parents/caregivers, educators, and community groups come together as partners and assume shared and equal responsibility to promote student learning and development in learning institutions (Caspé & Hernandez, 2023; Epstein et al., 2018; Mapp et al., 2022; Winthrop et al., 2021a).² One of the most prominent definitions of family, school, and community engagement is “a full, equal, and equitable partnership among families, educators, and community partners to promote children’s learning and development, from birth through college and career” (Mapp et al., 2022, p. 16).

Family, school, and community engagement differs from involvement. Involvement implies **one-way communication** and schools **telling** families how they can contribute, such as sending written notices home (Ferlazzo, 2011). The goal of engagement is to forge and sustain partnerships that encourage school educators to create opportunities to **listen** to families through **two-way communication**, and actively participate in shared decision making about the child’s education and development (Ferlazzo, 2011). Family engagement can occur in a myriad of settings such as schools, homes, community centers, and so on (Caspé & Hernandez, 2023). Most often, family engagement strategies include collaboration and two-way communication on caregiving responsibilities, supporting learning at school and home, shared decision making about school governance and advocacy, and collaboration with community programs and services (Epstein et al., 2018).

² Further literature on the types of and barriers to family, school, and community engagement are detailed in Annex II.

Effective partnerships between families, schools, and communities are forged through mutual respect and relational trust (Bryk et al., 2010). *Relational trust* encompasses care and mutual regard, respect, integrity (keeping one's words), and competence (believing in each other's skills and knowledge) (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Relational trust is built through social interactions and relationships. It is a powerful force that brings people to work in cohesion towards a change, and is fundamental for equitable partnerships (Bryk et al., 2010; Mapp & Bergman, 2019). School educators can build trust with families as they listen actively, seek inputs, communicate regularly, and create a welcoming environment (Caspé & Hernandez, 2023). Using asset-based, collaborative, and culturally responsive and sustaining practices such as viewing parents/caregivers as experts on their and their children's lived experiences, communicating in families' preferred languages, affirming each other's identities, and integrating culturally based practices and resources into teaching can result in emotional connections and authentic relationships (Caspé & Hernandez, 2023; Mapp & Bergman, 2019; Ritblatt et al., 2023).

The global definition for family, school, and community engagement used in this report was informed by the viewpoints collected across schools by CST teams as well as the literature, which honors multiple purposes of education but works toward a common goal rooted in the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal 4: *Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.*

Family, school, and community engagement

The many ways that families, educators, and community groups work together to promote student learning and development and to support schools to thrive. Family, school, and community engagement varies depending on the context, but the intention is to support greater collaborations and partnerships that ensure teaching and learning is equitable, inclusive, high-quality, and relevant.

About the Conversation Starter Tools

Background

In 2018, the Center for Universal Education (CUE) at the Brookings Institution began a mission to expand the evidence base for building stronger family, school, and community partnerships and to develop a network dedicated to doing so. In the landmark publication, [Collaborating to Transform and Improve Education Systems: A Playbook for Family-School Engagement](#) (“the Playbook”), global research alongside innovative strategies on how to build stronger partnerships in diverse schools and communities around the world were presented (Winthrop et al., 2021a). The goal of the Playbook was to provide school and education system leaders with research strategies to use in their efforts to transform education and schools to better serve students, families, and educators. It was developed in collaboration with CUE’s Global Family Engagement in Education Network, a peer learning community of practice convened by CUE that includes representatives from civil society and community organizations, government and education leaders, and research and higher education institutions from six continents. The Playbook sparked two years of collaborative workshops with hundreds of schools, government leaders, community and education groups, private sector entities, and many other actors interested in harnessing family, school, and community engagement research to improve their practice and policies. During these workshops and convenings, the need for a comprehensive suite of participatory and open-access tools that guide schools, districts, and civil society organizations through their own community-driven research and strategy development process was identified. The Playbook introduced an early version of surveys that aimed at understanding families’ and educators’ beliefs on school and served as a foundation for building what is now the CSTs. A new version of the CST approach was publicly shared in 2024 as an outcome of this collaborative research (Morris et al., 2024b).

What Are the CSTs? Who Are They For?

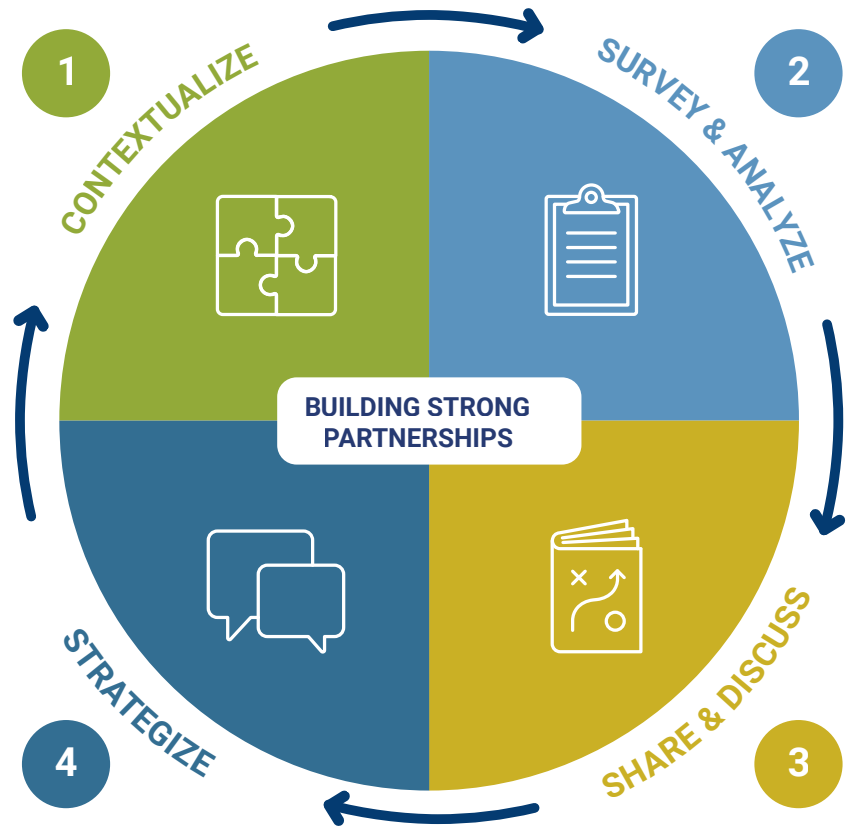
The CSTs are a set of surveys, conversation (focus group discussion) guides, and other protocols that can be used by schools, districts, and/or community organizations to conduct participatory and community-driven research with schools. The CST process guides school/community teams in identifying

educators', families', and students' beliefs on education, relational trust, and types of and barriers to family involvement. While there are many family and educator surveys available for capturing school climate and family, school, and community engagement practices, what makes the CST process unique is that it starts with mapping beliefs on education and ensuring that data are used for fostering dialogues and providing new strategies and directions to strengthen partnerships.

How Are the CSTs Implemented?

CST teams use surveys to build knowledge and awareness among families, school personnel, and students on their beliefs on and experiences with school and family engagement. Survey data are used to spark and guide conversations on the beliefs, barriers, and opportunities for engagement; these conversations foster relational trust between families and schools and help generate a shared vision and responsive strategies that schools can use to build family, school, and community engagement practices and policies.

The CST process follows four key steps as shown in Figure 2.





Figure 2**The Conversation Starter Tool (CST) Process**

1. **Contextualize:** Think through why teams are conducting this community-driven research (objectives), the design to be used (research design), who will participate (sample and demographics), and planning considerations (logistics).
2. **Survey & analyze:** Administer surveys to families, school educators, and students either in-person or remotely. Analyze and visualize data in easy-to-understand formats for schools to use.
3. **Share data & discuss:** Organize intentional conversations among families, school educators, and students to share, reflect on, and discuss the findings. Use conversations to build relational trust.
4. **Strategize:** Based on conversation and survey data, identify contextually relevant strategies to build stronger family, school, and community partnerships.

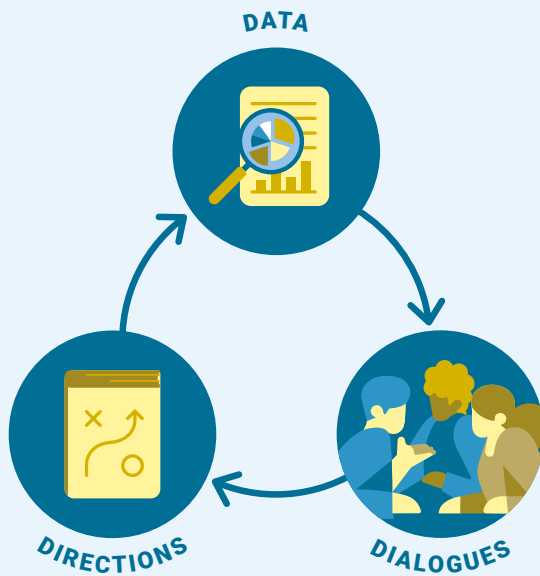
What Are the Contents of the CSTs?

The CSTs include seven tools to be adapted based on each CST team's context, objectives, and demographics.

Table 1: Contents of the Conversation Starter Tools (CSTs)

Step	Tool	Description
1. Contextualize 	Tool 1: Contextualization Checklist	Guides development of the research design and adapting survey tools to the relevant context.
2. Survey & Analyze 	Tool 2: Surveys	Family Survey for parents/caregivers, guardians, or others responsible for children's care and wellbeing. Educator Survey for teachers, teaching assistants, administrators, staff and specialists, leaders, and others working in schools, learning institutions, districts, etc. Student Survey for students 14 years and above who are in schools or nonformal learning institutions, or recently out-of-school.
	Tool 3: Field Testing Checklist	Guides testing of the surveys to make sure questions and responses are understandable, relevant, textually appropriate, and accurate.
	Tool 4: Analysis Checklist	Guides prepping and cleaning, analyzing, and visualizing the survey data.
	Additional Guidance: Data Collector Training & Survey Data Snapshot	
3. Share & Discuss 	Tool 5: Conversation Guide	Guides planning, facilitating, and documenting intentional conversations with survey participants.
	Tool 6: Global Rubrics Tool	Guides the identification and assessment of family, school, and community engagement practices and policies.
4. Strategize 	Tool 7: Strategy Guide	Guides the utilization of the survey and conversation findings to identify and develop implementable and contextually relevant strategies.

The Participatory Approach



The CSTs are rooted in a community-based participatory research and mixed methods approach. In community-based participatory research, decisions, planning, and implementation are shared among implementing organizations and institutions, researchers, communities, and youth (Hacker, 2013). The CST approach guides school teams through the process of collecting data with families, educators, and students, using data as a springboard for dialogues and ultimately to generate strategies and new directions to support greater family, school, and community engagement. Simply put, the CSTs foster data, dialogues, and directions on how to support stronger partnerships between families, schools, and communities.

The Research Collaborative

This study was led by 15 civil society or community organizations, who conducted their participatory research in close collaboration with school leaders and educators, families, and students. In addition to these organizations, GeoPoll conducted a representative survey with youth in Ghana (national), India (Maharashtra and Himachal Pradesh states), and South Africa (national) to inform the development of the student survey. Alongside students, families, and educators, officials from government offices, civil society organizations, and research institutions were vital partners throughout the process. All tools were field tested with samples of families, educators, and students during the development process. In many countries student researchers were part of the data collection teams.

Table 2: Collaborating Organizations³

Organization	Countries	Organization	Countries
Aga Khan Foundation	Kenya, Uganda	Milele Zanzibar Foundation	Tanzania (Zanzibar)
Alianza Educativa	Colombia	Parents International	Hungary, Kazakhstan, the Netherlands
Australian Schools Plus	Australia	Red PaPaz	Colombia
Community Schools Learning Exchange	United States (California)	Rising Academies	Sierra Leone
Education & Cultural Society	Bangladesh	Social Ventures Australia	Australia
EducAid	Sierra Leone	Vozes da Educação	Brazil
Leadership for Equity	India (Maharashtra and Tripura)	Whole Education	United Kingdom (England)
Mikhulu Child Development Trust	South Africa		

Note. A description of each organization's mission and work is outlined in Annex I.

The Participatory and Community-Driven Approach

In community-based participatory research, participant groups work together to determine the research objectives, design, analysis, and uses of the research (Hacker, 2013). Participants also consciously confront the status and power differences between groups and, to the extent possible, try to ensure that collaboration is equitable and democratic, and that all perspectives are valued in the results and applications of the research (Patton, 2014; Patton & Campbell-Patton, 2021). Research that is also community-driven is intended to uplift communities through the participatory research process (Perry, 2020). In the *Six Global Lessons* study, each collaborating organization was focused on conducting research that positively supported their efforts to support schools, families, and students and revealed strategies to build stronger partnerships. Although CUE utilized the survey data to validate the questions and to develop the participatory research methodology, the principal objective was to create an open-access set of tools to guide schools and communities in leading research in their communities. Another objective was to expand research in communities experiencing some of the greatest inequities, particularly in the Global South.

³ The Parents as Allies network, managed by Kidsburgh, conducted CST research with schools in southwestern Pennsylvania during the first phase of this research. Some of their ongoing insights are integrated into the report.

The CSTs are designed for organizations and institutions to customize and contextualize to their particular settings and needs. All collaborating organizations joined the research because they had a particular objective or need that the research helped address. In Colombia, the parent network organization, Red PaPaz, sought data from their communities on how to improve their family and school partnership efforts while simultaneously advocating for greater national strategies around family, school, and community engagement. In Sierra Leone, a government partner, the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE), joined the study to generate data that could inform national policy and programs. In Bangladesh, the civil society organization, Education & Cultural Society, used the research to inform how they support schools and public education and how they work with school educators and families to develop sustainable family engagement practices. Detailed objectives by country and CST teams are discussed further in the Case Studies section at the end.

The Theoretical Foundation

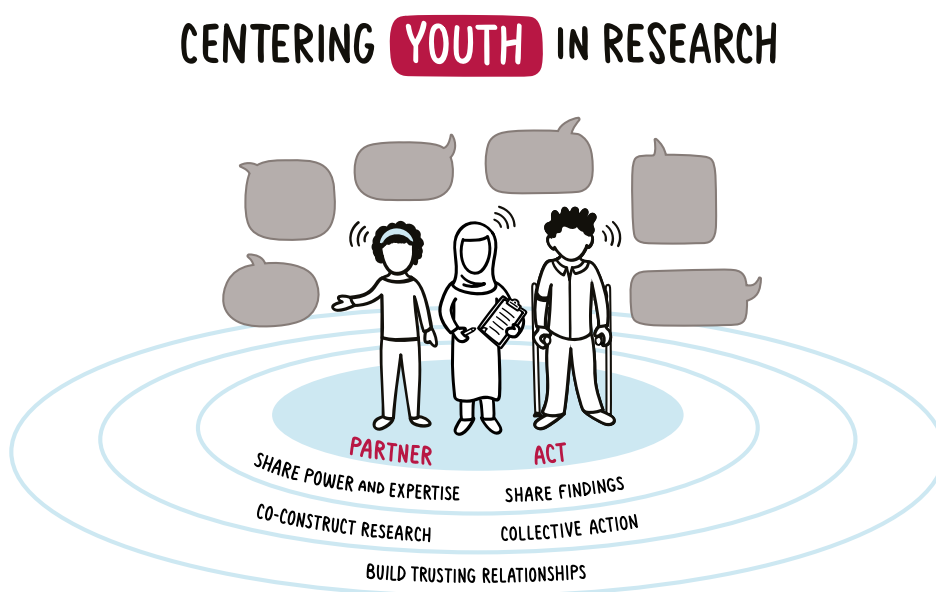
The theoretical and methodological underpinning of the community-based participatory research and CSTs is Paulo Freire's (1974) praxis and dialogic approach, where reflection plus action is critical for human transformation. The surveys provide an opportunity for educators, parents/caregivers, and students to identify and reflect on their individual and collective beliefs on education and to identify types of and barriers to engagement. The critical **dialogues** on the survey **data** allow participants to discuss differences in and alignment among beliefs and perspectives and to identify strategic actions that can lead to transformation and new **directions** (Freire, 1974). In addition to providing a process for school and community teams to build a collective vision on family, school, and community partnerships, the intentional conversations help confront power dynamics between schools, families, and students and provide an opportunity to build relational trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Winthrop et al., 2021a).

As this research demonstrates, taking the time to capture and discuss beliefs and perspectives fosters inclusive and equitable participation of families, educators, and students, especially for those who have been marginalized or excluded by ethnicity, race, language, education level, socioeconomic status, gender identity, disability status, and other identity markers. While first developed in Brazil in the 1950s as a response to the systemic oppression Freire grappled with as an educator, the dialogic approach continues to be a powerful way to break down barriers to engagement in education today (Bartlett, 2005; Gadotti & Torres, 2009). According to the praxis and dialogic approach, without conversations it is hard to move towards meaningful and sustainable transformation of educational systems. Lasting change to educational systems requires addressing the deeply held beliefs and values of groups and individuals within these systems (Meadows, 1999, 2008; Munro et al., 2002; Sengeh & Winthrop, 2022). Although surveys do not reveal the depth of one's beliefs or experiences with education, they are an important entry point and springboard for leading intentional conversations.

Integrating Student Perspectives

In the initial Playbook research and surveys, only families' and educators' perspectives were captured. However, this CST study used an expanded intergenerational approach, in which student voice is central to the CST process and analysis. The perspectives of students were collected through surveys as well as intentional conversations. Students were only surveyed if they were in middle school or secondary school and above, roughly 13 to 14 years old or older, as was deemed the age-appropriate level for the survey during the field-testing process. These student perspectives were analyzed alongside the adult perspectives gathered from their parents/caregivers and school educators in an approach called intergenerational research. Intergenerational research engages different generational viewpoints and leverages the diversity between generations to create more relevant, inclusive, and equitable research (Canedo-García et al., 2017). Leveraging intergenerational perspectives in educational research helps ensure findings are translated into programs, practices, and policies, as youth researchers understand how to apply the findings in their own lives and non-youth researchers "can help open doors, facilitate introductions, share historical and institutional knowledge, break up the work into smaller, more scaffolded projects, provide funding and advocate for students to be heard" (KnowledgeWorks, 2023, p.7). As shown in Figure 3, when youth perspectives are centered in the research, and youth are given a role as partners and actors, there is greater potential for building coherence, cohesion, care, and contact as communities (Naeem & Morris, 2023).

Figure 3 Centering Youth in Research



Note. Copyright 2023 by Emily Markovich Morris and Emily Marko. The image was inspired by Youth Participatory Action Research scholarship and principles and was first cited in Naeem & Morris, 2023.

In total, 9,963 youth participated in the CST surveys. Student-led conversations were held in schools in Bangladesh, Kazakhstan, and Tanzania (Zanzibar). In Tanzania (Zanzibar) and Kazakhstan, youth researchers led these conversations with students. As one of the leaders of the youth researchers on the CST team in Tanzania (Zanzibar) noted, having youth co-lead the research is important for four key reasons (adapted from Morris & Naeem, 2023):

1. Student participants do not feel like there is a right or wrong response and can be more confident speaking to other youth leading surveys and conversations.
2. Generational nuances are seen and heard, and recommendations are more responsive to student needs and their contexts when youth are centered in the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data.
3. Findings are based in and on the realities of young people and have credibility among youth.
4. Space for young people to grow and learn as rising leaders is created, which helps spread optimism, energy, and activism that the field of education needs.

Although student voice was critical to the CST analysis and findings, more can be done to ensure youth researchers are central in the process, including engaging youth as co-researchers where they co-construct and co-lead the design and implementation of research with non-youth researchers, as shown in Figure 3. As students stand to gain the most from family, school, and community engagement and partnerships, their perceptions are key to identifying and building meaningful strategies.

Research Sites

Country Sample

CST surveys were conducted between June 2022 and December 2023 with families, school educators, and/or students in 16 countries⁴ on six continents as indicated in Figure 4. In the first phase of the research between May 2020 and March 2022, family and school educator data were collected in seven countries⁵ and family data in five countries;⁶ Subsets of these data were published in the Playbook.

Figure 4 Map of the Research Sites



- 4** Teams in Egypt, Mauritius, and Mexico were ready to participate in the study but encountered country-level challenges in launching the research. Collaborating organizations in Francophone West Africa and the Gulf States were not able to participate during this phase of research because of competing priorities in their respective organizations. In future research, Gulf States, North Africa, and West Africa will be intentional priority areas.
- 5** Data for teachers and families were collected during the first Playbook phase of research between 2020 and 2022 in Australia (South Australia), Canada (British Columbia), Colombia, Ghana, India (Maharashtra), Malaysia, United States (Pennsylvania, Indiana, California), and a global private school network.
- 6** Data for families was also collected during the first phase in Argentina, Brazil, Botswana, South Africa, and the United Kingdom (England).

The full CST approach—a mixed methods combination of surveys (quantitative) and conversations (qualitative) with families, school educators, and students—was employed in all countries except for Ghana, which only participated in the nationally representative survey of youth. Although survey data were collected in all 16 countries, criteria were established as to whether the survey data could be used for quantitative analyses and classified as a mixed methods sample. In Table 3, countries in which survey and conversation data informed the *Six Global Lessons* are indicated as mixed methods samples. Countries where conversation data informed the findings are indicated as qualitative samples. Youth survey data were also collected by GeoPoll through a nationally representative survey of 14- to 22-year-olds across Ghana, India (Maharashtra and Himachal Pradesh states), and South Africa and was used to inform the quantitative findings on youth viewpoints.

Table 3: Participant Groups

Sample Type	Families, Educators, Students	Families and Educators Only	Students Only
Mixed Methods Sample	Bangladesh, Colombia, Kazakhstan, Tanzania (Zanzibar), United States (California)	Brazil, Kenya, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Uganda	
Qualitative Sample	India (Maharashtra, Tripura), United Kingdom (England)	Australia, Hungary, the Netherlands	
Quantitative Sample (Representative)			Ghana, India (Maharashtra and Himachal Pradesh states), South Africa

Note. There are four countries where a state or region is indicated in parentheses. In India, the United Kingdom, and the United States, this is because the country's education system is highly decentralized and controlled by a state or region. Zanzibar is a semi-autonomous archipelago with a unique population and an independent basic education system from the mainland Tanzania.

The criteria for determining whether survey data would inform the quantitative findings was based on the total sample size of participant groups as well as the proportion of families reached in the target grades to ensure as many families as possible were included and to reduce selection bias. In the five countries classified as a qualitative sample, conversations helped inform the six overarching findings and much was learned through the research process even though the final survey data are not aggregated into the different figures.

School and Participant Samples

As one of the main objectives of the CST research is to support collaborating organizations in strengthening their family, school, and community engagement practices and partnerships, teams conducted the CST research in schools with which they already work closely. The number of schools surveyed in each country ranged from five to 66 depending on the CST teams' resources and human capacity to carry out the research, as well as the size of the education systems and the collaborating organizations' reach and jurisdiction in their respective communities. For example, the collaborating partner in Zanzibar—Milele Zanzibar Foundation—reached 16 schools in 11 of the 12 districts so they could understand trends across the archipelago. In Colombia, the network of parents and schools conducting the CST research—Red PaPaz and Alianza Educativa—surveyed families, educators, and students in 66 secondary schools in 13 of 32 regions where they work. In communities like Kenya and Uganda with a sizable population of parents/caregivers who have never been to school or have only attended primary school, the CST teams concentrated on economically and socially marginalized districts. For example, researchers from the Aga Khan Foundation in Uganda targeted four districts in the West Nile that have a sizable population of displaced families from the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan.

The CST research was conducted across different education and grade levels, as indicated in Table 4. As the intention of this research was not to use the survey to generalize about the larger population, samples were not intended to be representative of the larger school or district population but instead to allow for analyzing demographics and trends within and between participant groups. In each school, all education leaders, specialists, staff, and other school personnel were invited to take the survey to ensure all educators felt included and engaged in the research. Middle and secondary school students were also surveyed. The ideal sample for each school and participant group was 50–75 students and their corresponding 50–75 family representatives. Families of students in specific grades, as opposed to the whole school, were targeted to ensure the participation of as many families as possible from given grade levels. For example, in a secondary school of 200 students with an average class size of 40 students, a total of 80 students from two classes were invited to take the surveys along with one of their parents/caregivers. To reduce selection bias, targeted outreach to the parents/caregivers helped ensure as many of these families participated as possible. This included providing special outreach and assurances (i.e., oral survey options, translations, disability accommodations, etc.) to ensure that families' literacy levels, spoken/written language, familiarity with surveying, and other factors did not pose a barrier to them taking the survey. Families and students surveyed came from the same households.

Table 4: Survey Sample by Number of Schools and Participants

Country	Education Level	Number of Schools	Number of Families	Number of Educators	Number of Students	Total
Mixed Methods Sample						
Bangladesh	Secondary	14	535	225	973	1,733
Brazil	Primary	12	734	267	n/a	1,001
Colombia	Secondary	66	1,280	659	2,478	4,417
Kazakhstan	Secondary	5	329	114	209	652
Kenya	Primary	12	692	62	n/a	754
Sierra Leone	Primary	25	1,767	211	n/a	1,978
South Africa	Pre-primary	10	484	74	n/a	558
Tanzania (Zanzibar)	Secondary	16	954	210	1,139	2,303
Uganda	Primary	21	1,173	191	n/a	1,364
US (California)	Middle-Secondary	8	230	132	1,463	1,825
Qualitative Sample						
Australia	Primary	4	194	112	n/a	306
Hungary	Secondary	5	94	72	182	348
India (Maharashtra)	Primary	6	186	31	n/a	217
India (Tripura)	Secondary	17	216	186	196	598
Netherlands	Secondary	5	110	60	159	329
UK (England)	Primary	6	217	69	n/a	286
UK (England)	Secondary	3	278	51	187	516
Quantitative Sample (Representative)						
Ghana	Youth	n/a	n/a	n/a	609	609
India	Youth	n/a	n/a	n/a	474	474
South Africa	Youth	n/a	n/a	n/a	1,894	1,894
Total		235	9,473	2,726	9,963	

Note. The GeoPoll youth sample (ages 14–22) in South Africa was notably higher than in Ghana and India, as South Africa only administered one version of the survey (current CST version). Ghana and India administered two versions (previous survey version and current survey version) to measure any differences in question and response wording. More details on this comparison are in the *Technical Report: Six Global Lessons on How Family, School, and Community Engagement Can Transform Education Systems*.

On average, across the ten mixed methods sample schools, roughly 45% of targeted families were reached through surveys, ranging from 10% in Kazakhstan, where the CST team relied on survey links because of school closures, to 66% in Tanzania (Zanzibar), where the CST team did notable mobilization to try and reach all families in the designated grades. In the target schools, an average of 78% of total educators were surveyed, whereas an average of 62% of students were surveyed, ranging from 11% to 100% depending on the school. Sampling details are provided in further depth in the *Technical Report: Six Global Lessons on How Family, School, and Community Engagement Can Transform Education Systems* (“the Technical Report”).

In Bangladesh, Colombia, and South Africa, private schools⁷ were included as part of the sample. In the other countries, government schools were targeted. In Bangladesh, 94% of secondary school students study in private schools, as there is a lack of public infrastructure at this level (World Bank, 2017). Among the 14 schools in the Bangladesh sample, 86% were private, as government schools were intentionally included and targeted in the research. Colombia also has a notable private school sector, with roughly 30% of secondary schools nationally being private schools (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística [DANE], 2023). In Colombia, of the 66 secondary schools in the sample, 40% were private. In South Africa, all the pre-primary centers were private community centers, as the early childhood sector is almost entirely privatized.

Conversations on the survey data were encouraged in all the participating schools. In most schools, these conversations included a mix of families and educators, except for in Kenya. The CST team in Kenya decided they would solicit greater participation from parents/caregivers if they held separate conversations. The CST teams also found that student-only conversations allowed youth to speak more freely, and in many sites these conversations happened within a designated class. In a few countries, like Bangladesh, Colombia, the Netherlands, and Tanzania (Zanzibar), intergenerational conversations involving families, educators, and students were also facilitated. On average, most conversations lasted 60 minutes. Conversations were led by a neutral, but trusted, member of the community that understood these data and encouraged participation across education level, gender, socioeconomic status, and other demographics. The conversations were conducted in the main language spoken by most families, with translators recruited as needed. For example, in Tanzania (Zanzibar), conversations were held in Swahili even though the language of instruction in secondary school is English. In Kenya, the conversations occurred in a mixture of Swahili and English, and in Uganda, given the high level of language diversity among family populations, translators for four of the different ethnic languages (Aringati, Madi, Gimara/Kakwa, Lugbarati) helped translate for the facilitators who led the conversation in English. The only country where conversations were

⁷ In the Netherlands all schools are operated by private entities and fully funded by the government.

not held in the national or main language spoken was in the Netherlands, where conversations were held in English to make more accessible to families who were not proficient in Dutch. English proficiency among native Dutch-speaking families is very high so this was not of concern.

Table 5: Conversations by Number of Schools and Participants

Country	Education Level	Number of Schools	Number of Conversations	Number of Families	Number of Educators	Number of Students
Mixed Methods Sample						
Bangladesh	Secondary	14	16	44	55	125
Brazil	Primary	12	12	70	91	n/a
Colombia	Secondary	66	6	34	46	8
Kazakhstan	Secondary	5	2	9	10	0
Kenya	Primary	12	24	140	127	n/a
Sierra Leone	Primary	25	20	135	116	n/a
South Africa	Pre-primary	10	10	84	16	n/a
Tanzania (Zanzibar)	Secondary	16	48	185	48	197
Uganda	Primary	21	6	50	44	n/a
US (California)	Middle-Secondary	8	8	32	26	7
Qualitative Sample						
Australia	Primary	4	0	0	0	n/a
Hungary	Secondary	5	6	20	22	20
India (Maharashtra)	Primary	6	0	0	0	n/a
India (Tripura)	Secondary	17	2	16	7	0
Netherlands	Secondary	5	5	25	28	25
UK (England)	Primary	6	0	0	0	n/a
UK (England)	Secondary	3	0	0	0	0
Total		235	165	844	636	382

Note. Zero indicates that meetings were intended to be held but did not take place. N/a means that it is not applicable as it was not in the design; for example, pre-primary school students were not intended to be surveyed or part of the conversations given their age and developmental stage.

Conversations were not held with the representative sample of youth surveyed in Ghana, India (Maharashtra and Himachal Pradesh states), and South Africa as these youth were not working directly with one of the collaborating organizations. In Australia, India, and the United Kingdom (England), conversations were planned but not carried out. This was largely due to reported scheduling conflicts and competing time demands by administrators and school staff in charge of leading the conversations. In cases where the CST team leading the research was a civil society organization, conversations were successfully held in most schools when conditions permitted. Where CST teams could not reach all participating schools because of school closures, national elections, or other constraints, they shared data with school leaders virtually, as was the case in some of the schools in one remote region in Sierra Leone and a few schools in Kazakhstan. In India (Maharashtra), the CST team was not allowed by government authorities to hold any conversations in schools as part of a blanket research prohibition for all non-governmental organizations, and in India (Tripura), a conclusion of a collaborative agreement with the government prevented the team from reaching all schools.

Analyses

The surveys were analyzed at school, district, region, and national levels to understand patterns of beliefs, relational trust, and types of and barriers to engagement. Responses were also analyzed across demographics, including level of education, gender, languages spoken at home, socioeconomic status, disability status, and other factors relevant to the context—including race, ethnicity, and length of time in the community, among others. Survey data were shared with schools, and CST teams led conversations on the findings and facilitated the process of identifying contextually relevant strategies. Meta-analyses were also conducted across the 16 countries to observe trends and significant differences⁸ in responses by the varying demographics. Validity tests were run on the relational trust scale to measure how well this construct held together. A relational trust scale was initially constructed with five to six questions.⁹ The scale reliability was analyzed with family and educator data from seven countries. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated using six questions from the family survey and five questions from the educator survey, with the reliability ranging from 0.66 to 0.97 (moderate to high reliability). The reliability of six questions from student surveys collected in four countries ranged from 0.73 to 0.81 (high) using Cronbach's alpha. Further details are included in the *Technical Report*. Conversations, or focus group discussions, held

⁸ Significance is determined at a 95% confidence interval throughout the paper unless otherwise noted.

⁹ The final relational trust scale has seven questions. During the pilot process, one original question was divided into two distinct questions.

in schools were inductively analyzed to identify recurrent themes that emerged across the different schools, districts or regions, and countries.

As this research approach is participatory and exploratory, the survey data are not meant to generalize or draw conclusions about what families, educators, and students think and experience, but rather to provide a pulse and snapshot of beliefs, perspectives, and engagement in the respective communities. The surveys do not provide a comparative yardstick of where schools and communities should be in terms of beliefs, relational trust, or engagement, but rather they provide critical data to help schools understand their communities and to create a shared vision on strategies for building stronger partnerships. CUE has helped develop additional tools, such as the [Global Family, School, and Community Engagement Rubrics Tool](#) (CUE, 2024), to help school teams map where they are with family engagement practices and policies and where they want to go.

Demographics

During the contextualization process, CST teams formulated demographic questions based on precedence in their countries and what was important in telling their stories on family, school, and community engagement. Consequently, some demographic data collected like race, ethnicity, and number of years in the community were not analyzed across all 16 countries but can be found along with all demographic data in the *Technical Report* appendices.

Level of Education and Socioeconomic Status

Parents'/caregivers' socioeconomic statuses and levels of education impact families' contact with and participation in schools. Research from around the world has found that parents/caregivers with high socioeconomic statuses are more likely to be involved in their children's schooling and able to provide additional resources to support children's learning and development (Cashman et al., 2021; Jeynes, 2011; Malone, 2017; Tan et al., 2020). Families of lower socioeconomic statuses have reported that they are often eager to participate in their children's schools but are unable to do so as they lack time and financial resources to support learning (Malone, 2017; Tan et al., 2020). Similarly, parents/caregivers with higher levels of education feel more confident about their participation in their children's learning and are more likely to be approached by schools and have a positive experience engaging with educators due to their familiarity with the system (Park & Holloway, 2013; Walker et al., 2011; Whitaker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2013).

Levels of education were synthesized across the different countries to get a relative picture of parents'/caregivers' access to education. The primary school category includes no education through completion of the primary grades. The secondary school category includes some or all of middle school in the United States, and some or all of lower and upper secondary in countries with a historically British education structure (Kenya, India, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Uganda, Tanzania). Post-secondary education includes university, college, tertiary, technical, and beyond.

To measure socioeconomic status, families were asked on a four-point Likert scale how often they were "able to cover basic food and living expenses." "Never" or "sometimes" able to meet their basic food and living expenses is considered poverty or extreme poverty, and "mostly" is relative poverty. This question has been tested in other contexts, as described further in the *Technical Report*. The majority of families in the four African countries and India (Tripura) were living in poverty or extreme poverty compared to the majority of families in Bangladesh, Brazil, Colombia, Hungary, India (Maharashtra), Kazakhstan, the

Netherlands, and the United States (California), who were mostly able to meet their basic needs. It is important to note, though, that nearly a quarter of families in Colombia and the United States (California) noted that they were living in poverty or extreme poverty. In Bangladesh, half of the families in this sample were living in relative poverty even though only 12.9% reported living in extreme poverty. In this research, as is common in the greater field, level of education and socioeconomic status are correlated. For example, nearly eight in 10 families (84.1% of n = 2,716) who reported always being able to cover their basic needs and living expenses had a higher level of education, at the secondary level or above.

Table 6: Parents'/Caregivers' Levels of Education and Household Socioeconomic Statuses

Country	Number of Families	Level of Education (Percent)			Socioeconomic Status (Percent meeting basic needs)		
		Primary or Less	Secondary	Post-Secondary	Never or Sometimes	Mostly	Always
Mixed Methods Sample							
Bangladesh	535	7.5%	54.7%	37.8%	12.9%	34.9%	52.2%
Brazil	734	17.6%	44.1%	38.3%	7.5%	24%	68.5%
Colombia	1,280	6.8%	36.6%	56.6%	26.3%	26.1%	47.6%
Kazakhstan	329	0.9%	6.2%	92.9%	7.6%	24.8%	67.6%
Kenya	692	76.7%	14.9%	8.4%	53.6%	25.2%	21.2%
Sierra Leone	1,767	44.1%	47.3%	8.6%	58.2%	25.1%	16.7%
South Africa	484	2.1%	70.3%	27.6%	47.8%	16.6%	35.6%
Tanzania (Zanzibar)	954	11.7%	79.6%	8.7%	57.9%	18.1%	24%
Uganda	1,173	64.2%	26.1%	9.7%	48.2%	33.4%	18.4%
US (California)	230	1.4%	43.7%	54.9%	24.3%	29%	46.7%

Country	Number of Families	Level of Education (Percent)			Socioeconomic Status (Percent meeting basic needs)		
		Primary or Less	Secondary	Post-Secondary	Never or Sometimes	Mostly	Always
Qualitative Sample							
Australia	306	3.8%	37.8%	58.4%	n/a	n/a	n/a
Hungary	94	0%	19.7%	80.3%	10.2%	50.8%	39%
India (Maharashtra)	186	0%	47.3%	52.7%	25.2%	19.7%	55.1%
India (Tripura)	216	11.1%	75.9%	13%	42.3%	25.1%	32.6%
Netherlands	110	0%	50.9%	49.1%	0%	30.8%	69.2%
UK (England Primary)	217	1%	24.7%	74.3%	n/a	n/a	n/a
UK (England Secondary)	278	0%	28.6%	71.4%	n/a	n/a	n/a
Quantitative Sample (Representative)							
Ghana	609	32.2%	25.5%	42.3%	33.2%	20.4%	46.4%
India	477	25.8%	18.7%	55.5%	24.6%	8.6%	66.8%
South Africa	1,894	16%	27.3%	56.7%	27.2%	31.1%	41.7%

Note. The highest percentages in each demographic category are shaded. Data for the mixed methods and qualitative sample were reported by families, whereas families were not surveyed in the nationally representative sample and, as such, parent/caregiver level of education and household economic status were reported by youth.

Gender

Gender of parents/caregivers can impact engagement and therefore was analyzed across and within countries. According to the literature, there are key differences between female and male caregivers' involvement, likely arising from the gendered roles of parenting across communities and countries (Jeynes, 2015; Kim & Hill, 2015; Kim, 2018). Among households led by a mother and a father, researchers in a study in the United States context found both parents' involvement to have a positive effect on their children's academic success; however, mothers tend to have a larger positive impact (Kim & Hill, 2015). In a systematic review of 66 articles, mothers' involvement was a stronger predictor than fathers' involvement in the United States (Kim, 2018). This may be a result of the different ways that female and male caregivers tend to engage in their children's education. Across global literature, female parents/caregivers tend to regularly support learning at home in developmentally appropriate ways, while male parents'/caregivers' support can be often more sporadic and harsher in

approach (Kim & Fong, 2014; Kim & Hill, 2015). More research is needed on families that do not have a two-headed household with a mother and father, including adoptive and foster families, single-headed households, and LGBTQIA+ families.

All survey responses were analyzed by gender to see if there were any notable differences in beliefs on education or experiences with family, school, and community engagement. In nearly all countries, the majority of family members who answered the survey identified as women. In Kazakhstan, Tanzania (Zanzibar), and Uganda, roughly half of parent/caregiver respondents identified as women and the other half as men. In Brazil, Colombia, and Kenya, more than four out of five parent/caregiver respondents identified as women. Gender of students and educators was also collected to ensure survey participation was gender inclusive to the extent possible. Among middle and secondary student participants, roughly half identified as women with a slightly higher proportion in Bangladesh and Tanzania (Zanzibar), where there are more women completing secondary school than men (World Bank, 2020; World Bank, 2022a).

The gender composition of educators varied across countries. In primary schools in Kenya, Sierra Leone, and Uganda the primary school educators were roughly half women and the other half men. In Bangladesh, the majority of the secondary school educators were men (two-thirds) compared to secondary schools in Colombia and Tanzania (Zanzibar), where the proportions of men and women educators was roughly equal. In Kazakhstan, four out of five secondary school educators were women. Educators were predominantly women in South Africa's pre-primary centers and Brazil's primary schools. These numbers are generally in line with national trends. In Brazil, nationally 88 percent of primary school teachers are female (World Bank, 2021). In South Africa, nationally 76 percent of pre-primary educators are female (World Bank, 2002).

Table 7: Gender and Disability Status of Students by Participant Groups

Country	Families			Educators		Students		
	Number	Percent Female	Percent CWD ^a	Number	Percent Female	Number	Percent Female	Percent CWD ^a
Mixed Methods Sample								
Bangladesh	535	69.3%	1.9%	225	33.8%	973	61.9%	1.4%
Brazil	734	87.0%	4.7%	267	94.3%	n/a	n/a	n/a
Colombia	1,280	85.7%	2.2%	659	52.5%	2,478	54.9%	4.8%
Kazakhstan	329	48.1%	1.2%	114	79.3%	209	55.8%	2.5%
Kenya	692	83.4%	3.9%	62	65.6%	n/a	n/a	n/a
Sierra Leone	1,767	72.2%	5.0%	211	45.5%	n/a	n/a	n/a
South Africa	484	78.9%	2.7%	74	93.2%	n/a	n/a	n/a
Tanzania (Zanzibar)	954	54.2%	5.3%	210	47.6%	1,139	64.3%	7.9%
Uganda	1,173	55.7%	11.1%	191	41.9%	n/a	n/a	n/a
US (California)	230	n/a	5.5%	132	n/a	1,463	n/a	4.7%
Qualitative Sample								
Australia	306	91.6%	7.0%	112	92.8%	n/a	n/a	n/a
Hungary	94	61.7%	1.1%	72	68.1%	182	50.9%	1.7%
India (Maharashtra)	186	41.8%	18.0%	31	37.9%	n/a	n/a	n/a
India (Tripura)	216	82.8%	12.6%	186	53.5%	196	46.9%	4.1%
Netherlands	110	67.9%	11.1%	60	66.70%	159	47.4%	9.0%
UK (England Primary)	217	83.9%	8.1%	69	86.6%	n/a	n/a	n/a
UK (England Secondary)	278	85.2%	8.9%	51	71.4%	187	58.2%	6.5%
Quantitative Sample (Representative)								
Ghana	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	609	51.9%	4.0%
India	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	477	50.1%	0.2%
South Africa	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1,894	49.6%	3.3%

^a CWD indicates children with disabilities.

