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Let's Talk: Starting Conversations with Parents and Teachers on their Beliefs in Education

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Abstract

Over the past decade, schools around the world have had to develop educational strategies to respond to pressing health, environmental, social, economic, and political emergencies and situations. A critical concern for education leaders is how to develop educational strategies that are responsive to and inclusive of families and communities. This article presents a methodology for facilitating conversations between families and schools that leads to recommendations for improving family, school, and community engagement. This methodology starts with surveying teachers' and families' beliefs on teaching and learning. Survey data on beliefs in seven countries are analyzed. Beliefs are then used to launch conversations between teachers, parents/caregivers, and community representatives, using a dialogical approach. A case study of this conversation process carried out in Colombia is presented. The parent/caregiver and teacher conversations not only led to new school and regional strategies, but helped teams confront power dynamics, a vital step in transforming education systems.

Keywords: family-school engagement; parent engagement; teacher and parent beliefs; relational trust; dialogues in education; parent-school-community collaborations; purpose of education

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Introduction

One of the many things the COVID-19 pandemic made clear is that educational systems are forever changed and must continue to change. Another consequential realization is that efforts to reform and transform education must involve families and communities. Parents/caregivers not only took on the role of educators during long stretches of the pandemic, but they also realized their agency and responsibility in shaping educational conversations in their schools, communities, and nations at large (Garbe et al., 2020; Dong et al., 2020, Logan et al., 2021; Smetackova & Stech, S. 2021).

This paper examines the role of intentional conversations in building greater family, school, and community efforts and demonstrates how understanding parents/caregivers' and teachers' beliefs on the purpose of school requires analyzing alignment and gaps in their beliefs. Building alignment of beliefs simultaneously helps foster relational trust between families and schools, an important step in developing recommendations and strategies for increasing family, school, and community engagement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Winthrop et. al, 2021a). The Conversation Starter tools and methodology for leading intentional and community-informed conversations developed by the Brookings Institution's Center for Universal Education (CUE) are presented in this research. Beliefs on education are captured through surveys and unpacked through structured conversations with schools and families.

This paper serves two key objectives. First, building a theoretical argument as to how teachers' and parents'/caregivers' beliefs on the purpose of school is critical to building relational trust between families and schools. Literature and quantitative analyses are used to build this argument. Second, demonstrating through qualitative research how holding intentional conversations informed by data on families' and teachers' beliefs is an important step in building relational trust and can lead to strategies that increase family, school, and community engagement. A case study in Colombia is used to show this dialogical approach. Findings and recommendations are intended to guide decision makers, civil society organizations, and parent, teacher, and community groups working with families and schools in building more innovative and effective strategies for family, school, and community engagement. Recommendations center on three main actions: a) surveying teachers' and parents'/caregivers' beliefs on the purpose of school and relational trust; b) facilitating inclusive, meaningful, and intentional conversations between schools and families on how to build trust and collaboration, and c) building family, school, and community strategies to increase collaboration. These steps provide a springboard for improving and transforming education systems, and ensuring schools are responsive to the needs and hopes of learners, teachers, and families.

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Background to the Conversation Starter Methodology

The Conversation Starter tools and methodology were developed during two research phases. During the first phase (2018-2021), the landscape of family, school, and community engagement was mapped and beliefs on teaching and learning were collected from parents/caregivers, teachers, and education leaders through surveys. Research from this phase can be found in the *Collaborating to Transform and Improve Education Systems: A Playbook for Family-School Engagement* (referred to within as "*A Playbook for Family-School Engagement*") (Winthrop et al., 2021a). This extensive research was led by over 49 institutions with contributions from thousands of contributors, including educators, parents, students, policy makers, community leaders, and academics from around the world. During the second phase (2022 onwards), the surveys were refined based on actor input and data, and a process for surveying student and youth beliefs was developed[2]. Additionally, guidance for how to communicate and discuss findings in schools and communities and steps for using findings to develop responsive strategies was developed (Morris, 2022).

The first step in the Conversation Starter tools and methodology is to survey three main groups: teachers and school leaders, parents/caregivers, and students. These surveys are exploratory tools that capture three main constructs:

- beliefs on the purpose of school and what makes a quality education;
- alignment of beliefs and level of trust between teachers, parents/caregivers, and students; and
- opportunities for and barriers to family, school, and community engagement.

At the start of the research process, teams identify the essential demographics that should be captured on the surveys, including age of learners, levels of education, gender, disability status, race or ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Teams also identify objectives, samples, and procedures for the survey that are responsive to their communities and conditions. Data on beliefs and perceptions, alignment and trust, and barriers and opportunities are then analyzed and mapped by the three groups (teachers, parents/caregivers, and students) to show alignment as well as gaps in beliefs according to the different demographics. Findings are then shared with school teams, who use data to hold intentional conversations with teachers and parents/caregivers. Through these conversations, strategies to increase family, school, and community engagement in their communities were developed.

2 Student surveys and findings are not discussed in this research as they are still being analyzed and integrated into the methodology.

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The theoretical grounding for the Conversation Starter tools and methodology is Paulo Freire's (1974) praxis and dialogic approach, where *reflection* plus *action* is critical for transformation. The surveys provide opportunities for teachers and parents/caregivers to both identify and *reflect* on their individual and collective beliefs on education before engaging in action and strategy building. The conversations allow actors to dig deeper into their beliefs on schooling, and to discuss opportunities and barriers to family, school, and community engagement. Reflection also allows the actors to identify areas of action that can lead to transformation (Freire, 1974). In addition to shifting mindsets, intentional conversations help confront power dynamics between families and schools and provide an opportunity to build relational trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Winthrop et al., 2021a). As this research has demonstrated, taking the time to capture and discuss beliefs and perspectives fosters equitable and inclusive participation of families, students, and educators, especially for those who have been historically marginalized or excluded by language, ethnicity, race, gender identity, education level, socioeconomic status, disability status, and other identity markers.

