

## INDONESIA: How to Get Parents' Attention

A growing number of countries are reforming how schools are managed and are working to involve parents and communities more directly into the school management process.

The idea behind school-based management reform is that devolving responsibility to schools and to those who use the schools will improve accountability, transparency and ensure that resources are allocated properly. In this way, the quality of education will improve and so will learning. However, evidence on the effectiveness of school-based management remains mixed and parental involvement is often weak.

Evaluating different approaches for strengthening accountability and transparency in education is critical to making schools successful to improve learning. In Indonesia, the World Bank worked with the government to set up and evaluate alternative ways to improve parents' knowledge of and involvement in the management of money that the government gives to schools for operational costs. The evaluation found that direct approaches, like inviting parents to a meeting or sending text messages, led to improvement in parental knowledge and actions, while sending home brochures and letters didn't lead to any changes. As countries, including Indonesia, continue to rely on school-based management to improve accountability and learning, the evaluation shows that getting parents and communities involved—and making sure they are informed—may require more intensive efforts.



### Context

Indonesia has been implementing school-based management reforms over the last decade through the School Operational Assistance program (Bantuan Operasional Sekolah, often referred to as BOS). The program provides block grants to primary and junior secondary schools to pay for operational costs, apart from salaries for teachers and other civil servants. Schools have more flexibility and autonomy in managing the money they receive. In return, schools are expected to be transparent about how the money is used and give parents of students and community stakeholders a bigger role in providing input and oversight. The grants made up more than eight percent of the government's education budget in 2012, covering 228,000 schools with a total of 43 million students.

Despite the changes, parental involvement in school management has remained low. According to a 2010–2011 national

survey, two-thirds of schools made decisions without the participation of parents or the school committee, which is made up of school officials, parents and community members. In 22 percent of schools, the principals reported making all decisions. The weak involvement of parents, including in how the grant money is used, appeared partly due to lack of knowledge about the program. In a 2009 survey, just over half of parents knew what BOS stood for and no more than 20 percent knew how much money their school received.

To increase awareness, the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2011 developed an information campaign with the support of the World Bank. The campaign included national, district and school-level interventions, including television and press coverage. It sought to inform people about the grant program, how funds could be used and how parents

could get involved. In order to test whether a more intensive approach was needed, the government worked with the World Bank to pilot and evaluate four additional ways to get information to parents. The goal was to improve use of the grants and

ultimately improve learning by boosting parental involvement in school management, but the short length of the evaluation meant that the focus was on measuring the impact on parents' knowledge and their school involvement.

## Evaluation

Randomized control trials were conducted in three districts in Indonesia: Tulungagung, Malang and Sumbawa. Each district tested one type of approach against a control group. (The exception was Tulungagung, which tested two variants.) There were four approaches tested: giving students either brochures or letters to give to their parents; sending parents text messages; and holding a community meeting. The approaches all sought to give parents information about the program and the role parents could and should play. For example: What is the grant program? How much does the program provide for each student? What can the money be used for? How are parents expected to participate in managing the grant?

In Tulungagung, the 81 primary schools were randomly divided into three groups of 27 schools each to test the impact of printed material. Students in the first group received a letter signed by the principal to give to their parents; students in the second got a colorful brochure for the same purpose, while those in the third group served as the control and didn't receive any materials. In each school, researchers surveyed 10 parents—for a total of 270 parents per group. In Malang, where text messaging was evaluated in 26 primary schools, the randomization was done at the individual parent level. Cell phone numbers and names of parents were collected and 20 parents in

each school were randomly selected to either receive text messages or to be part of the control group and receive nothing. All parents in the control and treatment groups were interviewed at endline. In Sumbawa, where the impact of a community meeting was evaluated, there were 41 primary schools available for the pilot. Twenty-one of the schools were randomly selected to be invited to join a facilitated school meeting, and 20 were assigned to the control group and didn't get anything. In each school, 12 parents were surveyed. At baseline, parents were asked about their knowledge of the program and how often they had visited the school; at endline they were also asked about their specific knowledge about the grant program in their school, about the role of the school committee, and about their own participation.

### Examples of text messages sent to parents

- What is BOS? BOS is operational assistance to reduce the burden of fees
- Parents should be involved in planning and monitoring
- Parents can ask and propose activities in BOS planning
- Parents can voluntarily contribute to school
- For monitoring, parents can talk to the school committee and read the notice board
- Parents can talk to the school committee and principal if they find misuse

## Findings

**Two of the approaches—holding a meeting for parents to communicate the information and sending parents text messages—strengthened parents' knowledge of the school assistance program.**

While both approaches improved parents' understanding of the assistance program and how they could get involved in managing it, meetings had the biggest impact. These meetings brought together school staff and school committee