Languages Spoken at Home

Languages can act as a bridge connecting families and schools, creating opportunities for meaningful relationships driven by emotional connections, understanding, and trust, thereby increasing family engagement (Ritblatt et al., 2023; Yohani et al., 2019). Families that speak, hear, read, and write in the language of instruction can communicate more fluidly with educators and schools, follow school news, and participate in events. Linguistically inclusive schools allow all families to build the necessary social capital to feel empowered to ask questions, share perspectives, and participate in decision making (Araujo, 2009; Barrueco et al., 2015; Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2012). A study of school websites in Australia found monolingual communication can isolate families, as they are unable to access the necessary information to actively participate in their children's schooling experiences (Piller et al., 2023). Increasing families' abilities to engage in formal and informal communication with schools can help mitigate miscommunication and misunderstandings and expel assumptions held by educators and schools about families' lack of interest or ability to support their children's learning and development (Barrueco et al., 2015; Ladky & Peterson, 2008).

Surveys were conducted in the languages of instruction used at the school and frequently spoken at home (as indicated in bold in Table 8). In seven of the 10 countries, the most frequent language spoken at home was also the language of instruction. For example, in Bangladesh all families reported that they spoke Bangla at home, which was the language used at school as well; the CST team adjusted for dialectical nuances when surveying. In Sierra Leone and Tanzania (Zanzibar) the language of instruction was not the most commonly used language at home. In Tanzania (Zanzibar), the language spoken at home is Swahili, but the language of instruction in secondary school is English, a policy laid during the British colonial era in the 1920s onwards, which has contributed to high proportions of students not passing their end of secondary school exams in English (Vavrus et al., 2013). In Sierra Leone, over 40% of families reported speaking Krio at home, which is an English-based creole language that is the lingua franca spoken across Sierra Leone. Over 35% speak Temne, one of many languages indigenous to Sierra Leone. While the official language of instruction is Standard English, in reality a mixture of Standard English and Krio are spoken in many primary school classrooms.

Kazakhstan was unique in that the language of instruction was previously Russian prior to the 1995 constitution where Kazakh was thereafter designated as the national language (Smagulova, 2016). Some of the schools in this research operated in Kazakh only and others in dual Kazakh and Russian. Roughly a third of families across the country speak Russian at home (AllahMorad & Mackie, 2021). The United States (California) was the only country in the study where a dual-language system was used. In dual-language schools, students speak both English and Spanish, a trend that is growing in the United States and especially in

communities where a large proportion of families speak Spanish at home (Gomez et al., 2005). While India's National Education Policy (2020) promotes multiple languages in education, in practice different states have varying policies on the language of instruction (Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, 2020; Mahapatra & Anderson, 2023).

Among the five countries that participated in the qualitative research, language of instruction and language spoken at home varied widely. In Australia, two-thirds of families spoke English at home, which is also the language of instruction. In secondary schools in England, 88% of families spoke English at home, and in Hungary, all families spoke Hungarian at home, which is also the language of instruction and the language used for the surveys and conversations. Most families in the Netherlands spoke Dutch at home followed by Arabic and Polish; conversations were held in English to enable all families could participate. In India (Maharashtra) where the mixed methods research was conducted by the CST team, Marathi was the language used on the survey as it is spoken by approximately 70% of the population in the state and is the compulsory language of instruction in government schools (Government of India, 2011; Mahapatra & Anderson, 2023). In India (Tripura) where the CST team also conducted mixed methods research, Bengali was the main language used for the survey and conversations and is the language of instruction and most widely used language at home, followed by Kokborok. There was also a representative (quantitative) sample of youth surveyed in India (Maharashtra and Himachal Pradesh states) and Hindi, English, and Marathi were used.

Table 8: Families' Languages of Instruction and Languages Spoken at Home

Country	Language of Instruction (LOI)	Number of Families	Use LOI at Home (Percent)	Frequency of Other Languages Spoken at Home ^a
Mixed Methods Sample				
Bangladesh	Bangla	535	100%	n/a
Brazil	Portuguese	734	99.7%	Spanish (0.3%)
Colombia	Spanish	1,280	99.8%	English (0.2%)
Kazakhstan	Kazakh ^b Russian	329	82.0% 29.6%	Others (0.6%)
Kenya	English Swahili	692	10.3% 84.0%	Bajuni (21.0%), Somali (3.6%), Luo (3.0%), Arabic (2.2%), Luhya (1.0%), Kikuyu (0.6%), Other (17.1%)
Sierra Leone	English (Standard)	1,767	0.2%	Krio (42.6%) , Temne (35.7%), Kono (9.3%), Limba (4.6%), Mende (3.6%), Fula (1.7%), Susu (0.7%), Madingo (0.6%), Loko (0.4%), Kissi (0.3%), Sherbo (0.2%), Koranko (0.1%)

Country	Language of Instruction (LOI)	Number of Families	Use LOI at Home (Percent)	Frequency of Other Languages Spoken at Home ^a
South Africa	Xhosa	484	91.1%	English (2.5%) , Sotho (2.3%), Zulu (2.1%), Other (1.8%), Afrikaans (0.2%)
Uganda	English	1,173	14.8%	Lugbarati (34.4%), Aringati (28.9%), Madi (33%), Gimara/Kakwa (11.8%), Other (6%), Kuku (5.8%), Juba Arabic (4.9%), Bari (1%).
US (California)	English ^c Spanish	230	47.8% 56.1%	Vietnamese (13.9%) , Other (0.4%)
Tanzania (Zanzibar)	English	954	0.0%	Swahili (100%)
Qualitative Sample				
Australia	English	306	60.8%	Arabic (12%), Persian (Dari and Farsi) (9%), Hindi (5.8%), Turkish (2.6%), Vietnamese (1.6%), Punjabi (0.5%), Chinese (0.5%), Other (7.2%)
Hungary	Hungarian	94	100%	n/a
India (Maharashtra)	Marathi	186	94.6% 3.8%	Other (1.6%)
India (Tripura)	Bangla	216	97.2%	Kokborok (0.5%), Other (2.3%)
Netherlands	Dutch	110	91.3%	Arabic (2.9%), Polish (1.9%), Other (3.9%)
UK (England Primary)	English	217	78.4%	Romanian (3.4%), Urdu (3.4%), Bengali (1.9%), French (1.4%), Gujarati (1.4%), Hindi (1.4%), Other (8.7%)
UK (England Secondary)	English	278	95.2%	Polish (1.5%), Romanian (1.1%), Other (2.2%)
Quantitative Sample (Representative)				
Ghana	n/a	n/a	n/a	Languages spoken at home were not reported. English was the only language used for surveying ^d
India	n/a	n/a	n/a	Hindi (95.0%), Marathi (5.0%), English (0%)
South Africa	n/a	n/a	n/a	English (99.8%), Isizulu (.2%), Afrikaans (0%), Xhosa (0%)

^a Surveys were offered in the bolded languages in addition to the LOI. In Kazakhstan, Kenya, Uganda, and the United States, the questions were offered as multiple choice as opposed to single choice, and the responses therefore do not sum to 100%.

^b In Kazakhstan three out of the five schools used Kazakh as the LOI, and two schools used Russian and Kazakh as the LOI.

^c In the United States (California) six out of the eight schools used English as the LOI, and two schools used Spanish and English as the LOI.

^d The youth surveys conducted by GeoPoll were conducted in languages used in previous surveying exercises, which were verified by youth during testing of the surveys to be the main languages in which they were comfortable completing the survey.

The Six Global Lessons



1 **Begin with beliefs**



4 **Build at the speed of trust**



2 **Position families as partners**



5 **Make family, school, and community engagement a must**



3 **Collectively break barriers**



6 **Disrupt power dynamics through community-driven research**

Family, school, and community engagement practices and policies varied within and between schools, as well as across districts, regions, and countries in this study. Survey and conversation data revealed diverse beliefs on education, an array of different types of and barriers to engagement, and different experiences with relational trust. Yet, across demographic and geographies, common threads of a story emerged. The need to position families as partners and to work slowly and authentically to build relational trust were consistent themes, as was the need to take time to understand beliefs and to make space to listen to each other's viewpoints.

As the findings highlight, understanding and mapping beliefs and viewpoints on the purposes of school is critical to building a **coherent** and shared vision of what family, school, and community partnerships should look like in schools as well as fostering relational trust among groups to turn visions into action. Having conversations around these beliefs helped to promote **cohesion** and a sense of community between families, educators, and students in pursuit of the shared vision. Conversations also helped to recognize not only barriers to building cohesion but also the innovative strategies schools and families were using to engage with each other. One unique and noteworthy contribution this research adds to the larger field is that measuring and unpacking relational trust is foundational to building cohesion. Through this research, a relational trust

scale was developed and tested to measure not only **care** and mutual regard for others in the school community, but also whether words were translating into actions and there was a culture of listening underlying interactions between families and schools. Finally, the tireless work of the CST teams to build **contact** and communication between families, students, and educators, has inspired community-driven solutions and recommendations that are interlaced throughout the *Six Global Lessons*.

Each of the six global lessons sections starts with a description of how each of the findings were measured, followed by comparative analyses across and between the different countries and then across the various participant groups and demographics. Quantitative findings are informed by data from a subsection of the 16 countries, and qualitative findings from all countries are woven into each of the different takeaways.

Before delving into the lessons, we start by presenting a synthesis in Box 1 of how family, school, and community engagement was explained and defined by the different school communities, which has deeply informed CUE's own language and terminology.

Box 1: What Family, School, and Community Engagement Means Across Countries

Across the hundreds of different schools and communities leading this research, families, educators, and students discussed how they defined family, school, and community engagement. One common thread was that engagement embodies **collaboration** across the home and school, as well as with community groups and actors, in support of students. Collaboration includes partnering and working together, building relationships, and fostering communication and mutual participation toward the common goal of ensuring students succeed.

Student success was frequently expressed as achieving learning outcomes and meeting educational goals and benchmarks set forth by education systems and schools. Student success also meant holistic development, which included developing social and emotional skills as well as a love of learning and commitment to community development. Families in the United Kingdom (England) emphasized that school is about developing “a joy of learning” and family, school, and community engagement should help cultivate that joy. Holistic learning among pre-primary families and educators in South Africa meant working together to ensure a child could navigate obstacles in school and life, whether they be health concerns, poverty, learning or other disabilities, and beyond. For secondary school students in vocational programs in the Netherlands and Hungary, student success included collaborating with community businesses and entities to support students in obtaining the work and livelihood opportunities they need to sustain themselves economically. As one parent/caregiver in the Netherlands noted, “For me it is about aligning learning at school with learning at other places, like at home or at the student’s job.”

Another purpose of family, school, and community engagement was to ensure schools were both **safe and welcoming**. In some communities like Brazil, South Africa, and the United States (California), families, educators, and students explicitly mentioned safety from physical threats and violence in the wider community. In Sierra Leone, conversations suggested that engagement helped to create peaceful societies and unity between different social and ethnic groups, mitigating and preventing further divisions from some of the historical conflicts that have divided societies.

Another theme across countries was the importance of family, school, and community engagement in **furthering equity and inclusion** of all children in achieving a quality education. This purpose intersected with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal for education: *ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*. As students in particular reiterated, family, school, and community engagement should center on removing the structural and situational barriers young people face in their schooling and ensuring they can achieve the purpose of school promised to them by society. In a conversation in South Africa with families and educators, one participant noted, “It [family, school, and community engagement] entails working with educators to raise community children and identifying issues early on so that we can address any issues our children encounter and prevent them from having negative effects later in life.”

These perspectives have enriched the definition of family, school, and community engagement used by CUE and in this report.



Global Lesson 1

Begin With Beliefs

Families, educators, and students often have different beliefs about the purpose of school, what makes a quality education, and preferred approaches to teaching and learning. Understanding families', educators', and students' beliefs and experiences in education is critical to building coherence in education systems and a shared vision of education.

As was found in the Playbook research, families and school educators in each country and study site had a distinct set of beliefs and expectations about the purpose of school, even if they were not always conscious of these beliefs. In *Six Global Lessons*, students' beliefs on education were analyzed and a further distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic beliefs was made. Beliefs on education were found to be both intrinsic, for development of personal or collective knowledge and skills building, and extrinsic, for economic gain and supporting the civic development of a country (Rabb, 2017; Robeyns, 2006; Shelton, 2023). Intrinsic beliefs consider when families, educators, and students are most personally satisfied with education in their own lived experience, whereas extrinsic beliefs situate the role of education in society. However, intrinsic beliefs can also be reflections of the larger education system and how student learning is valued in practice—such as framing exams and grades as markers of student success. For example, families often revealed in conversations that they chose their preferred pedagogy based on what they thought would help prepare their child most effectively for their preferred purpose of school. We intentionally tried to capture intrinsic and extrinsic beliefs in this study, through the surveys and intentional conversations as discussed in detail below.

One of the findings that this research confirmed from the initial Playbook study is that beliefs are often informed by participants' own experiences with education, alongside the ways in which the purpose of school is framed in their families and surrounding communities. National and global conversations on

the role of education in economic, social, cultural, and political development and how education systems and policies are structured both presently and historically can and do also influence beliefs (Qargha & Morris, 2023; Shelton, 2023). For example, some educators and families in Tanzania (Zanzibar) and Brazil echoed the words and concepts of revolutionary political and education leaders. In Tanzania, the notion of education as developing “kujitegemea” or “self-reliance” was reflected in President Julius K. Nyerere’s education policies that argue education is not only essential for promoting livelihoods and economic development but developing a national identity free from colonial vestiges (Nyerere, 1968). In Brazil, many educators referenced the “escola cidadã,” an idea birthed by Paulo Freire (1974) of education as a form of liberation, where together educators and students teach each other co-existence and democratic values and foundations.

As was discussed in the Playbook research, sometimes differences in beliefs lead to tensions, and other times they are simply a missed opportunity to build a coherent vision of how families and educators can work together to support students and schools to thrive. Beliefs on the purpose of school, satisfaction with the quality of education in their school, and the types of teaching and learning taking place in classrooms—or pedagogy—all inform families’, students’, and educators’ relationships with schools and are analyzed in-depth below.



SURVEY QUESTION (Families, Educators, and Students)

What do you believe is the most important purpose of school? [Select top one]

- To prepare for further education (e.g., university, vocational, technical school)
- To develop skills for work
- To be active citizens and community members
- To understand oneself and develop social skills or values
- Additional (please specify)
- Don’t know/Prefer not to answer



CONVERSATION QUESTIONS

Why do you think families, educators, and students chose the main purposes of ...? How did you decide which purpose of school to choose?

Note. All conversation questions were adapted to incorporate educators’ and students’ survey data before dialogues were held.

Purpose of School

On the CST surveys, the purposes of school were categorized into four choice options—*academic, economic, civic, and social and emotional learning*—even though these different categories intersect and inform each other in practice.

The survey intentionally asked participants to identify the main **purpose of school** instead of the **purpose of education**, as this research looked specifically at what was taking place in basic education systems; research in nonformal and adult learning centers would have required a slightly different set of questions and approach. The reason for encouraging participants to select only one response option on the surveys was to capture and compare initial impulses and to analyze patterns that emerged across and within participant groups. When given the opportunity during field testing and earlier phases of the research, most participants defaulted and named all purposes, which resulted in less variance between responses. Conversations on the purpose of school were nuanced and rich when participants had to choose based on their first impulse.

The four purposes of school named on the survey were written based on families' motivations and aspirations for sending children to school, and on how curricula, pedagogy, and learning are structured within basic education systems, as opposed to using more academic categories and typologies of purpose. Participants were given the opportunity to define their own purposes of school through an open response option. In some countries, such as the United Kingdom (England), around 7% of participants wrote in their own responses, while in other countries like Bangladesh, less than 1% named additional purposes. The rationale for the four categories is elaborated in Box 2.

Box 2: Purposes of School

The CST surveys draw on four main purposes of school, with the actual survey wording listed in parentheses. Additional purposes not captured in the survey are explained below.

- **Academic learning (to prepare for further education).** Further education encompasses secondary education through technical, university, continuing education, or other pathways.
- **Economic learning (to develop skills for work).** Work includes both formal employment and informal work not covered by formal arrangements.
- **Civic learning (to be active citizens and community members).** Civic and citizenship education encompasses the preparation of students for global citizenship and political participation, along with the development of other knowledge, skills, and attitudes relevant to being an active and informed community member.
- **Social and emotional learning (to understand oneself and develop social skills or values).** This broad-reaching category includes social and emotional learning, specifically the development of emotional, social, and cognitive skills as well as ethics and values.

The academic and economic purposes align with ‘education for economic development,’ the idea that learners use education to eventually gain work or income or improve their working conditions (Aslam & Rawal, 2015; Berman, 2022; Shelton, 2023). Civic learning encompasses ‘education for building national identities and civic engagement’ and is an important vehicle for promoting national or other identities and global citizenship (Akkari & Maleq, 2020; Verger et al., 2016). ‘Social and emotional learning’ refers to the skills and behaviors associated with self-awareness, managing one’s emotions, sustaining positive relationships with others, and responsible decision making (Denham & Brown, 2010; Ma et al., 2023).

Other purposes not captured in the surveys are ‘education for well-being and flourishing’ (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999); ‘education as liberation and critical conscientization’ against different forms of structural oppression (Freire, 1974; hooks, 1994; Mellor, 2013); and ‘education as culturally and spiritually sustaining’ (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2012; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). These more abstract purposes were not included in the surveys as during initial phases of the research, families and students expressed that their everyday motivations and aspirations for participating in formal schooling were more pragmatic and the response options needed to be highly tangible. Research on these purposes is important but requires a more in-depth qualitative process (Morris & Qargha, 2023; Morris et al., 2023).

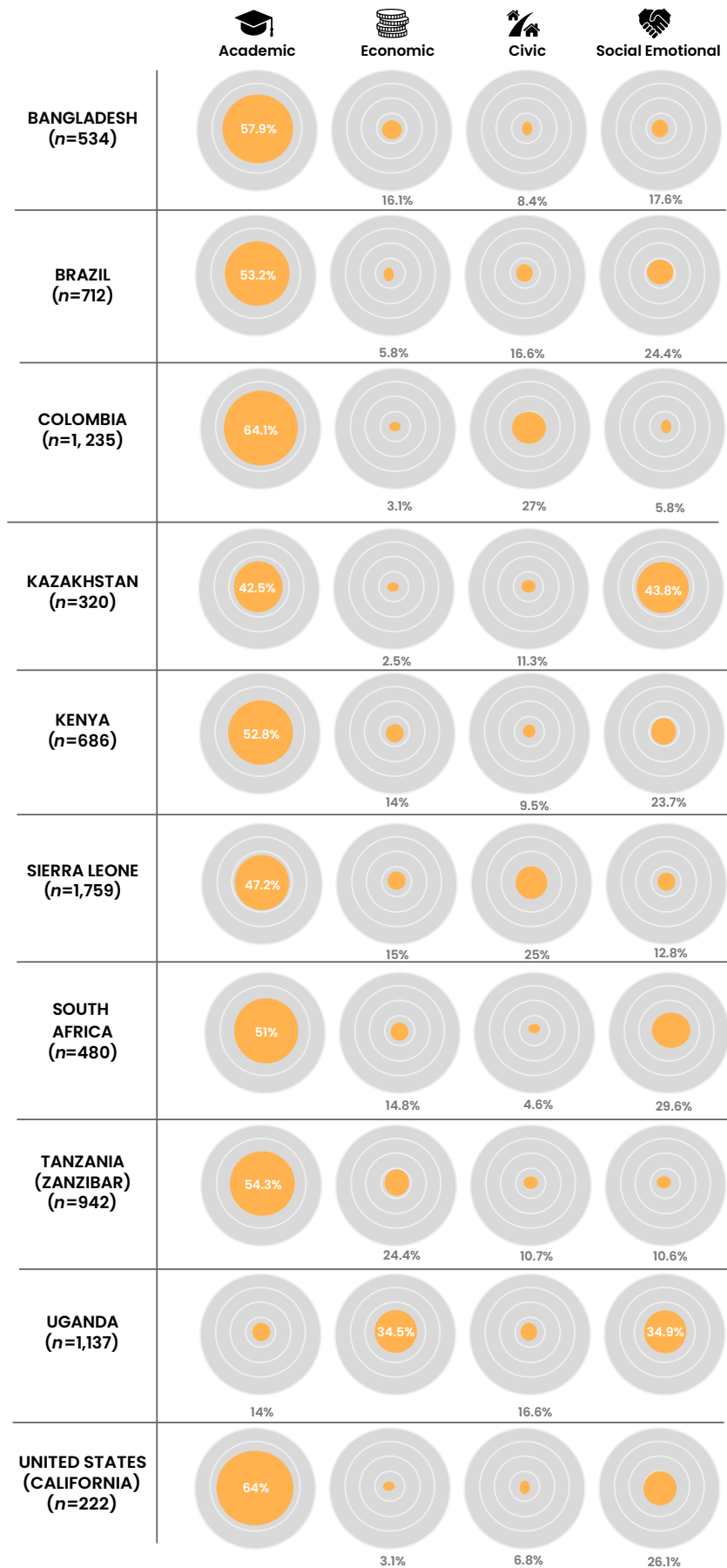


TAKEAWAY: Families and students viewed the main role and purpose of school as preparing learners for furthering education, but this purpose was highly intertwined with gaining skills for work.

In nine out of 10 countries, families believed that the main purpose of school was to further education, or what is classified as *academic learning*. Overall, 48.1% of families chose *academic learning (to prepare for further education)* as their top purpose. This mirrored students' beliefs, where youth in six out of eight countries centered *academic learning* as their main purpose, totaling 48.3% of all students surveyed. Only primary school families in Uganda and secondary school families in Kazakhstan chose a main purpose other than *academic learning*. In Uganda, families were split between preferring *economic learning (to develop skills for work)* and *social and emotional learning (to understand oneself and develop social skills or values)* whereas in Kazakhstan secondary school families were split between *academic learning* and *social and emotional learning*. Across the 10 countries, 15.4% of families, 12.3% of educators, and 19.6% of students named *economic learning* as their main purpose of school.

Figure 5

Families' Beliefs on the Purpose of School (n = 8,027 in 10 countries)



The *academic* and *economic* purposes were linked, as education was seen as a vital means for increasing economic and financial independence, building a secure future, and promoting social mobility. As a primary school parent/caregiver in Brazil noted, "Since we were little, we hear from our parents that we must go to school to get a job." Social mobility is defined as the movement of groups or individuals between different social and economic strata and toward greater life outcomes and circumstances (Vaid, 2016). Social and economic strata are an intersection of class, gender, race, ethnicity, caste, disability, or urban or rural residence and other identity markers. Families and students alike often positioned education as a pathway out of poverty and/or improving the economic and social well-being of their families.

This deeply held belief of education as a door, key, or pathway out of poverty toward a good life was a constant thread in nearly every conversation. The idea of the "good life" is rooted in economic prosperity, but also in ideas of well-being, community, familial values, and sometimes religious ethos (Morris, 2021). As an educator in Kenya noted, "Parents believe that those who perform well in academics will live a good life." A parent/caregiver in Kenya added, "Education is the key to success." In a conversation among families and educators in Sierra Leone, one participant summed up this cyclical relationship as, "If you go on with studies, you go to the university, get a good job. If you don't, you cannot get a good job. ... Continuing education will make [help] you get a job that will give you more money. Stopping at some level of your educational career will not help you gain a job with more money."

Among family representatives who took the surveys across the ten countries, parents/caregivers of secondary school students prioritized *academic learning* at significantly higher rates (56.2% of $n = 3,197$) than families of younger children in pre-primary and primary grades (42.8% of $n = 4,830$). Families of younger children named *social and emotional learning* as a higher priority (23.0% of $n = 4,830$) than those of secondary school students (14.2% of $n = 3,197$). As was gleaned from conversations, families of secondary school students were particularly worried about their children's *academic learning* and being able to achieve higher education so they could secure well-remunerated work, as compared to parents/caregivers in lower grades who were often more focused on ensuring their children are acquiring *social and emotional learning* as their children were further from the world of work.

Beliefs on the purpose of school also varied by education level and the socioeconomic status of families. Parents/caregivers with a primary school education or less reported *economic learning* as the main purpose of school to a greater extent (21.2% of $n = 2,391$) than families with secondary school education or above (12.9% of $n = 5,571$). To the contrary, over half of families with higher levels of education (50.6% of $n = 5,571$), and higher socioeconomic statuses who always were able to meet their basic needs, cited *academic learning* at significantly greater rates compared to families with only primary

school education or less (42.2% of $n = 2,391$) and lower socioeconomic statuses. Although it was not probed in the conversations why families of lower education and socioeconomic statuses centered *economic learning* to a greater extent and *academic learning* to a lesser extent, it may be that these families living in poverty or extreme poverty are concerned about their children getting skills to generate income and support themselves and their families. A secondary student in Tanzania (Zanzibar) mentioned, "In our community, the rise in poverty levels is huge, and education serves as a solution." Likewise, in a central meeting on these data, the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training in Tanzania (Zanzibar) discussed how families are living in a tourist economy, and while they may not have completed secondary school and as a parent/caregiver are working in the informal economy, they hoped their children could move into more formal and secure work in the future.

When analyzing across gender of parents/caregivers, a significantly higher proportion of women (49.9% of $n = 5,555$) named *academic learning* as their main purpose compared to men (42.1% of $n = 2,232$). It was unclear from the conversations why this gender difference was observed, except that women are often more involved in the day-to-day efforts of ensuring their children attend and complete school. While the sample of parents/caregivers with a child with a disability was relatively small ($n = 383$), *academic learning* was less privileged as a purpose among families of students with a disability (41.8% of $n = 383$ at $p < .01$) than of students without a known disability (48.4% of $n = 7,614$). Instead, *economic learning* was slightly higher among families with a child with a disability (20.9% of $n = 383$) compared to families without a child with a disability (15.1% of $n = 7,614$). Again, it was unclear from the conversations why families of children with disabilities differed slightly in beliefs, but it's possible the large concern of families in ensuring their children can contribute to their families may have factored into their responses.

Although families' and youth's impulses may have been to first select *academic learning*, during conversations they had deep dialogues about how education systems often concentrate on getting children through education, but that the intrinsic purposes of being happy, fulfilled, and healthy were vital to their hopes and beliefs. In Hungary, Kazakhstan, and the Netherlands, where the qualitative process was carried out by the civil society organization Parents International, families further qualified how education was not only helping young people get a job, but a "job they want," and noted the importance of young people being happy and fulfilled. As an educator in Kazakhstan noted, "Parents chose academic aspects as a main purpose of school, but later they indicated how important for them the social and emotional aspect is. Certainly, they first want their kids to succeed academically, but at the end of the day they will be happier to see that their kid is happy and can be emotionally healthy no matter what." In Kenya and Uganda, primary school parents/caregivers and educators also identified the importance of school for social mobility and viewed education as critical to helping children become good people and productive members of their

communities. In Kenya, a parent/caregiver noted that, “The child can not only help his people, but also the society in general and possibly even the country at large.” An educator in Uganda explained, “Education opens our eyes and also help[s] to build self-reliance. When you are educated you can help other people to open their mind/eye.”



TAKEAWAY: Students emphasized the importance of furthering education, but they also emphasized the importance of gaining skills to understand oneself and developing social skills or values and well-being.

Students’ beliefs largely mirrored their parents’/caregivers’ beliefs, as students named the main purpose of school as *academic learning* in six out of eight countries. One student in Tanzania (Zanzibar) noted that this is likely because families and students shared similar beliefs and ethos on learning. Students, like their parents/caregivers, also prioritized *social and emotional learning* and well-being. Overall, only 18.8% of students across eight countries and 19.5% of families across all 10 countries reported *social and emotional learning* as the main purpose. Students in Ghana and Kazakhstan chose *social and emotional learning* as their top choice. As one student described in Ghana, education is important to help young people “live meaningful[ly] in society.”

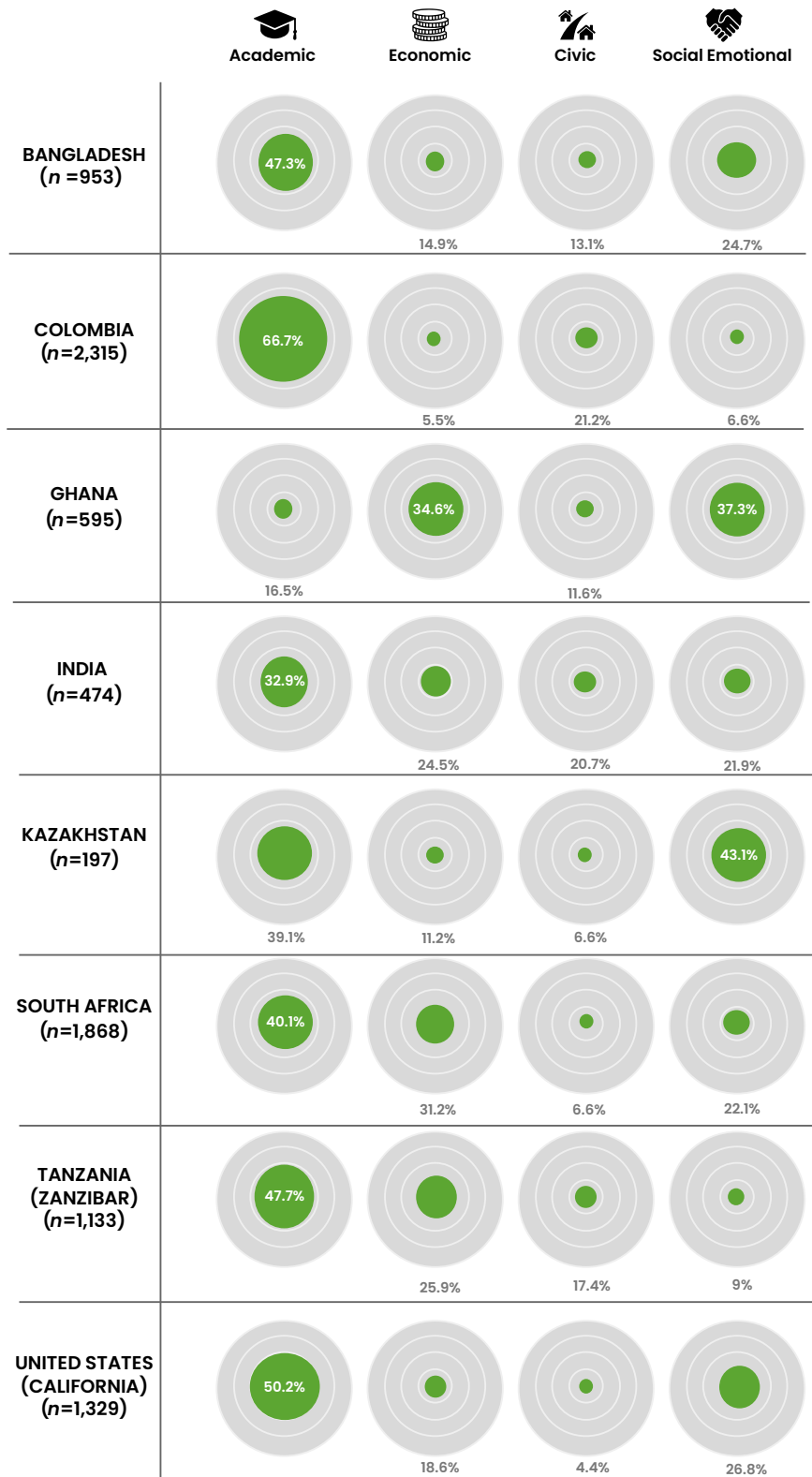
In Kazakhstan, educators and families discussed how the national focus in government schools has shifted from *academic learning* to *social and emotional learning* over time, as there is currently a much greater awareness of the need for social and emotional interventions than in the past. A female teacher in Kazakhstan recalled:

As parents we were taught in our childhood that academic achievement is the most important and we didn’t understand [under the Soviet regime] what it was, social and emotional well-being and how important it was. We just had to be good and well-behaved students. But as teachers in the contemporary world, we understand that by focusing on the social and emotional state of students, we can to some extent guarantee their success in studies and life.

The lead youth researcher in Kazakhstan also felt that social media was playing a role in students’ prioritization of *social and emotional learning*; students were “really being influenced by how people [on social media platforms] are promoting healthy ways of living.”

Figure 6

Students' Beliefs on the Purpose of School (n = 8,864 in eight countries)



Although students offered varied rationales for their purposes in conversations, a common theme was the notion that education should provide young people the relevant skills they need for the realities of their lives. Many youth communicated that there was a disconnect between what they were learning and what they needed for their lives. In the UK (England), one student noted, “[The purpose of school is] to learn useless things that most adults forget before they turn 30.” In the Netherlands, students discussed how their communities were becoming more diverse racially and ethnically, and how skills that teach students co-existence are critical. As one female student in the Netherlands noted, “In our area we traditionally have diversity, many people live here who come from former colonies, but lately we have a lot of newly arrived people who don’t speak Dutch and have different values and traditions, we need to learn to live together with them as a community.”

During conversations in Hungary and the Netherlands, numerous students emphasized the connection between *social and emotional learning* for their overall well-being, underscoring the importance of self-awareness, personal development, and resilience. For instance, a female student from the Netherlands elucidated the importance of *social and emotional learning* and its connection to well-being, stating that “nowadays academic knowledge can be gained on your own online, but we need the community of our class and school to gain skills for living in a community and also for finding our own way.”

There was little observable variance across student demographics, although male students tended to prioritize *economic learning* at significantly higher rates (21.3% of $n = 3,312$) than females (18.8% of $n = 4,151$). Similarly, students of lower socioeconomic statuses (23.3% of $n = 4,056$), who said they were never, sometimes, or mostly meeting their basic needs, more often prioritized *economic learning* as compared to students who were always meeting their basic needs (14.9% of $n = 3,808$).



TAKEAWAY: Educators saw the purpose differently across location but had a greater emphasis on the importance of being active community members and citizens, as well as gaining skills to understand oneself and developing social skills or values.

In contrast to families and students who largely chose *academic learning* as the main purpose of school, educators’ main purpose of school varied by location. In three countries, educators were split between two purposes—Bangladesh, Tanzania (Zanzibar), and the United States (California). Educators in three countries—South Africa, Sierra Leone, and the United States (California)—prioritized *academic learning* as the main purpose of school, with 22.4% of total educators across the 10 countries who selected *academic learning*. In Brazil,

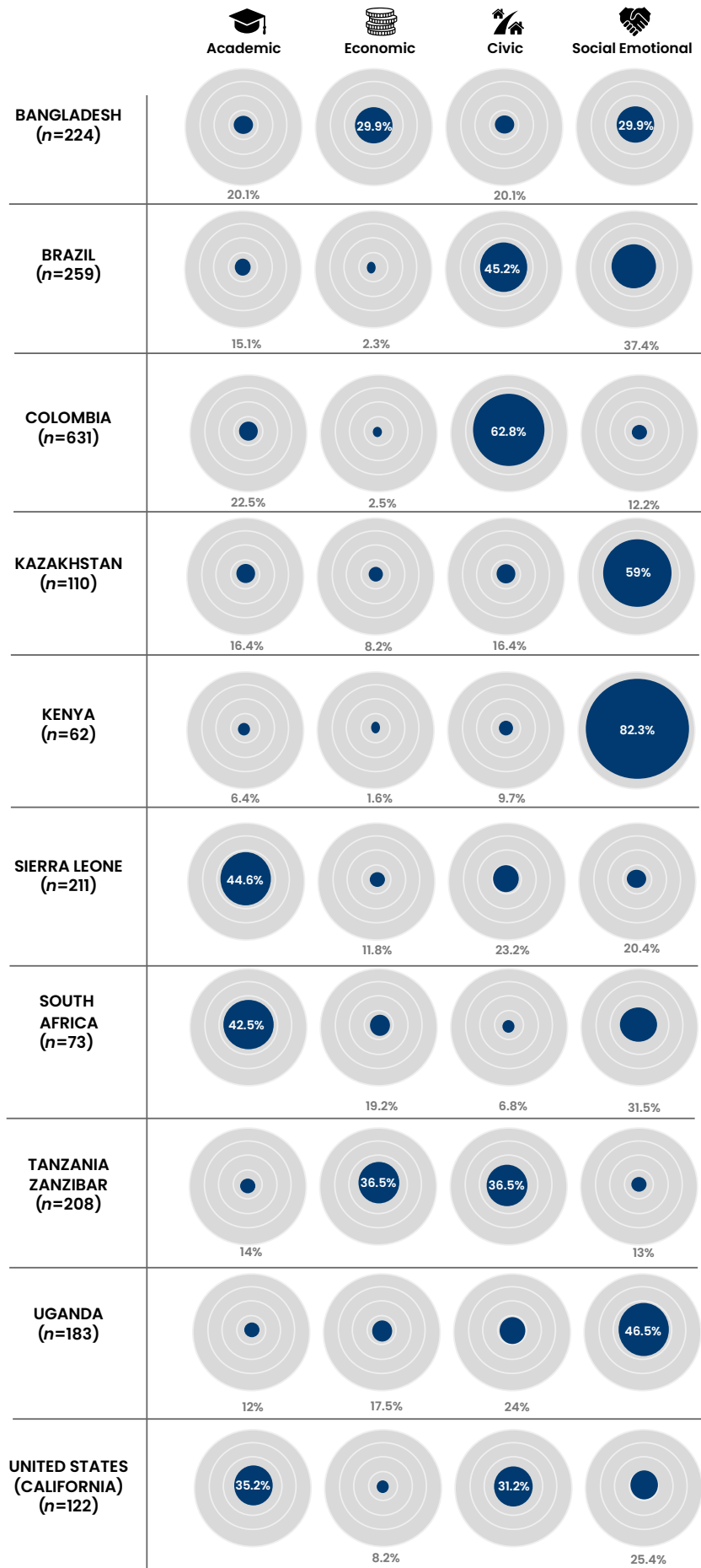
one parent/caregiver explained this difference between families' and educators' beliefs as: "Every parent's dream is to have a child who will have a university diploma. Teachers see education more broadly."

Educators in four countries prioritized *civic learning (being active community members and citizens)* as the main purpose of school. Overall, 38.1% of educators chose *civic learning* as the main purpose of school compared to 17.0% of parents/caregivers and 13.3% of students. *Civic learning* was a main purpose for educators in Brazil, Colombia, the United States (California), and Tanzania (Zanzibar), where there have been national conversations on civic education. As an educator in Brazil noted, "I think that if you form a citizen, a conscious person, a person capable of pursuing his/her goals, an active person in the community in which they live, they will be a person capable of pursuing technical training, something that makes sense to them. Today the school goes beyond just preparing students for higher education." In Tanzania (Zanzibar), educators and families noted that schools played a pivotal role in teaching young people to be good citizens, which included deep ethical and moral behaviors, such as resisting corruption as well as embodying cultural and religious values in the community. These civic beliefs overlapped with religious values and perspectives. As a secondary school parent/caregiver in Tanzania (Zanzibar) explained, "The main goal of a school is to raise a child on all the morals and values that are accepted in the society, including providing them with education, encouraging them with good behavior and respect." In the United States (California), *civic learning* is taught in middle and high school curricula, which may have weighed into educators' beliefs regarding its importance.

Social and emotional learning was named the most-important purpose by educators in four out of 10 countries; 27.2% of total educators chose *social and emotional learning* as their main purpose. *Social and emotional learning* was the most prominent purpose among educators in Bangladesh, Kazakhstan, Kenya, and Uganda. *Economic learning* was the most-important purpose in Bangladesh and Tanzania (Zanzibar) but was split with another purpose; overall 12.3% of educators prioritized *economic learning*.

Figure 7

Educators' Beliefs on the Purpose of School (n = 2,083 in 10 countries)



Among the educators in the 10 countries, a higher proportion of educators of younger children in pre-primary and primary named *academic learning* and *social and emotional learning* (25.6% and 36.3%, respectively, of $n = 910$) as main purposes compared to educators of older children (19.9% and 20.1%, respectively, of $n = 1,173$). Conversely, educators of older children reported *civic learning* and *economic learning* at slightly higher rates (45.6% and 14.3%, respectively, of $n = 1,173$) than educators of younger children (28.5% and 9.7%, respectively, of $n = 910$). During conversations in Kenya, primary school educators reiterated that *social and emotional learning* was vital for children to do well in school. Conversations in many countries revealed that *economic learning* resonated more with secondary school educators whose students were closer to the job market than those of primary and pre-primary educators. Secondary school educators seem to share similar concerns of families in that parents/caregivers of secondary school students want their children to secure well-remunerated jobs, while parents/caregivers of younger students have different priorities as their children are further from the job market. As a secondary school educator in Colombia explained, *academic learning* helps students “develop skills to allow them to get the best results possible and to advance to the university and later employment.”

Although there were not many gender differences in beliefs among educators, a slightly higher percentage of male educators (14.7% of $n = 832$) prioritized *economic learning* compared to female educators (11.0% of $n = 1,115$).

