What is this research about?
Previous research studies suggest that several barriers to new immigrant parent involvement in their children’s schooling can exist, including: language differences (Smrekar, 1996) and differences in cultural attitudes about the value of education and the role of parents in a child’s learning (Moles, 1993). This particular study investigated the perspectives of elementary teachers and administrators across southern Ontario on effective practices to engage new immigrant parents in their child’s schooling.

In this study, parent involvement is defined as “diverse activities occurring either at home or at school to allow parents (or extended family members) to share in their child’s education” (Kauffman, Perry, & Prentiss, 2001, p.2).

What you need to know:
This study examined the perspectives of elementary teachers and administrators across southern Ontario on practices for fostering immigrant parent involvement in their children’s learning, and the challenges they have faced in encouraging new immigrant parent involvement. Teachers reported using strategies such as using translators during parent-teacher interviews, simplifying language on report cards, encouraging parents to read to/with their children in their native language as well as English, involving parents in field trips and classroom activities, and encouraging parents to help with their child’s homework. A majority of teachers and principals also believed that new Canadian parents had work responsibilities and pressures resulting from immigrating to a new country that hindered their involvement in their child’s learning.
What did the researchers do?
The researchers invited principals and two teachers from each of 64 randomly chosen elementary schools. Selected schools had an English as a Second Language (ESL) student population of at least 20%.

Participants were sent a pen and paper questionnaire which contained a combination of closed-ended questions, where respondents checked their answers from a provided list, and open-ended questions that allowed respondents to write their own answers. For example, participants were asked, “In what ways are parents of ESL students involved in your school?” Participants were able to select from answers such as: helping in classrooms, fundraising, attending parent-teacher interviews, etc. Other questions included, “Which supports for ESL students and their parents are available in your school?” Possible answers included ESL resource centre, parent centre, translated information brochures, etc.

And “What do you feel tends to limit ESL parents’ involvement in your classroom?”. Possible responses included, language difficulties, work responsibilities, differing perspectives on instruction, etc.

What did the researchers find?
Results from this study revealed several findings including:

- Teachers used a range of strategies to facilitate communication with ESL parents including using simplified language on report cards (51.9%) and using translators at P-T interviews (90.7%). Many principals also indicated that they tried, where possible, to hire staff that represented the diversity of their students;

- Dual language books were present in all schools and immigrant parents were actively encouraged to read to and listen to their children read in both their mother tongue (73.8% of teachers and 93.8% of principals) and English (82.0% of teachers and 87.5% of principals) where possible;
85.2% of teachers indicated that they encouraged immigrant parents to help with their child’s homework. Few teachers, however, outlined explicit instructional strategies to involve parents as co-teachers at home.

30% of teachers indicated that immigrant parents helped out in their classrooms;

81% reported immigrant parents had been involved in field trips.

10% of teachers reported that they believed immigrant parents were not able to support their child’s literary learning. A small number of teachers reported being frustrated that all parents could not speak English. A few schools also had English only policies which widened the gap between home and school;

90% of principals and 82% of teachers listed parents’ work responsibilities as a barrier to their involvement. Parents were described as focused on the basics of survival in a new country such as finding steady work and suitable housing.

Overall, the researchers found that principals, more so than teachers, tended to view immigrant parents as literacy coaches, either in English or a mother tongue and perceived new immigrant parents as more involved in the school than teachers did. Teachers also tended to identify more challenges in dealing with ESL parents than principals.

**How can you use this research?**
The researchers suggest that teachers may wish to consider expanding their understandings of the role of immigrant parents as co-teachers at home. This would involve an increased recognition of the role of parents’ first language in their child’s literary development as well as a greater awareness of the teachers’ role in supporting immigrant parents as co-teachers.

Teachers and administrators may also wish to use this article as a starting point for discussions about how best to support students from new Canadian families and for consulting the wider body of research on students from new Canadian (or immigrant) families and effective teacher-parent, home-school and school-community partnerships that can support
student learning.

Original article:
To learn more about this research study, we invite you to read the original research article:


Other references:


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About this summary
The Ontario Education Research Exchange (OERE) is a project of the Knowledge Network for Applied Education Research, an Ontario network promoting the use of research in education. The OERE’s clear language summaries of academic research aim to support this mandate.

This summary has been adapted from the ResearchSnapshot series developed by York University and ResearchImpact and has been developed according to writing and design principles unique to OERE. For more information about this summary or the OERE network please contact oere.knaer.oise@utoronto.ca.

This summary reflects findings from this study only and is not necessarily representative of the broader body of literature on this subject. Please consult the original document for complete details about this research. In case of any disagreement, the original document should be understood as authoritative.