Although Freire developed the dialogic approach in Brazil starting in the 1950s as a response to the systemic oppression he grappled with as an educator, it continues to be a powerful approach to breaking down barriers to engagement in education today (Bartlett, 2005; Gadotti & Torres, 2009). As Freire's praxis and dialogic approach suggests, without conversations it is hard to move towards sustainable and deep transformation of educational systems. Deep and lasting change to educational systems requires addressing the deeply held beliefs and values of people and groups within these systems (Meadows, 1999, 2008; Munro et al., 2002; Sengeh & Winthrop, 2022). Although surveys do not reveal the depth and reason for beliefs on and experiences with education, they are an important entry point and tool for leading intentional and responsive conversations.

Defining Family Engagement, Purpose of School, and Relational Trust

How families and communities engage with schools can greatly differ by context and community, as do beliefs on the purpose of school and levels of relational trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Rabb, 2017; Winthrop et. al, 2021). It is important to understand how communities define and envision family, school, and community engagement and to uncover what they see as the main purpose of school. Family, school, and community engagement encompasses the many ways that families, educators (teachers, school leaders, and other school personnel), and community-based leaders and groups work together to support quality teaching and learning. Fami-

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lies and schools play equally and mutually important roles in building family-school partnerships (Mapp & Bergman, 2021). Engagement is a multidirectional process, whereby engagement can be initiated by families or schools (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Winthrop et. al, 2021). Family, school, and community engagement is different than involvement. Involvement is often school-initiated, where communication with families is centered on telling them what schools think they need to hear. Engagement focuses on ensuring parents/caregivers and families are heard, including their beliefs, ideas, and aspirations, and opening spaces where they can actively partner with schools (Ferlazzo, 2011). Family engagement can vary by context but generally includes communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 2011).

In order to build and sustain family, school, and community partnerships, there are essential conditions that must be in place, including relational trust, culturally responsive and inclusive approaches, and collaborative and interactive ethos (Mapp & Bergman, 2021). Intentional conversations help build this ethos while at the same time facilitate the capacity of families and teachers in four key areas: capabilities (skills and knowledge), connections (networks), cognition (shifts in beliefs), and confidence (self-efficacy) (Mapp & Bergman, 2021). The ultimate goal of building partnerships between families and schools is to ensure quality teaching and learning and to transform the system to better serve students, families, and society. In order to move towards this goal, families and teachers must feel heard, connected, and in solidarity. Intentional conversations around the purpose of school helps families and schools understand each other's beliefs as well as work towards collective goals built on mutual trust and collaboration towards a common vision (Rabb, 2017; Winthrop et. al, 2021a).

Understanding Beliefs on the Purpose of School

The purpose of school encapsulates parents' and teachers' vision of schools as well as the aims and goals for teaching and learning (Rabb, 2017). As the first phase of research revealed, teachers and parents/caregivers have deeply held beliefs on the purpose of school, even if they are not conscious of these beliefs (Winthrop et al., 2021a). These beliefs are often influenced by one's own experience with education and ways of knowing, as well as how schooling has been framed in one's family and communities. Beliefs are also informed by how education is portrayed, structured, and framed in larger sociopolitical, economic, cultural, and global conversations.

Some scholars analyze the purpose of school as intrinsic (i.e., for internal knowledge gain and/or collective development of values) or instrumental (i.e., securing work

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and greater wealth and income and/or growing systems and markets in societies) (see Rabb, 2017; Robeyns, 2006). This research frames the purposes from the viewpoint of parents, teachers, and students, and the motivations for sending children to school alongside the intentions of the curricula, pedagogy, school activities, and other pieces of schooling they experience. Purposes can vary for adult learners as compared to children and youth, for example cultivating socioemotional learning can serve different aims for adults who have left the workforce than for small children just entering their schooling. This study therefore discusses purposes of school as they pertain to basic education, or the compulsory education cycle for all children and youth in a jurisdiction.

On the Conversation Starter surveys, participants are asked, *what do you believe is the most important purpose of school?* Responses fall into four main groupings, academic, economic, civic, and socioemotional learning, which are defined below. Participants are also given the opportunity to define their own purposes of school through an open response option.

- **Academic, or furthering education and learning**. Further learning includes upper grade levels within the basic education system as well as vocational, technical, university, tertiary, continuing education, or other pathways.
- **Economic, or preparing for work and economic opportunities**. Work includes formal employment as well as informal work not covered by formal arrangements, contracts, or social benefits.
- **Civics, or being active community members and citizens**. Civics and citizenship encompass concepts such as global citizenship, coexistence, and political participation, among other knowledge, skills, and attitudes relevant to being an active community member.
- **Social and emotional, or understanding oneself and developing social skills and values**. This broad-reaching category includes social and emotional learning, specifically development of emotional, social, and cognitive skills as well as ethical and values development.

This research indicates that while schools and communities may define these purposes with different language and nuances, and that identifying one of four main purposes is easier for some individuals and groups than others, patterns in beliefs within and between groups helps identify overarching visions of education. Using four main groups, as opposed to a longer and more nuanced list, also helps jurisdictions working towards systems change understand at a macro level how teachers, parents, and students envision what schools are for, and the role they do and should

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play in society. The following section details the historical and contemporary landscapes for each of these four purposes[3].

Academic. This category can include learning for the sake of new knowledge, such as mastering a new language, as well as skills to seek and use knowledge such as digital literacy. However, most often parents/caregivers and teachers in this study associated further learning with academic achievement and progression in schooling. In instrumental terms, this included navigating tests, examinations, grades, and other assessment measures established by their schools and education systems (Graham, 1993). Examinations continue to serve as the main method for measuring learning and academic achievement in the countries in this study, as well as globally, despite a deep debate of how examinations reflect and reproduce social, class, racial, gender, and other hierarchies in societies (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Although furthering education can lead to future work, the focus here is on the pursuit of education and knowledge.

Economic. Another purpose determined from the literature and research was education for the aim of obtaining work and economic opportunities, which encompasses learning skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors needed for getting a job or generating income in both the formal sector and informal sector, which includes work not covered by formal arrangements, contracts, or social benefits (OECD/ILO, 2019). This economic purpose is rooted in the human capital theory, which poses that the more schooling a person completes, the higher their income, wages, or productivity (Aslam & Rawal, 2015). Human capital theory remains one of the driving theories behind the policies and practice of international aid institutions like the World Bank, research institutions like OECD, and education systems around the world (Berman, 2022). Economic and academic purposes often go hand in hand with efforts to promote social mobility, or the movement of individuals or groups —especially those historically marginalized by class, race, ethnicity, caste, gender, or urban or rural residence — between different social and economic strata and towards greater life circumstances (Vaid, 2016).