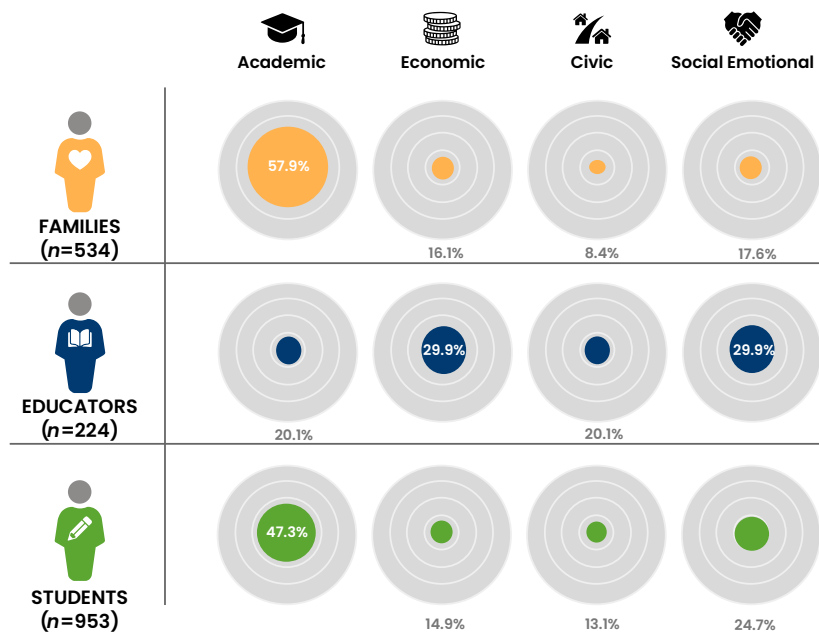
Country Snapshot on Purpose of School

Mapping differences in beliefs between families, students, and school educators is an important entry point into conversations and helps groups understand where they align and differ in beliefs. Unpacking beliefs is an important step in building a shared vision. In research led by the civil society organization Education & Cultural Society with 14 secondary schools in Bangladesh, families and students emphasized *academic learning* as the main purpose of school, whereas educators emphasized *economic learning* and *social and emotional learning* as the main purpose (see Figure 8).

During conversations, families described how they chose *academic learning* to advance their children’s social mobility and that school credentials were critical to securing formal and well-remunerated livelihoods. As one female educator of a rural school noted, “Families in our community often have many children but limited income. Consequently, they prioritize academic learning to ensure their children can secure employment quickly.” Parents/caregivers also expressed that they could teach *social and emotional learning* at home, as was echoed by families in Colombia and a number of other countries, but that they relied on educators for *academic learning* (see Morris & Winthrop, 2023, for deeper discussion). “Academic learning is considered the school’s top priority because parents and society can impart social behavior and emotional attitudes, but academic learning and examination preparation require the school’s dedicated focus,” according to a male parent at an urban school in Bangladesh.

Figure 8

Belief Map on the Purpose of School in Bangladesh (n = 14 secondary schools)



Educators in Bangladesh understood families' desire to focus on *academic learning* but believed education should provide more. Over the past few years, educators have had to contend with not only political and environmental challenges, but also school closures and inequities that were exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Educators were insistent that *social and emotional learning* was important, as well as *economic learning*, even though they often emphasize *academic learning* in schools. One educator at a rural school in Bangladesh described why *social and emotional learning* was important:

Our school is located in an extremely remote area, and our students have limited access to facilities. We follow a common curriculum which is quite advanced and challenging for our students given their socio-economic conditions. Additionally, due to the pandemic, many of these students experienced a significant setback in their education, particularly in grades 6 and 7. They now face a substantial learning gap. While we prioritize academic learning, as a teacher, I believe that the purpose of education extends beyond passing examinations or securing a fixed job. Education holds a broader value and vision, which is why we emphasize socio-emotional learning.



SUMMARY

In summary, beliefs on the purpose of school varied across participant groups and demographics, but some general trends stand out across countries. First, the purpose of school was often seen as an extrinsic belief about the role of education in society. Families and students tended to prioritize *academic learning*, believing that the role of education is to meet the promises of social mobility and that school is intended to open a door to greater economic opportunities. This belief reflects economic perspectives on education, which emphasizes the link between school and work readiness and the preparation of young people to be economically independent.

Educators were more nuanced in their beliefs of purpose. Across all grade levels, educators recognized the importance of *social and emotional learning* as a catalyst for all other forms of learning. When probed in conversations, educators often described what they were seeing in their classrooms—including mental health and emotional concerns—and wanting to support their students' well-being. In many countries educators also positioned school as being important to helping students “to be active citizens and community members” and as being vital to building peaceful and coherent societies. Although students largely chose *academic learning* as their main purpose, they often questioned or challenged assigning education to an economic role in society. For example, when asked about the purpose of school, one secondary school student in the United Kingdom (England) wrote in an additional option: “to brainwash you into becoming a worker.”

Mapping these beliefs helped education systems leaders and educators in this research think about the aspirations that families, students, and educators have for education and to discuss how these perceptions may vary. Understanding these beliefs is critical to building coherent education strategies and working together to develop a shared vision of the purpose of school that reflects different experiences and perspectives on education.

Perception Gaps on the Purpose of School



TAKEAWAY: Families in most countries did not accurately perceive educators' beliefs on the purpose of school and often thought that educators shared their beliefs. Overall, educators accurately perceived that families were focused on furthering education.

In addition to describing their own beliefs, families, students, and educators were asked how they thought other participant groups saw the purpose of school. When one group perceives the beliefs of another group accurately, it is known as perception alignment. Conversely, when one group does not correctly perceive the other group's beliefs, there is a perception gap. Across most countries, educators accurately perceived families' beliefs, but families and students rarely perceived educators' beliefs on the purpose of school correctly.



SURVEY QUESTION
(Families)

What do you think your child’s teachers believe is the most important purpose of school? [Select top one]

- To prepare for further education (e.g., university, vocational, technical school)
- To develop skills for work
- To be active citizens and community members
- To understand oneself and develop social skills or values
- Additional (please specify)
- Don’t know/Prefer not to answer



CONVERSATION QUESTION

Can you say a little bit about why you think your child’s teacher prioritizes this purpose?

Note. All conversation questions were adapted to incorporate educators’ and students’ survey data before dialogues were held.

In seven out of 10 countries, as shown in Figure 9, there was a perception gap where both families and students incorrectly perceived what educators believed to be the most important purpose of school. In most cases, families and students thought that educators were prioritizing *academic learning* like they were.

Figure 9

Perception Gap of Educators’ Beliefs

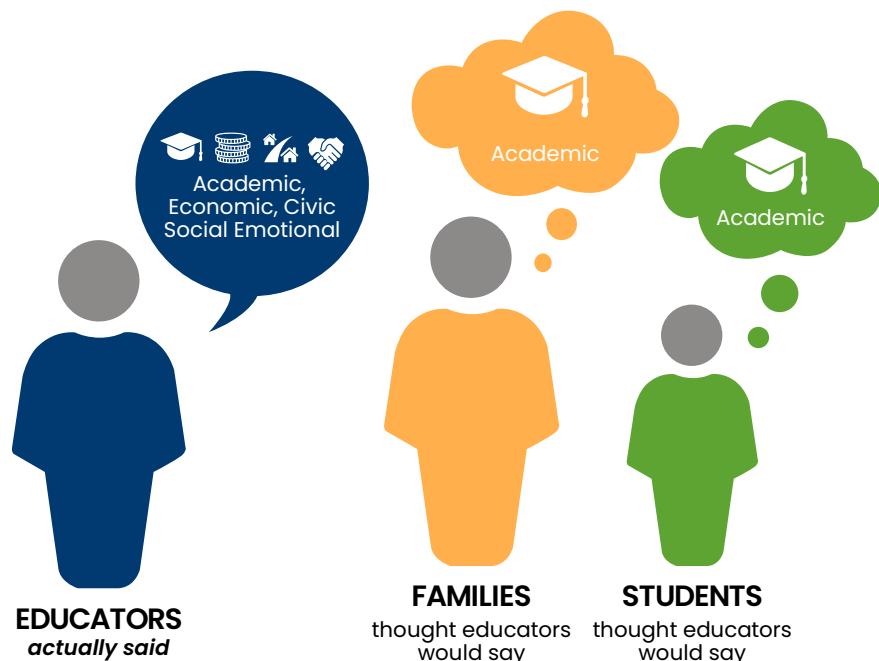
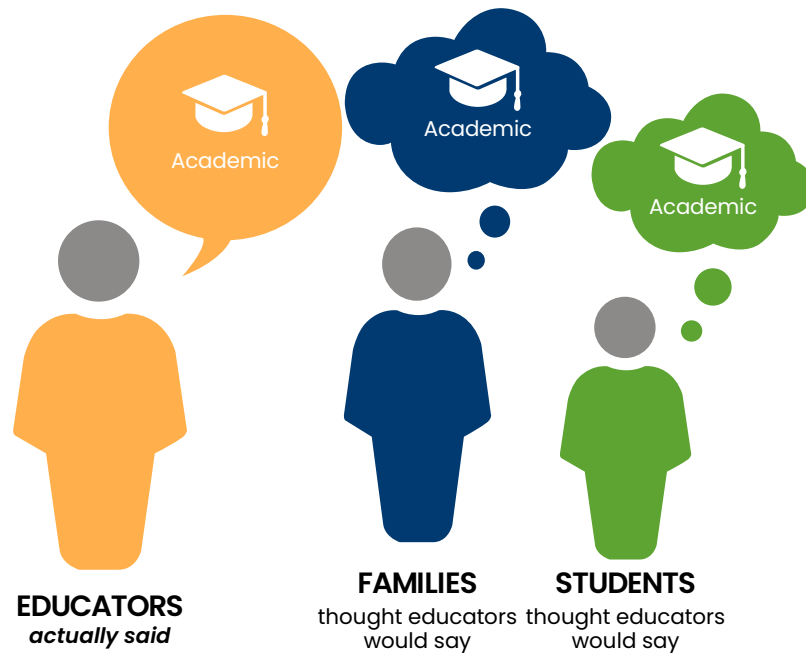


Figure 10**Perception
Alignment of
Families' Beliefs**

Among students and educators, as shown in Figure 10, there was a perception alignment where they correctly perceived that families prioritized *academic learning*. In all five countries that collected students' perceptions (Bangladesh, Colombia, Kazakhstan, the United States, and Tanzania), young people accurately perceived that their parents/caregivers prioritized *academic learning*. Educators in eight out of 10 countries (excluding Kenya and Tanzania) accurately perceived families' beliefs on the purpose of school. Educators in Kenya thought that parents/caregivers would prioritize *social and emotional learning*, whereas they actually prioritized *academic learning*. In Tanzania (Zanzibar), educators thought that families would prioritize *economic learning*, when in reality they prioritized *academic learning*. However, as *academic and economic learning* are highly linked, educators in Tanzania were not far off. Educators working with families with very low education levels often questioned the extent to which parents/caregivers could name a purpose of school, which likely played into their perceptions of parents'/caregivers' beliefs. As one educator in Brazil said, "I think most people think about a better future for their child, an economic future, a better living condition. I have my doubts that parents think higher education is the goal of the school."

Satisfaction With Education



TAKEAWAY: Families and educators often saw satisfaction with education as different from the purpose of school. Whereas the purpose of school was often seen as the role of education in society (extrinsic beliefs), satisfaction was influenced by families', educators', and students' direct experiences with education (intrinsic beliefs).

In addition to sharing their beliefs on the main purpose of school, participants were also asked when they were most satisfied with education, to understand their intrinsic feelings and motivations with education. These categories were again coded into four categories—*academic, economic, civic, and social and emotional learning*.



SURVEY QUESTION (Families)

When are you most satisfied with your child's education? When your child is ... [Select top one]

- Gaining skills to understand themselves, developing social skills or values
- Participating in community service/learning
- Gaining skills for work
- Getting good marks in your subjects/exams
- Additional (please specify)
- Don't know/Prefer not to answer



CONVERSATION QUESTION

Families said that they were most satisfied with their student's learning when they were Why do you think this is the case?

Note. All conversation questions were adapted to incorporate educators' and students' survey data before dialogues were held.

During the conversations, satisfaction invoked families', students', and educators' own experiences with education. For families, satisfaction was tied to their own prior experiences at school, whereas the purpose of school was tied to the role of school in society beyond their own personal experience. One primary school parent/caregiver in Brazil clarified this nuance between purpose and satisfaction, "The most important purpose of school is trying to understand the main objective of the school— what the school has and what it wants to develop in students. However, when asking about satisfaction, you are referring to when

I'm feeling good about my child's education." Comparing and understanding purpose and satisfaction helps reveal synergies and critiques that families, educators, and students may have of the role of education in society and how they translate these beliefs into their own experiences with school.

For educators, beliefs on satisfaction were influenced by their experiences in the classroom and what they felt students needed most, which was in many cases was acquiring *social and emotional learning* following the COVID-19 pandemic, a period when interpersonal skills and mental health were a noted concern across countries. Satisfaction with education was also at times linked to how educators were assessed within their education systems, especially in high stakes testing cultures. Both purpose and satisfaction are important to understanding beliefs on education as they help uncover narratives participants are hearing and thinking about at a societal level as well as within their own homes and schools.

In the Netherlands, families, educators, and students on average were most satisfied when students were acquiring *social and emotional learning* although satisfaction around *economic learning* was also high. Grades are not emphasized in the Netherlands and therefore participants emphasized other aspects of satisfaction. As one student noted, "There are no grades in Dutch schools, and what we expect is that our children pass the final exam. This school has a high passing rate, but nobody cares if it is a 6 or better." All participant groups reiterated the importance of students' personal development and self-awareness, and the agency to make choices about their future careers and adapt to dynamic workplaces. The Government of the Netherlands has emphasized self-awareness and agency in their Healthy School Program focused on improving students' mental health, and well-being was discussed in conversations (Government of the Netherlands, 2022). As one teacher reiterated, "Well-being is very high on the policy agenda, and we see that for being successful in their vocation our students also need to be OK, to be resilient, to feel good even if there are challenges."



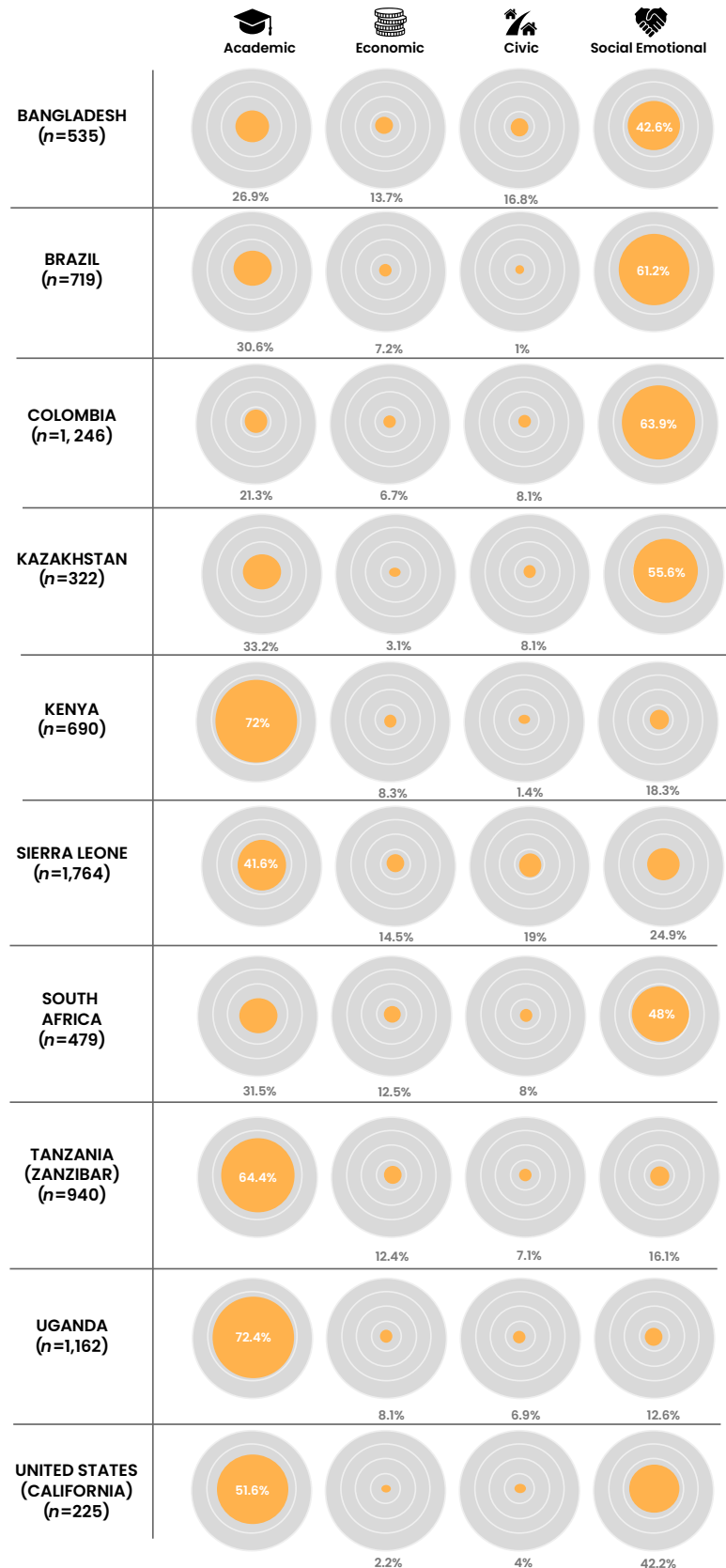
TAKEAWAY: Whereas families in most countries said the purpose of school was furthering education, they gravitated toward being satisfied when their children were acquiring *social and emotional learning*.

In half of the 10 countries that conducted mixed methods research, families said they were most satisfied with their child's education when they were acquiring *social and emotional learning*. The other half were most satisfied when their children were "getting good marks in subjects/exams," or *academic learning*. Across all 10 countries, the highest proportion (45.5%) were most satisfied with *academic learning*, but a greater proportion of families said they were satisfied when their children were developing *social and emotional learning* (35.0%) compared to families who chose *social and emotional learning* as a

main purpose of school (19.5%). Across all countries but Kenya and Uganda, the proportion of families who chose *social and emotional learning* for satisfaction increased compared to those who chose this as the main purpose of school.

Figure 11

Families' Satisfaction With Education (n = 8,082 in 10 countries)



In four of the five countries where families were most satisfied when their children were “*getting good marks in subjects/exams*”—Kenya, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and Uganda—families had lower education levels on average than in other countries and had not completed secondary and post-secondary education. During conversations, many parents/caregivers expressed the desire for their children to pursue further education because they themselves had not had the opportunity as youth. It is not surprising that these families were motivated by grades and test scores, as high-stakes exams determine whether their children can progress from primary to secondary school levels and earn a secondary school certificate in these education systems.

On the other hand, families in Bangladesh, Brazil, Colombia, Kazakhstan, and South Africa shifted from *academic learning* as the main purpose of school to naming *social and emotional learning* as their main measure of satisfaction with their children’s education. In a conversation in Colombia on why families may have shifted their thinking, one educator suggested that this was because families see their children experiencing anxiety and pressure around the secondary school exams that determine further education pathways and are concerned their students are too focused on exams and not enough on their aspirations beyond school outcomes.

Across the 10 countries in the mixed methods sample, families of secondary school students (42.8% of $n = 3,209$) were satisfied when their children were acquiring *social and emotional learning* at higher rates than families of pre-primary and primary school students (29.9% of $n = 4,873$). A greater proportion of families with higher levels of education (41.6% of $n = 5,594$) also reported being more satisfied with *social and emotional learning* than families with lower levels of education (20.0% of $n = 2,421$). Families in Kenya, Sierra Leone, and Uganda, who made up the largest proportion of families with lower education levels in the larger sample, said they were most satisfied with their children’s learning when they were acquiring *academic learning*.

Analysis across gender of parents/caregivers revealed that a significantly higher proportion of women (36.9% of $n = 5,586$) named *social and emotional learning* as their main measure of satisfaction with their children’s education compared to men (29.5% of $n = 2,254$). Men reported satisfaction with education as being linked to *academic learning* and *civic learning* (48.9% and 10.7%, respectively, of $n = 2,254$).

Parents/caregivers of children with disabilities reported satisfaction from their children when they were acquiring *academic learning* to a greater extent (55.2% of $n = 391$) than parents/caregivers who did not report having a child with a disability (45.1% of $n = 7,659$). More research on gender differences in beliefs is needed, as well as on differences among families with children with disabilities.



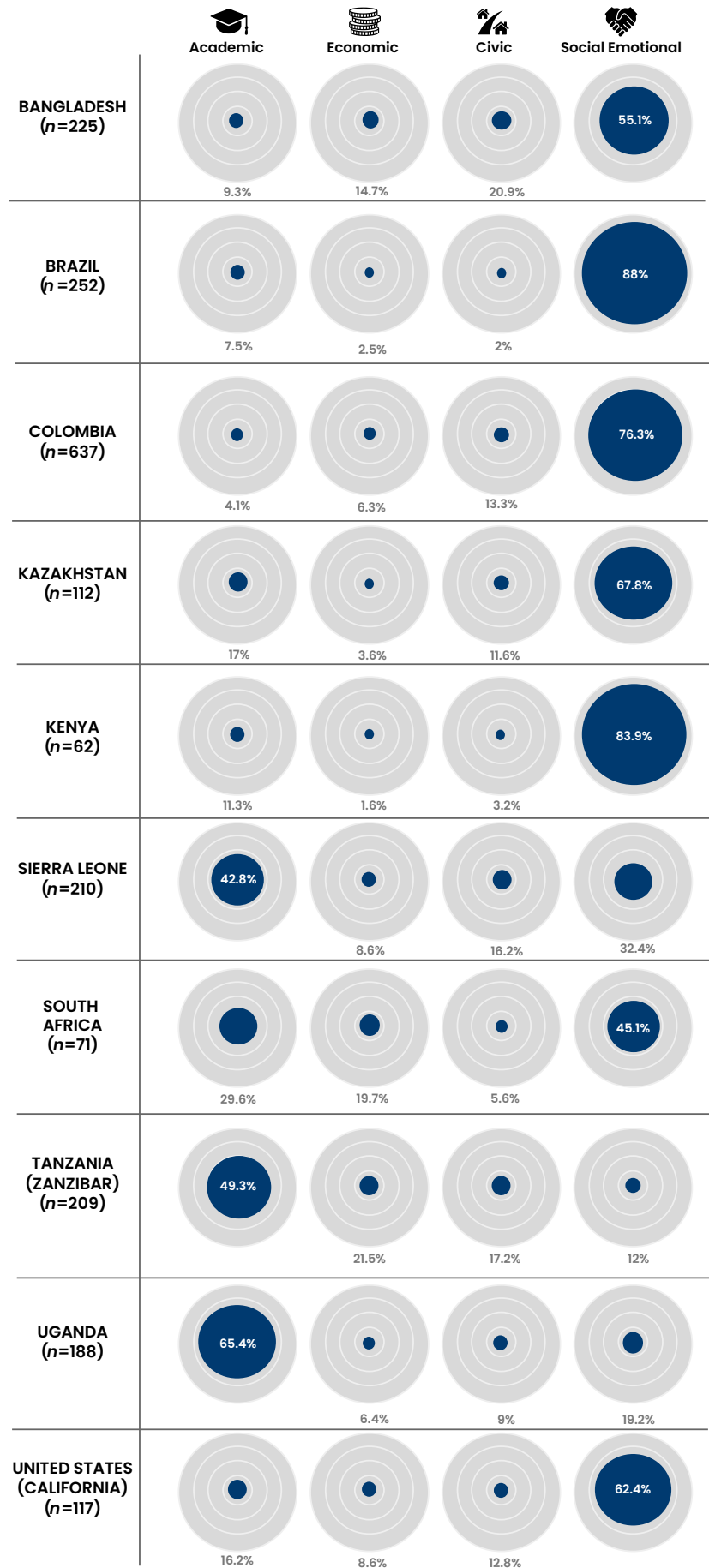
TAKEAWAY: While educators varied by country in how they saw the purpose of school, when it came to satisfaction with their students' learning they were more aligned around being satisfied when their students are gaining skills to understand themselves and developing social skills or values.

In seven out of 10 countries, educators reported that they were most satisfied with their students' learning when they were acquiring *social and emotional learning*. Overall, 57.3% of educators chose students *social and emotional learning* as their main measure of satisfaction with education, compared to 27.2% who named *social and emotional learning* as the main purpose of school.

Educators in Brazil, Colombia, South Africa, and the United States (California) moved from naming the purpose of school as *academic or civic learning*, to naming satisfaction with their students' learning when they were demonstrating *social and emotional learning*. Educators in Sierra Leone were steadfast in their beliefs that *academic learning* was both the purpose of school and their primary measure of satisfaction with their children's education. This is likely because Sierra Leone is still struggling with school access, retention, and completion rates in their basic education system.

Figure 12

Educators' Satisfaction With Education
(*n* = 2,083 in 10 countries)



Educators of younger children (31.0% of $n = 900$) and those working in government schools (25.6% of $n = 1,564$) were more satisfied when their students were acquiring *academic learning* than educators of older children (14.3% of $n = 1,183$) and those working in private schools (9.2% of $n = 512$). This is likely because educators in government primary schools in Sierra Leone and Uganda made up nearly a fifth of all educators. Educators working in private schools (62.9% of $n = 512$) were more satisfied when students were acquiring *social and emotional learning* compared to educators teaching in government schools (55.3% of $n = 1,564$).

When asked why primary school educators in Uganda leaned towards *academic learning*, educators said education is key to becoming self-reliant, getting jobs, and getting out of poverty. They also highlighted how educated people are respected in society. As one teacher in Uganda said, “Education opens our eyes and also helps to build self-reliance. When you are educated you can help other people to open their mind/eye.”



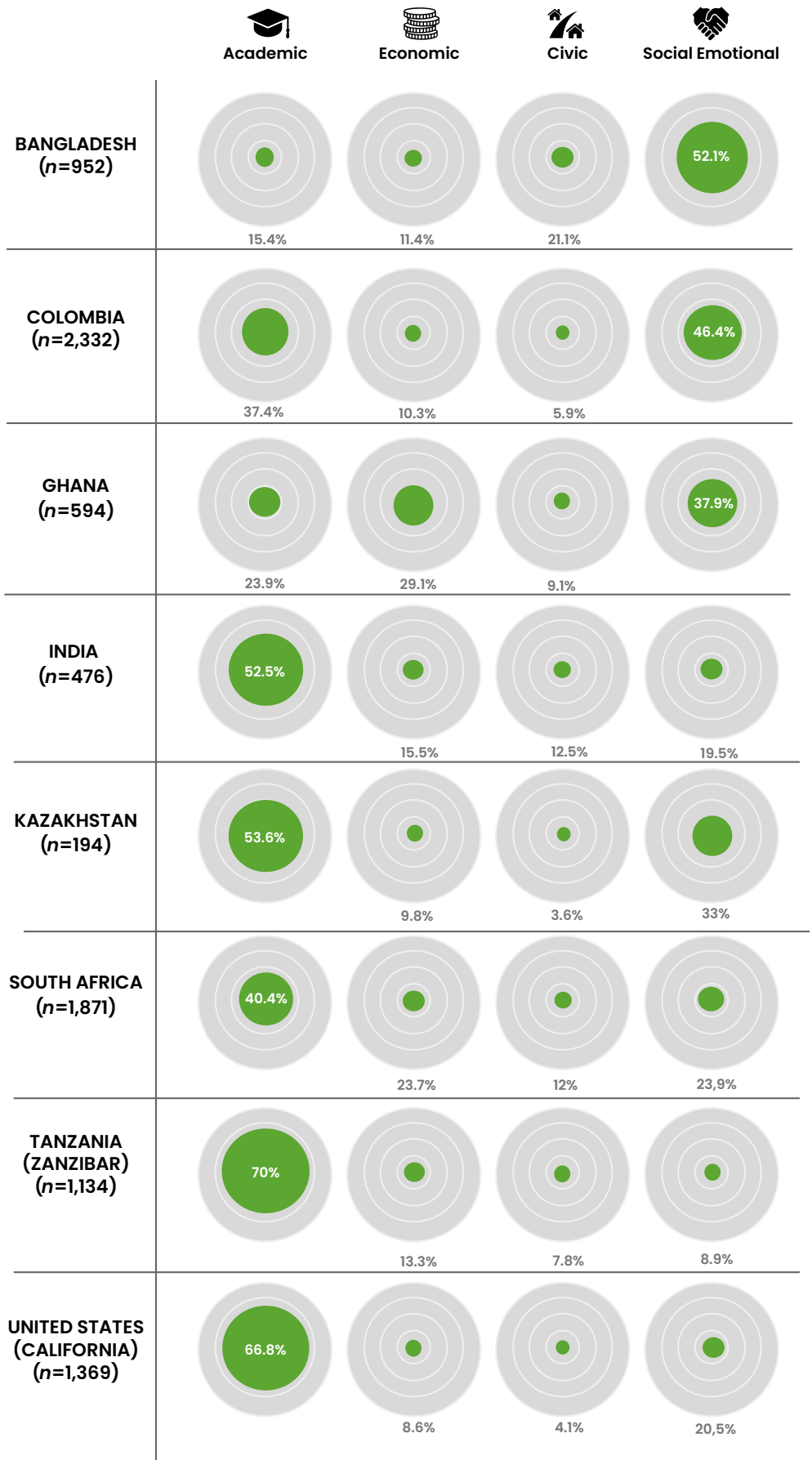
TAKEAWAY: Students' satisfaction with education aligned with how they saw the purpose of school. For example, if they named the purpose of school as *social and emotional learning*, they were most satisfied with their learning when they were developing social and emotional skills.

In six out of eight countries, the response students gave for satisfaction with education matched the response they gave for the purpose of school. Overall, 40.3% of students chose *academic learning*, as their main measure of satisfaction with education, compared to 48.3% who selected *academic learning* as the main purpose of school. In Bangladesh and Colombia, students said *academic learning* was the main purpose of school, but that they were satisfied with their education when they were gaining *social and emotional skills*. Although the emphasis on *academic learning* stayed fairly consistent across purpose of and satisfaction with school, the total proportion of students who selected *social and emotional learning* increased from 18.8% (purpose of school) to 35.5% (satisfaction with school).

For students, *social and emotional learning* often went hand in hand with *civic learning* and developing skills for work and life. As a secondary student in Colombia noted, “[Social and emotional learning] prepares us first and foremost to be good people and humans and gives us knowledge on how to advance in the future.” Another secondary student in Colombia explained, “[I am satisfied] when I feel that I am acquiring new knowledge that will serve me for life and to develop in the future in my professional career.”

Figure 13

Students' Satisfaction With Education (n = 8,922 in eight countries)



A higher proportion of female students (38.7% of $n = 4,152$) reported they were most satisfied with *academic learning* compared to male students (31.4% of $n = 3,325$). Students from higher socioeconomic statuses, who said their families were able to always meet their basic needs, also reported being more satisfied when “*getting good marks in subjects/exams*” (47.3% of $n = 3,819$) compared to those students whose families were not meeting their basic needs (35.5% of $n = 4,098$). A slightly higher but significant proportion of male students, and students from lower socioeconomic statuses, were satisfied when they were engaged in *economic learning*. This is likely because young men living in poverty often experience greater pressure to take on breadwinner roles earlier in life than girls in many countries (Mains, 2011; Morris, 2021). Interestingly, female students reported being satisfied with *civic learning* at slightly higher rates than their male counterparts. There were no significant differences among students with disabilities.

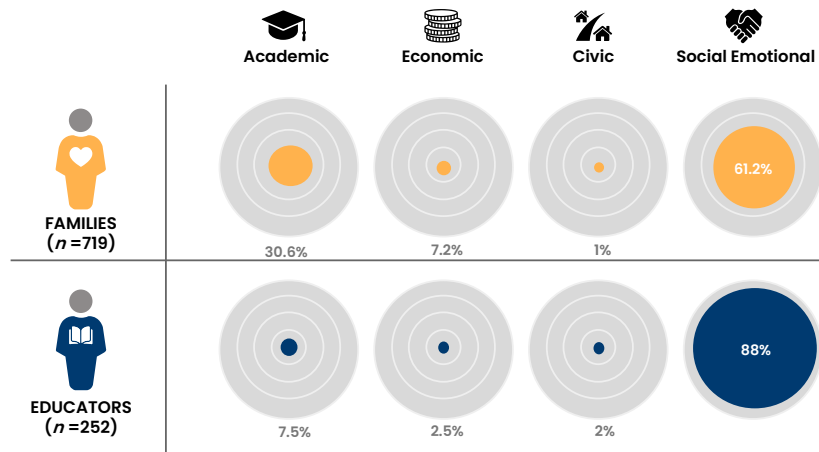
Country Snapshot on Satisfaction with Schools

Comparing and juxtaposing beliefs on the purpose of school and satisfaction with education is an important step in acknowledging extrinsic and intrinsic beliefs, and in building trust and collaboration among families, schools, and communities. In research led by the CST Team, Vozes da Educação, with 12 primary schools in Brazil, families prioritized *academic learning* as the purpose of school while educators named *civic learning*, yet their satisfaction with education was rooted in *social and emotional learning*. Roughly nine out of 10 educators and six out of 10 parents/caregivers expressed that they were most satisfied when students were gaining *social and emotional learning*. As one educator in Brazil noted, “We don’t train students for a specific purpose, we train them for life; currently, a lot of work is being done on mental health and social issues, and on all the requirements for life in society. Helping students understand their rights and duties.”

Although families and educators have different beliefs on the purpose of school in Brazil, they were on the same page when it came to satisfaction and wanted to see similar directions in education. This coherence is a fundamental element in building trusting relationships.

Figure 14

Belief Map on Satisfaction With Education in Brazil (n = 12 primary schools)



SUMMARY

In summary, there was an overall increase in the proportion of families, educators, and students who reported being satisfied with education when students were gaining *social and emotional learning* when compared to the purpose question. In conversations, families, educators, and students pointed out that for students to further their education, they needed the social and emotional skills and well-being to advance and succeed in their studies. These shifts between beliefs on the purpose of school and satisfaction with education, which was observed across countries and demographics, reiterated that parents/caregivers, students, and educators often saw the extrinsic role of school in society as being different from their intrinsic and emotional responses to education. More research and exploration on how families, educators, and students view their satisfaction with education is needed to understand how to build greater cohesion and coherence in educational systems.

Preferred Pedagogies



TAKEAWAY: Preferred pedagogies varied greatly by country, participant groups, and age and groups of learners, but overall there was emphasis on *learner-centered pedagogy, experiential learning, and technology-based instruction.*

Beliefs on preferred pedagogies, or what kind of teaching and learning practices participants would like to see in classroom as a student, parent/caregiver of a student, or educator were also captured by the surveys. Like the purpose of school, pedagogy is shaped by the social, cultural, historical, and political context

within which it occurs, as well as by the values and beliefs of the actors and the structures of the ecosystem (Qargha & Dyl, 2024; Tabulawa, 2013). Education systems reform efforts often include changes in curriculum and pedagogy.

On the surveys, families, educators, and students were asked to choose a classroom they would like to be a part of based on their pedagogical preferences.



SURVEY QUESTION (Families)

You are visiting different classrooms to choose the school where you want your child to study. Which teaching and learning practices are most important in your choice? [Select top one]

- | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher leads all instruction | <input type="checkbox"/> Home cultures and languages are central to learning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student participation is central to learning | <input type="checkbox"/> Play is central to learning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Experiences and projects are central to learning | <input type="checkbox"/> Additional (please specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Technology is central to learning | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Prefer not to answer |



CONVERSATION QUESTION

Families said that they preferred when teaching and learning was focused on What are some examples of this approach, and why do you think this was the top response?

Note. All conversation questions were adapted to incorporate educators' and students' survey data before dialogues were held.

These preferences are based on the literature and curriculum and pedagogy reform efforts globally as outlined in Box 3.

Box 3: Preferred Pedagogies

The six types of pedagogies included on the CST survey are outlined below with brief definitions. The actual survey wording is in parentheses.

- **Teacher-centered pedagogy (teacher leads all instruction).** Best described as the “sage on the stage” approach, the teachers are the sole source of knowledge, who establish rules, explain concepts, and model the learning objectives, while students are passive recipients of knowledge (Freire, 1973; Istance & Paniagua, 2019; Mascolo, 2009). Other terminologies used to describe this approach include rote, didactic, and chalk-and-talk teaching (Bartlett & Mogusu, 2013).
- **Learner-centered pedagogy (student participation is central to learning).** In contrast to teacher-centered pedagogy, student-centered pedagogy prioritizes the learner and is when learning is designed based on the learner’s needs, abilities, and interests. Rather than the teacher transmitting knowledge, knowledge is co-constructed by teachers and learners in the classroom. This teaching approach promotes active participation, choice, autonomy, and self-reflection and evaluation (Bremner, 2021; Garrett, 2008; Vavrus et al., 2013).
- **Experiential learning (experiences and projects are central to learning).** Centering learning in human experiences, this approach allows students to engage directly with what is being studied, promoting inquiry of and reflection on real-life and authentic contexts. This approach is often described as project-based learning, learning by doing, hands-on learning, and service learning, which can be linked to civic education, youth livelihoods and entrepreneurship education, and community development activities (Istance & Paniagua, 2019; Paniagua & Istance, 2018).
- **Technology-based instruction (technology is central to learning).** At the intersection of education and technology lies a wide range of pedagogical approaches that leverage technology to complement and supplement classroom instruction (Morris & Farrell, 2020; Qargha & Dyl, 2024). These can broadly be categorized as: (a) technology as a learning tool (e.g., laptops and internet access); (b) technology to deliver learning (e.g., online, mobile, radio, and television learning); and technology to support learning (e.g., digital content such as MOOCs and open textbooks) (Burns, 2021).
- **Funds of knowledge or identity approach (home cultures and languages are central to learning).** Funds of knowledge include students’ familial and cultural histories, knowledge, and networks that shape their identities and interests (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; González et al., 2006). In this approach, learning is rooted in and stems from students’ cultures, identities, and experiences (Moll, 2019). This includes mother-tongue instruction and plural and multiliteracy efforts as well.
- **Play-based learning (play is central to learning).** This pedagogical approach includes elements of play with accompanying adult direction that varies in degree and type (Weisberg et al., 2013). Play-based learning can range from child-directed play or free play, to collaboratively directed play with adults, to primarily teacher-directed play (Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Taylor & Boyer, 2020). Learning through play develops social and emotional competencies, including conflict resolution and support of others’ emotional well-being (Danniels & Pyle, 2018).

Although we have created a category of learner-centered pedagogy, as this language has been used in reform efforts like those in Tanzania (Vavrus et al., 2013), experiential learning, technology-based instruction, funds of knowledge and identity, and play-based learning incorporate varied degrees of student-centered instruction and personalization. Excluding teacher-centered pedagogy, the other pedagogies are often called innovative pedagogies and are characterized as inquiry-based. Istance and Paniagua (2019) provide six clusters of innovative pedagogical approaches—including blended learning, computational thinking, experiential learning, embodied learning, multiliteracies, and gamification—that can vary from country to country and between age groups of learners. There are many overlaps between these, as gamification and technology-based instruction can include elements of play. In practice, educators rarely employ discrete pedagogical approaches but often use a combination of strategies to deliver effective context-specific lessons based on students' needs (Qargha & Dyl, 2024).

A category that was not included is arts-based learning, which can be categorized as embodied learning, where arts are central to teaching (Wright & Leong, 2017). It was not included on the survey as arts education efforts vary greatly from country to country, and arts are often integrated into play-based learning, project-based learning, funds of knowledge and identity, and beyond.



TAKEAWAY: Although families, educators, and students selected a range of *learner-centered pedagogies*, a small proportion of each group chose *play-based learning* and funds of knowledge as their preferred pedagogies.

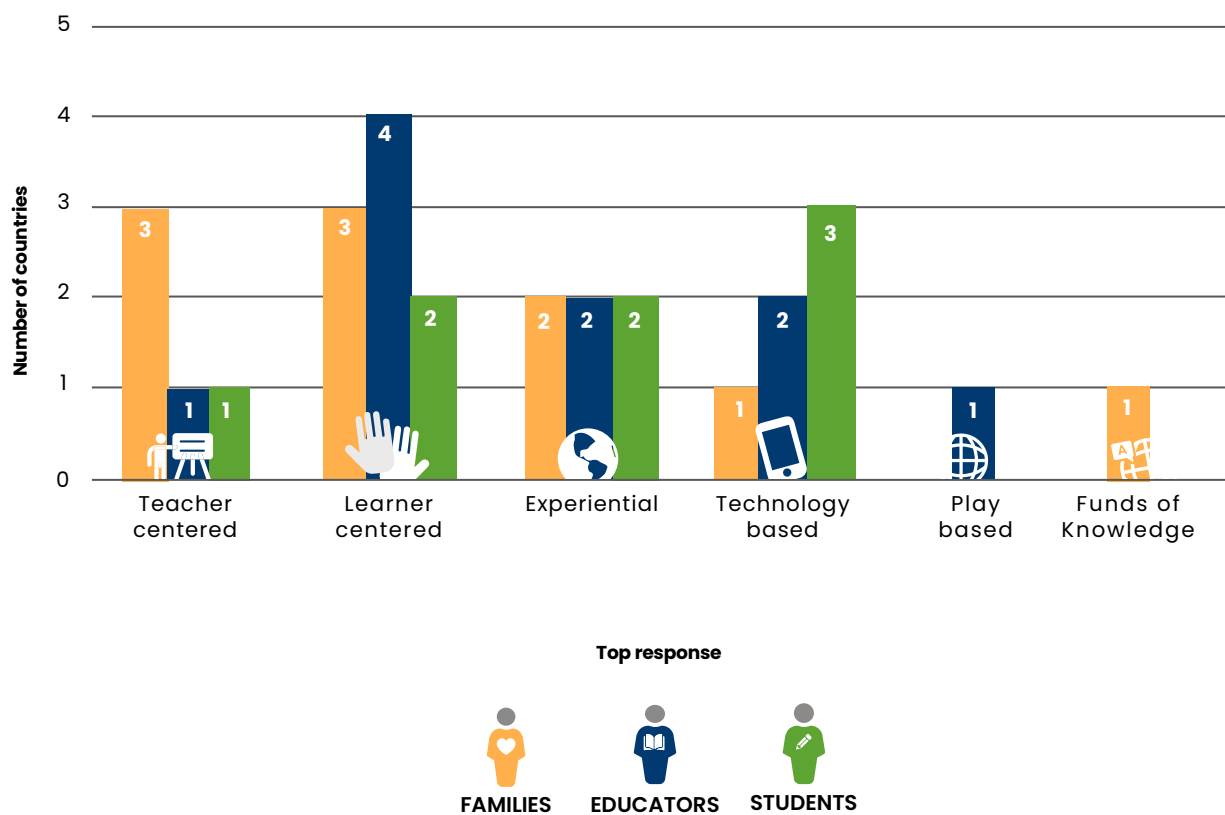
Families, educators, and students were asked to imagine what kind of pedagogical approaches they would like to see in a classroom they were selecting for their children or themselves, respectively. Families in many countries struggled to answer this question, particularly those parents/caregivers who had low levels of education and had limited exposure to different teaching and learning approaches. Although the CST teams made considerable efforts to contextualize and explain these nuances during the surveying, the families' responses reflected confusion. They were particularly unclear what *experiential learning* and *play-based learning* looked like in practice even though they often hear these terms used in new policies and programs introduced in their communities. While the survey data reflected the variances in families' understanding of pedagogical approaches, the conversations were an important entry point into helping parents/caregivers understand these approaches and feel they could contribute to dialogues on teaching and learning.