This policy note summarizes "Information, Knowledge and Behavior Evaluating Alternative Methods of Delivering School Information to Parents," Pedro Cerdan-Infantes, Deon Filmer, Policy Research Working Paper, #7233, World Bank, April 2015. [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/EAP/2015/04/26/090224b082e0af57/1\\_0/Rendered/PDF/finalOpaper0in00campaign0indonesia.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/EAP/2015/04/26/090224b082e0af57/1_0/Rendered/PDF/finalOpaper0in00campaign0indonesia.pdf)



members with parents, and gave them a chance to ask questions. On average, 80 percent of parents attended a school meeting. Their knowledge of five key items related to the school assistance program increased by 55 percent. These items included: whether they had ever heard of the program, what the program stood for, how much the school received (and whether parents knew how much the school was supposed to receive) and what the money could and couldn't be used for. Parents who received text messages showed a much smaller gain, around 8 percent, and there was no change in their knowledge of what the grant money could and couldn't be used for. In schools where children brought home letters or brochures about the school program, there was no change in parents' knowledge.

### **Text messaging and school meetings increased parents' knowledge about how the grants program applied to their school.**

In particular, holding a meeting proved very effective at boosting people's knowledge of the program as it related to their own school. There was almost a doubling in knowledge as measured by parents' answers to questions about whether they knew about how the money was used, the reporting documents for the program, the planning documents and whether they'd seen the poster that schools have to display about the use of funds. Meetings gave parents the chance to ask questions. It also got parents into the schools. The baseline survey found that less than 10 percent of parents had visited their children's school at least three times in the previous year. As a result, many parents would never have had the chance to see the informational posters that schools had to display. It's also possible that schools didn't bother putting up the informational posters before the meetings were scheduled.

Text messages appeared to work differently. Instead of encouraging a back and forth, the messages conveyed the key information in a non-interactive way. The text messages also could be stored, which allows parents to return and review the information. This may be why parents who received text messages—11 sent over 22 days—showed more familiarity with the planning and reporting documents for the grants program than parents who went to a meeting.

### **Meetings also increased knowledge of the school committees, which are supposed to be a key part of the school management process.**

Although every school is supposed to have a school committee, the national survey had found that close to half of parents said they didn't know their school had one and another 30 percent knew that there was a committee but had never attended a committee meeting or received information from



the committee. Holding the facilitated meeting raised awareness especially about school committees, most likely because the school committee members had to come to the meeting. Parents who received text messages didn't show the same improvement when it came to knowledge of school committees.

### **Parents who went to meetings or received text messages got more involved.**

At schools that held a meeting, 39 percent of parents reported visiting their school at least three times a year, twice the rate of that for control schools. Text messages, which led to increased knowledge of the specifics of the grants program for the school in question, also resulted in more school visits. In addition, these parents made more in-kind contributions, such as repair work. This may be because text messages explained how schools used the funding, possibly encouraging parents to assist with tasks that weren't covered by the grant program.



**It turned out that sending home printed material, whether a brochure or letter, didn't have any discernible impact on parental knowledge or involvement.**

These approaches resulted in no statistically significant change in parental knowledge. About one-fifth of parents who were supposed to get the written material didn't remember seeing it, possibly because their children failed to pass it along, or because the parents themselves may have forgotten about it due to lack of interest. Still, this isn't likely to be the main reason for the lack of impact; a similar ratio of parents didn't attend the informational meeting, but the meeting still had a strong impact. Similarly, only 32 percent of those who received text messages remembered getting the messages, yet there was still an impact.

**Despite the increase in parental knowledge, school principals continued to drive planning for grant spending, suggesting a need for more openness.**

Although the meeting and the text message interventions strengthened parents' knowledge of the school grant program, neither led to more parental participation in deciding how to use the funds—a key objective of the information campaign. In theory, schools are supposed to consult parents on the grant plan and the school committee is supposed to endorse it; in practice, very few parents reported participating. The shortcoming underscored a lack of formal communication channels between parents and schools, and indicated a need to open up the process to greater public scrutiny, perhaps by convening additional meetings.

## Conclusion

As more countries institute school-based management reforms, policymakers are often finding that informed parents translate into involved parents—and successful learning outcomes. But not all means of conveying information lead to the same result.

The findings from Indonesia have potential implications for the design of information campaigns and the direction of future research. The results suggest that information should be delivered from school to parents in the most direct way possible. While traditional marketing methods, such as television, were not part of the evaluation, the findings show they

may be less effective than more-direct approaches, such as community meetings or text messages, in engaging parents. Even while meetings did the most to bolster parent knowledge and school transparency, they failed to engage the parents in school planning. Getting parents to become more actively involved may require more formal avenues for interaction, such as additional facilitated meetings. With the evaluation covering just one year, opportunities exist for further research, both to explore the impact on student performance and other outcomes, and to study whether longer exposure might further boost parent knowledge and participation.

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