Civics. This purpose includes different aspects of civic and citizenship education. Civic education includes teaching and learning about a society's history, structures, and processes, alongside the attitudes, and beliefs that influence people's capabil-

3 It is important to note that the order in which they are presented follows the order in which they were asked on the survey but does represent a hierarchy or frequency of which they were observed in the data.

ities, commitments, and actions to participate and engage in a society (Crittenden & Levine, 2018; Kennedy et al., 2003; Winthrop, 2020). Citizenship education refers to the development of skills that predispose or allow one to participate in civic life in a society, such as voting in democratic contexts (Kennedy et al., 2003). This also includes community service learning and human rights and peace education, where there is a focus on fostering peaceful and tolerant societies. Active participation can vary based on community or country but requires some level of engagement beyond just understanding civic knowledge (Crittenden & Levine, 2018).

Socioemotional. The fourth purpose encompasses the various domains of social and emotional learning (SEL), which include the "process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions; set and achieve positive goals; feel and show empathy for others; establish and maintain positive relationships; and make responsible decisions" (Jagers, Rivas-Drake, & Borowski, 2018, p. 1). SEL includes different aspects of social (e.g., relationship building, conflict resolution), emotional (e.g., self-efficacy, empathy), cognitive (e.g., attention control, communication), and ethical development vital for the wellbeing of a learner and their community (Bubb, 2020: Emory, n.d.; Jagers, Rivas-Drake, & Borowski, 2018). This also includes values development as informed by faith-based learning. The language used to capture SEL can vary greatly by community and cultural context.

The Importance of Building Relational Trust and Aligning Beliefs

As this paper details, families, schools, and communities play an essential role in shifting the goals, beliefs, and values that orient the education system. Conversations between families, schools, and communities are an important leverage point in uncovering beliefs as well as shifting power dynamics, both of which are key to the process of transforming education systems to better serve all learners and their families (see Meadows' 1999 Leverage Point framework). As this research has uncovered, shifts in power dynamics and feedback loops can lead to opportunities for families, school, and communities to create strategies towards increasing family engagement around collective goals (Winthrop et. al, 2021a).

Just as Freire identified *mutual trust* as essential for praxis-oriented dialogues, researchers and practitioners have identified *relational trust* as essential for building effective family, school, and community engagement (Barton, 2021; Bryk, 2010; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Education Endowment Foundation, n.d.; Schneider, 2003). Relational trust, as defined by Bryk and Schneider (2002), is trust built in relation to the

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different social exchanges and roles within school environments. The four elements that precipitate relational trust are respect (mutual regard and listening), competence (acknowledgement of others' skills and competencies in their roles), personal regard for others (care and empathy), and integrity (following through with action) (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Mapp & Bergman, 2021).

Building relational trust between teachers, families, and communities goes hand in hand with creating alignment on beliefs, as successful education reforms are often dependent on the alignment of the beliefs of teachers, parents, and students (see Cohen & Meta, 2017 for the US). As has been revealed in both phases of this research, conversations are an important way to build alignment in beliefs and to foster relational trust between parents/caregivers and teachers (Winthrop et. al, 2021a). On the surveys, parents/caregivers are asked to rate on a six-point scale to what extent teachers *share their beliefs about what makes a good education and to what extent their input and suggestions are valued and respected*. The same is asked of teachers. According to the data described in the findings section below, there is a direct and strong correlation between perceived alignment of beliefs and teachers' and parents'/caregivers' trust of the other. Where teachers and families feel they share beliefs with each other, or at least understand these beliefs, they have greater relational trust.

Methodology and Sample

Conversation Starter Surveys

Teacher and parent/caregiver surveys were conducted by civil society organizations and school districts in ten jurisdictions in seven countries between May 2020 and June 2022. These ten jurisdictions are in seven countries: Australia (South), Canada (British Colombia), Colombia, Ghana, India (Maharashtra), Malaysia, the US (SW Pennsylvania, Wayne Indiana), as well as a private network of global schools that works across the Americas, Europe, Middle East, and Asia. Survey research was conducted in close collaboration with CUE and the Family Engagement in Education Network (FEEN). The FEEN, a vast group of global education actors, works collectively to co-create evidence and to document promising practices in family, school, and community engagement towards the goal of catalyzing systems transformation in education (see Winthrop et al., 2021b for details on the larger sample).

Sampling varied slightly by jurisdiction. In eight jurisdictions, the surveys were administered to parents/caregivers and teachers at conveniently selected schools in collaboration with the civil society or school team leading the research. In these schools, all parents/caregivers in the school (or a predetermined number of grades

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for large schools) were invited to participate, as well as their corresponding teachers. In Ghana, a nationally representative sample of parents/caregivers was surveyed by GeoPoll. In Maharashtra, India, a sample of parents/caregivers was drawn by region and blocked by the type of school in which their child was enrolled (government, private aided, private, or other), with a roughly proportionate sample from each of these school types as the target. Surveys were administered through an online link using Survey Hero or Microsoft Forms, or through oral surveys conducted in-person over the phone depending on the context. All surveys underwent field testing, where the research team met with a small group of parents/caregivers and teachers to review each question in the survey and to ensure that the directions, questions, and responses were accurate/clear, and to ensure that parents/caregivers of different backgrounds are able to answer the questions. Surveys covered three of the main constructs: beliefs on the purpose of school; alignment of these beliefs; and trust between parents/caregivers and teachers. Barriers to and opportunities for building family school engagement were also discussed in the conversations. Teachers' and parents'/caregivers' preferred pedagogical approaches, how they determine a quality education, and the sources that inform their educational beliefs were also captured but are not included in this paper[4].