Families', educators', and students' responses varied by country, as seen in Figure 15 and Table 9, and across education levels, with no clear patterns by age of children. *Teacher-centered pedagogy* was the preferred approach among families in Kenya, South Africa, and the United States (California) as well as

among educators in South Africa and students in the United States (California). *Learner-centered pedagogy* was the most popular response among educators. The majority of educators and families in Colombia, Sierra Leone, and Uganda selected classrooms with *learner-centered pedagogies*. Educators in the United States (California) also prioritized *learner-centered pedagogy*, as did students in Colombia and Tanzania (Zanzibar).

Experiential learning was preferred among families and educators in Brazil and Tanzania (Zanzibar) and students in Bangladesh and Kazakhstan. *Technology-based instruction* was common in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic, with families and educators in Bangladesh choosing this approach along with educators in Kazakhstan and the nationally representative student samples in Ghana, India, and South Africa. *Play-based learning* was very low in all countries except Kenya, where it was the preferred pedagogical approach for educators, which is likely due to the strong emphasis on play-based learning in curricular changes there. *Funds of knowledge* was the preferred pedagogical approach among families in Kazakhstan for reasons described in detail below.

Figure 15 Preferred Pedagogies Across Participant Groups (n = 10 countries)



In seven out of 10 countries, apart from Kazakhstan, Kenya, and the United States, families and educators shared beliefs on what teaching and learning practices they would like to see in their ideal classroom. According to one of the educators and CST team leads in Sierra Leone, this was likely because families and educators come from the same communities and have similar beliefs and expectations. A detailed discussion on pedagogical beliefs among families, educators, and students follows.

Teacher-Centered Pedagogies

A higher proportion of families tended to choose *teacher-centered pedagogies* when compared to educators, which could be because that is the pedagogy families know best. One exception was South Africa, where pre-primary educators and families alike chose *teacher-centered pedagogies* as their preferred approach. The CST team in South Africa—led by the civil society organization Mikhulu Child Development Trust (also referred to as “Mikhulu Trust” throughout the report) — was surprised that play was not more prioritized by educators and families given the strong emphasis on play in the country’s early childhood sector and donors’ efforts to promote play. As families in South Africa explained, they prioritized *teacher-centered pedagogies* because parents/caregivers did not feel that they had the education or skills to support their children’s academic learning and development in the same way that trained educators can, and thus families wanted teachers to direct learning. As one parent/caregiver said, “I prefer instructors to lead lessons because it is their job, and they are qualified to do it.” Another added, “I am not educated so I will feel small if I teach my children something wrong, it will show low self-esteem from my side as a parent.” Families had not fully embraced how play supported their children’s learning and development. Primary school families in Kenya also preferred *teacher-centered pedagogies* compared to other approaches; like parents/caregivers in South Africa, they saw teachers as being the experts. The United States (California) was the only site where the majority of middle and high school students preferred *teacher-centered pedagogy*, but it was not clear from the conversations why this was the case and is a point of further inquiry for the school leaders.

Learner-Centered Pedagogies

Learner-centered pedagogies was highly ranked in general, with families in Colombia, Sierra Leone, and Uganda preferring this approach. Families in Uganda noted that involving students in learning helped increase students’ confidence, curiosity, leadership, and ownership of learning, as well as encouraged students to collaborate and learn with their peers. Likewise in Tanzania (Zanzibar), more than half of educators prioritized *learner-centered pedagogies*, which has been a policy focus there in the past decades (Vavrus et al., 2013).

In Colombia and Tanzania (Zanzibar), students also clearly preferred *learner-centered pedagogies*. As students in Tanzania (Zanzibar) noted during their

conversations, when students are involved in planning and collaborating, it makes lessons more interesting, and students are given the opportunity to learn new skills and build their own engagement in the content matter. During these conversations, many students brainstormed details on how to involve students in planning and leading lessons—providing steps for how teachers could collaborate with students. A number of educators in Tanzania (Zanzibar) also expressed that they wanted their students to take on more agency in the classroom. Families were a little more skeptical, however, explaining that centering students in learning can work for some subjects—such as civics or history—but would be a substantial shift from the *teacher-centered pedagogies* they were accustomed to. Students were very enthusiastic in their beliefs that more agency in the classroom would support their learning.

Experiential Learning

In Brazil and Tanzania (Zanzibar), the two countries where participants were given the option to select all responses, families and educators alike chose *experiential learning* as their top response, followed by *technology-based instruction* in Tanzania and *play-based learning* for educators in Brazil. Experiential-learning pedagogies often enable students to connect learning to their real lives, and provide space for exploration and inquiry, with benefits including higher engagement, positive relationships with peers and teachers, and cognitive and social and emotional learning (Parker & Thomsen, 2019; Schenck & Cruickshank, 2015).

Families and students in Tanzania (Zanzibar) talked about how *experiential learning*, like *learner-centered pedagogies*, helped ensure that, despite varying expertise and quality of teaching, students could get practical skills they needed, and that these practical skills would help them be better equipped for exams. They also discussed how *experiential learning* builds confidence, and creativity, critical thinking, the same things they critiqued as lacking in *teacher-centered pedagogies*. However, in both Brazil and Tanzania (Zanzibar), there was an acknowledgement that even though families and educators may prefer what seems like a more novel or innovative pedagogy like *experiential learning*, in reality, it can be hard to implement. As nearly a dozen educators noted in Tanzania (Zanzibar), while *experiential learning* helps make learning relevant and “memorable,” finding the means, equipment, infrastructure, and time to prepare lessons with large class sizes was not feasible. This belief was echoed by families and students. One rural teacher even went as far to say that it required teachers to change their mindsets and ways of working, things that many educators were not willing to invest the time and energy to do. Although families, educators, and students in Brazil and Tanzania (Zanzibar) were enthusiastic about increasing *learner-centered pedagogies* and *experiential learning* in practice, 20% to 30% of educators and 44% to 57% of families in Brazil and Tanzania (Zanzibar), respectively, still valued *teacher-centered pedagogies*, signaling that moving toward a different pedagogy would require substantial mobilization, training, and resources.

Technology-Based Instruction

Across eight countries, students' preferred teaching and learning approaches were split between *technology-based instruction* and *learner-centered pedagogies*. Among the representative samples of youth in Ghana (national), India (Maharashtra and Himachal Pradesh states), and South Africa (national), between 68% to 84% of young people chose *technology-based instruction* as their preferred pedagogy. These surveys were conducted in June 2022 when schools were still transitioning back to in-person instruction, which likely contributed to their preferences.

In Bangladesh, *technology-based instruction* was also the top choice of families and educators alike, while students preferred *experiential learning*. Educators speculated that *technology-based instruction* was prioritized in Bangladesh because during COVID-19, schools and families had very low access to technology, and classes were largely halted. Recent curriculum changes that emphasized *technology-based instruction* and 21st century skills could also have been a contributing factor. As one of the educators on the CST team in Bangladesh noted, "Both parents and teachers agree that technology has created a divide between high-tech, low-tech, and no-tech communities. Because we cannot provide our children with laptops, tablets, or mobile phones, they face challenges in reaching their educational goals and showcasing their talents." Lack of access to technology was also named as a barrier to family engagement, as is discussed in the subsequent section.

Play-Based Learning

In Brazil, half of primary educators prioritized *play-based learning* in addition to *experiential learning*. Kenya was the only other country where educators emphasized play-based learning, which may be because of the focus on this pedagogy in Kenya's *Basic Education Curriculum Framework* (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, 2019a). The Aga Khan Foundation, the partner leading the CST research in Kenya, has also implemented numerous projects that support *play-based learning* in Lamu and Mombasa.

Across the 10 countries, play was ranked low among families, ranging from 1% to 15% who named play as their preferred pedagogical approach. Although emphasis on *play-based learning* was not highly selected by families, educators, and students across countries, school communities noted in conversations that this is likely because of a lack of awareness around the concept of playful learning. Educators in South Africa believed that parents/caregivers are unclear on what playful learning is and how it benefits children. As one early childhood educator in South Africa stated, "I think parents are slightly confused about why kids learn through play. They learn through playing, movement, and exploration. They learn better when they have fun. Kids like to experience everything; by doing that, they are learning, and when they play with dolls, balls, etc., they develop gross motor skills, fine motor skills, and emotional connection."

Funds of Knowledge or Identity

Kazakhstan was the only country where families chose as a pedagogical approach *funds of knowledge or identity* where “home cultures and languages are central to learning.” Families’ strong emphasis on home cultures and language may have been in response to efforts to promote speaking of the Kazakh language across the country. Prior to independence from the Soviet Union, language of instruction in Kazakhstan was Russian. Starting in 1995, Kazakh was officially recognized as the state language in the national constitution and thereafter became a primary language of instruction in Kazakhstan, leaving schools to decide whether they would teach in Kazakh or Russian. Instruction in Kazakh has increased over the decades, with the majority of primary and secondary schools now teaching in Kazakh (Smagulova, 2016). While nearly 30% percent of families in the sample reported still speaking Russian at home, support for using Kazakh language and culture in schools was notable in the data. As the CST team in Kazakhstan noted, there is an emphasis by many educators, families, and students to “get back to our roots,” which has continued in the aftermath of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. The team further elaborated, “If a student is going to create his or her future in this country ... he or she should have an education [in Kazakh] that is relevant to our country’s mentality.”

There have been policy-level conversations in a few countries, such as the Netherlands and the United States, on the importance of *funds of knowledge or identity* as a pedagogical approach. According to this research, however, there is still a lack of understanding and momentum among families, educators, and students as to what this means and how it can support students’ academic and social development.

Table 9: Preferred Pedagogies Across Participant Groups, by Percentages (n = 10 countries)

Country	Group	Teacher centered	Learner centered	Experiential	Technology based	Play based	Funds of Knowledge	Total
Mixed Methods Sample								
Bangladesh	Families	14.8%	17.5%	25.0%	26.8%	8.8%	7.1%	100%
	Educators	13.5%	19.3%	20.6%	33.6%	5.4%	7.6%	100%
	Students	21.7%	18.3%	25.1%	20.7%	7.7%	7.1%	100%
Brazil	Families	44.1%	35.3%	49.9%	34.2%	23.6%	14.3%	n/a
	Educators	19.1%	26.2%	64%	47.9%	50.9%	7.1%	n/a
Colombia	Families	26.3%	29.4%	10.6%	10.2%	4.0%	19.5%	100%
	Educators	3.8%	31.9%	20.2%	17.4%	12.3%	14.4%	100%
	Students	14.5%	25.5%	19.6%	18.0%	11%	11.5%	100%

Country	Group	Teacher centered	Learner centered	Experiential	Technology based	Play based	Funds of Knowledge	Total
Kazakhstan	Families	20.7%	10.7%	13.3%	17.7%	13.6%	24%	100%
	Educators	15.7%	13.0%	11.1%	34.3%	14.8%	11.1%	100%
	Students	19.6%	17.3%	25.1%	17.3%	15.1%	5.6%	100%
Kenya	Families	48.0%	17.7%	7.2%	15.1%	8.5%	3.5%	100%
	Educators	6.5%	22.6%	8.1%	24.2%	33.9%	4.8%	100%
Sierra Leone	Families	32.7%	48.6%	7.7%	8.3%	0.8%	1.9%	100%
	Educators	19.4%	64.0%	4.7%	8.1%	0.9%	2.8%	100%
South Africa	Families	36.8%	25.7%	6.9%	13.0%	12.6%	5.0%	100%
	Educators	30.1%	23.3%	9.6%	6.8%	26%	4.1%	100%
Tanzania (Zanzibar)	Families	57.7%	59.4%	72.9%	60%	10%	16.5%	n/a
	Educators	30%	57.1%	72.9%	61.4%	16.7%	17.6%	n/a
	Students	62.7%	74.7%	64.7%	35.4%	19%	29.1%	n/a
Uganda	Families	35.5%	38.7%	8.3%	4.9%	7.3%	5.3%	100%
	Educators	17.7%	61.3%	7%	5.4%	5.9%	2.7%	100%
US (California)	Families	41.2%	21.6%	10.8%	7.8%	4.9%	13.7%	100%
	Educators	22.9%	24.8%	21%	16.2%	7.6%	7.6%	100%
	Students	30.0%	14.9%	16.6%	13.6%	19%	6.0%	100%
Quantitative Sample (Representative)								
Ghana	Students	29.7%	53.0%	51.9%	84.2%	16.3%	30.9%	n/a
India	Students	37.1%	23.3%	42.3%	67.5%	44.7%	52.2%	n/a
South Africa	Students	35.2%	45.5%	48.7%	72.3%	24.7%	38.5%	n/a

There were few notable differences in pedagogical preferences among family, educator, and student demographics. However, on average parents/caregivers with lower levels of education chose *teacher-centered pedagogy* to a greater extent (41.6% of $n = 2,386$) than those with higher levels of education (33.9% of $n = 5,495$). The same was true for families of younger children in pre-primary and primary school, who chose *teacher-centered pedagogy* at higher rates than did families of older children.

In the qualitative samples (not listed in Table 9) from Hungary, India (Maharashtra, Tripura), and the Netherlands, families, students, and educators leaned toward *experiential learning*, *learner-centered pedagogy*, and *technology-based instruction*. *Teacher-centered instruction* was the preference of families in Australia's primary schools and the United Kingdom (England) secondary schools.

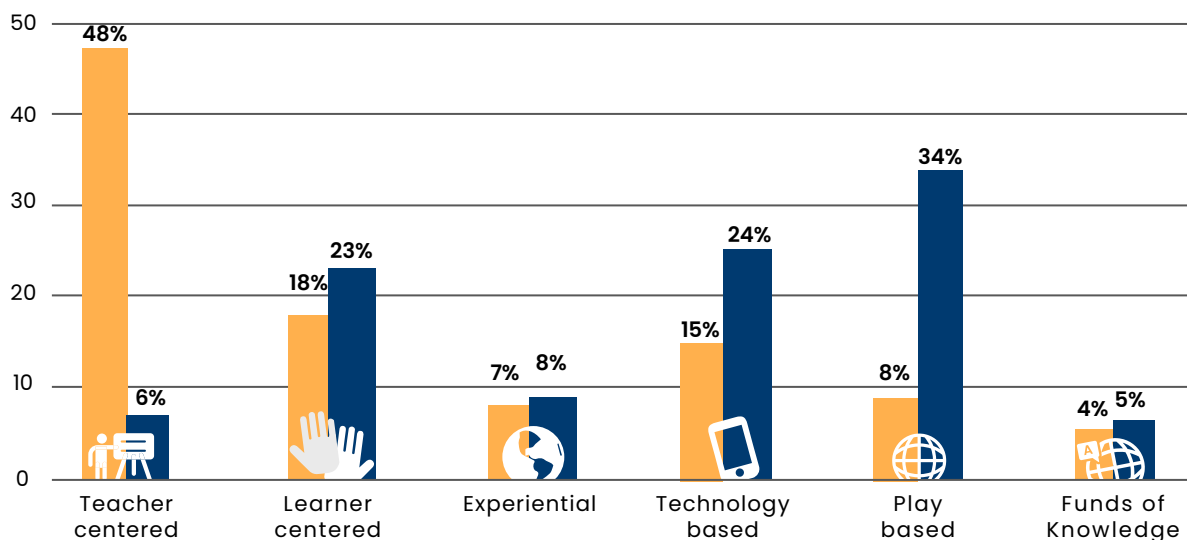
Country Snapshot on Preferred Pedagogy

In Kenya, differences in pedagogical preferences were quite pronounced, with most families (48%) preferring *teacher-centered pedagogy* compared to most educators (33.9%), who preferred *play-based learning*. Parents/caregivers revealed during conversations that they were only aware of *teacher-centered pedagogy*, given their limited knowledge about teaching and learning. They were also skeptical of more experiential and innovative pedagogies amid oversized and under-resourced classrooms and school environments. As one parent/caregiver noted, “Parents don’t understand the different ways of learning [e.g., learning through play] because of our poor [school] infrastructure [access]. If we get [obtain a] good infrastructure, we will embrace different types of learning.”

When discussing with educators in Kenya why they preferred *play-based learning*, they explained that this approach increases students’ interest and engagement in academic content and helps children express themselves. One educator reported, “Learning through play is the best [approach], it breaks class monotony. It makes it easy for a child to capture content.” During the debrief with the CST team—led by the the Aga Khan Foundation in Kenya—they noted that teacher professional development in *play-based learning* has been an emphasis of their programmatic efforts, and therefore it is not surprising that this was the most popular pedagogical approach among teachers. While some families noted that they were aware of the current emphasis on *play-based learning*, they still believed that *teacher-centered pedagogy* should be the central approach in schools. As one primary school parent/caregiver noted, “Learners understand well when learning through play is used, but there has to be an educator to lead them.”

During their conversations, families and educators also mentioned that as of 2017 Uganda was utilizing the Competence Based Curriculum (CBC)—as was the case in Kenya and Tanzania (Zanzibar)—but few families really understood the intentions of this curricular shift. As one parent/caregiver in Kenya described, “Parents haven’t understood the structure of CBC, that’s why they have not embraced it yet.” Conversations revealed that greater understanding and buy-in of families in the CBC adoptions is needed if it will be successfully implemented to support student learning outcomes.

Figure 16 Preferred Pedagogies Across Participant Groups in Kenya
(n = 12 primary schools)



Top response



FAMILIES
(n= 683)



EDUCATORS
(n= 62)



SUMMARY

In summary, preferred pedagogies varied across country and participant groups. Among families and communities with low education levels, parents/caregivers often reinforced the idea that educators are the most qualified educational experts, and they wanted to see teaching and learning approaches, whether *teacher-centered pedagogy* or other approaches, that would prepare their children for their qualifying exams. Although students expressed enthusiasm for *technology-based instruction*, *experiential learning*, and *learner-centered pedagogies*, their families were often less optimistic about these pedagogies or listed obstacles and challenges to implementing these pedagogies in practice.

Educators' beliefs also varied across countries ranging from 3.8% to 30.1%, but overall they were less likely than families and students to choose *teacher-centered pedagogy*, which ranged from 14.8% to 62.7% for both groups. Among families and students, even though there was enthusiasm for what were considered "innovative pedagogies" and approaches that would yield "21st century skills" and student success, a substantial percentage still chose *teacher-centered pedagogy*. Conversations revealed that beliefs were often influenced by contextual factors, including global trends, national curriculum reforms, and implementation efforts by non-government organizations and other groups working with schools. Conversations further revealed that integrating new pedagogical approaches into the classroom took considerable training, equipment, and infrastructure as well enabling conditions such as buy-in from educators, students, and families and not only policymakers. However, fostering this buy-in and shared vision on pedagogical beliefs helped families, educators, and students work more collaboratively in supporting learning.

Differences in beliefs on pedagogical approaches within school communities have been known to influence policy implementation (Qargha & Dyl, 2024). For example, during policy efforts to universalize early childhood education in Tanzania (Zanzibar) starting in 2006, families and community members resisted *play-based learning* until they understood both the intent and benefits through community mobilization (Education Development Center, 2009). More examination of the links between beliefs on the purpose of school, satisfaction with education, and pedagogical approaches is needed, but this preliminary research supports research that suggests that having a coherent, shared vision is critical to developing cohesion and building a sense of community among families, educators, and students.



Global Lesson 2

Position Families as Partners

Families see themselves as involved and engaged in their children's learning in numerous ways; however, this involvement is not highly visible to educators. The vast majority of families are supporting learning at home, but educators often define family engagement as the level of families' participation in school events, committees, and activities that take place in the school.

Participants were asked to name all the different ways that families were involved and engaged in their children's schooling. Asking about types of involvement and engagement before asking about barriers was intentional to encourage participants to think from an assets-based mindset and to identify what was currently taking place in their schools, before digging into the challenges. Although types of involvement and engagement varied across countries and school cultures, the CST teams worked inductively through a field-testing process to identify key types that resonated in each of the different communities, as indicated in the survey questions below.



SURVEY QUESTION (Families)

How are you involved in your child's learning or school? [Select all that apply]

- | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Not involved | <input type="checkbox"/> Volunteering in school activities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Supporting or monitoring student learning | <input type="checkbox"/> Providing feedback on school decisions (e.g., policies) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communicating with teachers and school staff | <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership in a parent association |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Following school news | <input type="checkbox"/> Additional (please specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Donations (financial) | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Prefer not to answer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Attending school events | |

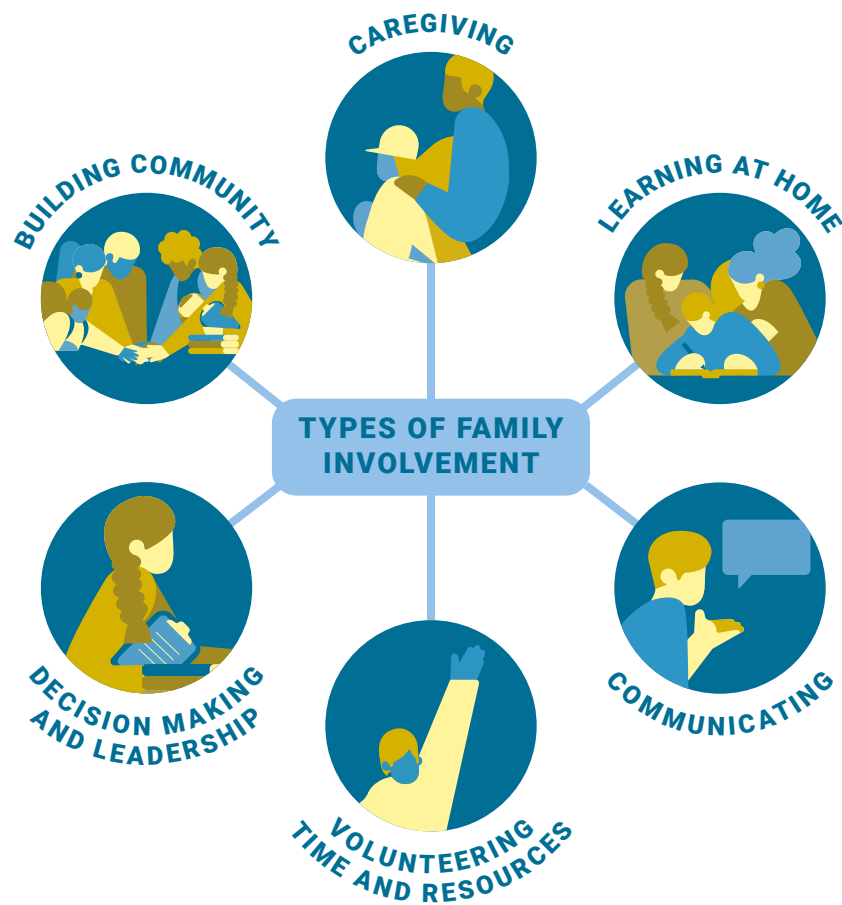


CONVERSATION QUESTION

In the surveys, families reported ... as their main type of involvement as compared to ... for educators and ... for students. What are some examples of these types of involvement that you have observed/heard about in your school or community?

Note. All conversation questions were adapted to incorporate educators' and students' survey data before dialogues were held.

The collective list of involvement and engagement types devised by the CST teams during the field-testing process was then aligned with Epstein's *Framework of Six Types of Involvement for Comprehensive Programs of Partnership* (Epstein et al., 2018) to ensure that response options reflected existing research and literature. Epstein's six types of involvement include *caregiving, learning at home, communicating, volunteering, decision making, and building community* are mapped to the survey responses in Figure 17. These six types of involvement and their corresponding response options are further explained in Box 4.

Figure 17**Types of Family Involvement and Engagement**

Each response option can be considered an example of involvement or engagement, depending on how it is enacted in practice. Involvement often refers to one-way interactions where school representatives **tell** parents/caregivers what they need to know and provide directives on how they should participate in their children’s education (Ferlazzo, 2011). Engagement encompasses two-way interactions that represent authentic opportunities for schools to **listen** to families and think of them as partners in their children’s learning. This distinction was previously developed into an image created by CUE and Kidsburgh, based on Ferlazzo’s and Hammond’s (2009) and Ferlazzo’s (2011) research, shared in Figure 18. The intention of distinguishing between involvement and engagement is not to create a hierarchy between the two, as both are critical to building strong family, school, and community relationships, but to rather help schools think about how they can deepen engagement. For example, if schools are thinking about strategies to involve families more in learning, they may provide services to *supporting learning at home*, like apps, worksheets, or free tutoring services to families. However, schools may also engage and partner with families to *supporting learning at home* by developing learning strategies and activities that are tailored to the needs and contexts of the families and their children.

Figure 18

Comparing Family Involvement and Engagement



Source: Center for Universal Education, Brookings Institution & Kidsburgh.
 Based on: Ferlazzo, L., & Hammond, L. A. (2009). *Building parent engagement in schools*. Linworth Books/Libraries Unlimited.

Box 4: Types of Family Involvement and Engagement

The CST survey included eight different response options for types of family involvement and engagement. These were intentionally labeled on the survey as types of involvement, as not all constitute examples of engagement as previously discussed. Participants also had the option to select “additional” and write in their own response. They could have also chosen “not involved,” with no other form of involvement. The response options are linked to each of Epstein’s six types of involvement. Where the response options were shortened in the analysis for brevity, the full survey language is indicated in parentheses.

Type 1: Caregiving and Type 2: Learning at home

- **Supporting learning at home (supporting or monitoring student learning)** includes all of the ways in which families support children in learning, from helping children with academic content as well as supporting social and emotional learning. Families also described providing children with material and basic needs as supporting learning at home.

Type 3: Communicating

- **Communicating with teachers and school staff** includes direct communication through written notes, email, text messages, messaging platforms, telephone calls, and in-person meetings.
- **Following school news** includes keeping informed via social media groups and platforms, emails, newsletters, word-of-mouth, and letters of communication.

Type 4: Volunteering (time and resources)

- **Volunteering (volunteering in school activities)** includes helping with the planning or execution of school events or activities.
- **Donating (donations-financial)** include giving grants and/or gifts toward a school or classroom, which can encompass costs associated with schooling (such as school fees, learning materials, uniforms, and after-school tutoring).

Type 5: Decision making and leadership

- **Providing feedback on school decisions** includes giving input on school policies, practices, rules and regulations, curricula, and other school frameworks.
- **Leadership in a parent association** includes serving as a representative on a parent association, school management committee, or other governing board.

Type 6: Building community

- **Attending school events** includes participating in social gatherings, parent association meetings, parent-teacher conferences, community service days, and other events sponsored by the school or community.

Wording on types of involvement in the surveys varied slightly from Epstein's typology, which was developed in a United States context (Epstein et al., 2018). For example, caregiving and supporting learning at home was combined into a single category, as families had varying levels of education and skills to support academic learning. While some parents/caregivers may not have been able to help their child read, for example, they could support their child's literacy development in other ways, such as by securing access to print materials, allocating time and space for studying and learning, telling stories, and other strategies that also fell under caregiving. Epstein's "collaborating with community" was modified to "building community" on the survey, as community resources and partnerships varied greatly by country. Finally, "volunteering" in Epstein's typology was expanded to "volunteering time and resources" on the survey, which included making "donations." As schools in many countries rely on the financial contributions of families for books and teaching and learning materials, among other resources, families wanted to be recognized for these efforts.

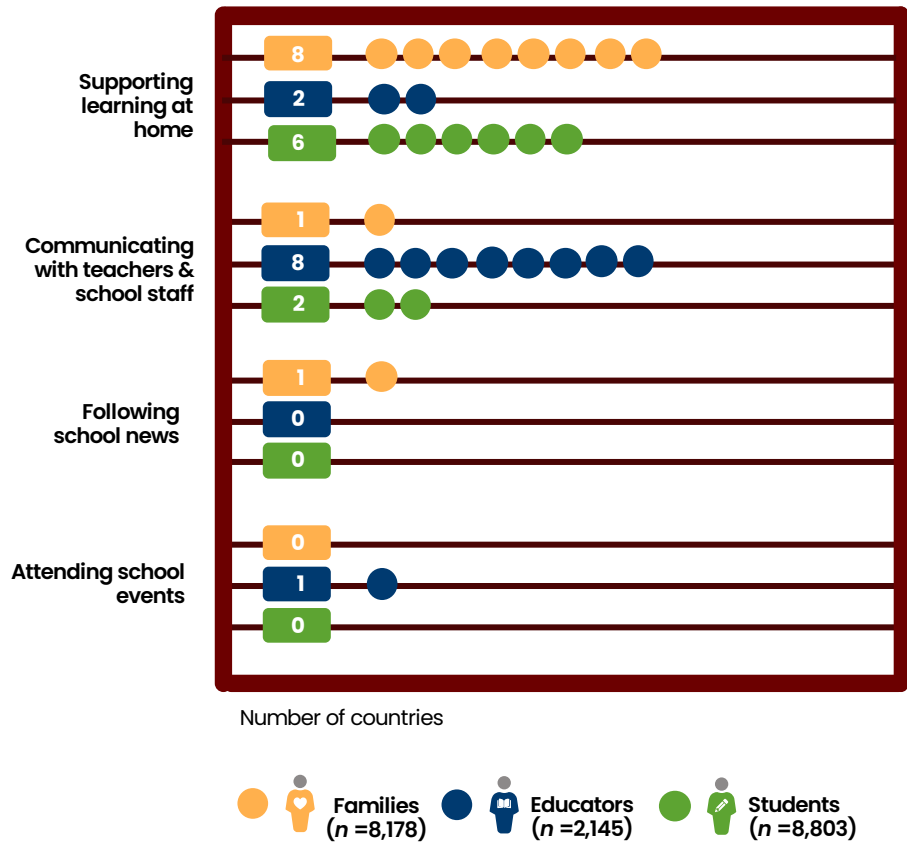


TAKEAWAY: According to families, educators, and students alike, only a small proportion of families were involved in decision-making activities at school, which included participation and *leadership on a parent association*. While these are important forms of family engagement as they ensure parents'/caregivers' voices are reflected in school decisions, it is important to define and frame family, school, and community engagement as encompassing practices that are more inclusive and representative of a wide range of families.

In eight of the 10 countries, families said the primary way that they were involved in their children's education was by *supporting learning at home*. *Communicating with teachers and school staff* and *following school news* were named in two other countries. Students mirrored their families' responses— in six out of 10 countries, they named *supporting learning at home* as the main type of involvement. In two other countries, *communicating with teachers and school staff* was recognized as a common type of involvement. Educators in eight out of 10 countries saw the number one form of family involvement as *communicating with teachers and school staff*. *Supporting learning at home* and *attending school events* were the most frequently named types of involvement in three other countries.

Figure 19

Top Types of Family Involvement Across Countries (n = 10 countries)



Note. Student data come from eight countries. Educators in the United States selected two top types of involvement: *communicating with teachers* and *school staff* (43.90%) and *attending school events* (43.20%).

Caregiving and Learning at Home

Across all 10 countries, 76.5% of parents/caregivers named *supporting learning at home* as one of their main forms of involvement. When discussing what they meant by *supporting learning at home*, and why this was their main type of involvement, one parent/caregiver explained how families actively develop creative learning activities at home (e.g., drawing, singing, reading story books, etc.) as well as offering homework support and monitoring their child’s learning and progress at school. This parent/caregiver in South Africa explained, “We got equipment to use at home during COVID. I still use it now to teach my child. I keep shapes around the house so I can teach my kids about shapes and counting.”

Students tended to mirror families’ responses, with *supporting learning at home* being the most commonly reported type of involvement, followed by *communicating with teachers and school staff*. Across all eight countries, 62.2% of students also selected *supporting learning at home*. As a vocational school student in Hungary explained, parents/caregivers were often monitoring their progress at school and offering help with homework and projects. This student noted, “My parents regularly ask me about the test we have, my grades, and offer their help if I struggle with something.”

Students of higher socioeconomic statuses, who were always able to meet their basic needs, reported that their parents/caregivers were *supporting learning at home* (64.5% of $n = 3,907$) more than did students from lower socioeconomic statuses (59.5% of $n = 4,111$). Likewise, students from higher socioeconomic statuses noted that their families were *communicating with teachers and school staff* (41.7% of $n = 3,850$) to a greater extent than did families from lower socioeconomic statuses (26.7% of $n = 4,036$). A higher proportion of students without disabilities (63.5% of $n = 6,113$) also reported that their parents/caregivers were *supporting learning at home* compared to students with disabilities (58.1% of $n = 365$), although the sample size was small.

Over half (53.7%) of educators listed *supporting learning at home* as a main form of engagement. In Sierra Leone and Uganda, educators recognized *supporting learning at home* as the primary way families were involved. In Sierra Leone, this often meant that families helped with homework, either by providing direct guidance or giving their children time and space where they could study.

Communicating

Educators tended to note the most common way that families engaged with schools was by *communicating with teachers and school staff*. Roughly 61.1% of educators selected this option across all 10 countries. In the United States (California), educators cited both *communicating with teachers and school staff* and *attending school events* as the main forms of involvement, emphasizing their expectation that families do their best to attend school events to build community and facilitate communication. Only students in Bangladesh and India (representative sample of Maharashtra and Himachal Pradesh states) also reported that the most common way that their parents/caregivers engaged with schools was by *communicating with teachers and school staff*. Overall, 32.7% of students across all countries selected this option. South Africa was the only country where families said their main type of involvement was *communicating with teachers and school staff*. However, this type was a close second in five countries.

Families with lower levels of education (primary schooling or less) were less likely to report *communicating with teachers and school staff* (56.2% of $n = 2,438$) than were families with higher education levels (60.5% of $n = 5,668$). This suggests that parents/caregivers with higher levels of education (secondary or above) were more comfortable communicating with educators, which was echoed in the student data.

In Bangladesh, families said *following school news* was their main form of involvement. Families in Bangladesh explained that this meant using social media groups (e.g., WhatsApp) and SMS texts to communicate among parents/caregivers and educators and learn information directly from their children. It also included talking to other community members in their neighborhoods.

Decision Making

In only four countries (Bangladesh, Kenya, South Africa, and Tanzania), 20% to 30% of families selected *providing feedback on school decisions*. Among the other six countries, participation in school decisions was even lower (15% or less). Similarly, only 3% to 14% of families reported involvement or *leadership in a parent association*. Despite only a small proportion of parents/caregivers reporting that they were engaged in leadership and decision making, this was how education authorities defined engagement in many policy documents. In Sierra Leone, for example, only 5% of families reported being involved in school through *leadership in a parent association*, like a school management committee. Although these committees and their associated meetings were open to families beyond parents/caregivers who served on the leadership teams, conversations with the CST teams revealed that these meetings were not widely attended and were rarely inclusive of the most marginalized families, including those of young mothers, children with disabilities, and children from low-income families. The Sierra Leone and Tanzania (Zanzibar) CST teams made recommendations to policymakers that educational frameworks should not consider school management committees to be the main form of family, school, and community engagement, but rather just one form of engagement. Furthermore, they recommended that changes needed to be made to the composition of these committees—such as ensuring marginalized families, students, and educators were authentically represented and not just recruited to fill quotas—in order to make them an effective and inclusive decision-making mechanism.

Students shared a similar perspective regarding their parents'/caregivers' involvement in schools' decision making. In only three countries (Bangladesh, Ghana, and Tanzania), more than 30% of students said that their parents/caregivers were involved by *providing feedback on school decisions*. Among the other five countries, the response rate was 20% or less. When asked about participation or *leadership in a parent association*, students reported even lower levels of family involvement; only 5% to 22% of students reported that their parents were engaged in their school's decision making.



TAKEAWAY: Families of younger children reported higher levels of involvement in their children's school and were more engaged in *supporting learning at home* than were families of older children.

In general, families of younger children reported higher levels of involvement in their children's school on a 4-point scale than did families of older children (3.43 of 4 for $n = 4,873$; 3.31 of 4 for $n = 3,194$). Although the average rating is modest, it is significant.

Parents/caregivers of younger children in pre-primary and primary school grades across the 10 countries were more likely to report supporting student *learning at home* (80.9% of $n = 4,910$). As one educator in Kazakhstan explained, although some parents/caregivers may spend more time *supporting learning at home* when their children are small, this can also vary by family and the needs of the child:

As a parent of 5th grader, I have to help my child with her homework and that's how I show my engagement in her studies. But as a teacher of high school students, I can say that it's not the case and they might not really need their families' involvement in their home tasks/classes. In general, I myself encountered parents (of 11th graders specifically) who were very engaged and concerned about events at school or about graduation and in general about school affairs.

Likewise, parents/caregivers of younger children named *communicating with teachers and school staff* (65.3% of $n = 4,910$) as a top form of involvement more often than families of secondary school-aged children (70.0% and 49.9%, respectively, of $n = 3,268$). In South Africa, families of pre-primary school children said they were *communicating with teachers and school staff* more frequently than their older children because of needing to connect about sleep, feeding, bathroom skills, and other developmental stages. Among parents/caregivers of secondary school students, they often described a decrease in involvement in their children's schooling and less direct communication with educators because their children were becoming more independent and mature. As a parent/caregiver in Hungary noted, "Our children are mature enough to negotiate their way, we are there at home when they need help or ideas."

Like families, pre-primary and primary school educators were more likely to cite *supporting learning at home* as a top form of parental/caregiver involvement (62.9% of $n = 937$) compared to educators of older children (46.5% of $n = 1,208$). According to an educator in Colombia, "In primary school ... the parents do the student's homework so that they do not fail, in high school the student is left alone." There were no notable or significant differences across educators' gender in reported types of parent/caregiver engagement.

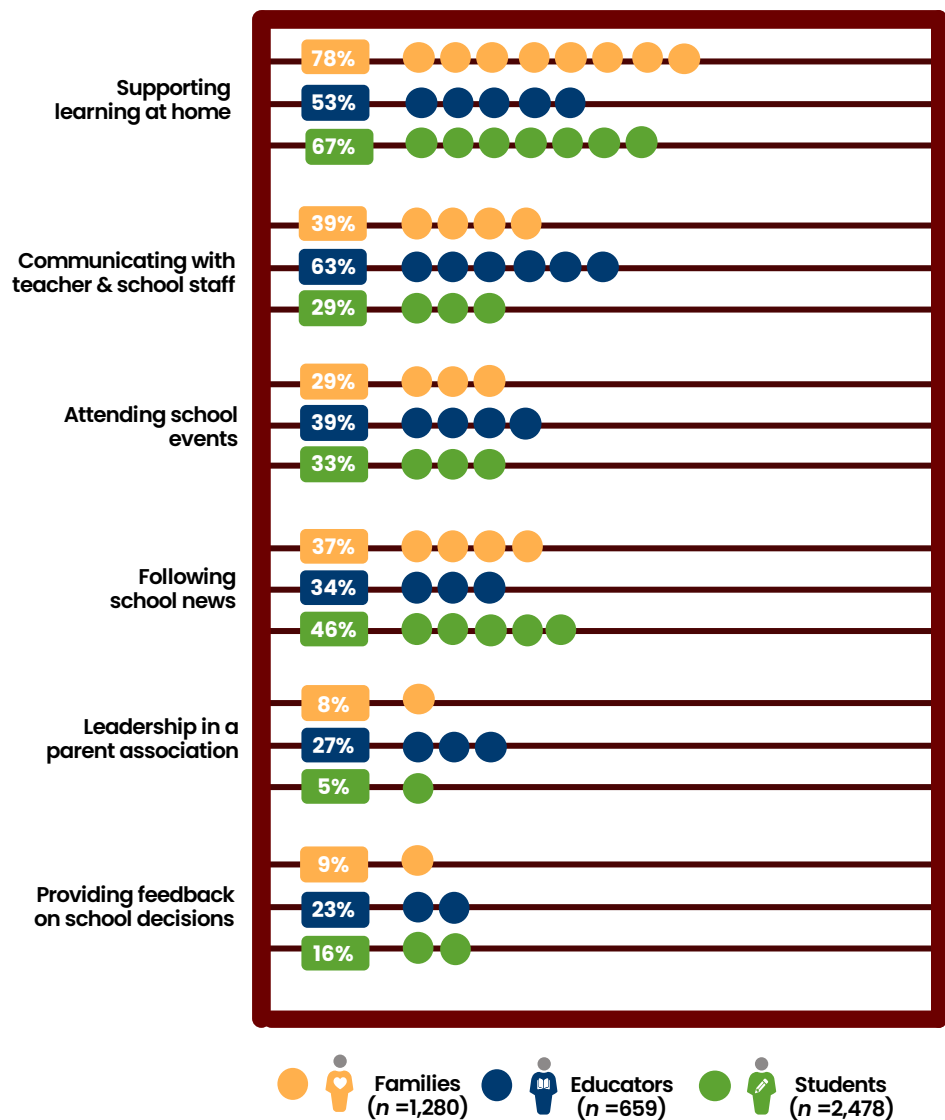
Country Snapshot on Types of Involvement

In the community-driven research led by Red PaPaz and Alianza Educativa in Colombia, families and students recognized that the main type of involvement of parents/caregivers was *supporting learning at home*, as shown in Figure 20. Although educators also recognized this as a main form, they named *communicating with teachers and school staff* at slightly higher rates. This vision of family, school, and community engagement as collaboration, care, and contact between families and schools was reiterated during conversations. Educators and families alike wanted more communication with each other. For educators, more communication meant adding formal and informal means of communication between families and school teams, whether with technology or in-person interactions, to ensure that the schools' and teachers' messages were getting home to families. When probed, however, educators' examples of communication were often one-way, **telling** families what they think they needed to hear or creating channels like parent universities that educated families on engagement. Returning to Ferlazzo's (2011) point about two-way communication, engagement is about creating opportunities to **listen** to families and having appropriate channels for a productive dialogue. Families were less clear about what they wanted to see through communication, but they critiqued the current mandatory meetings (*escuelas de padres, madres y cuidadores*) as being a form of one-way communication and penalizing families that can attend these meetings.

Another concern that arose in conversations was using students as a channel for *communicating with teachers and school staff*. Although students were acknowledged as important links between home and school communication, relying on students as messengers did not contribute to greater family-school collaboration and often put students in an awkward position. Relying on students for *communicating with teachers and school staff* also meant families received asymmetrical communication depending on whether the child conveyed the message to their parent/caregiver.

Figure 20

Top Types of Family Involvement in Colombia (n = 66 secondary schools)



Note. Decimals in the figure have been rounded up or down to the nearest whole number for simplicity.

These data from Colombia also showed that educators identified school-based types of involvement, such as *communicating with teachers and school staff*, *attending school events*, *providing feedback on school decisions*, and *leadership in a parent association*, at higher rates than families, whereas families placed more emphasis on *supporting learning at home*. During conversations, educators expressed that they expected families to come to the schools for mandatory meetings regardless of the parent’s/caregiver’s situation and circumstances at the home. As is elaborated in the Case Study section, this presented challenges for families living in poverty and surviving on hand-to-mouth daily earnings—which was over a quarter of the families in the sample—as well as single-caregiver households. In consequence, conversations revealed that families often felt judged and misunderstood, and that their real struggles with poverty

and barriers to involvement were overlooked. Educators also shared that they felt like parents/caregivers were not involved enough and not reachable, so they felt alone and frustrated in trying to engage with families.

It will be important going forward for school teams in Colombia to continue to define what they mean by family, school, and community engagement, and the different roles and responsibilities of all parties, but also to foster greater two-way communication to help understand the different tensions and barriers families are facing. As one participant in a conversation in Colombia noted, “It is important that everyone recognizes their share of responsibility and works together to provide full support to students.” Collaboration includes mutually deciding roles and responsibilities that are realistic for all sides and that honor the complex situations of poverty that families are living in on a daily basis.



SUMMARY

In summary, whether families are involved or engaged in school, they are important partners and allies of educators. A critical part of family, school, and community engagement is what happens in the home, not just what happens in school. The vast majority of families reported *supporting learning at home*, according to both parents/caregivers and students. Yet, conversations revealed that families needed more guidance and direction on how to support their children—especially parents/caregivers who did not finish their basic education and/or who did not have positive experiences with school.

Educators saw *communicating with teachers and school staff* and *attending school events* as important forms of engagement but noted in conversations that they sometimes overlooked the work that families were doing at home to support their children. Participation in *providing feedback on school decisions* and *leadership in a parent association* were not the most common forms of family, school, and community engagement across families, even though they were often the activities that were most emphasized by schools and education frameworks.

Data collected with schools revealed that while families and educators may have different definitions of family, school, and community engagement and what constitutes the major types of involvement, they generally agreed that two-way communication was essential and that every school and community could do more to strengthen communication and contact. This did not mean adding more events—as is often the impulse of schools when trying to increase family involvement—but, instead, it meant developing deeper and more authentic solutions to communication challenges and creating more welcoming schools.



Global Lesson 3

Collectively Break Barriers

Families, educators, and students often agree that there are many structural and situational barriers impeding strong partnerships. Yet, educators tend to blame low family engagement on parents/caregivers without fully acknowledging the challenges they experience in trying to engage with schools.

In addition to naming the different forms of family involvement, participants were asked to identify the top ten barriers that families faced in engaging with schools. Parents/caregivers named their own barriers to engaging with schools. These barriers were identified inductively during the initial field-testing phase of the research and informed by the literature (see the section on barriers in the Literature Review in Annex II).



SURVEY QUESTIONS (Families)

What are some challenges you have in being involved in your child's learning or school? [Select all that apply]

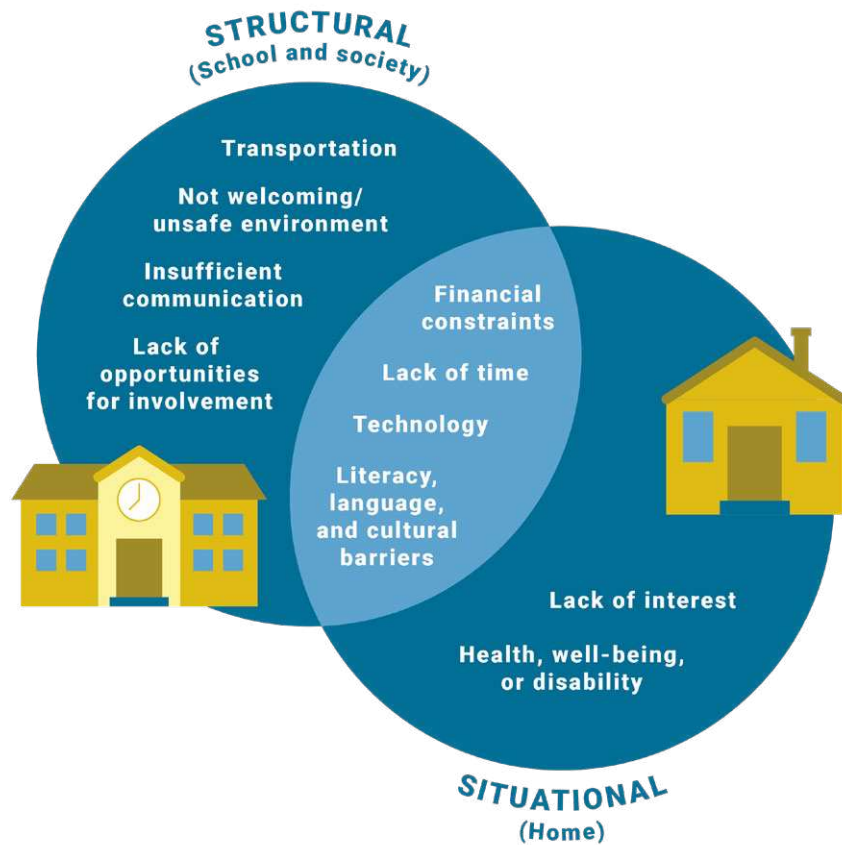
- | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of time | <input type="checkbox"/> Literacy, language, cultural barriers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Financial constraints | <input type="checkbox"/> Not welcoming or unsafe environment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation | <input type="checkbox"/> Health, well-being, or disability |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of technology | <input type="checkbox"/> No challenges |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient communication | <input type="checkbox"/> Additional (please specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of opportunities for involvement | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Prefer not to answer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of interest | |



CONVERSATION QUESTION

In the surveys, families reported ... as their main barrier as compared to ... for educators and ... for students. What are some examples of these barriers that you have observed/heard about in your school or community?

Some barriers were **structural** in nature and perpetuated by schools and education systems, such as lack of opportunities for families to engage with schools. Other barriers were **situational** for families, such as the compromised health of a parent/caregiver that prevented them from engaging with their children's teachers and school staff or participating in school events and activities. Most barriers, however, fell under both structural and situational barriers, such as *financial constraints* and *lack of time*, as shown in Figure 21. A breakdown of all barriers using examples from conversations with teams around the world is detailed in Box 5 and elaborated on through the subsequent discussion of data.

Figure 21**Barriers to Family Involvement and Engagement****Box 5: Barriers to Family Involvement and Engagement**

Participants were asked to select more than one of 10 barriers listed on the CST surveys. Participants also had the option to select “no barriers” and to write in their own response. Although structural and situational barriers overlap, listing them as discrete response options helped teams intentionally probe for examples during conversations. The actual survey wording is in italics.

Structural

- ***Transportation*** includes lack of transportation to schools, large distances between schools and homes, and high costs associated with commuting to and from schools.
- ***Not welcoming or unsafe environment*** includes physical dangers (such as weather and threats of gun or other forms of violence) as well as absence of a school culture and practices that are inclusive of all families.
- ***Insufficient communication*** includes lack of contact between families, educators, and students and little information on how families can be involved.
- ***Lack of opportunities for involvement*** includes the absence of structured or scheduled points of engagement as well as intentional decisions by schools and students to dissuade families from being engaged.

Situational

- **Lack of interest** includes parents/caregivers not showing interest in engaging with school staff, activities, or student learning.
- **Health, well-being, or disability** includes disabilities, chronic illnesses of parent/caregiver, the student, or other family member.

Structural and Situational

- **Financial constraints** include high costs associated with schooling (such as for school fees, learning materials, uniforms, and after school tutoring) and the inability of families to afford to take time off from work. Suggested or optional donations were also financial constraints, as families often felt highly obligated and pressured to make contributions.
- **Lack of time** includes insufficient time families have to be involved, as well as schools scheduling events and activities at times difficult for families to attend.
- **Lack of technology** includes lack of access to devices and software, and knowledge of how to use technology to communicate with educators or monitor student learning at home.
- **Literacy, language, cultural barriers** include low literacy skills among parents/caregivers and schools communicating in languages in which families are not proficient. This barrier also includes cultural differences in ways that families and educators interact and communicate.

What this list does not explicitly include are systemic barriers such as racism, gender bias, ableism, and other forms of discrimination, which influence whether a school is welcoming and safe for families. Threats of violence or environmental disasters also factor into school safety.

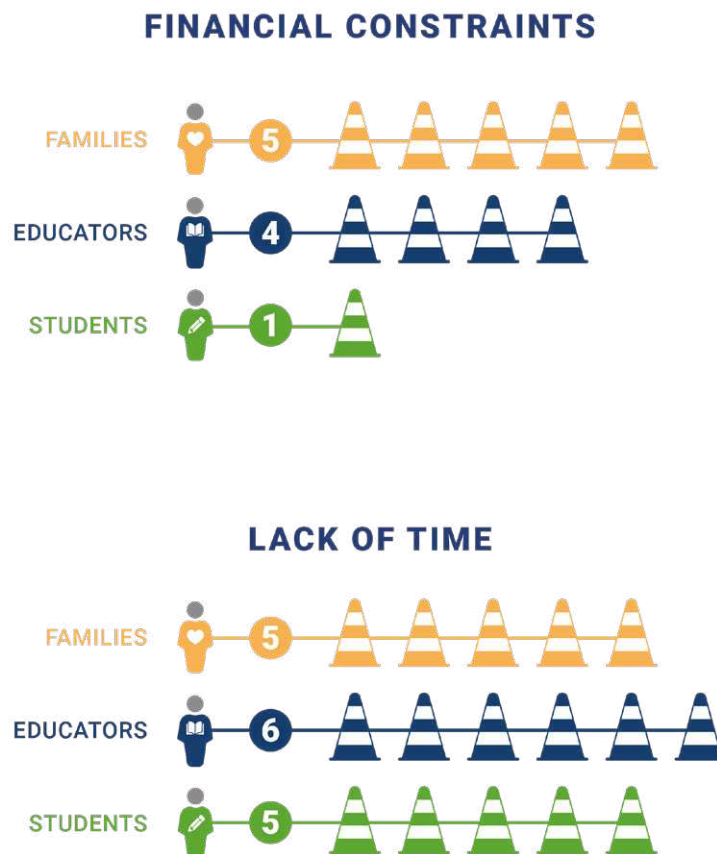


TAKEAWAY: The main barriers to family, school, and community engagement were overlapping structural and situational barriers, namely *financial constraints* and *lack of time*.

Families and educators alike named *financial constraints* and *lack of time* as the top barriers. Among the over 8,000 family respondents across 10 countries, the top responses to barriers to involvement and engagement were *financial constraints* (47.3%), *lack of time* (35.2%), and *no barriers* (24.2%). Like families, educators identified *lack of time* (61.6%) and *financial constraints* (49.6%) as main barriers. Students also recognized *lack of time* as a major barrier for their parents/caregivers, and to a lesser extent *financial constraints*. Across most countries, families, educators, and students reported the same top barriers. For example, the largest proportion of families, educators, and students in Colombia named *lack of time* as the top barrier. The other top barriers were *transportation* and *lack of interest*.

Figure 22

Top Barriers to Family Involvement Across Countries (n = 10 countries)



Note. Students' responses are reported for Colombia, Kazakhstan, Tanzania (Zanzibar), and United States (California). The question on barriers to family involvement was not included in the youth surveys conducted by GeoPoll or in Bangladesh. Among students in Tanzania (Zanzibar), there were two top options: *lack of time* (40.4%) and *financial constraints* (40.9%).

Financial constraints and *lack of time* are both structural and situational barriers. Structurally, the expectation that parents/caregivers communicate and participate in activities during the school day and take time away from work and income-generating activities to come to school creates a predicament for parents/caregivers working in multiple jobs and in positions where they do not have flexible work hours and conditions. If parents/caregivers experiencing *financial constraints* in the home were to miss work to come to school and meet with educators or attend events, their children would be at risk of not having their basic needs met for the day. As families in many countries raised, the problem was relational and cyclical. Families struggling to meet their basic daily needs had a harder time interacting and engaging with the schools according to the timing and structures set by the schools. Finding times convenient for working families and creating hybrid formats where parents/caregivers could join school events virtually, often meant that educators had to engage with families on evenings and weekends—which was not ideal for their own families but was essential for fostering greater inclusion of families in the school community. An in-depth look at these barriers, as well as the other top barriers, is detailed in the following sections.

Financial Constraints

In half of the 10 countries in the mixed methods sample—Bangladesh, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Tanzania (Zanzibar), and Uganda—*financial constraints* was the top barrier named by the majority of families. Although there is officially free and universal primary education in each of these five countries, families reported that there were many unofficial costs, including for uniforms, learning materials, transportation, and fees for examinations and tuition, among other expenses. For example, in Uganda these payments account for 56% of household spending on education for students in primary schools and 38% in secondary schools (UNESCO, 2016).

In Bangladesh, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Tanzania (Zanzibar), and Uganda, families described how they struggled to pay school fees and expenses and were subsequently apprehensive to engage with schools for fear of being penalized or shamed. As a secondary school student in Bangladesh explained, “My parents have passed away and my grandparents are struggling to continue my education. Children like me face difficulties in pursuing education and supporting their livelihoods. While our school offers free tuition, other hidden education costs are challenging to bear.” One educator in Uganda acknowledged parents’/caregivers’ hesitancy to communicate and interact with schools for fear of being asked for *financial contributions* but argued that teachers often reached to families for issues beyond *financial contributions*. This educator said, “The parents have the wrong mentality that whatever time the teachers call them to school, the teachers want to shout at them, or the students have done something wrong or increase fees.”

The conversations in Sierra Leone also revealed that at family, school, and community engagement events, such as family assemblies and meetings, there were requests for donations for the school. Some parents/caregivers described how they avoided these events because they did not want to risk being asked for *financial contributions*. As one parent/caregiver in Sierra Leone noted, “It is not like we do not want to invest in our children’s education, but the economic situation does not allow us to fulfill our responsibilities as parents.” One of the recommendations in Sierra Leone’s country-level policy brief, developed together with the CST teams—EducAid and Rising Academies – was to “decouple family, school, and community engagement efforts from financial asks, and make the use of school finances from families more transparent” to encourage all families from feeling comfortable attending and participating in school activities and events (Morris et al., 2024a).

Another response that often intersected with *financial constraints* was *transportation*. Across the 10 countries, a fifth of families (19.4%), named lack of *transportation* as a main barrier to family, school, and community engagement. Over half of educators in Sierra Leone and the United States (California) said *transportation* was a barrier. During conversations with educators and families,

one parent/caregiver in Sierra Leone said, “The cost of *transportation* to come to the school and attend meetings is high so, sometimes we will decide to send one person [one parent/caregiver] to represent us in the meetings.” This was reiterated by a parent/caregiver in Kenya who said, “Parents who live far from the school mostly need transportation to access their children’s school. Some are poor and can’t afford it, making them unable to be involved in their children’s education.” Students in Tanzania (Zanzibar) also said that *transportation* was a challenge to family engagement for the same reasons.

Lack of technology was another barrier that intersected with *financial constraints*. The problem was particularly acute in African countries, where between a quarter to half of educators and parents/caregivers in Kenya, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Uganda, and Tanzania (Zanzibar) cited *lack of technology* as a top barrier. Over half of educators in Bangladesh and the United States (California) also cited *lack of technology* as a major barrier to family engagement. In the conversations, some families reported not having a mobile phone, computer, tablet, or other devices needed to communicate with educators and schools, or to access school news and educational materials. In some cases, technology and digital literacy, and how to use devices and learning platforms, was the challenge. Furthermore, one parent/caregiver in Kenya noted, “Communication with teachers requires airtime or internet, which some parents can’t afford.”

Lack of Time

Lack of time was the top barrier named by families in the other half of the 10 countries in the mixed methods sample—Brazil, Colombia, Kazakhstan, South Africa, and the United States (California). In the qualitative sample, families in Australia, Hungary, and the United Kingdom (England) also identified *lack of time* as the most notable barrier. It was one of the top barriers for many reasons. First, parents/caregivers struggled to find time in their days because of work and family obligations, as already noted. According to the research conducted with Leadership for Equity in India (Maharashtra), one parent/caregiver noted, “It is stressful to balance work and school.” Second, many families had multiple children at different schools, and sometimes only one parent to juggle engagement. According to research conducted by Whole Education in the United Kingdom (England), schools often expected parents/caregivers to participate in activities without always acknowledging that families often have children at multiple schools and are trying to meet the demands from each school. As one parent/caregiver noted, “I have three children at three different schools/nurseries, so hard to be across all three.” Third, schools often did not design involvement and engagement activities with single-parent/caregiver and foster families in mind. In particular, single-parent/caregiver homes faced the extra challenge of juggling all interactions and school expectations on their own, often while facing *financial constraints* in the home. As a single mother in Sierra Leone noted:

I am a single mother and I have nine children to take care of so I need any kind of help so that my children will get education. For now, I can't even afford good shelter or even provide food for my family on a daily basis.

No Barriers

Families in three countries, Kazakhstan, South Africa, and Tanzania (Zanzibar), selected *no barriers* followed by *lack of time* (Kazakhstan, South Africa) or *financial constraints* (Tanzania). During conversations and probing as to why families selected no barriers, in Tanzania (Zanzibar) they noted it was in large part because families did not know what family, school, and community engagement was in practice. Many parents/caregivers had not been to secondary school and did not know the expectations of the school or why engagement was important to their child's education. In South Africa, one parent/caregiver noted that she selected no barriers because she did all she could to overcome her daily barriers: "I still say I don't have challenges when it comes to my children's education. As a parent, you need to sacrifice for your child, no matter what." A significantly greater proportion of families who cited *no barriers* were parents/caregivers with higher educational levels compared to those without (29.9% of $n = 5,668$ compared to 11.0% of $n = 2,438$) and parents/caregivers who had older students in middle school or higher compared to those with younger students (37.4% of $n = 3,268$ compared to 15.4% of $n = 4,910$). A low proportion of educators, ranging from 0% to 14%, reported *no barriers*. The one exception was in Kazakhstan where 22% of educators named *no barriers* after *lack of time*.

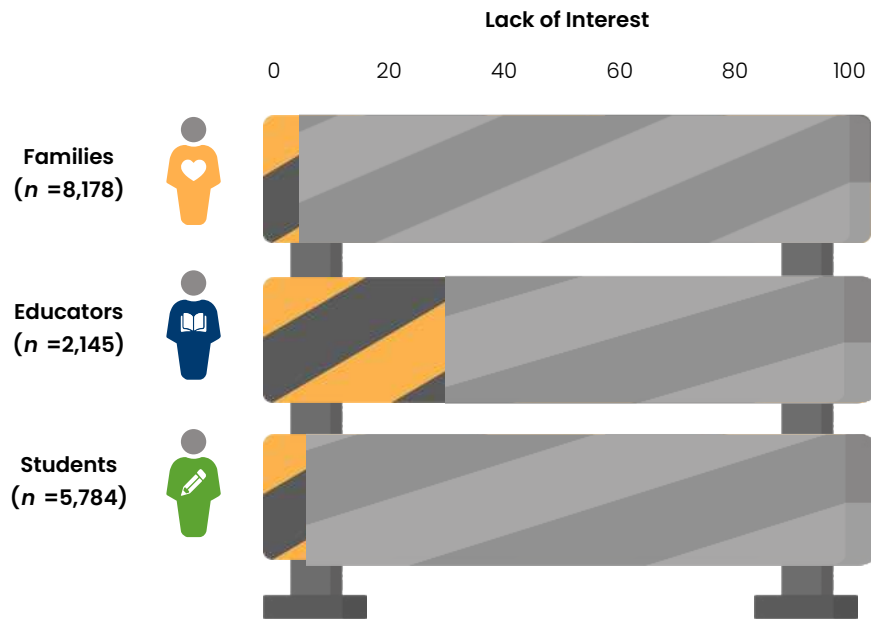


TAKEAWAY: Breaking the blame game that assumes that families *lack interest* in their children's education was critical to building greater relational trust and building meaningful family, school, and community engagement strategies.

Across the 10 countries in the mixed methods sample, one-third (34.9%) of educators cited *lack of interest* as a barrier. Between a fifth and half of educators in five out of these 10 countries—Bangladesh, Brazil, Colombia, Kazakhstan, and Uganda—named families' *lack of interest* as one of the top three barriers to family involvement. In the qualitative sample, among educators in Australia, Hungary, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom (England), as many as 50% to 90% of educators said *lack of interest* of families was a main barrier to family involvement. *Lack of interest* of families was not a top barrier identified by parents/caregivers or students in any country; only a very small proportion of families (4.3%) across countries even named *lack of interest* as a barrier. This notion that families' interest and motivation are a barrier to involvement and engagement is both a perception gap and deficit perspective and contributes to the blame game, where educators blame families for not being more engaged.

Figure 23

**Lack of Interest
as a Barrier to
Involvement
Across
Countries (n = 10
countries)**



When unpacking why educators blamed families for *lack of interest* during conversations, one educator in Brazil noted, “The school has done so many things, but parents lack interest. We call, get in touch, but we don’t hear back from the parents. They lack will.” However, a primary school parent/caregiver in Brazil pushed back against this idea and said that family, school, and community engagement was more difficult for working class families without the flexibility to attend events and activities. As this parent/caregiver noted, “I believe that our society is built so that [working] families cannot participate in school. If a worker asks for time off from work to visit their child’s school, their pay is deducted.” Similarly in Hungary, one teacher raised the question, “When I don’t see the parents of my students for years, how am I to know that they are interested?” To the contrary, a parent/caregiver of a secondary school student in Hungary noted that educators often judge engagement by level of communication with educators, but that does not mean families lack interest: “I think the teachers only judge our interest by the regular contact with them. These children are teenagers, we support them, but try to make them negotiate their own way as part of their growing up.”

During separate debriefs in Australia and the United Kingdom (England) with primary and secondary schools that participated in research led by the CST teams Australian Schools Plus, Social Ventures Australia, and Whole Education (United Kingdom), education leaders were taken aback by the tendency of their educators to blame families for what they saw as low family, school, and community engagement. Education leaders agreed among themselves that they needed to work with their educators to shift the blame game narrative and discussed strategies to do this, such as professional development,

conversations, and other approaches. *Lack of interest* was least commonly cited as a barrier by primary and pre-primary school educators in Sierra Leone and South Africa, with only 7% and 14% of educators, respectively, choosing this response. When probed as to why this blame game was low relative to other countries, CST teams in these two countries noted that families and educators came from the same communities, lived near each other, and had regular communication; therefore, educators were acutely aware of the structural and situational challenges of their students' families.

Among educators who named *lack of interest* as a key barrier, a larger proportion taught older children than taught younger children (39.7% of $n = 1,208$ compared to 28.8% of $n = 937$). Educators noted that how they communicate with families of older students often differs from that of families with younger students, a point reiterated by families. As a parent in Hungary noted, "In primary school, we were informed and even consulted, but it is not happening in secondary school." This corroborates with family, school, and community engagement research that indicates that types of engagement and barriers to engagement shift with students' ages (Avvisati et al., 2010; Catsambis, 2001; Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Skaliotis, 2013). As one school principal in a rural Pennsylvania middle school in the United States, who was part of the phase one Playbook research, noted during a conversation with teams in CUE's Global Family Engagement in Education Network, as young people start to become adolescents, family engagement is no longer just a conversation between families and educators—it is a conversation that students must help mediate. If a student decides they want their parents/caregivers to be engaged, they will support and nurture family engagement. If students do not want their families to be engaged, they may try to block family engagement. However, not all students seek to block their parents/caregivers from engaging with their educators and schools. The CST team in Hungary found that secondary students' desire for their families to be more engaged in their education was higher than anticipated, a finding that also resonated across secondary school students in Tanzania (Zanzibar).

Regardless of whether students sought for their parents/caregivers to be more or less engaged with their teachers and schools, they often pushed back against the idea that their parents/caregivers lacked interest in their education. A higher proportion of students from families of lower socioeconomic statuses who were *never, sometimes, or mostly* meeting basic needs at home reported that their parents/caregivers struggled with *lack of time* to get involved with their schooling (50.8% of $n = 1,659$) compared to students of higher socioeconomic statuses whose families were always meeting their basic needs (45% of $n = 3,148$). Students from households of lower socioeconomic statuses also noted that their parents/caregivers confronted greater structural barriers than those from higher socioeconomic families. As one rural secondary school student in Bangladesh explained:

I have to travel to school by bicycle because my home is 2 kilometers away. It's impossible for my mother to come to my school, and my father works as a driver in the capital, Dhaka. This creates a gap where my school may think parents are not interested in my studies, but in reality my parents have the willingness to be involved, but they are hindered by limitations and barriers.

The blame game can flow in the converse direction, where families blame educators for low engagement and schools for *insufficient communication* and because the schools were *not welcoming* or were *unsafe environments*. However, these barriers were not among the top three barriers selected by families, although they ranged from 2.6% (*not welcoming* or *unsafe environment*) to 6.3% (*insufficient communication*). Families' critiques of schools and negative experiences with educators did emerge in some conversations in Kenya, Hungary, South Africa, and Uganda. A parent/caregiver in South Africa made her criticism by pointing out that, "We don't communicate and get involved in school matters. We only hear from the school when we are being asked for money." A parent/caregiver in Uganda noted that, "The teachers don't like when the parents say the truth about their behavior when they do something wrong." A student in Hungary described how her mother did not feel safe and welcome when interacting with teachers: "My mother came to the first parent-teacher meeting and she was ridiculed for her accent, so she never came again." In the public rhetoric in some countries, families have openly blamed educators for poor or insufficient communication and not creating a welcoming or safe environment. Further exploration of this public rhetoric and how it impacts relationships between educators and families in schools is needed.

Country Snapshot on Barriers to Involvement

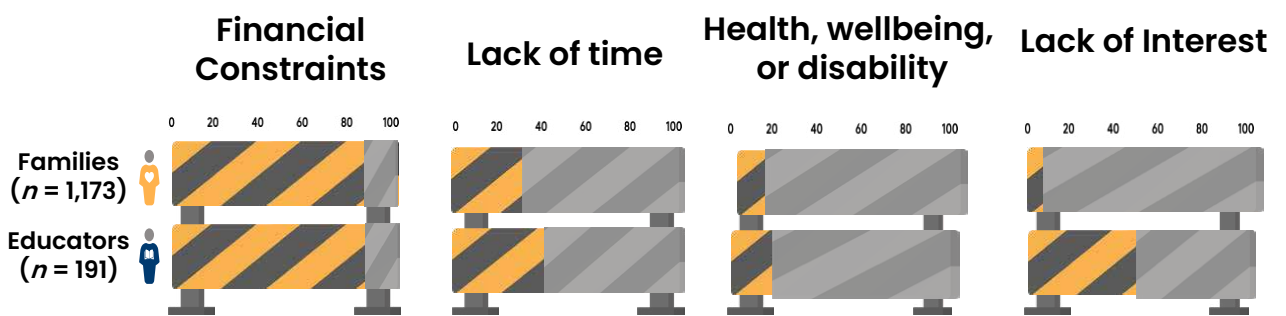
In community-driven research led by the Aga Khan Foundation in Uganda's West Nile district, *financial constraints* were clearly the main barrier identified by both families and educators, as families were struggling to find income-generating activities to survive. Also high was *lack of time* and trying to attend meetings with schools and educators amid *financial constraints* at home. In the West Nile, families are contending with extreme poverty, as a notable proportion of the families have migrated to the region from Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan and have experienced displacement and loss of economic resources and assets. The families surveyed reported historically low access to education, with 52% having finished primary school and 12% having never attended school. Nearly half (48.2%) were living in extreme poverty and were not able to meet their basic food and housing needs.

Most families surveyed said they had lived in the region for a number of years, yet establishing stable income-generating activities was difficult because of their poverty and lack of access to land and other resources for engaging in agricultural and entrepreneurship activities (Avalos Cortez, 2024). Families noted that their third most common barrier was *health, well-being, or disability*, as lack

of healthcare services served as a major challenge. If a child or family member was ill, parents/caregivers struggled to attend school activities. Furthermore, their children did not have the guidance and counseling they needed to continue their schooling and mitigate barriers.

Educators cited *lack of interest* as a top barrier to family, school, and community engagement. From educators’ vantage point, families were not very involved (2.8 of 4 replace by for n = 191), which they in part attributed to the fact that many families had not been to school and did not know the value of education. Another reason they cited in conversations was the notable familial and social pressure for boys to start earning income at a young age to help their households financially. In the case of girls, educators noted that many girls were pulled out of school to marry early, as families could not provide for them sufficiently. Families were particularly concerned with their daughters’ well-being if they stayed unmarried and needed to search for income, fearing the possibility of them being recruited into exploitative activities and sex work at one of the many discos and bars in the community. This act of families pulling their child out of school to help work and generate income, or to marry, was often construed by educators as families not being committed to education. However, pressures to enter the world of work and to marry early were directly related to families’ dire economic circumstances, which is reiterated in the literature (Jones et al., 2020; Schaffnit & Lawson, 2021).

Figure 24 Top Barriers to Family Involvement in Uganda (n = 21 schools)





SUMMARY

In summary, families, educators, and students alike reported overlapping structural and situational barriers impeding family involvement, with *financial constraints* and *lack of time* being the most notable. Families struggling to get by financially, as well as single-parent households, faced the extra challenge of balancing economic survival and school expectations. Across countries and family demographics, there was a strong consensus that families wanted to be more engaged in their children's learning; however, educators often assumed that families had a lack interest in being involved. While in some contexts educators were deeply aware of the barriers families faced, in many sites educators made assumptions and judgments about parents'/caregivers' levels of engagement without really understanding and listening to the struggles of families.

It is important for families, educators, and students to be allies in breaking down barriers and to collectively resist falling into the blame game by placing fault on each other instead of on the structural circumstances in each context impeding greater collaboration. The fact that so many families are struggling to meet basic needs is a real concern in developing sustainable and responsive family, school, and community partnerships, and to pursuing strategies that consider the multiple layers of barriers to family involvement and engagement.



Global Lesson 4

Build at the Speed of Trust

School educators are reporting lower levels of trust with families than families and students are reporting with educators. Families, educators, and students agree that higher levels of trust will promote student and school outcomes and success, but it takes time to build trust. Understanding families', educators', and students' beliefs and experiences in education contributes to building relational trust and developing responsive strategies.

The goal of building stronger family, school, and community partnerships is to ensure students and schools have the conditions they need to thrive, and to transform education systems to better serve young people, their families, and their societies. To help schools move toward this goal, families, students, and educators must feel they are heard, connected, and working toward a shared vision (Strike, 2004; Winthrop et al., 2021a). During conversations, educators often expressed struggling with anxiety when communicating with families, citing families' use of negative and blaming language. Similarly, families expressed apprehension about engaging with teachers, particularly if they sensed a lack of respect or recognition of their parenting efforts. Intentional conversations around beliefs on education help families and schools understand each other's beliefs as well as work towards coherence and a shared vision built on relational trust and collaboration (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Freire, 1974; Morris & Winthrop, 2023; Rabb, 2017). These relationships and partnerships take time and care to build.

Superintendent Dr. Thomas Washington from the United States (Pennsylvania)—whose school district participated in conversations on the purpose of school and barriers to engagement at a workshop on the preliminary findings of the *Six Global Lessons*—noted that family, school, and community relationships are “built at the speed of trust,” adapting Stephen Covey’s mantra in the book *Speed of*

Trust (2006). Drawing on his own experience leading schools and speaking with families on how to rebuild trust after COVID-19 school closures, Superintendent Washington noted, “For meaningful changes in family engagement, the foundation must be built on trust. Change ... can only happen at the speed of trust.” This point has resonated throughout the data and has become the framing for this global lesson.

One of the major contributions that the CSTs and *Six Global Lessons* makes to the field of family, school, and community engagement is the creation of a relational trust scale that can be used globally and enables CST teams to measure trust between families and educators, educators and families, and students and educators in each community. This scale, which is a subset of seven questions in the CST surveys, provides a tool for school teams to explore the different elements and levels of relational trust between families, educators, and students, with the intention of fostering deeper alliances between them.



SURVEY QUESTIONS
(Families)

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly agree (4)	Don't know / prefer not to answer
My child's teachers share my beliefs about what makes a good education					
My child's teachers seek and value my input and suggestions					
My child's teachers respect me					
My child's teachers keep the commitments or promises they make					
My child's teachers care about my child and our family					
I am satisfied with the teaching and learning at my child's school					
I am very involved in my child's school					



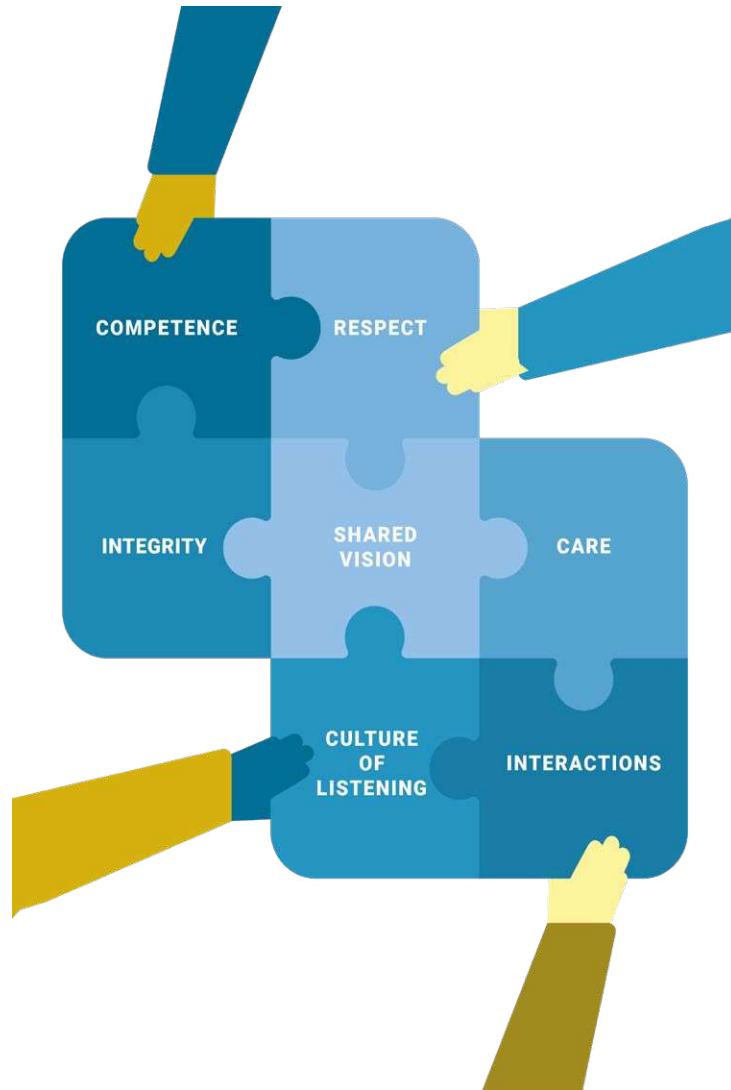
CONVERSATION QUESTION

What strategies do you think your school could use to build greater relational trust between families, schools, and communities to build greater partnerships?

This scale was developed over the course of two years and went through many iterations.¹⁰ It draws on research and the *Teacher-Parent Trust Scale* developed by Bryk and Schneider (2002) along with the *5 Essentials Survey* (Sebring et al., 2006) developed at the University of Chicago. The different elements measured in the scale are further detailed in Box 6.

Figure 25

Elements of Relational Trust



10 For example, in Brazil, Sierra Leone, and Tanzania (Zanzibar) a five-element scale was used with families and students, while a four-element scale was used with educators. Further details on reliability are outlined in the *Technical Report*.

Box 6: Global Relational Trust Scale

Relational trust is both the foundation of family, school, and community engagement and the outcome of meaningful partnerships. Relational trust in schools is built through social exchanges and interactions within communities and environments. Adapted from Bryk and Schneider (2002), there are four main, inter-related elements that precipitate relational trust. These are **respect** (mutual regard, value, and esteem), **integrity** (following through with action), **care** (personal regard for others), and **competence** (acknowledgement of others' skills and competencies in their roles). These four elements of relational trust are measured in the global relational trust scale. Three additional elements were added during the piloting process: **shared vision**, a **culture of listening**, and **interactions** between families, educators, and students. A shared vision examines the degree to which families, educators, and students perceive their alignment in beliefs. A culture of listening gauges whether there are opportunities to share input and suggestions in schools, which was found to vary greatly across contexts. Finally, the level of interactions measures the extent to which families and educators have contact with each other.

The seven elements are detailed below alongside their respective link to the 4 Cs of community: coherence, cohesion, care, and communication (Strike, 2004). Each element is measured on a scale of 1 to 4 (1 as strongly disagree to 4 as strongly agree) with 1 translating as *very low trust*, 2 as *low trust*, 3 as *trust*, and 4 as *high trust*. Survey wording is indicated in parentheses and varies slightly depending on if being answered by family, educator, or student.

1. **Shared vision (share my beliefs about what makes a good education)**. A shared vision and language on education is essential to developing coherence in school communities and formulating clear strategies for transforming education systems to better serve students, families, and schools. Developing a shared vision is an outcome of the CST process, where families, educators, and students spend time understanding and discussing their diverse beliefs, experiences, and perspectives on education.
2. **Culture of listening (seek and value my input and suggestions)**. A culture of listening and valuing families', educators', and students' input signals the **cohesion** of a community and a sense of welcoming and belonging. This culture of listening is measured in greater depth with the [Global Family, School, and Community Engagement Rubrics Tool](#) (CUE, 2024).
3. **Respect (respect me)**. Treating each other with dignity and regard, and valuing and including people and groups equitably across diverse demographics and identities, is central to respect. While respect is related to care, it goes beyond care in seeing and valuing the different identities and positionalities of members of the school community.
4. **Integrity (keep the commitments or promises they make)**. Following promises through with actions, or 'saying what you mean and meaning what you say,' is central to relational trust and demonstrating integrity and commitment toward each other.
5. **Care (care about me and my family)**. Care is personal regard for and concern about and among families, educators, and students, which is foundational to forming connections and bonds within school communities.

6. Competence (satisfied with the teaching and learning [in school or home]). Competence is acknowledging families' capabilities as caregivers and recognizing educators' skills and competencies as teachers. Competence is captured among families and students in the relational trust scale as their satisfaction with teaching and learning at school, and among educators as their satisfaction with the level of learning and support families are providing their children at home.

7. Interactions (involved in my/our school). The extent to which families, educators, and students are in **contact** and communication with each other is critical to relational trust; the more contact they have, the more opportunities to develop trust (Bryk et al., 2010; Mapp et al., 2022). Socioeconomic and cultural factors can also influence families' interactions with schools, their perceptions of family engagement, and how interactions with families are perceived by educators (Lareau, 2000). There is a question in the relational trust scale that asks families and students to rate their involvement in school—a proxy for the level of interactions and contact they have with teachers and school personnel. Educators are asked the extent to which their students' families are involved. Actual types of involvement and engagement are measured separately beyond the scale.

Trust is also a central component of Freire's praxis and dialogic approach, where trust is both built through effective dialogue and is an outcome of dialogue. The absence of trust signals a breakdown in the dialogic process. Trust necessitates honesty and integrity and translating words into actions. *"Trust is the testimony that an individual gives to others about their real and concrete intentions. It cannot exist if the word does not coincide with actions. Saying one thing and doing another, not taking words seriously, cannot be a stimulus for trust"* (Freire, 1973, p. 96).