Although common survey items were used across jurisdictions, each survey team modified the language to be responsive of their context and cultures. Best practices were used for jurisdictions that translated surveys from English (see Douglas & Craig, 2007). Additionally, a test of the literacy levels was run on the English versions to ensure they were accessible to parents/caregivers and teachers. The surveys reflected a Flesch reading ease score of 68% and a Flesch-Kincaid reading level of 6.4 on a US grading metric. The higher the score, the greater the ease of reading; the ideal metric is between 7.0 to 8.0 (Ershadi & Winthrop, 2023; Williamson & Martin, 2010). Basic descriptive analyses were conducted as well as statistical hypothesis tests to measure differences between demographic groups, including parents' education levels and students' grade levels. Quantitative analyses are utilization-focused to allow jurisdictions with varying research competencies to analyze and present their data to their school teams to spark conversations.

During the second phase of research these surveys have been revised to fewer questions and piloted with ten jurisdictions in addition to a checklist that helps teams

4 Parents/caregivers were asked to answer the survey thinking about their oldest child in school when asked questions about their child's education. Teachers were asked to think about all their students when asked about the beliefs of their students' parents.

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plan and contextualize their surveys (contextualization checklist), and guidance on how to analyze and visualize data (analysis guide), use the data to host conversations (conversation guide), and a process for developing strategies to further family engagement (strategy guide). Throughout this research process, CUE has developed belief maps on the purpose of school, which are a suite of charts and images to help teams compare different beliefs on education by parents/caregivers and teachers. These belief maps are presented in the tables and graphs section at the end of this paper, as well as perception gap maps that show how teachers' and parents'/caregivers' perceive each other's beliefs.

Parents' and Teachers' Demographics

Over half of the total 18,941 parents/caregivers surveyed had children in primary school, the other half were parents/caregivers of secondary school parents. Similarly, a little more than half of the 4,983 teachers taught primary school grades. In three countries (Ghana, Maharashtra, India, and Malaysia), the majority of parents/caregivers surveyed had a secondary school certificate or below. In the other jurisdictions, most parents/caregivers had above a secondary school certificate, ranging from 67% Colombia and 97% in the Network of global schools (see Table 1 for a summary of demographics across jurisdictions).

Table 1 Demographics of the Respondents (n=23,924)

	Parents	Teachers
Total number	18,941	4,983
Percent of respondents with children/students in:		
Primary School	57%	57%
Secondary School	43%	43%
Percent of respondents with level of education in:		
Secondary school or less	35%	7%
More than secondary	65%	93%
Languages of surveys: Arabic, English, Farsi, French, Haitian Creole, Malay, Mandarin, Marathi, Spanish, Swahili, Twi, and Vietnamese.		

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The vast majority (93%) of teachers had more than a secondary education, with the lowest average education being in Maharashtra, India where 83% of teachers had a secondary school certificate or below. Among the teachers who answered the surveys, 61% were female and 39% were male. On surveys in the second phase of research, primary language spoken at home, socioeconomic status, and whether parents/caregivers and teachers have students that identify with having a disability are also asked.

Conversation Starter Discussions

Using a focus group methodology, small groups of teachers and parents/caregivers participated in a series of collective discussions. General guidance and questions were provided in the form of a conversation guide, which was co-constructed with the pilot teams and the FEEN. Each guide was contextualized by the team facilitating the conversations. Conversations started with examining findings from the survey data and discussing alignment or differences in beliefs and perspectives. The conversation guides also included case studies to lead teams in developing a strategy for their school or community. Conversations were then recorded by school teams and used to monitor progress in achieving the intended strategy. Conversations and strategies across schools were then analyzed to help inform district, regional, or national-level efforts to increase family, school, and community engagement.

Findings

Findings demonstrated that while parents'/caregivers' and teachers' perspectives on the purpose of school varied by country and jurisdiction, understanding differences in beliefs was important for creating alignment and fostering relational trust. Holding intentional conversations with small groups of parents/caregivers and teachers where barriers and solutions to family, school, and community engagement were discussed was an important first step in developing school-based strategies to increase family, school, and community engagement. In Colombia, intentional conversations held with 41 school groups culminated into school-based strategies intended to improve family, school, and community engagement. These strategies ranged from building greater communication through in-person and virtual activities to involving families in the processes of developing school frameworks. The findings presented below show some of the various beliefs gathered through the survey data in the ten different global jurisdictions; this includes gaps in beliefs and perceptions as well as how alignment of beliefs is strongly correlated to relational trust. Next, an in-depth look at how school teams in Colombia used the survey data to start intentional conversations and inform family, school, and community engagement strategies is documented.

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Understanding and Discussing Beliefs on the Purpose of School

Parents/caregivers and teachers actual beliefs on the purpose of school are broken down by each of the ten global jurisdictions in Tables 2 and 3. In six of ten jurisdictions, parents/caregivers listed SEL as the main purpose of school. Three jurisdictions (Cajon Valley, CA, Colombia, and Wayne Township, IN) named academics as the main purpose of school (41%, 48%, and 38% respectively). Maharashtra, India was an exception, where most parents/caregivers (43%) cited civics as the main purpose. As data were collected during the pandemic, it is not surprising that SEL received so much attention as teachers and parent/caregivers were, and still are, highly concerned about children's wellbeing (Winthrop et al., 2021). Parents' emphasis on SEL was slightly lower in the three US schools districts. This may have been because of the strong emphasis in the US on learning losses, or because the teaching of SEL has been controversial in some school districts where some parents/caregivers have alleged that schools are using SEL to talk about race and gender (Blad, 2020). Education for civic purposes was low for most jurisdictions except for Maharashtra, India and Ghana, where civic learning has received strong support by education leaders (education experts in Maharashtra and Ghana, personal communication, June 2022). Across all jurisdictions, including Colombia, teachers named SEL as the most important purpose of school[5]. After SEL, teachers tended to name economics as the next most important purpose, especially in the US and Ghana where this ranged from 23% to 31% respectively. Most respondents who selected "other purpose" named two or more purposes and could not decide on a single purpose.

5 In British Columbia, the network of global schools, and SW Pennsylvania over 10% of respondents selected "other" and these were recoded in the circumstance they fit under one of the other four purposes.

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Table 2 Parents' Most Important Purpose of School (n=18,941)

Question: What do you believe is the most important purpose of school?[6]

Jurisdiction	Academic	Economic	Civic	SEL	Other	Total
British Columbia, Canada (n=1101)	26%	16.5%	9%	42%	6.5%	100%
Cajon Valley, CA, USA (n=351)	41%	16.5%	6.5%	31%	5%	100%
Colombia (n= 6,233)	48%	15%	6%	31%	0%*	100%
Ghana (n=2024)	16%	25%	22%	35%	2%	100%
Maharashtra, India (n=3012)	13%	17.5%	43%	24%	2.5%	100%
Malaysia (n=1078)	31%	8%	1%	60%	0%*	100%
Network of global schools (n=3084)	29%	8.5%	6%	52.5%	4%	100%
South Australia (n=221)	17%	22.5%	6%	47.5%	7%	100%
SW Pennsylvania, USA (n=1400)	32%	22.5%	6.5%	34%	5%	100%
Wayne Township, IN, USA (n=437)	38%	18%	7%	31%	6%	100%
Mean Percentage	29%	17%	11%	39%	4%	100%

* Note that Colombia did not ask other on their survey. Malaysia did ask other on their survey but received less than 1 percent of responses.

6 Purpose by grade level of students: For parents/caregivers with primary school aged children, the choices were as followed: SEL (44.5%), academic (25.5%), economic (16%), civic (12%), and other (2%). For parents/caregivers of secondary school aged children, purposes were distributed by: academic (34%), SEL (33.5%), economic (18.5%), civic (10.5%), and other (3.5%).
Purpose by education level of parents/caregivers: Parents/caregivers with more than a secondary level education selected SEL (41%), followed by academics (26%), economic (18%), and civic (12%) (3% reported other). However, parents/caregivers who completed secondary school or less preferred academic (37%) and SEL purposes (33%), followed by the economic (14%) and civic (13%) purposes (3% reported other).

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Table 3 Teachers' Most Important Purpose of School (n= 4,983)

Question: What do you believe is the most important purpose of school?[7]

Jurisdiction	Academic	Economic	Civic	SEL	Other	Total
British Columbia, Canada (n=205)	7%	16%	17%	51%	9%	100%
Cajon Valley, CA, USA (n=95)	2%	26%	10%	58%	4%	100%
Colombia (n=1,264)	19%	19%	14%	48%	0% *	100%
Ghana (n=301)	5%	31%	5%	59%	0%	100%
Maharashtra, India (n=1556)	2%	16%	32%	47%	3%	100%
Malaysia (n=301)	7%	13%	0.5%	79%	0.5%	100%
Network of global schools (n=372)	7%	10.5%	10%	67%	5.5%	100%
South Australia (n=164)	6%	14%	15%	58%	7%	100%
SW Pennsylvania, USA (n=300)	11%	26%	11%	43%	9%	100%
Wayne Township, IN, USA (n=425)	10%	23%	16%	42%	9%	100%
Mean Percentage	8%	19%	13%	55%	5%	100%

* Note that Colombia did not ask other on their survey.

In addition to looking at beliefs across parents/caregivers and teachers, teams were also encouraged to analyze beliefs across demographic groups to reflect on any notable differences. For example, parents'/caregivers' beliefs varied slightly by the grade level (primary or secondary) of their children, as well as their own educational level. Parents/caregivers of primary school students were slightly more likely to name SEL as the main purpose than parents/caregivers of secondary school students. Parents with more than a secondary school education named SEL as the main purpose at a slightly higher rate than those with less than a secondary school education.

7 Purpose by grade level of students: Both primary school and secondary school teachers preferred SEL (59.5% and 52% respectively), followed by economic (18% and 21%), civic (14% and 12%), and academic (5.5% and 9%) purposes (other was 3% and 6%).

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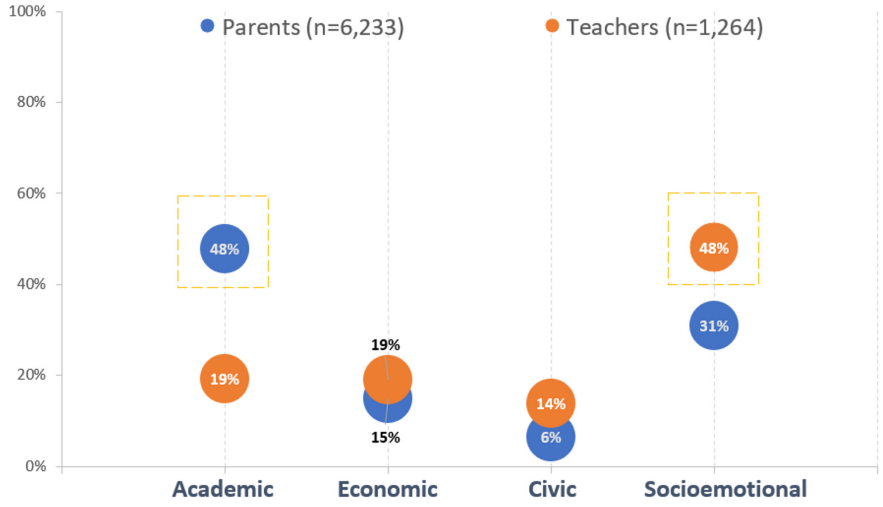
In Colombia, school teams designed their intentional conversation to focus on the large gap between parents'/caregivers' and teachers' beliefs on the purpose of school. They wanted to understand why teachers were prioritizing SEL and why parents/caregivers were concerned that teachers were not focused more on academic learning. Belief maps were used to help school teams understand these differences in perspectives visually, as shown in Figure 1. Belief maps illustrate a gap (depicted as the white space) between parents'/caregivers' and teachers' beliefs on the purpose of school. The belief gap is largest for academic learning, where 48% of parents/caregivers compared to 19% of teachers thought that furthering education was the main purpose of school. This represents a belief gap of 29%. The smallest belief gap, or a 5% difference in beliefs, was for economic learning, where 19% of teachers and 14% of parents/caregivers prioritized school for developing schools for work. These maps help school communities visualize differences in beliefs on the purpose of school and are an entry point into facilitating conversations between families and schools. CUE has been experimenting with visualizations to ensure that families and teachers of all education and data literacy levels can understand and reflect on data.