TAKEAWAY: Educators reported lower levels of trust with families than families and students reported with educators.

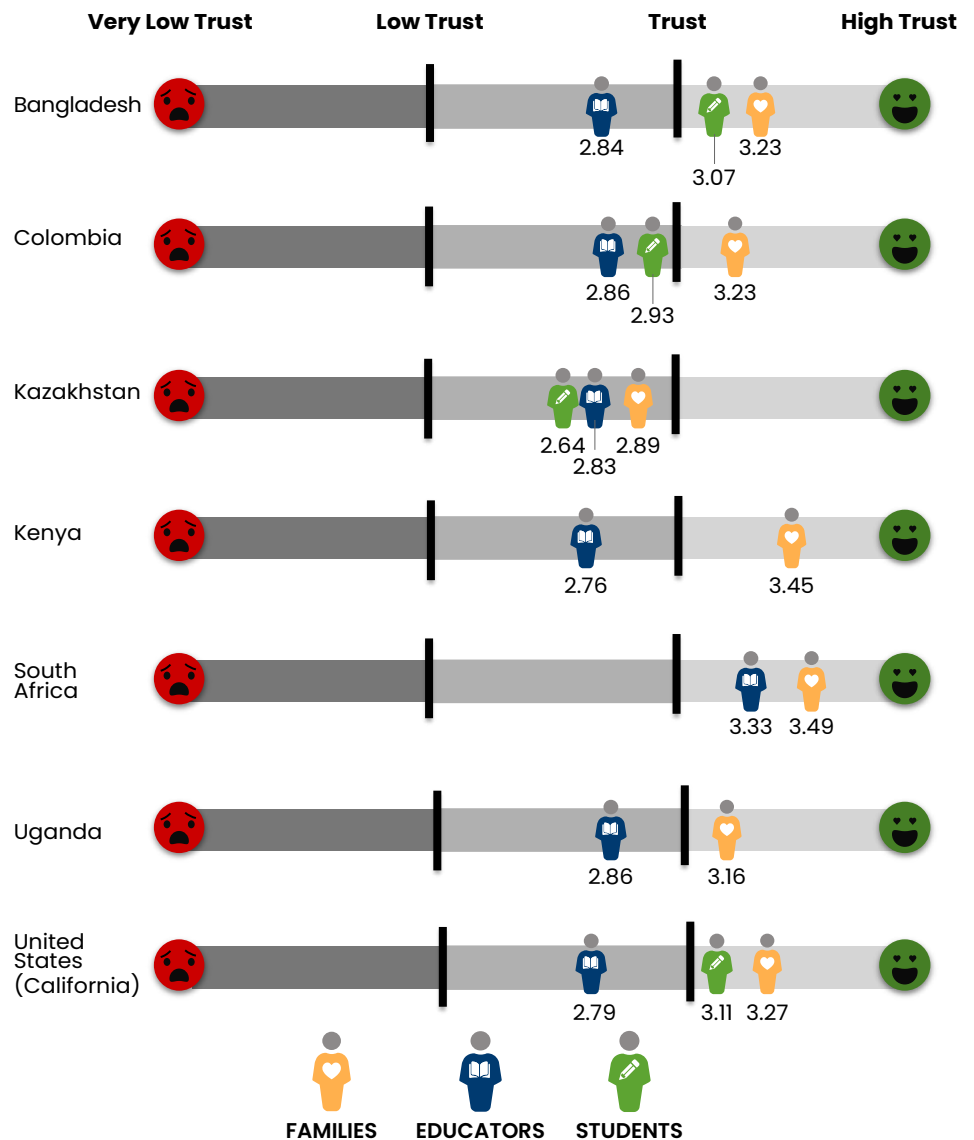
Across the seven countries where relational trust was measured, families and students on average reported higher trust with educators than educators reported with families. In six out of seven of the countries, families reported that they fell somewhere between feeling moderate and high trust with educators on a four-point scale. In only Kazakhstan, families' trust with educators was slightly lower and fell between low to moderate trust.

While there are seven elements on the final scale, in this research phase there were six elements measured, as two (respect and culture of listening) were combined during data collection. Of the six elements of relational trust measured, families scored their *interactions* as the highest, at 3.38 out of 4. In other words, they saw their level of involvement in school as relatively high. The element that was rated the lowest was *care*; on average, families across the seven countries rated care as 3.14 out of 4, which is still considerably high.

The relational trust scale was employed with students in four countries: Bangladesh, Colombia, Kazakhstan, and the United States (California). On average, students in Bangladesh and the United States (California) reported between moderate to high trust with educators, whereas students in Colombia and Kazakhstan reported between low to moderate trust. Across countries, students scored *care* and *integrity* lower than the other elements, with *care* being the lowest (2.85 out of 4). The two highest rated elements among students were *competence* (3.13 of 4) and *respect and culture of listening* (3.12 of 4). Although the full trust scale was not administered in Tanzania (Zanzibar), students rated a subset of questions quite high with *shared vision* (3.66 out of 4) as the highest, and *respect and culture of listening* as the lowest (3.47 out of 4).

Figure 26

Relational Trust Scale Across Countries (n = 7 countries)



Note. The educators' scale only covered five of the seven elements, as *respect* and *culture of listening* were combined as a single question and *competence* was not measured. The students' and families' relational trust scale only covered six of the seven elements as *respect* and *culture of listening* were combined as a single question.

Relational trust from the perspective of educators was notably lower than that of families. In all countries but South Africa, educators' level of relational trust with families fell between low and moderate trust. Low trust can result in educators being less likely to seek strategies and opportunities to engage with families (Bryk et al., 2010). In South Africa, early childhood educators' trust in families was slightly higher. According to the CST team, Mikhulu Trust, this was likely because the educators were from the same communities as the families and because of the students' young ages. As they noted, early childhood educators have more interactions with families because of the students' developmental stage (Avvisati et al., 2010). An additional factor was that the early childhood centers in South Africa were privately-run community institutions that relied on parents/caregivers to pay fees, and thus had more incentive to be in contact with families. Of the seven elements, educators scored the highest on *respect* and *culture of listening* (on average, 3.15 out of 4) and the lowest on *care* and *integrity*, or having families keep their word (on average, 2.75 and 2.72, respectively, out of 4).



TAKEAWAY: Trust decreased among families and educators as children move through school. Intentional efforts to build trust among families and educators of middle and secondary school students is important in supporting students' well-being and learning outcomes.

Across all families in the seven countries where the scale was used, there were significant differences between the families of younger and older students in levels of trust with educators, while there were no significant differences based on parents'/caregivers' gender, socioeconomic status, or disability status of child. Across all six elements in the relational trust scale, the average rating decreased as the grade level of the child increased. Families of children in pre-primary and primary grades reported higher levels of trust with educators across all elements of the scale (3.31 out of 4 for $n = 2,218$) than families of older students (3.15 out of 4 for $n = 1,940$). This is likely because, on average, families of younger children had more contact with educators than did families of older students, as noted in the previous example of South Africa. Additionally, pre-primary and primary schools are often in closer vicinity to families than secondary schools, particularly in countries that lack sufficient secondary school access and where schools tend to be further away from where students live (Motala et al., 2009).

Figure 27

**Relational Trust
Decreases as
Children move
Through School**



When asked their level of involvement in their child's education, families' reported involvement decreased as their child's grade level increased, with families of secondary school students reporting a lower level of involvement than families of younger children. As mentioned in the barriers section, older students are often an entry point into building trust with families. As noted by a school principal in a rural school in the United States (Pennsylvania), who initially participated in the phase one Playbook research,¹¹ it is important for educators to authentically engage with students on a daily basis to understand their ideas and aspirations for family engagement. If students build trust with educators, then parents/caregivers get on board and start to trust educators as well (personal communication, April 14, 2023).

Relational trust was fairly consistent across educators' demographics, with no significant differences by gender. Educators that taught middle and secondary grades reported on average lower relational trust with families (2.84 out of 4 for $n = 792$) across the scale than did educators of children in younger grades (2.91 out of 4 for $n = 388$). While this difference was modest, it was significant, at a confidence interval of 90%. Educators of older children scored *respect* and *culture of listening* the highest (3.14 out of 4) and *care* the lowest (2.65 out of 4). As educators of older students tended to teach more students and have less individual contact with each student and their families, this was not surprising

¹¹ This educator is part of the Parents as Allies network of schools in southwestern Pennsylvania, managed by Kidsburgh. CUE conducted research with Parents as Allies as part of the first phase of this CST research.

(Roorda et al., 2019). However, as middle- and secondary-school-aged students go through rapid physiological and psychological changes with puberty and brain development, while simultaneously developing their sense of self-identity and autonomy, parental/caregiver involvement and support continue to be important (Erikson, 1968; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Wang et al., 2014).

Although relational trust scores did not vary among families based on gender, disability, or socioeconomic status of a child, the relational trust between students and educators did vary by the following demographics. Female students reported significantly higher relational trust with educators than did male students (3.07 out of 4 for $n = 1,445$ vs. 2.95 out of 4 for $n = 1,110$, respectively). Students with disabilities, although their sample was small ($n = 136$), also reported a lower level of trust with educators than did students without disabilities ($n = 3,185$) (2.84 out of 4 vs. 3.04 out of 4, respectively). Students that identified with a lower socioeconomic status also reported a significantly lower level of trust with educators (2.99 out of 4 for $n = 1,140$) than did students of higher socioeconomic statuses (3.07 out of 4 for $n = 2,189$).



TAKEAWAY: Trust varied by families' levels of education.

Relational trust also varied significantly based on families' levels of education. Parents/caregivers with lower levels of education (primary level or less) reported significantly greater relational trust with educators (3.26 out of 4 for $n = 1,311$) than those with higher levels of education (secondary school or above) (3.22 out of 4 for $n = 2,814$). While this may seem counterintuitive, this is likely because parents/caregivers who have had less access to education rely more on educators to support their children. In this sample, the majority of families (51% from the full 10 countries and 40% from the subset of 7 countries) had a primary education or less, which was notably lower than the average level of education of families in the Playbook research. Also, in many countries, teachers hold a very revered role in their students' development and in society and are trusted as experts in education. As a parent of a pre-primary student in South Africa noted, "Teachers are trained to look after the kids. I trust them because they are trained for this, and [they] can pick up when something is wrong with the child." This sentiment was echoed among families in Kenya, Sierra Leone, Tanzania (Zanzibar), and Uganda as well, who explained that because they had limited education levels, they relied on the educators to determine the best pedagogical approaches and curricula, and ultimately to help implement the purpose of school that most supported their child to succeed in life.



TAKEAWAY: Trust varied by country, and it was influenced by communication and interactions between families, students, and educators and other structural and situational factors.

One of the notable findings was that the culture of trust, and beliefs on what should be expected between families and educators, varied greatly by country. These beliefs were often rooted in the history of schooling and how education institutions were established and spread through colonial legacies as well as through present global and national events (Qargha & Morris, 2023). As captured in a conversation in Kenya, a parent/caregiver said, “Parents trust teachers because teachers are educated and well trained.” This sentiment that teachers are experts was woven throughout conversations in Kenya, South Africa, and Tanzania (Zanzibar), Uganda.

A full breakdown of families’, educators’, and students’ ratings on the relational trust scale elements is listed in Table 10.

Table 10: Relational Trust Scale Ratings by Element and Country

Element	Country	Rating		
		Families	Educators	Students
Shared Vision	Bangladesh	3.10	2.91	3.19
	Colombia	3.18	3.02	2.86
	Kazakhstan	2.86	2.92	2.61
	Kenya	3.45	2.82	n/a
	South Africa	3.33	3.29	n/a
	Uganda	3.07	2.92	n/a
	US (California)	3.19	2.97	3.06
Respect and Culture of Listening	Bangladesh	3.15	3.07	3.30
	Colombia	3.18	3.15	3.00
	Kazakhstan	2.89	3.13	2.64
	Kenya	3.48	2.98	n/a
	South Africa	3.50	3.38	n/a
	Uganda	3.15	3.12	n/a
	US (California)	3.25	3.29	3.19

Element	Country	Rating		
		Families	Educators	Students
Care	Bangladesh	2.63	2.88	3.18
	Colombia	3.13	2.55	2.62
	Kazakhstan	2.85	2.68	2.32
	Kenya	3.49	2.70	n/a
	South Africa	3.57	3.46	n/a
	Uganda	3.05	2.83	n/a
	US (California)	3.22	2.88	3.10
Competence ^a	Bangladesh	3.13		3.11
	Colombia	3.29		3.09
	Kazakhstan	2.88		2.72
	Kenya	3.24		n/a
	South Africa	3.53		n/a
	Uganda	3.22		n/a
	US (California)	3.15		3.10
Integrity	Bangladesh	3.17	2.67	3.28
	Colombia	3.11	2.70	2.83
	Kazakhstan	2.96	2.76	2.76
	Kenya	3.39	2.75	n/a
	South Africa	3.52	3.21	n/a
	Uganda	3.05	2.59	n/a
	US (California)	3.23	2.58	3.06
Interactions	Bangladesh	3.20	2.66	3.12
	Colombia	3.30	2.73	3.07
	Kazakhstan	2.80	2.64	2.84
	Kenya	3.54	2.73	n/a
	South Africa	3.52	3.34	n/a
	Uganda	3.38	2.84	n/a
	US (California)	3.24	2.24	2.99
Total Scale	Bangladesh	3.07 (n = 501)	2.84 (n = 196)	3.23 (n = 764)
	Colombia	3.23 (n = 1,067)	2.86 (n = 511)	2.93 (n = 1,736)
	Kazakhstan	2.89 (n = 228)	2.83 (n = 85)	2.64 (n = 112)
	Kenya	3.45 (n = 642)	2.76 (n = 54)	n/a
	South Africa	3.49 (n = 463)	3.33 (n = 68)	n/a
	Uganda	3.16 (n = 1,091)	2.86 (n = 188)	n/a
	US (California)	3.27 (n = 166)	2.79 (n = 78)	3.11 (n = 859)

^a In this phase of the research, educators were not asked about their perceived competence of their students' families but instead about their own beliefs regarding their school. As such, educators' responses were not directly comparable to what was asked of families and students for this element.

Families in Hungary also talked about relational trust being a systemic issue—meaning there was low historical precedence of family, school, and community engagement, especially with the vocational schools where this research took place. In surveys with 66 families in Hungary, the average trust scale rating of families toward educators was 2.88 out of 4, which was notably lower than the 3.06 out of 4 that 40 educators reported regarding families of their students. According to one parent/caregiver, “School hasn’t changed much since my school time, you have to survive it to have a paper that makes it possible for you to start learning your trade. Nobody was interested in my opinion as a student or as a parent.”

Across countries, educators commonly cited the challenges they experienced in fulfilling their roles, including low pay, lack of sufficient classroom resources, and minimal mental health supports, as impacting both their morale and their level of trust with families. According to educators, trust was also impacted by whether families carried through with commitments. A few pre-primary educators in South Africa noted that parents/caregivers did not always carry through with their commitments, which led to distrust and often a blame-game dynamic. In Uganda, educators also tended to blame families for lack of integrity and noted that they often make financial and other asks of parents/caregivers that are largely met with frustration by families or ignored—which can lead to educators questioning the integrity of families. While educators often recognized that lack of integrity—not following words through with actions—was due to poverty and family circumstances, the consequence was still diminished trust. More research on how to support educators’ trust with families is needed, not only to support efforts to retain teachers and ensure their well-being, but also to ensure that educators can support students and families to thrive.

According to conversations, communication was the main factor that impacted levels of relational trust between families and schools. Across all countries, families, educators, and students alike blamed low trust on poor communication between educators and families. “We don’t have a relationship with teachers, how could there be trust?” asked a parent in Hungary. Although in many countries, erosion of trust between families and educators was in part blamed on the COVID-19 pandemic and other political debates (Stelmach, 2020; Winthrop, 2023; Woo & Diliberti, 2023), this research suggests that erosion of trust due to COVID-19 was not a universal trend. Political debates, however, as noted by CST teams in Brazil, England, Hungary, and the United States (California), were impacting levels of relational trust. For example, recent teacher strikes in Hungary were said to have eroded trust with families. While some families and students were in support of these strikes, others were frustrated by it, as they perceived that educators were prioritizing their activism over student learning, and there was little communication and transparency from educators and schools regarding disruptions to learning on any given day.

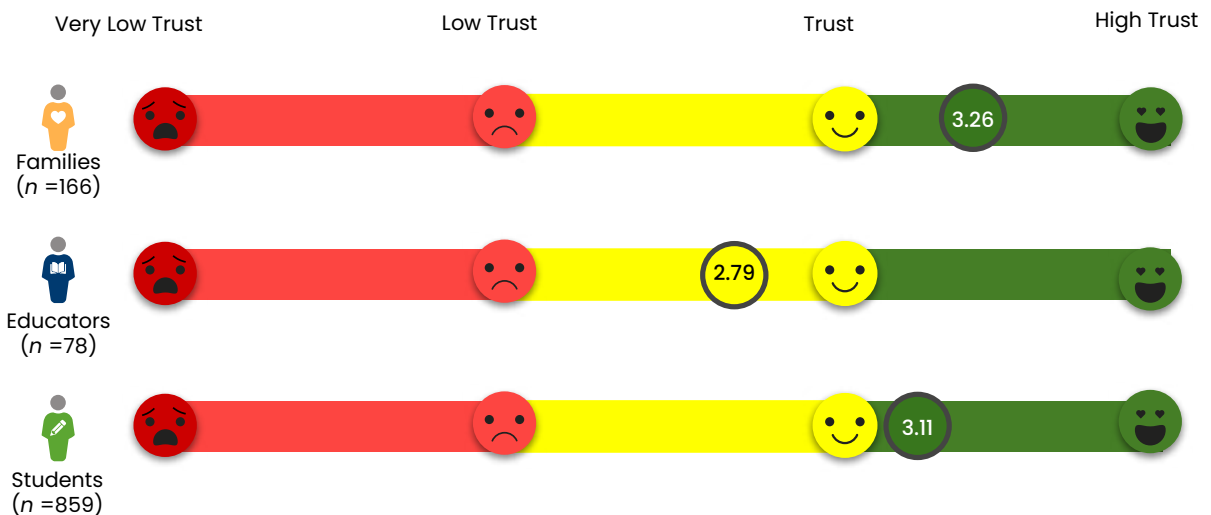
Similar debates on teacher strikes have erupted in the United States, such as those in the states of Portland and California in 2023, where low relational trust with education leaders and policymakers played into the morale and demands of teachers (Will, 2023). How relational trust changes across time and varies by country is another area of much-needed research going forward.

Country Snapshot on Relational Trust

In research conducted by Community Schools Learning Exchange with eight schools in the United States (California), families and students reported high levels of trust with educators. Of the six elements of relational trust measured, families and students scored *respect* and *culture of listening* the highest (3.25 and 3.19, respectively, out of 4.0). *Care* and *competence* were also rated highly by families and students. As one parent/caregiver in California noted, “We know that all the teachers at [the school] care about our kids. They want what is best for our kids.”

On the other hand, educators reported lower levels of trust with families. Of the seven elements, educators scored *respect* and *culture of listening* the highest (on average, 3.29 out of 4) and *interactions* and *integrity* the lowest (2.24 and 2.58, respectively, out of 4.0). One educator explained why they rated families’ interactions lower. They said, “Overall I know that the parents express a high desire for their children’s education, but I do not feel they follow that up with actual support or participation.” Another educator also reported that families do not always keep the commitments or promises they make, saying, “Many parents attend meetings for their children, however, follow through at home is rare.”

Figure 28 Relational Trust Scale Across Participant Groups in the United States (California) ($n = 8$ schools)



Conversations in California further highlighted the importance of communication and interactions among families, students, and educators in fostering relational trust. As described by the CST team in the United States (California), much of the communication initiated by educators with families tended to be one-way, primarily seeking feedback from families without opportunities for meaningful two-way dialogue and robust collaboration. This lack of meaningful engagement poses a barrier to developing stronger trust with families as educators do not have many opportunities to learn about families' diverse backgrounds and experiences.

Conversely, families reported close contact with office staff, including family liaisons, who had a similar demographic background and that spoke Spanish. These shared experiences between school staff and families significantly contributed to the high levels of trust observed. One parent/caregiver noted, "For the most part, we feel very comfortable communicating with the office staff because we know they are here to help us."



SUMMARY

In summary, families and students across countries on average expressed a higher level of trust with educators than educators expressed with families. The reasons cited during conversations were often structural challenges at the global and national level (macro), across school districts or school types (meso), and within school communities (micro). Across countries, lack of compensation and public support of the teaching profession impacted trust among educators. This national and global sentiment trickled down into the meso and micro levels, where families and students had many preconceived expectations and judgments regarding the role of educators in society.

Trust also seemed to depend on the history and reputation of the schools and districts, and the power dynamics at play in education systems. For example, vocational secondary schools in Hungary—as in other parts of the world—were designated as a track for students not eligible for university. This led to stigmatization that the schools were of lower quality and, in consequence, impacted morale, motivation, and communication among educators, students, and their families. In many countries, including Bangladesh, Brazil, Colombia, Kenya, the Netherlands, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania (Zanzibar), and Uganda, educators were said to hold an esteemed role in society and were considered highly competent experts on teaching and learning—and, as such, were highly trusted. This was not the case in Kazakhstan, the United Kingdom (England), and the United States (California), where educators felt they were publicly under attack and that their expertise was challenged.

At the school district level (meso) and school and classroom levels (micro), poor communication and lack of meaningful interactions between families and schools were named as the main contributors to low trust. In some schools, teachers were not allowed to communicate with families, which, consequently, negatively affected trust levels. For example, among private early childhood centers in South Africa, the level of trust depended on the director of the school and their policies on staff communication with the families. At the micro level, families, educators, and students said levels of communication between educators and students and their families depended on a combination of factors, including the class size, technology access among families, fluency in the language of instruction, levels of education of parents/caregivers, as well as the educators' comfort with being in contact with families.

Relational trust was also related to the education level and age of students, as educators of older students tended to have fewer interactions with families because they had larger class sizes and students were more independent. More research needs to be done to examine how relational trust varies across grade levels and types of schools, with a special emphasis on schools in economically and socially marginalized communities. Understanding promising practices and strategies of engagement in these schools is critically needed. A few of these promising practices and strategies are highlighted in Box 7. Researching strategies to build greater relational trust will be a focus of CUE's future efforts.

Box 7: Promising Practices and Strategies for Building Stronger Partnerships

During the conversations, families, educators, and students identified a variety of strategies to strengthen family, school, and community engagement—the majority being efforts to strengthen communication. However, the strategies proposed in many conversations reinforced one-way communication with families and telling or training parents/caregivers how to engage with schools. In many countries, educators and families in conversations recommended creating more events where they had opportunities to interact with each other. In a few countries, structural barriers—such as lack of transportation to schools for meetings—were addressed.

While these strategies were intended to build communication and interactions, according to the research, they also have the potential to reproduce barriers to family, school, and community engagement; creating more events to engage families demands more time of families who are already stretched thin (Mapp et al., 2022). What is needed are strategies that build two-way communication between families and schools and that create opportunities to understand each other's perspectives and challenges to engagement—and thus work to build both coherence (shared vision) and cohesion (relational trust and sense of community).

As an outcome of this research, CUE will expand the [Strategy Finder](#) and add more strategies aimed at building coherence and cohesion between families and communities. This includes intentional strategies for building relational trust. A few existing strategies in the current Strategy Finder are described below (Winthrop et al., 2021a).

1. **Home visits:** A strategy used across the world where educators visit families in their homes to foster communication, relationships, and collaboration. These visits allow educators to experience the home contexts and cultures of their students and to engage outside of schools in a space comfortable for families and students.
2. **Family-school coffee mornings and listening circles:** Informal opportunities for families and educators to meet over coffee or in a circle dialogue, where educators have the chance to listen to families and build trust.
3. **Parent/caregiver engagement volunteers:** Using parent/caregiver champions to meet with other families about schooling. As intermediaries between schools and families, these parent/caregiver champions help foster stronger relationships and trust.
4. **Poverty empathy simulations:** A strategy to help educators and school leaders understand the experiences of families living in poverty and the challenges they face in engaging with schools. This strategy is meant to help educators create stronger and more trusting relationships with those families.

The Strategy Finder will be updated on an ongoing basis and will prioritize strategies for engaging diverse families and communities.



Global Lesson 5

Make Family, School, and Community Engagement a Must

Many education systems frameworks envision a limited partnership role for families. Consistent and sustainable funding of family, school, and community engagement activities is critical for building strong partnerships.

Thirty-three total education frameworks across 13 of the 16 countries were examined using a document analysis to map how the respective governments envisioned the roles and responsibilities of families and communities in their schools and education systems. The education frameworks analyzed included national education acts/laws, policies, programs/sector plans, and curricula guidelines.¹²

Analyses captured what roles were assigned to families across five categories, as laid out in Box 8. Analyses also focused on how detailed the actual roles and responsibilities were in the education frameworks and whether there were clear strategies for operationalizing their roles. In addition to informing this finding, analyses were used for country-specific policy and research briefs co-authored with the collaborating CST teams and organizations.

12 Legal frameworks included national laws and acts typically approved by a legislative body and that govern education systems. Education policies lay out the goals of education systems, the values that govern them, and the major components needed to achieve those goals (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009; Robertson, 2018). Education sector plans are how policies are implemented and include the accompanying national and/or regional objectives and strategies, as well as how progress and outcomes are to be measured (UNESCO, 2015). Strategies or strategic plans are similar in nature to sector plans but are usually more focused on a specific component of the sector, such as early childhood, primary, secondary, or vocational education. Curriculum frameworks are the teaching and learning standards and the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and practices that students will demonstrate at each stage of the system; these frameworks include pedagogical and assessment approaches and practices (UNESCO, 2017).

Box 8: Roles and Responsibilities of Families and Communities in Education Frameworks

Across the various frameworks, the roles and responsibilities of families and communities in education systems fell under five general categories. These categories were derived inductively during the document analysis process and were shaped by existing literature on how policies and programs engage families (Epstein et al., 2018; Mapp et al., 2022). The five categories are organized by the frequency with which they appeared across the different education frameworks.

1. **Implementing policies and practices:** Utilizes families to implement education policies and frameworks, and/or to promote decentralization of education systems. This includes enlisting families in supporting learning at home, enhancing communication with teachers and school leaders, and encouraging active participation and volunteerism in school events and activities.
2. **Decision making and leadership:** Involves families in school decisions and governance bodies through various committees, associations, and boards, and/or in accountability and advocacy efforts.
3. **Being informed:** Ensures families and communities are aware of key education policies, practices, responsibilities, and rights, such as the right of all children to a quality education and healthy nutrition at home.
4. **Providing resources:** Designates parents/caregivers as contributors of financial and in-kind materials and services to schools. This includes any financial or in-kind contributions to teaching, learning, infrastructure, supplies and equipment, management, and other critical areas.
5. **Shifting mindsets:** Mobilizes families, schools, and community to work together to promote inclusion and reduce stigma and norms prohibiting marginalized children and families from participating in schools. Shifting mindsets also includes intentional efforts to promote positive attitudes and beliefs about family, school, and community partnerships.

Missing from this list are a few other critical roles named in policy-focused research. This includes advocacy, or families' and communities' efforts to ensure their children's needs are heard and addressed at school and systems levels, such as by taking a stance on critical issues like budgets or policy decisions (Epstein et al., 2018). Advocacy appeared in only one of the analyzed education frameworks, the Kenyan *Guidelines on Parental Empowerment and Engagement* (2019b), which included advocacy as a strategy to foster greater family engagement in education and encompassed activities such as establishing a school advocacy committee and providing its members training on lobbying strategies (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, 2019b). Consultation is another role and responsibility, which is often linked to *decision making and leadership*—such as weighing in on school policies—but also can include reviewing and providing feedback on education systems decisions and changes through surveys, focus group discussions, and other approaches. Consultation could also include co-design and co-creation of school policies, practices, and strategies.



TAKEAWAY: While national education policies and frameworks often mentioned families and communities as part of their ecosystems, few frameworks laid out a comprehensive vision of family, school, and community engagement.

A detailed analysis of the specific roles and responsibilities envisioned for families and communities in the 33 frameworks are identified in Table 11. In several countries' frameworks, namely those of Bangladesh, India, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Tanzania (Zanzibar), and Uganda, roles and responsibilities spanned all five categories. The most frequently cited roles and responsibilities for families and communities were *implementing policies and practices and decision making and leadership*, which were present in roughly four out of five (80%) of the frameworks. The least prevalent was *shifting mindsets*, which appeared in only two out of five (42%) of the frameworks. *Being informed* was present in a little over half (64%) of the frameworks and *providing resources* in a little less than half (45%) of the frameworks.

Countries varied in the roles and responsibilities designated to families and communities. For example, frameworks in Australia, Colombia, and Kazakhstan positioned families and communities in roles of *implementing policies and practices, decision making and leadership, and being informed*, yet each country had different examples and strategies under each category. In Kazakhstan, families' roles under *implementing policies and practices* included ensuring their children were enrolled in and attending school, as well as providing safe and healthy environments at home (Ministry of Justice, Government of Kazakhstan, 2007). In Colombia, families were expected to participate in *implementing policies and practices* by attending school discussions and events, and by teaching citizenship skills to children at home (Government of Colombia, 2013).

Table 11 presents a picture of how differently countries envisioned families' and communities' roles in education systems, but also highlights the commonalities in their approaches. A detailed analysis, broken down by each of the different categories of roles and responsibilities, directly follows the table.

Table 11: Families' and Communities' Roles and Responsibilities in Education Frameworks

Country	Title	Type	Implementing	Decision making	Being informed	Providing resources	Shifting mindsets
Australia	Education and Care Services National Law Act (2011)	Legal					
	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy (2015)	Strategy					
	National Quality Framework (2012)	Guidelines					
Bangladesh	National Education Policy (2010)	Policy					
	Education Sector Plan (2020-2025) (2020)	Sector Plan					
Brazil	Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional [National Education Guidelines and Bases Law] (1996)	Legal					
	Plano Nacional de Educação [National Education Plan] (2014)	Sector Plan					
	Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais da Educação Básica [National Curriculum Guidelines] (2013)	Curriculum Framework					
Colombia	Decreto (2022)	Legal					
	Ley [National Education Act] 1620 (2013)	Legal					
Hungary	Törvény a Nemzeti Köznevelésről [National Public Education Law] (2011)	Legal					
	Köznevelés-fejlesztési Stratégia [School Education Development Strategy] (2021-2030) (2014)	Strategy					
India	National Education Policy (2020)	Policy					
	Samagra Shiksha: Integrated Scheme for School Education (2022a)	Sector Plan					
	National Curriculum Framework for School Education (2023)	Curriculum Framework					
Kazakhstan	Об образовании [On Education] (2007)	Legal					

Country	Title	Type	Implementing	Decision making	Being informed	Providing resources	Shifting mindsets
Kenya	National Education Sector Strategic Plan (2018-2022) (2019)	Sector Plan					
	Competency Based Curriculum: Guidelines on Parental Empowerment and Engagement (2019b)	Curriculum Framework					
Netherlands	Leerplichtwet [Compulsory Education Law] (1969)	Legal					
	Wet medezeggenschap op scholen [Participation in Schools Act] (2007)	Legal					
	Wet op het primair onderwijs [Primary Education Act] (1998)	Legal					
Sierra Leone	The Basic and Senior Secondary Education Act (2023)	Legal					
	Comprehensive School Safety Policy (2023b)	Policy					
	National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools (2021)	Policy					
	Education Sector Plan of 2022-2026 (2020)	Sector Plan					
South Africa	National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (2015)	Policy					
	Action Plan to 2024: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2030 (2020)	Strategy					
	Rights and Responsibilities of Parents, Learners and Public Schools: Public School Policy Guide (2006)	Guidelines					
Tanzania (Zanzibar)	Zanzibar Education Policy (2006)	Policy					
	The Zanzibar Education Development Plan II (2017)	Sector Plan					
Uganda	The Education Act (2008)	Legal					
	Gender in Education Sector Policy (2016)	Policy					
	Education and Sports Sector Strategic Plan (2017)	Sector Plan					

Note. There were 11 legal frameworks, 7 policy documents, 7 sector plans, 3 strategy documents, 3 curriculum frameworks, and 2 guidelines analyzed with a total of 33 frameworks.

Implementing Policies and Practices

Across all of the 13 countries' respective frameworks, the most frequently cited role and responsibility of families was in *implementing policies and practices*. *Implementing policies and practices* meant a few different things depending on the context. One key role was *supporting learning at home*, including providing a safe and conducive home environment, homework support, engaging children in stimulating activities, and monitoring progress (Epstein et. al 2018). For example, in Brazil's *Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais da Educação Básica (National Curriculum Guidelines)* (2013), schools and educators were expected to support families in *supporting learning at home* and to complement the learning of pre-primary and primary school students, albeit no specific examples were provided (Ministério de Educação Nacional, 2013). Similarly, Bangladesh's Education Sector Plan (2020-2025) emphasized how parents/caregivers will receive "assurance and support" in their efforts to engage their children "in learning activities at home" (Ministry of Education, Government of Bangladesh, 2020, p. 108). However, Bangladesh's plan provided little in-depth information as to how families should be *supporting learning at home*. Kenya's *Competency Based Curriculum: Guidelines on Parental Empowerment and Engagement* (2019b), provided more detail on *supporting learning at home*. For example, the school leadership is responsible for providing information to families on "how to get information from a report card, how to help with homework, how to monitor schoolwork (for example by asking what they learned at school, what they like in school and other related questions)" (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, 2019b, pp. 12-13).

In a number of the countries' frameworks, the families' role in *supporting learning at home* went beyond academic learning; families were given responsibility for civic learning and supporting emotional and spiritual development. For example, in Colombia's *Ley 1620 (National Education Act)* (2013), parents/caregivers were tasked in part with developing children's citizenship skills (Government of Colombia, 2013). Families in Kenya and Uganda were encouraged to teach morals and values at home, to take children to places of worship, and to nurture the cultural and spiritual growth of children (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, 2019b; Ministry of Education and Sports, Government of Uganda, 2016).

Another example of activities under *implementing policies and practices* was attending school planning and celebrations. These are examples of *building communities*, one of the six types of family involvement (Epstein et al., 2018). In Colombia's *Decreto (Decree)* (2022), schools enlisted families to attend and participate in school activities (Government of Colombia, 2022). India's *National Curriculum Framework for School Education* (2013) recommended that schools engage families in school celebrations and cultural events. It stated that schools should "engage them [parents/caregivers] actively in such events rather than keeping them as mere audiences/spectators" (National Council of Educational Research and Training, Government of India, 2023, p. 538). Attending parent-

teacher meetings to share updates on students' learning needs was also a designated role of families across most frameworks. For example, according to Hungary's *Törvény a Nemzeti Köznevelésről (National Public Education Law)* (2011), schools have the responsibility of holding parent/caregiver and teacher meetings as well as managing direct channels of communication between schools and families (Government of Hungary, 2011).

Finally, encouraging parent/caregiver involvement through *volunteering* in schools was also named in educational frameworks in India, Kenya, Sierra Leone, and beyond. In Kenya, the *Competency Based Curriculum: Guidelines on Parental Empowerment and Engagement* (2019b) included strategies to encouraged parents/caregivers to volunteer their services and time at schools (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, 2019b). In Sierra Leone, the *National Policy for Radical Inclusions in Schools* (2021) recommended developing parent/caregiver volunteering programming and highlighted the important roles parent volunteers play as community champions in promoting inclusive schools (Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, Government of Sierra Leone, 2021).

In summary, aiding in the *implementing policies and practices* was the most common role ascribed to families across education frameworks. While it is important to recognize families' roles and responsibilities in *supporting learning at home, communicating with teachers and school staff, and volunteering*, only a few frameworks like Kenya's provided clear details on how to operationalize families' role in *implementing policies and practices*.

Decision Making and Leadership

In the educational frameworks across all 13 countries, the importance of engaging families in decision making, school leadership, accountability, and governance structures was named. Each country had at least one educational framework with a mandate for including family representatives on their respective school committees, associations, and boards. Decision making entities in schools had different names depending on the country and school level, but some examples were as follows:

- **School Management Committees:** Bangladesh, India, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Tanzania (Zanzibar), and Uganda
- **Parent Committees or Councils** (term varied across schools): Australia, Brazil, Colombia, Hungary, Kazakhstan
- **Parent Teacher Associations or Organizations:** Bangladesh, Sierra Leone
- **Participation Council:** the Netherlands
- **School Governing Council or Body:** Australia, South Africa

Across all 13 countries, the main role of parent-teacher decision-making entities in schools (i.e., school management committees, parent committees, parent-teacher

associations) was to weigh in on school policy decisions and plans as well as finances, although there were nuances in the exact mandates between countries. In India's *Samagra Shiksha: Integrated Scheme for School Education* (2022), which is equivalent to an education strategy, school management committees were responsible for creating School Development Plans in collaboration with community members and civil society organizations (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2022a). The School Development Plan is described as a "comprehensive plan focusing on all aspects of school e.g., protection of children's rights, infrastructure, teacher availability, classroom transaction and child assessments, inclusiveness, etc." (Government of India, 2009, p. 13). The Netherlands' *Wet Medezeggenschap op Scholen (Participation in School Act)* (2007), tasked families with helping manage school funds, oversee afterschool care provision, and develop school policies and regulations (Government of the Netherlands, 2006).

Sometimes parent/caregiver entities and representatives were tasked with contributing to curriculum and pedagogical decisions and plans in school. For example, in Brazil's *Plano Nacional de Educação (National Education Plan)* (2014), families were important members of the school democratic management body, *gestão democrática*, and helped co-create the Political-Pedagogical Plan, or *Projeto Político-Pedagógico*, which details the schools' pedagogical objectives and its teaching and learning plan (Ministério da Educação Nacional, Government of Brazil, 2014). In some education frameworks, families were charged with assessing the quality of teaching and learning in schools. For example, in Kenya's *National Education Sector Strategic Plan* (2018-2022), parent associations and boards of management conducted internal quality assurance checks of schools (Ministry of Education, Government of Kenya, 2019).

To ensure that marginalized communities were represented on these committees, associations, and boards, quotas and other inclusion and equity efforts were often made. For example, in Tanzania (Zanzibar), school management committees were expected to meet a gender quota. Similarly, in India, the national Government has mandated that three-fourths of school management committees' members must be families, and half of the members must be female (Government of India, 2009). However, while education frameworks across all countries designated families as critical to *decision making and leadership*, reflecting democratic participation ideals, the actual role and agency of parents/caregivers in these committees, associations, and boards varied greatly and was often more symbolic than effectual (Chugh, 2021). Conversations revealed that there were many politics of representation involved in deciding who served on parent associations and committees. There was a sentiment across conversations in all the countries that parent/caregiver representatives on these parent associations rarely represented families of marginalized groups. Another critique was that parent/caregiver representation on these parent associations was more often an accountability mechanism than

an intentional effort to ensure families' voices were reflected in school policies. There is more to be done to position families as partners in decision making and to ensure their role is meaningful and not solely symbolic.

Being Informed

Across the 33 educational frameworks, the third most common designated role and responsibility of families was in *being informed* about current policies, practices, curricula, and other frameworks. This included ensuring families and communities were aware of their rights on education as stipulated in existing national laws/acts, policies, and plans. *Being informed* about national laws and policies is directly linked to human rights frameworks like the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child* (1989), which recognized basic education as a fundamental right of every child and helped ensure all young people have an equal opportunity to participate in school (United Nations, 1989). One of the assumptions across education frameworks was that the more informed families were about their rights, the more agency and responsibility families would have in supporting their children's learning and accessing educational services. For example, in South Africa's *National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy* (2015), the government committed to "[providing] families with information enabling them to access services that promote the well-being of children, and the realization of their full potential" (Department of Social Development, Government of the Republic of South Africa, 2015, p. 37).

Presumably, families who were familiar with their children's rights could confidently advocate for their children, especially those from marginalized groups who often struggle to get the educational resources they need. This includes children with disabilities; children from language, religious, and ethnic minorities; parent students (young mothers); and children from displaced and refugee communities. In Sierra Leone's *National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools* (2021), efforts to help families of parent learners (students who are pregnant or have children) and children with disabilities understand their rights to education were clearly laid out. Information on families' rights to appeal to the local council or the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) should they experience discrimination was also provided (MBSSE, Government of Sierra Leone, 2021, p. 52). Similarly, Uganda's *Gender in Education Sector Policy* (2016) aimed to ensure communities and families understood the importance of girls' education and the rights of girls in obtaining an equal education (Ministry of Education and Sports, Government of Uganda, 2017). In Colombia's *Decreto (Decree)* (2022), families were to attend an annual meeting to learn more about the prevention of sexual violence against children (Government of Colombia, 2022).

Another aspect of *being informed* is ensuring that families understand the specific policies of their children's schools. This often entails sharing clear information about the school's mission and objectives, safety and absenteeism

policies, and expectations of families for *providing resources*, such as supplies and uniforms. The level of detail on how families should be informed varied by the educational framework, as did the level of responsibility schools had in disseminating information about school policies. For example, the Netherlands' *Wet op het primair onderwijs (Primary Education Act)* (1998), provided notable information for families on safety and absenteeism policies and mandated schools to keep families abreast of policy changes (Government of the Netherlands, 1998). In Hungary and Kazakhstan, national policies clearly indicated that schools must communicate what kinds of textbooks, uniforms, and other education-related expenses were required from families, so that they would know at the start of the school year their expected financial contributions (Emberi Erőforrások Minisztere, Government of Hungary, 2014; Ministry of Justice, Government of Kazakhstan, 2007).