Figure 1 **Belief Map*: Purpose of School, Colombia (Data source: Red PaPaz Colombia)**



* The dark blue circles represent what parents/caregivers believe to be the most important purpose of school, while the light orange circles represent teachers' beliefs as reported in Tables 2 and 3. Gaps in beliefs are indicated by the spaces (white) between parents' and teachers' responses. IIn Colombia, parents/caregivers believed that the main purpose of school was academic learning, while teachers prioritized socioemotional learning. This suggests that parents/caregivers and teachers are on different pages when it comes to defining the purpose of school.

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Parents' and Teachers' Perceptions of Each Other's Beliefs

In addition to providing their own beliefs on the purpose of schooling, parents/caregivers were asked to think from the perspective of their child's teachers and teachers were asked to think from the perspective of their students' parents/caregivers (see Table 4)[8]. Although in six of the ten jurisdictions both parents/caregivers and teachers named SEL as the main purpose of school, they often did not know they were on the same page with the other group. Their perceptions of each other followed four patterns: a) both groups accurately perceived each other's beliefs; b) teachers accurately perceived parents' beliefs; c) parents/caregivers accurately perceived teachers' beliefs, or d) both groups inaccurately perceived each other's beliefs. Understanding actual beliefs as they relate to perceived beliefs helps families and teachers understand where they are accurately or inaccurately reading each other and to help address some of these misconceptions. Sometimes these conversations need to focus on how to align beliefs and understand each other's beliefs. Other times these conversations need to focus on understanding how there is actual alignment even if teachers and parents/caregivers do not perceive this to be the case.

- **Both groups accurately perceived each other's beliefs**. Only in Malaysia did parents/caregivers and teachers perceive each other accurately. Both groups prioritized SEL, and they perceived that the other group also prioritized SEL.
- **Teachers accurately perceived parents' beliefs.** In three jurisdictions, teachers perceived parents' beliefs accurately, but parents/caregivers did not perceive teachers accurately. In Cajon Valley, CA and Colombia, teachers accurately perceived that parents/caregivers prioritized academic learning. Similarly in Maharashtra, India, teachers accurately perceived that parents/caregivers prioritized civic learning.
- **Parents/caregivers accurately perceived teachers' beliefs**. In British Colombia, the Network of global schools, and South Australia, parents/caregivers accurately perceived that teachers prioritized SEL.
- **Both groups inaccurately perceived each other's beliefs**. In Southwestern PA, both parents/caregivers and teachers perceived each other inaccurately — parents/caregivers perceived that teachers prioritized academic learning when they prioritized SEL, and teachers perceived that parents/caregivers prioritized economic learning when they prioritized SEL. Parents/caregivers and teachers were actually on the same page, even though they thought they were on different

8 In Ghana, data were not collected for parents' perceptions of teachers' beliefs, only of teachers' perceptions of parents.

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pages. In Wayne Township, IN, parents/caregivers perceived that teachers prioritized academics when they prioritized SEL, and teachers perceived that parents/caregivers prioritized economic learning when they prioritized academic learning.

Table 4 Parents' and Teachers' Perceptions of Each Other's Beliefs (n=21,349)

Question for parents: What do you believe most of the teachers in your school consider to be the most important purpose of school?[9]

Question for teachers: What do you believe most of your students' parents in your school consider to be the most important purpose of school?[10]

Jurisdiction		Academic	Economic	Civic	SEL	Other	Total
British Columbia, Canada	Parent (n=1043)	23%	12%	16%	40%	9%	100%
	Teacher (n=188)	47%	31%	5%	12%	5%	100%
Cajon Valley, CA, USA	Parent (n=320)	42%	18%	7%	26%	7%	100%
	Teacher (n=86)	40%	35%	2%	14%	9%	100%
Colombia	Parent (n=6,233)	47%	17%	8%	28%	0%	100%
	Teacher (1,264)	34%	29%	10%	27%	0%	100%
Ghana*	Parent	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Teacher (n=240)	25%	32%	6%	37%	0%	100%

9 Parents/caregivers perceived beliefs by grade level of students: Families of primary school aged children believed that teachers preferred SEL (39%), academic (32%), civic (14%), and economic purposes (13%) (other was 2%). Parents/caregivers of secondary school aged children believed that teachers preferred academic learning (41.5%), SEL (29.5%), economic (14%), and civics (12%) (other was 3%). Parents/caregivers perceived beliefs by their education level: Families with a secondary school education or less believed that teachers preferred academic (39%), SEL (34%), economic (13%), and civic purposes (11%) (other was 3%). Parents/caregivers with more than a secondary education believed teachers preferred SEL (36%), academic (34%), economic (13%) and civic (13%) purposes equally (other was 4%).

10 Teachers perceived beliefs by grade level of students: Teachers who taught primary school believed families preferred economic (30%), academic (29%), SEL (28%), and civic (10%) (other was 3%). Teachers who taught secondary school believed parents/caregivers preferred academic (39%), economic (29%), SEL (20%), and civic purposes (7%) (other was 5%).

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Jurisdiction		Academic	Economic	Civic	SEL	Other	Total
Mahar-ashtra, India	Parent (n=3012)	16%	16%	40%	23%	5%	100%
	Teacher (n=1549)	10%	15%	43%	31%	1%	100%
Malaysia	Parent (n=1078)	33%	9%	2%	56%	0%	100%
	Teacher (n=301)	20%	15%	1%	64%	0%	100%
Network of global schools	Parent (n=2934)	33.5%	7%	9.5%	45%	5%	100%
	Teacher (n=340)	68%	11%	3.5%	15%	2.5%	100%
South Australia	Parent (n=215)	26%	11.5%	15%	46.5%	1%	100%
	Teacher (n=152)	47%	29%	6%	17%	1%	100%
SW Penn-sylvania, USA	Parent (n=1308)	53%	14%	8%	20%	5%	100%
	Teacher (n=274)	28%	42%	4%	18%	8%	100%
Wayne Township, IN, USA	Parent (n=417)	52.3%	12.2%	6.2%	22.3%	7%	100%
	Teacher (n=395)	29%	52%	4%	8%	7%	100%
Mean Percentage	Parent (n=16,560)	36%	13%	12.5%	34%	4.5%	100%
	Teacher (n=4,789)	35%	29%	8.5%	24%	3.5%	100%

* Ghana did not survey parents/caregivers on perceptions of teachers.

Differences in perceptions presents an opportunity to really lean into conversations, especially when teachers are inaccurately perceiving families' beliefs. In one district in PA, teachers were so surprised that they had misunderstood their families' beliefs that they asked the education leaders to share the raw data so they could run their own analyses. This led to a deep conversation in the districts on how to help teachers and families get on the same page on teaching and learning priorities, and to use conversations to unpack parents'/caregivers' and teachers' perceptions. School

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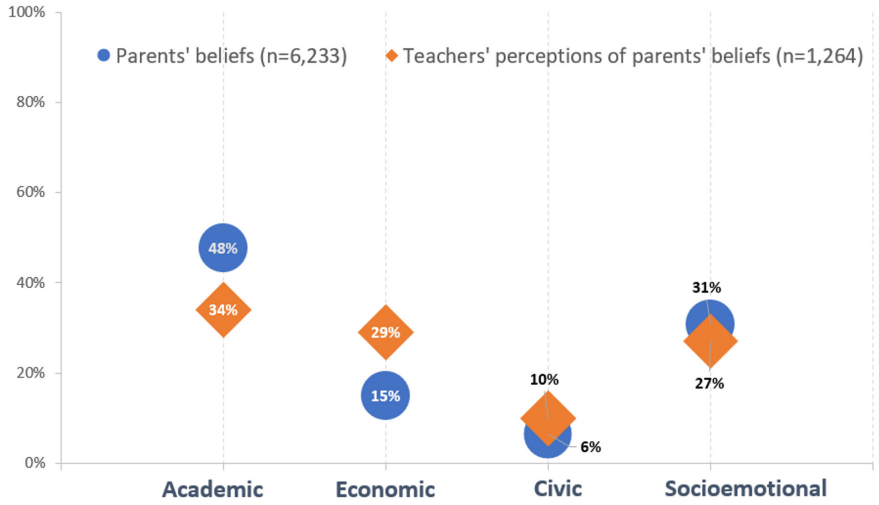
leaders used the survey data and subsequent conversations to develop annual priorities for the district.

In Figures 2 and 3, perception gaps are shown for parents/caregivers and teachers in Colombia. The perception gap for how teachers perceived parents is quite small in Figure 2, as indicated by the overlap between the parents' actual beliefs (circle) and what teachers perceived of parents/caregivers (diamond). This means that teachers understood that parents/caregivers prioritized academic learning. In Figure 3, there is a notable perception gap for how parents perceived teachers because parents/caregivers thought that teachers also prioritized academic learning, when in fact teachers prioritized SEL. This finding guided Colombia's conversations with schools, as will be discussed below.

Figure 2 **Belief Map*: Perception Gap Between Parents' Actual beliefs and How Teachers Perceive Parents (Data source: Red PaPaz Colombia)**



* This figure shows the gaps between parents' actual beliefs (circles) on the purpose of school, and teachers' perceptions of parents' beliefs (squares). There are very little gaps (white spaces) between actual and perceived beliefs by the four purposes of education, because teachers are accurately perceiving the beliefs of their students' parents.

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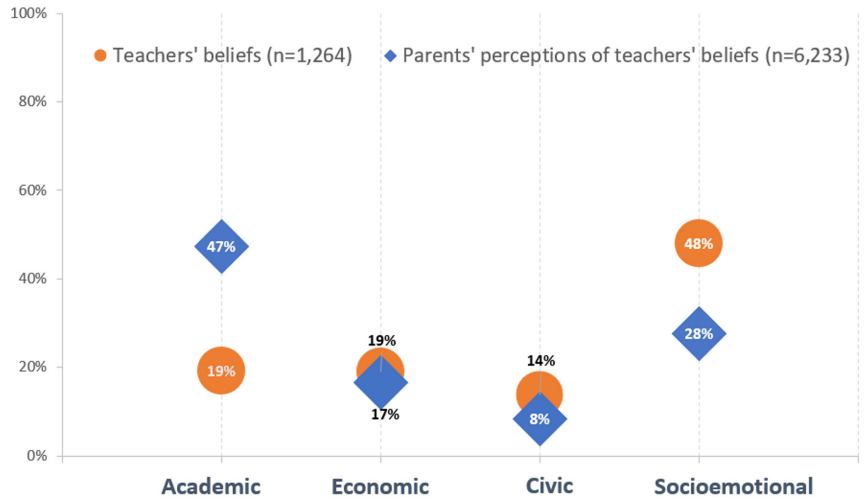
Figure 3 **Belief Map*: Perception Gap Between Teachers' Actual beliefs and How Parents Perceive Teachers (Data source: Red PaPaz Colombia)**



* This figure above shows the gaps between teachers' actual beliefs (circles) on the purpose of school, and parents' perceptions of teachers' beliefs (squares). In contrast to Figure 3, there are fairly large gaps (white spaces) between actual and perceived beliefs by the four purposes of education, because parents/caregivers do not accurately perceive teachers' beliefs on education. For example, teachers prioritized socioemotional learning, but parents/caregivers thought teachers prioritized academic learning.

Alignment of Beliefs and Relational Trust

As demonstrated in the literature, uncovering beliefs on school is a critical step to building trust between families and schools (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Winthrop et al., 2021a). In all ten jurisdictions, whether parents/caregivers and teachers felt they were aligned on what makes a good quality education was directly correlated to whether they felt respected by each other, respect being a critical component of relational trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). On both the parent/caregiver and teacher surveys, respondents were asked to report on a six-point scale the extent to which they thought the other group's beliefs on what makes a good-quality education were aligned with their own. They were also asked to what extent the other group respected and valued their input and suggestions (see Table 5). Correlation analyses between these two questions were then run for each jurisdiction's sample (see Winthrop et al., 2021b for reporting of these analyses). Pearson correlation coefficients ranged from .43 to .79 on both surveys. There was a significant ($p < .001$) and positive correlation between alignment and relational trust for all jurisdictions. Parents/caregivers who said that their children's teachers were more recep-

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tive to their input and suggestions were more likely to report that their children's teachers shared their beliefs about what makes a good quality education (Winthrop et al., 2021b). On the teacher survey, the relationship between alignment and trust followed the same pattern.