A few frameworks went as far as to mandate that schools provide information and resources on community services to support the well-being of families and students. For example, in Australia, the *National Quality Framework* (2012) tasked schools with providing "relevant community services and resources to support parenting and family wellbeing" (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2012). Similarly, South Africa's *National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy* (2015) stated that "parents and other primary caregivers must have access to and receive the information, support and services necessary to enable them to fulfill their responsibilities" (Department of Social Development, Government of the Republic of South Africa, 2015, p. 22).

An emphasis on mobilizing and sensitizing families and communities on the importance of early childhood education was highlighted in some policies. India's *Samagra Shiksha: Integrated Scheme for School Education* (2022) devoted a whole section on community mobilization and sensitization activities, including helping families understand the importance of early childhood education through workshops and trainings, media and public engagement campaigns, and other efforts (Ministry of Education, Government of India 2022a). Similarly, in Tanzania (Zanzibar), the *Education Development Plan II* (2017) included a multi-year campaign strategy for increasing awareness on universal pre-primary education and community mobilization of families (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar, 2017). According to the various education frameworks, parents/caregivers and schools play an important role in mutually ensuring that all families are informed of their educational rights and that all children are participating in school.

Providing Resources

A clear expectation that families should be *providing resources* for their children's education was noted in education frameworks for roughly two-thirds of the countries, but depth and details on what this entailed was only provided in roughly half of the countries. *Providing resources* largely includes financial

contributions that can be made through direct payments for school fees or indirect expenditures on textbooks, uniforms, food, and school supplies. Other types of donations and services, such as helping with school construction efforts or donating professional services, are also forms of *providing resources*. Families' roles and responsibilities in providing resources were cited in educational frameworks in nine countries. References to *providing resources* were not noted in educational frameworks in Australia, Brazil, Colombia, and Hungary, albeit *providing resources* may have been indirectly folded under other roles and responsibilities. In Hungary, requesting resources from families was not allowed (Government of Hungary, 2011).

Across all countries in this study, primary education was free in government schools, thus material contributions were not supposed to include direct school fees; however, families still spent resources on other school-related costs. In some countries, such as Sierra Leone, efforts were made to limit or abolish additional costs like uniforms, textbooks, examination fees, etc. (MBSSE, 2021). In countries where pre-primary and secondary education were not universal and free, families often had the additional role and responsibility of covering fees and tuition. For example, 94% of secondary school education in Bangladesh is privately administered (World Bank, 2017), including a combination of tuition-based schools and those operated by non-governmental organizations, and therefore a large role of families in this system is paying for expenses. Pre-primary education was also costly for families in a number of countries, such as Uganda (Government of Uganda, 2008; Ministry of Education and Sports, Government of Uganda, 2016).

This expectation that families provide resources to their schools was discussed in nearly all conversations, and there was a general frustration across families and students that governments and schools relied too much on families to cover the shortfalls in education funding. As discussed in the next section, it is important to identify in education frameworks activities for building strong partnerships with families and designate sufficient financial resources. When there are insufficient financial resources, parents/caregivers often end up being asked to contribute to schools beyond their roles, responsibilities, and economic means, which can serve as a barrier to building stronger partnerships.

Shifting Mindsets

Strategies related to *shifting mindsets* were visible in educational frameworks from eight out of the 13 countries: Bangladesh, Brazil, Hungary, India, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Tanzania (Zanzibar), and Uganda. According to the education frameworks, *shifting mindset* meant that families participated in community sensitization efforts aimed at ensuring marginalized groups were enrolled in school. These sensitization efforts focused on helping families and communities understand children's rights to education and on supporting families in enrolling their children. Community sensitization efforts often targeted girls (Kenya,

Uganda), pregnant and parent learners (Sierra Leone), children with disabilities (Hungary, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Uganda), and children living in rural communities (Sierra Leone) (Government of Hungary, 2011; Ministry of Education, Government of Kenya, 2019; Ministry of Education and Sports, Government of Uganda, 2016; Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, Government of Sierra Leone, 2021; 2023b).

In a few cases, shifting families' and educators' mindsets about family, school, and community engagement was cited. The most notable was in Kenya's *Competency Based Curriculum: Guidelines on Parental Empowerment and Engagement* (2019b), which highlighted the "need for teacher-parent partnerships" and the "critical role of parents in supporting the achievement of learning outcomes" (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, 2019b, p. 8).



TAKEAWAY: Family, school, and community activities and partnerships were not consistently and sustainably funded in a way that is easy to analyze and monitor.

One of the points that resonated across the CST teams was the lack of earmarked and consistent funding for building family, school, and community engagement activities and partnerships. Conversations revealed that most schools and communities did not have clearly allocated funds for family, school, and community engagement in their budgets. Sometimes such funding was rolled into budgets for other activities, such as professional development and communications, but was not its own budget line item that could be used to implement strategies that emerged during the research process. This prevented schools from developing clear activities and being able to monitor and evaluate their efforts. When funding was present, it was often ad hoc, varying across years depending on the level of priority assigned by governments and donors. Sometimes there were specific funds for family, school, and community engagement under a larger school or district grant, but these funds had to be used for specific activities prescribed by the education frameworks and did not always give schools the freedom to allocate available resources as they saw fit.

Country Snapshot on Funding of Family, School, and Community Engagement

In order to better understand what funds are allocated to family, school, and community engagement and how activities are budgeted in practice, a budget analysis in Table 12 looks at Maharashtra India as an example. This analysis examines how the Government of India envisioned family, school, and community engagement in its national education strategy, *Samagra Shiksha*:

Integrated Scheme for School Education (2022), relative to how it budgeted activities in the state budget of Maharashtra. Maharashtra was one of the two states in which the CST research was conducted by the Leadership for Equity team. Although it is a limited analysis, it provides a case study of the challenges of funding family, school, and community engagement consistently and comprehensively.

The *Samagra Shiksha* covers pre-primary to secondary school. It positions families and communities as partners in the provision of education, with roles and responsibilities across five categories defined in Box 8: *implementing policies and practices, decision making and leadership, being informed, providing resources, and shifting mindsets*. In 2024, the *Samagra Shiksha* was the largest strategy implemented by the national Ministry of Education and accounted for 33% of its total budget for 2023-2024 (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2023b). The state of Maharashtra received 60% of its funds for implementing the education strategy from the national government. The remaining 40% came from the state's own funds (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2022a).

The *Samagra Shiksha* provides national guidelines for how states should allocate funds to schools for different priorities and activities, including the funds schools will receive for family, school, and community engagement. In these national guidelines, the two major activities with attached funding are community mobilization and training for school management committees. Community mobilization refers to informing families and communities of their rights to education and school-level interventions and “community sensitization, parental advocacy, and leveraging parents as a resource” (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2022a, p. 289). This falls under three areas: *implementing policies and practices, being informed, and shifting mindsets*. The second activity, school management committee training, falls under *decision making and leadership*. Each school was slated to receive Indian Rupees 1500 (USD 65.55 purchasing power parity [PPP])¹³ and Indian Rupees 3000 (USD 131.11 PPP) per school (per year) for community mobilization and school management training, respectively (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2022a). Other roles and responsibilities listed under *implementing policies and practices and decision making and leadership* have not been allocated any funding in the national guidelines. For example, the activity of training parent/caregiver volunteers under *implementing policies and practices* has no funds allocated.

13 Purchasing power parity (PPP) is the actual purchasing power in the context of India, when price levels between countries are eliminated (OECD, 2022b).

Table 12: Roles and Responsibilities for Families and Budget Guidelines in India's Education Strategy

Roles of Families and Communities	Activities Named in the Education Strategy	Budget Guidelines
Implementing Policies and Practices	Community mobilization of families and communities to participate in planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation activities at school (i.e., planning of extracurricular clubs and activities).	Indian Rupees 1 500 (USD 65.55 PPP) per school (per year) ^a
	Volunteering in schools and participating in training on how to be a volunteer.	No funds allocated
	Recruit families to lead safety and security audits of schools following guidelines (any volunteer parent/caregiver).	No funds allocated
	Preparing parents/caregivers to support learning at home, monitoring learning at home.	No funds allocated
Decision making and leadership	Recruit school management committee whose members then:	
	• Receive training by school leaders and teachers.	Indian Rupees 3 000 (USD 131.11 PPP) per school (per year)
	• Draft School Development Plans.	No funds allocated
	• Oversee infrastructure repairs, monitoring student attendance, and weighing in on other administrative decisions (school management committee members).	No funds allocated
	• Participate in safety and security audits of schools following guidelines.	Indian Rupees 50 (USD 2.19 PPP) per elementary school
Being informed	Community mobilization of families and communities to understand their rights to education and the school-level interventions mandated by education frameworks.	Indian Rupees 1 500 (USD 65.55 PPP) per school (per year) ^a
Providing resources	Encourage families and communities to donate.	n/a
Shifting mindsets	Community mobilization of families and communities to ensure children from economically and socially marginalized families are enrolled in school.	Indian Rupees 1 500 (USD 65.55 PPP) per school (per year) ^a
	Sensitization of families and communities on how to serve as resources (volunteers, support network) for schools and to support learning at home.	No funds allocated

^a This allocation is the same amount split across multiple activities.

Furthermore, an analysis of the state budget of Maharashtra between 2020 and 2024 was conducted to determine what funds states received for implementing the vision of families and communities in the *Samagra Shiksha*, which is presented below in Table 13. This was not an exhaustive analysis and only considered line items that were clearly linked to family, school, and community engagement activities. Of the total *Samagra Shiksha* budget for 2023 to 2024, 0.45% was visibly designated for family, school, and community engagement activities, which is a modest amount. In the state budget, funds were allocated for two main family, school, and community engagement activities: community mobilization of parent/caregiver volunteers and school management committee training (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2023b). It is important to note that while the state government of Maharashtra designated national funds for implementing the *Samagra Shiksha*, not all funds were utilized. For example, in the 2021-2022 school year only 37% of nationally available funds for *Samagra Shiksha* were utilized, the lowest in the country (Bordoloi et al., 2023).

Community mobilization fell across a few categories of roles and responsibilities of families, including *implementing policies and practices, being informed, and shifting mindsets*. The state budgets of Maharashtra included a line item for community mobilization, which equaled roughly USD 65.55 (PPP) per school and was expected to cover a number of activities. Funds for community mobilization were inconsistent over the years. For example, only one-third of schools were allocated funds for community mobilization activities in the 2021-2022 school year, but in the 2022-2024 school year budgets all schools were allocated funds (Ministry of Education, 2021; Ministry of Education, 2022b). However, while schools were officially allocated funds for community mobilization in the state budgets, they were not guaranteed to receive these funds. It is not clear what proportion of schools in Maharashtra actually received community mobilization funds for family, school, and community engagement.

As was revealed conversations with the CST team in India, if there was designated government funding for family, school, and community engagement, it was usually for school management committee member trainings and could fluctuate over the years. In Maharashtra, funds were designated in the budget for school management committee member trainings but no other committee activities, such as hosting events with families. Furthermore, although state budgets had designated funds for these trainings (USD 131.11 PPP per school), not all the funds were then officially allocated to schools and, in consequence, not all schools received funds. For example, for the 2022-2023 school year, nearly 100% of schools were designated funds for school management committee trainings in the state budget, but it is unclear what proportion of schools actually received these funds (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2022b). The following year (2023-2024), no school was allocated funds for school management committee trainings, demonstrating the inconsistency of allocations from year to year (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2023b).

The analysis also showed that secondary schools were allocated funding for school management committee member training more consistently than primary schools. While all secondary schools were allocated funds for 2021-2022, only 17% of primary schools received funds for the same period (Ministry of Education, 2021).

Table 13: Maharashtra State Budget Estimates for Family, School, and Engagement Activities (in USD millions PPP)

Year	Maharashtra State Budget for Samagra Shiksha	Number of Schools	Community Mobilization			School Management Committee Training		
			Eligible Funding ^a	Allocated Funding	Percent of Eligible Funds Allocated	Eligible Funding ^b	Allocated Funding	Percent of Eligible Funds Allocated
2020-2021	178.08	64,096 primary schools	4.19	1.38	33%	8.41	1.38	16%
		1,798 secondary schools	0.11	0.04	33%	0.25	0.04	14%
2021-2022	182.89	63,900 primary schools	4.19	1.40	33%	8.38	1.38	17%
		1,820 secondary schools	0.11	0.11	100%	0.25	0.25	100%
2022-2023	251.44	63,759 primary schools	4.18	4.18	100%	8.36	8.26	99%
		1,851 secondary schools	0.12	0.12	100%	0.24	0.24	100%
2023-2024	262.18	63,638 primary schools	4.17	4.17	100%	8.34	0.00	0%
		1,859 secondary schools	0.12	0.12	100%	0.24	0.00	0%

^a Eligible funding is calculated as community mobilization = total number of schools x Indian Rupees 1500 / 22.882 (PPP 2022) per school.

^b Eligible funds for school management committee training = total number of schools x Indian Rupees 3000 / 22.882 (PPP 2022) per school.

Consistent and sustainable funding is critical for enabling school leaders and educators to plan family, school, and community engagement is essential to building partnerships. When schools do not receive sufficient funds, they must rely on the families in the schools to donate funds for family, school, and community engagement activities. Given that families with children in government schools in India are often from families of lower socioeconomic statuses (Gouda et al., 2013; Muralidharan & Kremer, 2008), this expectation puts extra strains on families already trying to make their ends meet and prevents activities from being sustained from year to year. Building strong partnerships between families, schools, and communities requires on-going, intentional, and dedicated funds and efforts.

In addition to government funds for family, school, and community engagement, and those raised directly by families and community groups, donors are another source of funding for family, school, and community engagement. A brief analysis of Global Partnership for Education's (GPE) compacts for partner countries that receive foreign aid and how these national governments envision family, school, and community engagement in their requests for funding is presented in Box 9.

Box 9: Family, School, and Community Engagement in GPE Partnership Compacts

GPE is the world's largest global fund for education, whose mission is "to mobilize partnerships and investments that transform education systems in lower-income countries, leaving no one behind" (GPE, n.d.). GPE works with country governments predominantly in Africa and South Asia to prioritize key elements of their education sector plans. These priorities are formulated into a compact, which is the basis of each government's vision for implementing these priorities. These compacts drive how GPE funding is allocated to each country. A brief analysis of compacts for four of the countries receiving GPE funding—Kenya, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and Uganda—was conducted to understand how these governments conceptualize and prioritize family, school, and community engagement.

Family, school, and community engagement was mentioned to some extent in all four of the country partnership compacts, but with few strategies or details provided. The compact in Kenya provided the most detailed roles and responsibilities for families and communities of the four examples, highlighting the need for involving parents/caregivers in *supporting learning at home* and increasing communication between the government and families/communities on key issues, such as how to support children with special needs and disabilities. None of the four compacts provide an in-depth vision or details on how family, school, and community engagement was to be operationalized. The three key roles and responsibilities of families and communities in the compacts were *implementing policies and practices, shifting mindsets, and decision making and leadership*.

Within the role of *implementing policies and practices*, the importance of *supporting learning at home* was emphasized in the four compacts, recognizing the connection between home support and student learning outcomes, but there were no concrete strategies named on what this support should look like. The compact in Uganda, for example, stated that standards guiding the delivery of early learning were to include “the roles of parents/guardians and communities in support of the child’s learning and wellbeing,” but there were no concrete strategies of what this support should entail (Ministry of Education and Sports, Government of Uganda, 2022, p.7).

The second role of families in the compacts was to receive information for the purpose of *shifting mindsets*, with the assumption that communities do not have enough knowledge to make informed decisions about their children’s education. Programs and activities outlined in the four compacts positioned family, school, and community engagement as a vehicle for providing families with a better understanding of critical issues, such as inclusive education and the importance of education for children with disabilities, which would then lead to a mindset shift and behavioral change, such as enrolling children with disabilities in school. For instance, the Tanzanian compact detailed efforts to support education access for children with disabilities nationally, namely “to increase community support for safe and inclusive education in and out of school” (Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, Government of Tanzania, 2022, p. 50).

The third major role assigned to families was *decision making and leadership* in schools. The compacts mentioned strengthening family-school decision-making bodies like school management committees and parent associations in order to improve accountability within schools and promote government priorities. For example, the Kenya compact emphasized “build[ing] capacity of technical officers, Boards of Management, Parent Associations, and school managers on gender matters” (Ministry of Education, Government of Kenya, 2021, p. 7). In the compacts there were few strategies for building engagement through family-school decision-making bodies beyond training of members.

While the four compacts did include families and communities in their vision for education systems transformation, they did not provide an in-depth vision or details on how family, school, and community engagement would be operationalized. There is more work to do to support countries and donors in making education a must through both vision, planning, and funding.



SUMMARY

In summary, education frameworks across countries revealed the critical role of family, school, and community engagement in achieving the country's vision for education. Education frameworks varied, however, in the roles and responsibilities ascribed to families and communities, with the most frequently cited being *implementing policies and practices*, followed by *decision making and leadership*. Other roles and responsibilities included *being informed*, *providing resources*, and *shifting mindsets*. Education frameworks also varied in the comprehensiveness of strategies to support family, school, and community engagement activities and partnerships. While most listed specific roles and responsibilities, few provided clear and concise strategies with planned activities and monitoring and evaluation frameworks to support families and communities in successfully playing their roles.

Although research has shown that funds directed toward family, school, and community engagement result in increased student success, better-supported families, and more-effective teachers for all (Epstein et al., 2018), this research found that funding for family, school, and community engagement was often inconsistent, rolled into other activities, and lacked sustainability, making it challenging to analyze and monitor effectively. The analysis of Maharashtra' state budget showed that while India's largest national education strategy, *Samagra Shiksha*, envisioned comprehensive family, school, and community engagement, including clear and specific strategies and activities, the state budget told a different story. Family, school, and community engagement funding was limited to a few activities, namely school management committee training (USD 131.11 PPP per school per year) and community mobilization (\$65.55 PPP per school per year) and fluctuated by year. This inconsistency in funding disproportionately impacts under-resourced schools and economically marginalized communities as they have limited time and resources to address multiple pressing needs.

In order to make family, school, and community engagement a must, comprehensive frameworks centering the role of families and communities in the country's vision and aims of education are essential alongside clear, consistent, and sustainable funds to empower education leaders and families to build partnerships. More can be done in these educational frameworks to situate educators and families as allies and partners, whether in the role of implementing *policies and practices*, *decision making and leadership*, *shifting mindsets*, and the other roles.



Global Lesson 6

Disrupt Power Dynamics Through Community-Driven Research

Community-driven and participatory, collaborative research is a powerful way to build relational trust between families and schools, and to disrupt traditional power dynamics. Through collaborative research, families, educators, and students develop cohesive and coherent strategies to address the needs of their communities.

During one of the debriefs with the Education & Cultural Society CST team in Bangladesh, Nilufar Yasmin, a government Head Teacher who led the research in her community was asked what she had learned from the process, and said, “Research is [often] confined to universities and research institutions, and as school-level teachers we do not have any opportunity to be involved in research or conduct any research. We want to contribute as researchers.” One of the intentions of the larger CST study was to demonstrate how collaborative educational research can be more participatory, inclusive, and community-driven, and how families, educators, and students coming together to study and understand their communities can disrupt power dynamics in the larger field of research. Each of the collaborating organizations thought deeply about how and why they were engaging in the CST research and in which ways they hoped the findings and process would inform their own work. The takeaways and findings below were informed by the dozens of conversations held with CST teams about their findings from and experiences with the research. Takeaways were also formulated through the community of practice of CST teams who continued to support each other in using the research to build stronger partnerships in their school communities even after this report was published (See Nora & Morris, 2023). The takeaways reflect the principles of community-based participatory research and build on the strengths of the community, spread findings and knowledge to all actors, and share power in the process (Hacker, 2013).



TAKEAWAY: Sharing power and expertise across communities and teams enhanced the design, analysis, and utilization of the research.

One of the intentions and outcomes of this research was to ensure families, educators, and students had power and agency in the process, and that community organizations and school teams were leading decision making. By using dialogue, data, and directions as guiding principles, the research collaborative came up with a number of insights as outlined below.

Box 10: Summary of Methodological Insights

There are many aspects of sharing power and expertise in research, but six critical areas used to build a community of practice between and among the CST teams are outlined below. These six insights fall under the takeaway: **Sharing power and expertise across communities and teams enhanced the design, analysis, and utilization of the research.**

- **Insight 1: Support existing expertise. Emphasize resource sharing over capacity building.** Position schools and community teams as experts and think about opportunities for exchanging knowledge and resources as opposed to assuming a one-way capacity building approach where outside researchers are the experts.
- **Insight 2: Think co-construction and not translation or adaptation.** When working across languages and cultural contexts, continuously refining concepts helps ensure that the research is not translated, but co-constructed.
- **Insight 3: Utilize multiple modes of participation.** Reaching families, educators, and students through mixed formats (e.g., in-person oral survey, remote survey links, oral mobile-phone survey) ensures greater inclusion and participation in the research.
- **Insight 4: Create space for reflection before action.** Start by assuming that families, educators, and students have very diverse experiences with education, including negative and traumatic experiences, and that doing the work of listening, acknowledging, and reflecting on these experiences must take place before launching into the development of strategies.
- **Insight 5: Make data accessible and meaningful.** Giving back data to schools in easy-to-read visualizations encourages further reflection and dialogue, both of which are vital to developing responsive and sustainable strategies.
- **Insight 6: Ensure family, school, and community engagement practices can be analyzed by demographic groups.** Demographic data must be collected according to each context, and equity analyses conducted in order to understand how family, school, and community engagement experiences and practices vary across groups and to understand any historical patterns of exclusion.

Insight 1: Support existing expertise. Emphasize resource sharing over capacity building

School and community teams are rarely positioned as research experts in most evaluation and research efforts, despite their deep knowledge of the environment and context (Patton & Campbell-Patton, 2021). Instead, the experts are often designated scholars from research and higher education institutions. As was noted in the above quote by Nilufar in Bangladesh, it is vital to acknowledge the unique perspectives that educators and school leaders bring to educational research and to position them as co-leaders in the design and implementation of studies. The CSTs are less about building capacity and more about sharing resources and knowledge.

Designing research objectives and questions with families, educators, and students ensured their perspectives were centered in the research. It was important for families, educators, and communities to participate actively in collecting and reflecting on the data in their own schools so they could understand their practices and see themselves as part of transformation efforts. It took substantial time and resources to support educators and community organizations in co-leading this research, but the benefits of having them drive the research were seen across communities and countries.

As part of the process, the CST teams also determined a process for analyzing and interpreting the data together based on their level of time, interest, and capacity in analysis. Roles and responsibilities were established together with CUE, and spending the time to deeply explore the data as it emerged throughout the survey process was a critical step in co-designing the questions that would frame the conversations as well as building collective expertise.

Insight 2: Think co-construction and not translation or adaptation

There were 23 languages used and analyzed in this research, which forced the CST teams to think carefully about the language used in surveys and conversations. It also provided a rich analytical opportunity to understand how beliefs, opportunities, barriers, and relational trust are perceived and experienced differently depending on culture. Although surveys were developed in English initially, they were redeveloped and refined over three dozen times as the surveys evolved across the languages and cultures. The tools were therefore not translated and adapted in a one-directional sense but co-constructed back and forth as cross-cultural and cross-linguistic lessons emerged. The CST teams made intentional decisions on the languages in which the analyses would be conducted, and analyses and debriefs were held in Marathi, Portuguese, Spanish, Swahili, or the respective language in which it was easiest for communities to collaborate. For example, in Brazil, teams worked fully in Portuguese, from conducting the research to analyzing the data to sharing and presenting the data.

Insight 3: Utilize multiple modes of participation

In addition to using different languages, families, educators, and students were offered multiple ways to participate in the survey. Although there was an emphasis during the contextualizing and planning step on ensuring school and community teams use mixed formats (e.g., in-person oral survey, remote survey links, oral mobile-phone survey) to extend the reach and inclusion of participants, in practice this did not always happen. In the United Kingdom (England) and the United States (California), schools defaulted to sending surveys through a link even though they considered trying to reach families more actively through other formats. Consequently, they had lower response rates, and undoubtedly response rates were biased toward those families with fluency in the language(s) in which the surveys were administered and who were accustomed to taking surveys online.

Although the survey was simplified for readability, it still required upper-primary-level reading proficiency for families and students to complete the survey on their own.¹⁴ Oral surveys helped ensure the surveys were accessible for all families. The surveys were always offered in the national languages of instruction (e.g., English, Portuguese, Kazakh, Spanish, Swahili, etc.). In sites like Australia, Bangladesh, India (Maharashtra, Tripura), Kenya, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Uganda, and the United States (California), families had the opportunity to take the surveys in one of the major languages they use at home. For example, in the United States (California), the survey was offered in Arabic, English, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

The teams experimented with different modalities of surveying during the field-testing process and solicited feedback from families, educators, and students on how to make participants most comfortable in taking the surveys. This enabled higher response rates and the opportunity for researchers to connect directly with families. As one parent/caregiver in Sierra Leone noted, “The encouraging words from the enumerator [surveyor] inspired me to respond to all the questions.” There is much to learn from the predominantly Global South schools on how to mobilize families and create more equitable opportunities for participation in research.

Insight 4: Create space for reflection before action

The CST approach does not stop at asking about families’, educators’, and students’ beliefs through surveys; it ensures there are intentional follow-ups and dialogues to understand these beliefs. Across the different sites, it was

14 The Flesch–Kincaid tests were used as a metric to assess the readability of the surveys in English. The estimated level of education required to understand the family and student surveys ranged from seventh to eighth grade, while the level required for the educator survey ranged from eighth to ninth grade.

noted that families, educators, and students were rarely given the opportunity to reflect on their beliefs on school and education. Reflecting on educational beliefs can be challenging, especially for individuals who have not attended school or completed their basic education. Among parents/caregivers with low education and literacy levels, capturing beliefs on the purpose of school took time and probing by a skilled surveyor who could help families feel that their beliefs and perspectives mattered regardless of their education levels.

Efforts were made to control for reliability and to ensure that families with low education levels had not only the same opportunity as families with higher education levels to participate in conversations but also the space and time during conversations to reflect on their beliefs. Cognitive interviews—a questioning technique that encourages participants to provide an explanation for why they selected their given responses and their thought process while answering—were conducted with parents/caregivers with low education levels in Brazil and Tanzania (Zanzibar) during the survey development process. Families with low education levels indicated that they understood the questions on the purpose of and satisfaction with school but needed the space to think about the options and to have response options repeated several times.

Insight 5: Make data accessible and meaningful

Changing and transforming education systems requires sharing and discussing data. All the collaborating organizations thought deeply about how they would share data with their families, educators, and students and how to make data understandable and relevant for each group. Although one of the goals of the CSTs was to disseminate the collective research to a wide audience, it was even more critical to ensure schools, communities, and decision makers could actually use the data and findings to inform their practices and decisions. Ensuring data are used by the research collective is also a principle of participatory research and evaluation (Patton & Campbell-Patton, 2021).

Families, educators, and students in many countries noted during the step of sharing the data back to school teams that this was one of the first times they had seen findings from school surveys in which they had participated. Together they brainstormed how the findings could live in different formats like short videos, radio programs, infographics, and other formats that could be shared through text messages, social media groups, and beyond—a next step for this research.

Insight 6: Ensure family, school, and community engagement practices can be analyzed by demographic groups

Capturing intersectional demographics is critical to enabling equity analyses. During the contextualization processes, all teams considered demographic questions on gender, socioeconomic status, education level, race or ethnicity, languages spoken at home, and disability status. However, finalizing the demographic questions was a complex process. For example, in Australia and the United States (California), tense national conversations on gender identity influenced if and how schools asked gender questions. In the sites in Europe, race and ethnicity were often not captured consistently (or at all) on official surveys. Consequently, it was challenging to come to a consensus on how best to capture race and ethnicity. In Kenya and Uganda, many families were internally, or externally displaced, and additional questions were asked to understand how long families had been living in communities. Asking about ethnicity was not appropriate given ethnic tensions in both regions, and so language spoken at home was used as a proxy. In summary, careful consideration of how to ask demographic questions ensured demographic groups were seen but not harmed in the process. Capturing intersectional demographics that allow for equity analyses is critical for enabling teams to develop strategies to include families and communities who have experienced exclusion.



TAKEAWAY: Centering families, educators, and students as researchers provided not only greater collaboration but also more meaningful data and findings for organizations to transform their own practices.

Schools were not only important sites of research but important agents of research. It is important for educators and communities to have the agency to gather data and evidence in their own schools so they can understand their practices and see themselves as part of transformation efforts. It took substantial time and resources to support educators and community organizations in leading this research, but the benefits of having them lead the research were seen across communities and countries. Additionally, working with civil society organizations rooted in the communities and schools helped ensure that family, school, and community engagement was not just a one-off research endeavor but rather a new way of centering families in their education systems efforts. Six case studies are presented in Table 14 and then elaborated upon to demonstrate how the different CST teams used the research to deepen the work their organizations are doing to intentionally center families and communities.

Table 14: Case Studies Overview

Country	Objectives of the Research	Lead CST Team	Lead Education Partners
Bangladesh	Building sustainable family, school, and community strategies in rural secondary schools	Education & Cultural Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private and government school leaders (secondary) Ministry of Education
Brazil	Supporting student well-being through family, school, and community partnerships	Vozes da Educação	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government school leaders (primary) Municipal education departments
Colombia	Leveraging families as assets and breaking the blame game	Red PaPaz and Alianza Educativa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private and government school leaders (secondary)
Sierra Leone	Generating evidence to inform national education policies and plans	EducAid and Rising Academies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government school leaders (primary) MBSSE
South Africa	Promoting family-friendly early childhood development and education	Mikhulu Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private pre-primary school centers ECDE sector
Tanzania (Zanzibar)	Positioning families as partners in policies and practice	Milele Zanzibar Foundation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government school leaders (secondary) Ministry of Education Vocational and Training



Case Study: Bangladesh

Building Sustainable Family, School, and Community Strategies in Rural Secondary Schools

Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries in the world, with over 60% of people living in rural areas (World Bank, 2022c). Only 67% of secondary-school-aged youth are currently enrolled in school and nearly 94% of secondary school students study in private institutions as the public infrastructure is insufficient to accommodate the growing youth population (World Bank, 2018; World Bank, 2017). The CST research was carried out in rural private and government schools to examine how to strengthen collaboration with families in this understudied sector.

Identifying promising practices

The CST team was led by Education & Cultural Society (ECS), a non-governmental organization started by educators in Bangladesh with the mission of supporting girls' equity in education and the promotion of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) in schools. ECS worked in

close collaboration with other educators and school leaders to determine the objective of the research: how to sustain and deepen family-school relationships and practices in Bangladesh's rural secondary education system. This research was carried out to help ECS uncover promising practices for family, school, and community engagement and how to empower local educators to sustain family-school relationships.

Surveys were administered orally to over 500 families, 200 educators, and 1,000 students between February and March of 2023. Educators from rural secondary schools led the surveying process, shared the data with schools, and facilitated intergenerational conversations on the findings. While conducting the surveys with families, ECS had to use several methods to ensure that they were including all families in the process, as many parents/caregivers in rural areas work as day laborers in urban centers far from their homes. Because day laborers depend on their daily earnings for survival, they could not easily come to schools to take the surveys. Therefore, ECS met with families in markets, their homes, or at their places of work. These community and home visits provided invaluable understanding of the economic and social barriers that rural families face in educating their children.

Through the research, ECS identified a key challenge to sustaining family, school, and community engagement practices in Bangladesh: school leaders were often not from the rural communities where they worked and were transferred to another school or district every few years, which impacted relational trust. While these leaders may have enacted efforts to engage families, these practices often disappeared when they left the school community. Consequently, ECS identified the need to build the agency of educators who are from the community and who are committed to improving education in their schools as family, school, and community engagement champions.

Understanding the barriers to engagement

One of the key lessons learned from the CST research in Bangladesh was that in order to truly improve inclusion and access to secondary education, understanding the barriers and challenges of not only students but also of their families is critical. Through the surveys, the CST team spent time understanding the structural barriers to family, school, and community engagement, such as how families struggled to pay fees and expenses (financial contributions) and to find the time to be involved. In conversations, families highlighted the challenges they faced as day laborers. They struggled, for example, to miss work, and they often could not conform to the school-scheduled parent/caregiver visits. For many families, being more involved would require them to miss work and lose their daily income. As one parent/caregiver noted during the conversations: "If I go to my children's school, I will lose a day's work as I am a day laborer."

In addition to examining barriers, the CST team also identified the ways that families were already engaged in their children's schooling. Families reported that their main

forms of involvement were following school news and communicating with the school. Conversations revealed that there was considerable variation across schools on the extent of involvement. Some schools, typically those with more resources, had email and SMS systems for reaching out to parents, regular in-person meetings, and parent associations that were actively involved in the operation of the schools. Schools with fewer resources and higher poverty levels among families had more difficulty nurturing family engagement, as poverty and the reality of day labor work made it more difficult for families to attend in-person meetings and get involved in parent groups and associations. Another discovery was that families whose children attended private, after-school tutoring/coaching sessions with educators had more communication and contact with their child's teachers. This created a challenge for very poor families whose children could not attend these sessions and perpetuated a mindset among educators that some families were hard to reach.

Sustaining promising practices in rural schools

The high turnover rate of education leaders, especially in rural areas, and the ecosystem of mostly private schools, made it difficult to create a coordinated systemic effort to engage families and communities in schools. In order to build stronger family, school, and community partnerships, which was a hope for all the schools that participated in the research, ECS recognized that school champions who come from the rural communities are essential. These school champions could be teachers, staff, or other community members who work directly with the schools.

During conversations, ECS named various strategies that could be implemented in schools to help school champions advance engagement. For example, school champions could lead workshops and professional development with fellow educators on how to collaborate with all families and how to build a mindset and culture of communicating with diverse families. Another idea was to create short videos for educators and families on the importance of family, school, and community engagement, with specific strategies on how they could work together to support students of all economic backgrounds—including those from day laborer families. These videos could feature school champions and focus on building a positive mindset towards engagement while showing concrete and culturally responsive approaches relevant to rural schools.

Another strategy proposed by some rural schools was to organize a community engagement day at least once a year, with a goal of twice a year if feasible. This initiative could entail hosting various events, including speeches by nationally renowned figures, video presentations highlighting the advantages of family, school, and community engagement, open discussions, and panel sessions where parents/caregivers and members of the community could actively participate. Additionally, sessions focusing on topics such as effective parenting and healthcare could be included. These community-driven solutions led by school champions would help build a culture of sustained and meaningful family, school, and community partnerships in rural schools.



Case Study: Brazil

Supporting Student Well-being Through Family, School, and Community Partnerships

During the CST research in Brazil conducted with public primary schools in two municipalities, one concern that consistently emerged across educator and family dialogues was student well-being. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an observable rise in anxiety, depression, and stress reported among students, and school safety challenges. In research conducted in 2022 with public primary and secondary schools across Brazil, one in four students said they were feeling overwhelmed, and one in three were struggling to control their emotions. One in five students reported being depressed or sad (Datafolha, 2022). In another study carried out in São Paulo during 2021 with fifth- through ninth-grade students in public schools, two out of three young people reported that they struggled with mental health (Instituto Ayrton Senna, 2021). This included experiencing symptoms of anxiety, such as difficulty concentrating in school, insomnia due to stressors, loss of self-confidence, and exhaustion (Instituto Unibanco, 2022). In schools across Brazil, acts or threats of violence increased by 50% between 2022 and 2023 (Ministério dos Direitos Humanos e Cidadania, Government of Brazil, 2023). School safety and student mental health are often directly related and can impact student performance and overall well-being (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2023).

Voices da Educação, the CST team that led the research in Brazil, identified school safety and student mental health as important areas of focus both nationally and within their organization as an outcome of this study. Voices da Educação's mission as a team of experienced educators and researchers in Brazil is to advance education by connecting people, organizations, and education networks with ideas and knowledge to solve the country's problems of basic education. Through their participation in the CST process, Voices da Educação was able to start to imagine what further work on student safety and well-being looks like in practice.

Contextualizing the process in collaboration with school communities

Voices da Educação worked together with the municipal education departments in Cruz and Londrina to design the objectives of the CST research, which was to understand how strengthening partnerships between families and educators can support greater student well-being and address the concern of student mental health and school safety. Voices da Educação worked with 12 public primary schools, 734 primary school families, and 267 educators between September 2022 and February 2023. As step one in the process, the CST team did deep work in reflecting on why they were doing the research and how to contextualize the process in their communities. They determined a clear process for conducting in-person surveys with families to ensure inclusion of all parents/caregivers, especially those with lower education levels who were less likely to complete a survey through a distributed survey link.

Prior to surveying, Vozes da Educação extensively field-tested the survey questions with a group of families and educators from diverse backgrounds. They determined what demographics to capture and what survey language to use in the final Portuguese versions to ensure wording was understandable, relevant, and accurate for families of all literacy levels and backgrounds. Surveys were then administered by community members already known to the families and school staff. These community members also developed creative ways of engaging families in the survey through short videos and audio messages on WhatsApp explaining the purpose of the research. Once the data were collected and analyzed, Vozes da Educação created posters and presentations with easy-to-understand figures so that school teams, families, and students could have access to the survey findings.

Identifying strategies to support students' well-being

During conversations, families and educators expressed their concern about the mental health of students and said they were unsure how to work together to support children's and youth's well-being. Educators said they lacked the time, training, and financial resources to support students and their families and felt they did not have enough information on how to respond to their students' needs or the resources to get them the help they deserved. Some educators described feeling overwhelmed with students' mental health needs and frustrated that parents/caregivers were not doing their part to support overall well-being. One educator said, "Many parents leave their children at school because they want the teachers to do everything. We noticed an outsourcing of parents to the school. As if the responsibility for education lay entirely with the school."

Families in return said that they did not know how to engage with educators when their children were struggling. They felt stigmatized and blamed, and while educators often felt parents/caregivers lacked interest in their children's education, families were struggling to make ends meet and to keep their families safe. This blame game between educators and families not only stood in the way of developing partnerships but also prevented students from getting the support they needed to succeed in school and their own lives. During follow-up research using the [Global Family, School, and Community Engagement Rubrics Tool](#) in the municipality of Cruz, it was identified that there was stigma and skepticism about mental illness and well-being intertwined with a lack of information on how to address the needs of students in effective, developmentally appropriate ways.

Vozes da Educação is now working closely with municipal education departments to identify school-based strategies that effectively improve family, school, and community engagement, with a focus on strategies that support mental health and school safety. They are also exploring how to build family, school, and community engagement in education system frameworks to ensure it is sustained in focus and in practice. This includes helping teachers and education leaders to exchange knowledge and experiences of how to partner with families to support

student well-being. More in-depth research is planned to dig deeper into these preliminary findings, and to more intentionally build family, school, and community partnerships around student well-being and school safety.



Case Study: Colombia

Leveraging Families as Assets and Breaking the Blame Game

Colombia is home to 51 million people who live in 32 diverse regions, or departments (World Bank, 2022b). Over 71.4% of all students enrolled in pre-primary through secondary school attend government schools (DANE, 2023). Among these families in the government schools, a large proportion work in the informal economy, with roughly 56% of Colombia's overall working population in the informal economy (DANE, 2024). The informal economy is characterized as work that is not covered by formal arrangements like contracts, social benefits, safety standards, reliable and sufficient earnings, and flexible working hours and agreements (International Labor Organization, n.d.). The CST conversations and data revealed that parents/caregivers working in the informal economy in Colombia often struggled to take time away from their work to meet expectations for family, school, and community engagement set by the schools and the government policies. This often contributed to a blame game, where educators saw the parents/caregivers as lacking interest and follow-through, and families felt shamed and lectured when they could not attend family-parent meetings.

Family-school meetings

The Government of Colombia recognizes the important role families play in their children's learning and later life outcomes and has taken several measures to encourage parent/caregiver participation. There are two main national education frameworks where family, school, and community engagement is integrated, *Ley 1620 (National Education Act) (2013)* and *Decreto (Decree) (2022)*. These education frameworks mandate schools to hold *escuelas de padres y madres de familia y cuidadores*, or "schools for parents/caregivers," where all families must attend three family-school meetings a year where they listen to information on a variety of topics, such as drug abuse and early pregnancy prevention. These mandatory meetings must be led by experts and are typically one-way communication, telling families what they need to do.

The aim of these family-school meetings is to increase participation of parents/caregivers in their children's education across the age spectrum, from pre-primary through secondary, and to make family, school, and community engagement an intentional effort in schools. One challenge with this approach, though, is that it does not position families as partners and often overlooks the barriers families face in engaging with schools—which are predominantly financial and time constraints from working in the informal economy, as the CST conversations indicated.

Research collaboration with schools

Red PaPaz, a Colombian organization focused on building parental engagement to effectively protect children's rights in schools and communities, carried out the CST research in public and private secondary schools with which they work closely. Already experienced in conducting CST research after previously leading the process with primary schools in 2022, Red PaPaz expanded their study to secondary schools in 2023 to ensure that student voice and participation were centered in their research. One of their hopes for the research was to examine family, school, and community engagement across the age and grade spectrum so that their programming can be more responsive to children across their lifespan.

Red PaPaz collaborated with Alianza Educativa, a Bogota organization committed to ensuring that all children learn in safe environments and that educators and families have the skills to foster their students' intellectual and emotional potential. Red PaPaz and Alianza Educativa's collective research in secondary schools was conducted in 2023 with 26 private and 40 government schools in 13 departments, with 1,280 families, 659 educators, and 2,478 students. Their objective was to examine how to better partner with families who were less able to be engaged with schools, and to understand how to support these families in being—and being seen as—assets to their children's learning.

Naming the blame game and understanding families' barriers to engagement

Like in Brazil, the survey data collected in Colombia indicated that educators often assumed that families lacked motivation and interest in their children's education—especially those families who they deemed as being “less engaged.” Roughly 50% of participating educators thought that families lacked interest in getting involved in their children's education. To the contrary, less than 1% of parents/caregivers reported such lack of interest.

Red PaPaz and Alianza Educativa dug into this blame game through their conversations. They found that educators often expected families to attend meetings, regardless of their economic situations or statuses at home. Many educators expressed frustration or disappointment that families were not attending the mandated school visits. For example, one educator noted, “More than a lack of interest or time, it seems that what prevails is the lack of establishing priorities ... parents are not interested in their children.”

Families, on the other hand, often felt demoralized that schools did not consider the difficult economic and social circumstances they faced when planning and mandating these official meetings. Students also echoed the concerns of their families and were often stuck in the middle of the blame

game. They expressed how difficult it was for their parents/caregivers to attend these meetings if they worked in the informal economy and were reliant on daily wages for survival.

According to the survey data, one in four families never or only sometimes were able to meet their daily needs, and another one in four families were only mostly meeting these needs. For these families struggling to meet their basic needs, being engaged with their children's schools often meant making the hard decision of whether to prioritize attending meetings and events or providing food for their children. As one parent/caregiver explained:

It's not that I don't have an interest, of course I have it. What happens is that either I work, or I come to school, they must create a space where we can all participate. I am a street vendor; the day I don't make a sale I don't bring food home. I want to be part of my children's lives, but it is not that easy.

Developing more empathetic and authentic strategies

While some educators were empathetic to the economic situations of their children's families, the conversations revealed that others did not fully understand the deep poverty and social hardships that families were often going through. Mandating family attendance at school meetings did not foster partnerships in ways responsive to students and families. These meetings often failed to help families feel a sense of belonging and that their struggles were understood. Instead, mandatory meetings often focused on **telling** families about the problems their families already experienced in their communities—such as drug abuse, disengagement, mental health challenges, and other issues—as opposed to sharing concrete strategies and solutions to mitigate these challenges and creating opportunities to listen to families. More efforts to understand the underlying barriers to family, school, and community engagement and how to help families feel welcome and honored—as are more opportunities for two-way communication where families can be seen and heard.

Red PaPaz and Alianza Educativa are focusing their next steps on designing opportunities for schools to listen to families and on supporting school leaders to plan engaging activities without further stigmatizing families. For example, they are exploring strategies for helping educators understand what families depending on work in the informal economy go through in their efforts to support their children, so that schools can be more welcoming to all families. One of the next steps is also to expand the CST process to 730 schools, which serve roughly 994,000 families across Colombia, so that there is a clear cross-country map of beliefs on education, types of and barriers to family engagement, and strategies for building partnerships and relational trust across the regions where they work.



Case Study: Sierra Leone



Generating Evidence to Inform National Education Policies and Plans

In a country of more than 8.5 million people—of which only 12% of adults have completed secondary education—the Government of Sierra Leone is on a mission to not only expand access to education but to transform the quality and inclusivity of basic education (Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education [MBSSE], Sierra Leone, 2023a; Statistics Sierra Leone, 2018; World Bank, 2019). Between 2021 and 2023, the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) of Sierra Leone passed several important governing frameworks to ensure the education system is “free, accessible, compulsory, relevant, all-inclusive and right-based” (MBSSE, 2023a). Most notably, in 2021, MBSSE passed the *National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools* (2021), which governs the “day-to-day-operations” of schools and ensures “inclusion and positive experience for all students regardless of their status in society,” with a special focus on pregnant girls and parent learners, children with disabilities, and students from rural and low-income families (MBSSE, 2021, p. 1).

In all these education frameworks, families and communities play important roles in accountability and leadership, such as serving on school management committees, helping ensure all children are enrolled in school, and being informed about education policies, practices, responsibilities, and rights. Absent from these frameworks, however, is evidence and data on family, school, and community engagement. Also missing is a clear and shared vision alongside implementable strategies for building sustainable, equitable, and inclusive partnerships with families where parents/caregivers are positioned as vital collaborators in their child’s learning and success. The CST research focused on building evidence and identifying promising strategies to strengthen family, school, and community partnerships.

Generating evidence

The main intentions of the collaborative research between MBSSE and CUE were to expand evidence and data on family, school, and community engagement and to support integrating families and communities into the operationalization of policies and frameworks. To lead this community-driven research, MBSSE designated a civil society organization, EducAid, and a school network, Rising Academies, which were already working closely with government schools across the country to implement the campaign, Education Innovation Challenge (Education Outcomes Fund, n.d.). Both organizations are dedicated to bringing families and communities into the education ecosystems to support better student and school outcomes.

From March to June 2022, CST surveys were conducted with 1,767 families and 211 educators in 25 primary schools across 3 districts. Follow-up conversations were held with families and educators from each school. Like in Bangladesh, surveys were administered one-on-one in spaces convenient and accessible to families and educators, such as near markets and town centers. Conversations on the data were then held in schools or community spaces that were comfortable and inclusive for all families. To understand more keenly the barriers to engagement, special efforts were made to include families who were not on school management committees or deeply engaged with school activities. Given that nearly one in two parent/caregivers in the sample had not gone to school, the CST team knew it was important to bring school conversations into the community in ways in which all families felt they could contribute—regardless of their education levels or socioeconomic statuses. The intention was to make families who had been historically excluded from schooling feel included in conversations on how to transform schools to better support students and families.

Using evidence

From the evidence generated, there were a number of critical takeaways that can inform the operationalizing of policies and frameworks in Sierra Leone. First, families wanted to be partners and allies to schools and their children, but they often did not know how to do this. Family engagement was often narrowly conceived by education and donor frameworks as participation in school management committees that were responsible for accountability and oversight of schools, even though these committees only involved a small proportion of families in school communities and usually those who had gone to school themselves.

Second, families were enthusiastic about engaging in schools through events and other practices that were free, open, and focused on student learning and community building, but they were less interested in attending events where they were pressured to pay donations or fees. Since family engagement is not just attending events and volunteering at schools, but also supporting learning at home, schools can do a better job of helping parents/caregivers support their children in their home environments. EducAid and Rising Academies, together with the schools, identified a number of strategies already in place to help families support their children's learning at home, which can be elevated as part of a more intentional national strategy. In order to build collective action to support the learning and development of all children across Sierra Leone, evidence and data from the perspectives of families and educators are critical to operationalizing relevant policies. The CST research helped MBSSE, EducAid, Rising Academies, and the schools understand how families and educators see the purpose of school alongside the different types of family involvement and some of their barriers to engagement. This process exemplified how families and communities are essential partners in ensuring education is truly accessible, relevant, and all-inclusive, and gave partners space to reimagine family, school, and community engagement in Sierra Leone.



Case Study: South Africa

Promoting Family-Friendly Early Childhood Development and Education

Early childhood development and education (ECDE) is fundamental to the learning and development of children over their lifetime (UNESCO, 2022). In South Africa, pre-primary education is not yet part of the compulsory basic education system, which covers grades one through nine (Government of South Africa, 2021). However, many parents/caregivers of younger children send their children to ECDE centers. As of 2021, 60% of preschool-aged children in urban areas and 40% of preschool-aged children in rural areas had access to ECDE (Department of Basic Education, Government of the Republic of South Africa 2021). The majority of provision was through private ECDE centers.

Fundamental to quality and holistic ECDE is family, school, and community engagement (OECD, 2022a; World Health Organization, UNICEF, & World Bank, 2018), yet more research on this critical aspect is needed. Greater understanding of family, school, and community engagement in ECDE institutions is important for advancing quality and inclusion. The Mikhulu Trust of South Africa was the only ECDE-focused CST team in the *Six Global Lessons*, and their contributions were critical to understanding how family, school, and community engagement differs across the grade and age spectrum.

Mikhulu Trust is a civil society organization that works across South Africa, with a focus in the Western Cape province. When they embarked on the CST research in 2023, they identified that community-driven family, school, and community engagement research would inform their mission to support all parents/caregivers in developing “positive, nurturing and stimulating relationships with their young children.” Experts in the field of ECDE, Mikhulu Trust knows how critical partnerships between schools and parents/caregivers are in the early years and wanted to understand the barriers to and opportunities for engagement, as well as beliefs on education and how to build relational trust.

Understanding beliefs on education and relational trust

Mikhulu Trust conducted CST research with 10 private ECDE centers, surveying 484 families and 74 educators. They then led intentional conversations on the survey findings with families and educators in each of the different centers. Mikhulu Trust recruited youth from the communities in which they were conducting the CSTs to act as data collectors for both the surveys and the conversations.

There are many forms of private ECDE centers in South Africa, but centers are often started by a single community member—and usually a woman—who looks after the children of their neighbors or friends. This small endeavor often

grows organically over time into a more formalized center with hired staff and a set curriculum. These centers tend to survive by piecing together money paid by families alongside grants from non-governmental organization funds. Government funding is available for ECDE centers that can meet strict criteria, such as having classrooms painted with flame-retardant paint, a kitchen, and a fenced outdoor area, which require costs and resources. It can take many years for an ECDE center to fulfill these criteria. Because of the organic way many centers evolve, and the nature of being a private business, communication expectations can vary across institutions as can their pedagogical approaches.

In Mikhulu Trust's research in private ECDE centers, there were two findings that stood out. First, the relational trust between ECDE parents/caregivers and educators in South Africa was higher than in other countries in the study. According to conversations, this was because families were in constant communication with the educators given the developmental stage of the children and because the teachers were from the same communities as the parents/caregivers. A second finding of note was that, despite efforts to infuse greater play-based learning in ECDE and primary education across South Africa (Goyal & Hassan, 2023; Matangira, 2022), families and educators did not prioritize play-based learning when asked for their ideal pedagogical approach in classrooms. Only one in 10 parents/caregivers and one in four educators named play-based learning as their preferred pedagogy when given only one of six options. Instead, teacher-centered pedagogy was their top selection, with one in three parents/caregivers and educators, respectively, naming this as the approach they would like to see in their classroom of choice.

When probing why so few families and educators were prioritizing play-based learning, conversations revealed that parents/caregivers were confused about what learning through play meant and how it was critical to developing the breadth of skills that children need to succeed in school. As noted under the pedagogical beliefs section, strategies to build this common definition and understanding of play are needed, and a clear understanding of how play supports students' learning outcomes.

A more family-friendly approach

To build greater family, school, and community engagement partnerships in ECDE centers, one next step identified by Mikhulu Trust is to develop a more family-friendly approach. According to Mikhulu Trust, family-friendly schools provide opportunities to listen to parents/caregivers and help them feel both welcomed and empowered to serve as partners in their children's learning. An important part of building partnerships between families and schools is also understanding what children need to be able to succeed in their early learning and development. There is substantial research on play-based learning and the positive impacts on student outcomes (Danniels & Pyle, 2018). However, this CST research indicates that families and educators do not yet have the

information on and understanding of play-based learning to embrace it as a pedagogical approach.

If the ECDE sector in South Africa is to continue to support play-based learning as a critical approach, more work is needed to understand families' and educators' beliefs on education and pedagogy and how to support learning at home through play. Mikhulu Trust is taking the lessons learned from the CST research to explore what a family-friendly approach looks like in their organization's mission and is reflecting on the role that play-based learning can and should play in ECDE centers. As they plan their next steps as an organization, and their role in the ECDE sector, this community-driven research provides critical insights on how to promote more family-friendly ECDE centers.



Case Study: Tanzania (Zanzibar)

Positioning Families as Partners in Policies and Practice

In Tanzania (Zanzibar), nearly half of students do not complete the compulsory 11 years of basic education (Oxford Policy Management, 2019). These students are pushed out at some point in their educational journey due to a range of structural and situational factors, such as poverty, poor-quality instruction, and lack of learning support, to name a few (Oxford Policy Management, 2019). Prior research has shown that when families and communities are positioned as partners and students have strong family-school support networks in their lives, they are better able to navigate these structural and situational factors that push and pull them out of school before graduation (Morris, 2021).

Adding families to the educational ecosystem

Milele Zanzibar Foundation (referred to as "Milele") is a community-based organization dedicated to working with government schools across Zanzibar, particularly those in rural areas. Milele led the CST research with 16 secondary school communities in 10 of Zanzibar's 11 districts in both Pemba and Unguja islands. Milele works in close collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training to support schools in teacher training, materials development, and a range of other school supports that aim to promote greater school quality and inclusion.

Prior to this research, Milele had not strategically engaged families in their efforts—parents/caregivers were critical stakeholders but not intentional partners and collaborators in their initiatives. Furthermore, while Milele's interventions often targeted students and youth, they had not hosted intergenerational research and dialogues to understand a range of educator, family, and student perspectives. One of Milele's objectives for conducting

this research was to better understand families' and youth's perspectives on education and to identify ways to build family, school, and community engagement as a more intentional pillar of their work. The CST process gave the organization both evidence and experience on how to partner more purposefully with parents/caregivers.

In 2022, Milele conducted in-person surveys with 1,139 secondary school students, 954 families, and 210 educators. A team of youth research collaborators led the surveying. Secondary school classes were invited to participate in the research and to share their viewpoints. The survey data prompted a few critical dialogues, one being a look at the purpose of school. According to the surveys, families and students were very concerned about completing secondary school and obtaining their certificate so they could earn a livable income and support their families and communities. Across all districts and both islands, families and students saw the purpose of school as furthering education. Educators, however, saw the purpose of school differently. Educators in the northern island of Pemba were focused on ensuring their students became active community members and citizens, and educators in the southern island of Unguja were concerned about students acquiring skills for work.

Milele held more than 48 conversations in the 16 school communities to discuss the data and to better understand perception gaps and alignments. When digging in a little further during critical dialogues in Pemba, educators described the importance of education in their community's unity, and educators in Unguja described the role of education in helping their youth get a job. While families, educators, and students alike emphasized how all purposes were important, the different pressures on the communities influenced their thinking. Unguja is grappling with high youth unemployment amid an expanding tourism economy, and Pemba is focused on holding onto its community-oriented ethos. Conversations highlighted the importance of centering different purposes of school, including social and emotional learning, which was the least prioritized purpose but was noted by participants as crucial in ensuring the well-being of youth.

Milele adult and youth representatives led these conversations as they are trusted in the communities but are also neutral partners outside of the decision making and leadership bodies in school. Students and families were first given the opportunity to reflect on the data in separate youth and parent/caregiver dialogues before the groups were mixed across generations. As educators carry a lot of weight and stature in communities across Zanzibar, initial separation by participant groups gave students and families a chance to express their perspectives and to formulate their ideas before sharing them with educators. The Milele facilitators spent time prepping for the conversations and ensuring they were attentive to gender, socioeconomic, geographic, and education-level differences, among other dynamics. They also practiced role playing to encourage reluctant parents/caregivers and students to speak up and to feel comfortable and welcomed in conversations.

Creating space to listen to students and families

For most students and families, conversations in school were a new experience. Many parents/caregivers described being reluctant to participate in the survey process at first because they had rarely, if ever, been called to schools except for punitive reasons to answer for a child who had gotten in trouble or failed an exam. Being asked to share their perspectives with no judgment or consequence opened up a new way of communicating with schools and of building relational trust. As one parent/caregiver noted, being asked their beliefs and ideas during the CST process was not only a new experience but a welcome one. After the process of listening to student perspectives, a youth researcher also noted, “Before doing this research I never imagined that school could change.” In order to position families as partners, schools needed to disrupt typical one-way and punitive communication and create opportunities to listen to families.

The CST research not only helped provide valuable lessons for the schools and communities, but it also helped Milele think about how to more intentionally ensure that family, school, and community engagement is a part of their mission and efforts in supporting rural, government schools. Milele also organized a debrief with leadership in the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training to ensure that the data could be used to inform policy-level discussions and decisions, and to think about how to reframe families as allies, not barriers to learning. Using their experience with the CST research, the Milele CST leads traveled to Kenya and Uganda to share their experience with the CST teams in both countries and to build a community of practice across East Africa. The organization went from having little experience with family, school, and community engagement research and practice to centering families as a key part of their educational ecosystem approach.

One of the lessons and strategies that has resonated across schools, Ministries, and communities of practice is the need to listen to families. Milele is starting its next chapter of positioning families as partners in policymaking and practice and ensuring parents/caregivers are at the center of their work.



SUMMARY

There is a deep history of using extractive methodologies and practices to study educational systems and communities in international educational research, especially when involving communities from the Global South. Insufficient attention is paid to disrupting power dynamics and to centering families, educators, and students as agents of research, as global calls to decolonize research have brought to light. Conducting community-driven and participatory research with communities and organizations from diverse cultures, geographies, and languages requires addressing power inequities and dynamics as well as collectively formulating research designs, processes, and findings along the way.

Conclusion

Despite the notable differences and nuances between family, school, and community engagement practices and policies across schools, districts, and countries, a very clear story emerged in the CST research and the writing of the *Six Global Lessons*. The need for greater family, school, and community partnerships became a consistent and universal rally to action across all CST teams and schools in this study. While families, educators, and students had varied beliefs and perspectives on education, they consistently agreed that greater engagement was important to supporting students and wanted to see more, not less, partnership and collaboration.

One of the unique and central pieces of this research is understanding how beliefs on school and teaching and learning differ among families, educators, and students, as well as across schools and communities. As the Playbook research revealed, families and educators have deeply held beliefs on the purpose of school and what makes a good-quality education, even if they are not conscious of these beliefs (Winthrop et al., 2021a). Understanding and mapping these beliefs is critical to building a shared vision on what family, school, and community engagement should look like in schools and fostering relational trust among groups to bring visions into action. This process of collecting data on beliefs and relational trust, having **dialogues** on these **data**, and identifying new strategies and **directions** is critical to education systems transformation and ensuring that families, as well as educators and students, are at the center.

Survey data and conversations revealed that families, educators, and students have both intrinsic and extrinsic beliefs on education. Extrinsic beliefs reflect the perceived role of school in society and what education should achieve, whereas intrinsic beliefs reflect when families, educators, or students were most personally satisfied with education based on their own experience. In conversations, families often took time to help each other understand the different pedagogical approaches and revealed that they chose their preferred teaching and learning approach based on what they thought would help prepare their child most effectively for further education or the other purposes they identified.

Conversations also uncovered how one's own experience with education and ways of knowing, as well as how schooling has been framed in one's family and communities, influences these beliefs. Beliefs are also reflections of geopolitical, economic, social, and cultural discussions across national and global spaces (Morris & Qargha, 2023; Rabb, 2017). For example, in Tanzania (Zanzibar), secondary school educators and families often said in response to the purpose of school that it helped young people “kujitegema,” or “to be self-reliant.” This

echoes the words and ideologies of the first president of independent Tanzania, Julius K. Nyerere, who asserted in his *Education for Self-Reliance* (1968) policy that the purpose of education was to help young people become economically self-reliant as well as independent from colonial ways of thinking and doing (Nyerere, 1968). In Brazil, educators talked about the purpose of school as being an “*escola cidadã*,” or “citizen school,” where a teacher’s duty is in part to help students foster co-existence and democratic values and foundations. As one primary school educator in Brazil noted, “When you form a good citizen, who recognizes their own rights and obligations, higher education is a consequence of this well-built foundation.”

The varying levels of relational trust were also eye-opening for schools, as families struggled to understand why educators did not trust them in the same way that they trusted teachers. During one emotionally charged conversation in the United States on the relational trust data, educators revealed that they were often anxious about communicating with families not only because of demographic and language differences, but because of the negative and blaming language frequently hurled at educators when their children were not performing to the expectations of families and schools. Likewise, families noted their trepidation about communicating with teachers if they felt educators did not respect them or see them as “good parents,” or if there were educational and language barriers that made conversations challenging. One parent/caregiver from the Netherlands said, “Some parents I know find it a bit intimidating to talk to teachers,” while another parent/caregiver in Hungary said, “I don’t think teachers are interested in my opinion, but I talk to my child about education.”

Despite the tensions and struggles in building partnerships, the types of involvement outnumbered the barriers, and the willingness of educators, families, and students to work together to remove obstacles and position families as assets resonated across countries and schools. As part of their collective work during conversations, school teams identified strategies for building stronger partnerships. In order to ensure strategies are translated into deep and sustained practices, decision makers, educators, families, and communities alike must ensure family, school, and community engagement is a must and not just a nice-to-have. This requires more funding and evidence and the centering of family, school, and community engagement in education systems transformation. A teacher from one of the rural secondary schools in Bangladesh captured this sentiment succinctly. She said:

Fulfilling the necessity of education and achieving holistic change with proper engagement involves four pillars/sides: students, teachers, parents, and the broader community. If one of these is weak or broken, the entire system will be affected or collapse. If these sides do not support each other, if there is a lack of interaction, the achievement rate drops. Ultimately, schools and the entire education system cannot reach their expected goals.

More evidence on how to leverage family, school, and community partnerships to promote equity in schools and societies is direly needed, especially in schools and communities across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, which have historically not received equivalent and sufficient funding and support to lead community-driven research. This includes research on the link between family, school, and community partnerships and the well-being of students, a direction all the CST teams around the world have identified as a pressing need they are facing today with inadequate attention and resources. As CUE continues to move forward in advocating for greater research, practices, and policies to support partnerships, it will continue to bring parents/caregivers, students, educators, and community leaders together to ensure that families are at the center of education systems transformation. Centering the voices of and strategies proposed by students, educators, and families in educational research will help support more equitable solutions and a shared vision on how to transform education to better serve children and youth, schools, and societies.

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Annex I. About the Collaborating Organizations

This research was conducted in collaboration with teams from the following organizations: Aga Khan Foundation (Kenya and Uganda), Alianza Educativa (Colombia), Australian Schools Plus (Australia), Community Schools Learning Exchange (California, United States), Education & Cultural Society (Bangladesh), EducAid (Sierra Leone), GeoPoll (Ghana, India, South Africa), Leadership for Equity (Maharashtra and Tripura, India), Mikhulu Trust (South Africa), Milele Zanzibar Foundation (Zanzibar, Tanzania), Parents International (Hungary, Kazakhstan, the Netherlands), Red PaPaz (Colombia), Rising Academies (Sierra Leone), Social Ventures Australia (Australia), Vozes da Educação (Brazil), and Whole Education (England, United Kingdom). Information about each collaborating organization is below.

Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) is an agency of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), established by His Highness the Aga Khan in 1967. AKF is a private, not-for-profit international development agency that seeks to provide long-term solutions to society's problems. AKF brings together human, financial, and technical resources to address challenges faced by the poorest and most marginalized communities in the world. AKF has a special focus on investing in human potential, expanding opportunity, and improving overall quality of life, especially for women and girls. AKF's primary areas of focus are education, early childhood development, health and nutrition, civil society, agriculture and food security, and economic inclusion.

Alianza Educativa is a Colombian organization committed to ensuring that all children learn in safe environments that foster their intellectual and emotional potential so they can build successful lives and contribute to their country and society. Made up of four leading educational institutions in the Colombian education sector, Alianza Educativa is guided by the belief that a high-quality public education is the best driver and means to achieve equal opportunity. Alianza Educativa works together with parents to promote high expectations for children, academic excellence, and socioemotional development and trains teachers in accordance with these values.

Australian Schools Plus is a national not-for-profit that enables children to have the equal opportunity to thrive through school and beyond. The Schools Plus vision is that all young Australians reach their potential through access to a great education. Schools Plus empowers teachers and school leadership teams with funding and resources to help them create sustainable change

for the communities that they serve. The Schools Plus model combines three interdependent components that work together to drive impact: a place-based approach, investment to effect change, and influencing systems change.

Community Schools Learning Exchange (CSLX) works directly with districts, municipal agencies, community-based organizations, and the statewide system of support to build and strengthen community school strategies primarily in California, but also throughout the United States. CSLX's work includes direct coaching, consulting, and strategic thought partnership with schools, districts, partner agencies, and other stakeholders; facilitating spaces of peer learning, professional development, and collaborative practice; creating, curating and/or co-constructing community school knowledge and research; and engaging policy influencers and decision makers to advocate for changes to legislation and state policy.

Education & Cultural Society (ECS) is committed to promoting the development of the education system in Bangladesh, with a focus on girls' education, STEM education, and the empowerment and rights of women. ECS also prioritizes the protection of the environment and tangible and intangible cultural heritages. Through their work, ECS works to create a more just and equitable society where all individuals have access to education, resources, and opportunities to reach their full potential.

EducAid runs an educational network of free schools, as well as school improvement and research projects, in Sierra Leone. EducAid works to serve the diverse needs of communities and teachers to improve education quality, social inclusion, gender equality, and community resilience. With in-depth understanding of the specific contexts arising in Sierra Leone, EducAid uses local knowledge, skills, relationships, and experience to raise the standard of education for as many children as possible across the country.

GeoPoll is the global leader in remote research, revolutionizing data collection across Africa, Asia, MENA, and Latin America and the Caribbean. GeoPoll's mission is to harness the power of mobile technology to collect high-quality data at scale, even in hard-to-reach areas, affordably and with speed.

Leadership for Equity (LFE) is a systems change and advisory organization in India that works toward improving the public education system. LFE's mission is to build government capacity to improve the learning and well-being of children, using a three-pronged approach of working with People, Policy, and Partnerships. LFE collaborates with NGOs and state-, urban-, and rural-level education departments to co-create and deliver capacity-building programs for government leadership. LFE also provides research and advisory support on policies.

Mikhulu Child Development Trust is an early childhood development organization that focuses on developing evidence-based programs for

parents and caregivers of young children and designs systemic approaches to implementing these programs by working with government and nonprofit organizations. The work of Mikhulu Trust results in nurturing parent–child relationships and improved cognitive and socio-emotional development of children.

Milele Zanzibar Foundation (MZF) is a non-profit, non-governmental organization focused on ensuring the sustainable development and improved quality of life of rural communities in Zanzibar, Tanzania, through accelerating progress in the areas of health, education, and livelihood opportunities. MZF's education programs support nearly 60 schools in Zanzibar through various interventions, including infrastructure, scholarships, training, and capacity-building programs impacting over 200,000 students and teachers.

Parents International (Stichting IPA) is an independent research, advocacy, and training organization with the mission of supporting parents around the world to help their children grow up happy and healthy 21st-century citizens. With members from over 60 countries around the world, Parents International conducts research and provides evidence-based services—primarily training and capacity building for professionals working with parents—to its members and partners in fields, such as education, that parents consider important and in which they want to see improvement and change.

Red PaPaz is a Colombian grassroots caregivers' network that builds skills to effectively protect children's rights, with actions focused on relevant issues and based on evidence and proven good practices.

Rising Academies is an education company managing a growing network of inspiring schools in West Africa and Rwanda. It owns and operates great-value private schools, partners with governments to improve the quality of public school systems and uses content and technology to help other education providers. It is one of the fastest-growing quality-focused education companies in Africa. Rising Academies supports more than 250,000 students in 900+ schools across Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ghana, and Rwanda. Through great curriculum, intensive teacher coaching, and actionable data, Rising Academies helps teachers and school leaders bring quality to every classroom.

Social Ventures Australia (SVA) works with partners to alleviate disadvantage, helping move toward an Australia where all people and communities thrive. SVA influences systems to better deliver social outcomes for people by learning about what works in communities, helping organizations be more effective, sharing perspectives, and advocating for change. The Connection Social Ventures Australia is a unique collaborative network design, co-designed with education professionals for education system adoption and adaptation. The Connection network catalyzes improved leadership and teaching and learning environments, with a focus on impact for learners and educator capacity building

in the most disadvantaged communities within Australia.

Vozes da Educação is an educational consultancy organization with the mission of connecting people, organizations, and education networks with ideas and knowledge to solve the problems of basic education in Brazil in an intelligent, colorful, didactic, and accessible way. Basing work in data, evidence, and the reality of education systems, Vozes da Educação looks for creative solutions to structural problems in education that make sense for educators and learners on the ground.

Whole Education is a dynamic network of schools, trusts, experts, and organizations in the United Kingdom who are united in the belief that all children and young people deserve a fully rounded education. Whole Education believes that a “whole education” is one that develops the range of knowledge, skills, and dispositions learners need to thrive in life, learning, and work; makes learning relevant and engaging for all, with individuals taking ownership of their own learning; and supports learning across various environments while engaging the local and global community.

Annex II. Literature Review

What are the frameworks for understanding family, school, and community engagement partnerships?

There are several models and frameworks with which to conceptualize family, school, and community engagement, each providing a vision for how to enact policies and practices in education institutions. This research draws on elements from each of these models:

- **Ecological model:** Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1986) ecological framework model demonstrated that a child's learning and development is influenced not only by their relationships with various actors in their lives, such as caregivers, educators, etc., but also by the relationship between these actors as well as by the governing social and cultural beliefs. These relationships are represented through concentric and interdependent spheres of influence.
- **Overlapping influences:** Epstein's (1987) overlapping influences framework emphasized the shared responsibilities of families, schools, and communities for a child's learning and development, highlighting that consistent and overlapping, rather than separate and varying, messages from all stakeholders have a more profound and positive impact.
- **Practical model for partnership:** Swap's (1993) model introduced four categories of schools that can encourage or resist family, school, and community engagement. These categories include: (a) the protective model, where families delegate the role of education to schools, (b) the school-to-home transmission model, where schools inform families how to contribute and families agree, (c) the curriculum enrichment model, which recognizes and integrates family and community knowledge into teaching and learning, and (d) the partnership model, which emphasizes long-term and widespread involvement of families and schools in a child's education.
- **Dual capacity-building framework:** Developed by Mapp and Kuttner (2013), and revised by Mapp and Bergman (2019), this framework helps actors in the education system better understand the challenges, conditions, and programmatic practices and policies necessary for constructing effective family-school partnerships. This framework was adopted by the U.S. Department of Education in 2013 and is used by global researchers and practitioners to ensure that families and schools play a dual and equal role in family, school, and community engagement. This framework was central to the Playbook.

CUE will be further developing a global framework for family, school, and community engagement with the Global Family Engagement in Education Network.

What is the link between family, school, and community engagement and student outcomes and development?

There is a growing evidence base of research that demonstrates that family, school, and community engagement influences both children's learning and development. Much of this research to date has been carried out in the United States or Europe. Learning and development includes academic learning, social and emotional learning, and other forms of learning. Strong family, school, and community partnerships have also been shown to create more accessible, inclusive, and equitable schools and education systems and contribute to student well-being.

Academic learning. Effective family, school, and community engagement has been shown to support students in developing and mastering academic skills across various contexts and geographies (Boonk et al., 2018; Castro et al., 2015; Fan & Chen, 2001; Gurung et al., 2020; Lara & Saracostti, 2019). Academic skills include literacy, numeracy, science, social studies, and beyond. This link has been observed through all education levels from kindergarten to secondary school (Castro et al., 2015).

There are several aspects of family engagement that have been linked to children's academic learning. These include parental/caregiver expectations, communication with students about school, and support of learning in the home. There is less research on the link between family engagement in school activities, committees, and events and student outcomes. Parental/caregiver expectations and aspirations have been known key predictors of student achievement (Castro et al., 2015; Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2007). A meta-analysis of 15 studies situated in East Asian countries (China, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan) from 1990 to 2017 found a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between family involvement, parental/caregiver education expectations, and student achievement (Kim, 2020). In a study in the United States, parental/caregiver aspirations improved 10th-grade students' math self-efficacy (Fan & Williams, 2010).

In addition to family expectations, research has shown that parent/caregiver engagement in children's academic learning at home supports their outcomes in school. For example, there is a body of research across a number of countries showing significant relationships between parents/caregivers and children reading together and children's scores on reading assessments (Bracken &

Fischel, 2008; Friedlander, 2013; Kalia & Reese, 2009; Park, 2008; Department of Basic Education, Government of the Republic of South Africa, 2017; Sylva et al., 2008; Van Steensel, 2006). Playing literacy games, singing, and other home activities to increase literacy have also been seen to effect literacy achievement in school in different contexts (Nord, 2000; Leseman & De Jong, 1998). Furthermore, a study in Latin America showed that third graders who received parental/caregiver help with homework achieved higher academic scores in reading and math (Torrecilla & Hernández-Castilla, 2020).

Communication with students about school activities and family supervision of homework are other types of parental/caregiver involvement that have been shown to have a significant positive influence on students' outcomes (Castro et al., 2015; Echaune et al., 2015; López et al., 2001). A cross-sectional survey of 2,669 sixth-grade students in government and private primary schools in Uganda showed that when families, schools, and the children communicate regularly about students' performance, literacy and numeracy skills improve (Mahuro & Hungi, 2016).

Social and emotional learning and development. Family, school, and community engagement has also been shown to play a vital and positive role in influencing children's social and emotional development and impacting students' behavior in schools. Research has demonstrated that greater family involvement can result in fewer socioemotional problems and better student performance (Chiappetta-Santana et al., 2022; Saracostti et al., 2019). Research has also shown that when families are engaged in schools, it can improve student well-being and self-confidence (Driessen et al., 2005) and students are less likely to be absent from school, report higher levels of effort, concentration, and attention, and take more ownership and interest in learning (Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005; Robinson et al., 2018; Veiga et al., 2016). In preschool, family engagement has been shown to improve students' social and emotional and behavioral functioning (Reaves et al., 2022). As a study with middle school students in Belgium revealed, students' perceptions of family involvement have a strong effect on their achievement and school well-being (Thomas et al., 2019). The research found that parental/caregiver involvement had a strong and positive effect on students' social and emotional skills such as self-regulation and motivation, while also having a significant influence on student achievement (Thomas et al., 2019).

Improved access, inclusion, equity, and well-being. Partnerships between families and schools have also been shown to improve equitable access to education for all. Studies from rural Pakistan and Cyprus highlighted that understanding family needs and dynamics can help reduce dropout rates in secondary schools (Mughal et al., 2019; Symeou et al., 2012). Effective family engagement has also been shown to support enabling environments for girls in the home and to decrease girls' household responsibilities to allow time for schoolwork (Intili et al., 2006). Indigenous Mayan girls in Mexico noted that their mothers' support and female role models in their communities positively

influenced their access to school as well as their academic success (Vázquez, 2017). In certain regions of India, discussions between parents/caregivers and children on school performance, friendships, and personal issues contributed to delaying marriage (Paul et al., 2023).

Family, school, and community engagement has also been shown to be particularly important for children with disabilities. Parents/caregivers engage with schools to support their children with disabilities in many ways and to different extents, depending on the social and cultural context of the education system. Engagement often includes some form of advocacy and making sure that children with disabilities have the conditions, services, and supports they need. The extent of school-based family engagement like volunteering, attending parent-teacher conferences, and discussing their children's Individualized Education Plans has varied by region and location (Zablotsky et al., 2012). For example, research found that in Singapore's education culture, participating in school-based activities or leadership and governance committees are not common forms of family, school, and community engagement, but providing extra-curricular tutoring and attending to physical and psychological needs outside of school are (Khong & Ng, 2005; Wong et al., 2015). In one study in India, parents/caregivers of children with disabilities were found to participate in schools through observing and learning strategies employed by educators and volunteering in classrooms (Kulkarni & Gathoo, 2017). Families in Europe, Latin America, and North America, in another study, employed various strategies to secure access to reasonable accommodations and learning support. These included accessing or forming communities of support for caregivers who engaged in collective action, building positive relationships and collaborating with schools, and engaging in parent/caregiver capacity-building activities (Camino & Turley, 2023).

Family, school, and community engagement has been shown to play a critical role in crises and conflict contexts as well, where refugee families and communities work with existing educational institutions to create schooling opportunities where they are absent (Dryden-Peterson, 2016; 2022). For example, community-initiated schools in Dadaab refugee camps were established by parents to provide primary education for their children (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). In Afghanistan, community-based and home-based schools were critical in ensuring access to education, particularly for girls, as teachers nominated from within the community used culturally appropriate instructional strategies (Kirk & Winthrop, 2008). Religious organizations and faith leaders from the community have also been found to play a key role in promoting educational access and success for refugees and migrating families in Australia and in other countries (Wilkinson et al., 2017). In the case of crises and conflict contexts where young children are exposed to traumatic experiences, this can have serious lifelong consequences; research has shown the importance of family-focused programs in providing access to resources and services of family reunification, protection, and psychosocial support for children (Mattingly, 2017; Moving

Minds Alliance, 2019). A study on child protection interventions in post-conflict rural Sierra Leone found that community-driven programs had high levels of ownership and collaboration, with results indicating a reduction in teenage pregnancy, higher likelihoods of teenage girls refusing unwanted sex, and ripple effects of decreased dropouts and community discussions on the problem of early marriage (Wessells, 2015). In countries, such as Nepal, that experience climate-related natural disasters, effective school-based disaster risk reduction programs that engage families and communities have been shown to ensure wider awareness and readiness (Tuladhar et al., 2014).

What are the barriers to achieving strong partnerships?

Barriers to family, school, and community engagement can be structural, situational, or both. Structural barriers are those associated with school and society, while situational barriers are linked to the home environment. Frequently reported situational and structural barriers described in the literature varied from lack of time to engage and difficulty finding common schedules, to poor or inconsistent communication between families and schools compounded by parents'/caregivers' lack of fluency in the languages spoken at school, to low literacy levels of families. Structural barriers have been found to include families feeling unwelcome in schools and limited family knowledge and school support to navigate complex education systems (Al-Mahdi & Bailey, 2022; Baker et al., 2016; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Mapp & Bergman, 2019; Riblatt et al., 2023). Lack of education and professional development for educators on effective family, school, and community engagement with diverse schools has also been found to create further barriers (Caspé & Hernandez, 2023; Masabo et al., 2017).

Poverty and economic marginalization have been found to compound barriers for family, school, and community engagement. Parents/caregivers of pre-school children living in economically marginalized neighborhoods in Canada, as well as single-parent families and parents/caregivers with low levels of education in Finland, reported as barriers to engagement demanding work schedules, lack of information and knowledge on how to engage, and economic factors such as limited budgets (Poissant et al., 2023; Rönkä et al., 2019). Similarly, a study in rural Bangladesh highlighted that families' and educators' lack of awareness on the benefits of family, school, and community engagement served as a barrier to building partnerships, as educators in the study had never received training or professional development on the importance of engagement (Kabir & Akter, 2014).

More research on family, school, and community engagement for students with disabilities is needed in the Global South, as much has been concentrated in the Global North (Smith et al., 2023). Trends across countries and continents have consistently suggested that families with children with disabilities face notable

structural barriers to engagement, mismatched expectations with educators, negative teacher attitudes toward their children or family, and language differences between family and school. Such families have also been found to have situational barriers such as financial constraints that prevent caregivers from providing appropriate learning resources at home (Oranga et al., 2022). Globally, research has found that when families advocate for children with disabilities, they are often hindered by competing priorities of caregiving, societal discrimination against people with disabilities, lack of accessible knowledge of strategies for supporting learning at home as well as of their rights within complex education systems, and tensions with schools in getting the needed support for their children (Camino & Turley, 2023; Oranga et al., 2022). One systemic challenge surfaced by UNICEF is that parents/caregivers of children with disabilities are less likely to receive grades/report cards and be given the opportunity to discuss their child's academic development with their schools (UNICEF, 2021). A study from rural Kenya found that poverty and additional expenses like assistive support and care, and transportation and medical costs, alongside discrimination and low educational expectations of children with disabilities in school and society, impeded families' ability to engage with schools and to advocate for their children; in some cases, families resorted to withdrawing their children from schools (Odongo, 2018). Limited policies for social supports and funding for children with disabilities around the world have been found to lead to exacerbated financial stress and to create additional barriers for meaningful engagement (Ilias et al., 2018; Odongo, 2018).

Families and those caregiving for refugee and displaced children often seek education as a source of hope and future opportunities but have been found to face some of the greatest barriers to engaging with schools worldwide (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2017). Literature has highlighted how displaced and refugee children in many countries and contexts have very low access to education, as they experience poverty and food insecurity, family separation, lack of safety, and exclusion from the national education systems in their countries of exile (Dryden-Peterson, 2016; Dryden-Peterson et al., 2017; UNESCO, 2018). Trauma, separation of families, instability, and violence make building relationships between families, schools, and communities very difficult. Newly resettled refugee and immigrant families also face unique cultural and social barriers to engagement, including limited proficiency in school language of instruction, educators' limited cross-cultural and interreligious understanding, and asymmetric power dynamics as they often lack the social and institutional knowledge and capital to engage with and navigate unfamiliar school systems and cultures (Cranston et al., 2021; Norheim & Moser, 2020). In one study in the United States, Turkish immigrant and Burmese refugee parents/caregivers reported school communication was unsatisfactory and one-way, and that they would prefer the school employ alternative forms of communication to better serve them and honor their identities (Isik-Ercan, 2018). Additionally, displaced families often struggle culturally and socially to gauge what is acceptable in family, school, and community engagement. For example, families of South

Sudanese refugees described how they had limited engagement with schools in the refugee resettlement as they did not understand the structures and benefits of education, having been denied education opportunities due to the civil war in their home country (Demissie & Boru, 2023). Finally, securing employment to provide for basic needs such as food and shelter, along with financial burdens associated with resettlement, commonly forces families to deprioritize school engagement activities over other basic survival needs (Cranston et al., 2021).

As previously noted in *Six Global Lessons*, families', educators', and students' perspectives on what constitutes effective partnerships vary across and within contexts. However, much of the growing body of research on the importance of, opportunities for, and barriers to family, school, and community engagement among displaced persons and refugees has been situated in the Global North in resettlement countries such as the United States, Canada, and Australia. As of 2022, there were 35.3 million refugees and 62.5 million internally displaced people worldwide, approximately 40% of whom were children; roughly 85% of refugees lived in exile in low- and middle-income host countries (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2019). Less than 1% of refugees received resettlement in a country where they had access to permanent residence status, often in the Global North (UNHCR, 2019). More educational research that examines the needs, worries, hopes, and dreams of families, schools, and communities from diverse contexts and geographies, and especially of displaced families living in the Global South, is needed.