Table 5 Correlations Between Level of Alignment and Trust (n=22,654)

Questions for parents: My child's teachers share my beliefs about what makes a good education. AND My child's teachers are receptive to my input and suggestions. (Responses: 0 strongly disagree, 5 strongly agree).

Questions for teachers: My students' parents share my beliefs about what makes a good education. AND My students' parents are receptive to my input and suggestions. (Responses: 0 strongly disagree, 5 strongly agree).

Jurisdiction	Survey	n	r	p-value
British Columbia, Canada	Parent	937	.698	<.001
	Teacher	180	.437	<.001
Colombia	Parent	6233	.659	<.001
	Teacher	1264	.595	<.001
Cajon Valley, CA, USA	Parent	294	.552	<.001
	Teacher	81	.632	<.001
Ghana	Parent	1975	.613	<.001
	Teacher	171	.592	<.001
Maharashtra, India	Parent	2875	.431	<.001
	Teacher	1461	.612	<.001
Malaysia	Parent	1078	.793	<.001
	Teacher	301	.778	<.001
Network of global schools	Parent	2768	.728	<.001
	Teacher	326	.509	<.001
South Australia	Parent	207	.688	<.001
	Teacher	145	.487	<.001
SW Pennsylvania, USA	Parent	1218	.737	<.001
	Teacher	261	.560	<.001
Wayne Township, IN, USA	Parent	368	.555	<.001
	Teacher	375	.527	<.001

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Differences were also analyzed across different demographic groups. For example, in all jurisdictions but Malaysia, parents/caregivers of younger children were more likely to report that their children's teachers shared their beliefs on what makes a good education and that teachers were receptive to their input and suggestions than those with secondary school children (see Winthrop et al. 2021b for these analyses). Among parents/caregivers, the level of alignment in beliefs was comparable across education levels except for in Maharashtra, India and Wayne Township, IN where parents/caregivers with higher levels of education were less likely to feel aligned with teachers' beliefs than parents/caregivers with lower levels of education (see Winthrop et al. 2021b for these analyses). The level of trust was similarly comparable across parents'/caregivers' educational level in all jurisdictions except for South Australia and Wayne Township, IN, where parents/caregivers with lower levels of education were more likely to report that teachers were receptive to their inputs and suggestions as compared to parents/caregivers with higher levels of education (see Winthrop et al. 2021b for these analyses). During conversations, parents/caregivers and teachers discussed the extent to which they felt their beliefs were aligned and the extent that each group felt respected, in addition to any differences between demographic groups. Conversations were both an opportunity to reflect on their actual level of trust, as well as an opportunity to build greater relational trust through dialogue.

Using Conversations to Build Relational Trust and to Develop Strategies

In Colombia, survey data on beliefs and perceptions were used to spark conversations within schools and across schools. The research was led by Red PaPaz, a network of parents/caregivers that works across Colombia and partners with public and private schools to improve the wellbeing of children and youth. Surveys were conducted with teachers and parents/caregivers from 41 primary and secondary schools. After the survey data were analyzed, Red PaPaz worked with CUE to present the data in ways that school teams could easily digest the data. They then convened 12 cluster meetings with family and teacher representatives from all 41schools. Using a conversation guide, the school teams discussed common trends from the data, especially differences in beliefs on the purpose of school, perceptions of each other's beliefs, and alignment of beliefs and level of trust. For example, across all schools, why teachers prioritized SEL while parents/caregivers prioritized academic learning was a key theme in the dialogues. Conversations focused on understanding parents'/caregivers' concern with the emphasis on SEL and explanation of why teachers' were emphasizing SEL so strongly in their classrooms. One teacher and parent/caregiver group from Costa Caribe explained the parents'/caregivers' concern, "Some parents think/feel that they can address a child's socioemotional learning, but when it comes

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to academic learning, they want education professionals to lead this because they don't know how to lead this." In school teams they discussed strategies to better understand each other's perspectives and to help parents/caregivers learn how they can support their child's academic development as well as SEL. Barriers and opportunities to family, school, and community engagement in their schools were also discussed in these dialogues, as well as how to build greater relational trust.

From the conversations, school teams identified concrete short-term strategies for improving family, school, and community engagement; all teams created a strategy to increase communication between parents/caregivers and teachers. These strategies ranged from establishing more inclusive family and teacher committees to establishing better and more regular communication strategies using a range of in-person approaches as well as technology platforms. Teams also talked about how to build relational trust through regular monthly meetings between families and schools. As teachers and parents/caregivers from Pompilio Martinez described, "relational trust takes time to establish and build, and it is important to continue to strengthen these relations so there can be trust."

Across school teams, in the 12 cluster meetings, families and teachers also looked at medium- and long-term strategies for fostering greater family, school, and community engagement. Strategies included inviting parents/caregivers to take part in revisions of important national and district-level school frameworks, such as the *Manual de Convivencia* (Manual on Coexistence), a manual that lays out the rights and obligations of every member in the school community (Osario de Sarmiento & del Pilar Rodriquez, 2012). Red PaPaz is also helping facilitate national discussions with education leaders from across the country, with the intention of putting family, school, and community engagement on the national policy agenda. Survey data provided an important entry point into discussing beliefs, and conversations led to the development of short- to long-term strategies to build family, school, and community engagement that are responsive to the needs and perspectives of the communities.

Discussion

Family, school, and community engagement is essential for education systems transformation. Building impactful and sustainable family, school, and community engagement requires enacting strategies that are responsive to schools, families, and communities. This paper has mapped out the Conversation Starter tools and methodology, which supports families, schools, and communities in developing strategies. The first action in the process is to survey teachers, parents/caregivers and the second is to hold conversations with school teams so families and teachers

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can discuss their beliefs and perceptions. Survey data from ten jurisdictions in seven countries were shared in this article, as well as outcomes from conversations held in Colombia. The findings help serve two key objectives. The first being to demonstrate why teachers' and parents'/caregivers' beliefs on the purpose of school is critical to building relational trust between families and schools. The second to show how intentional conversations between families and schools on beliefs is an important step in building relational trust and can lead to strategies that increase family, school, and community engagement. As the survey data and belief maps show, parents/caregivers and teachers in many jurisdictions are often closer in alignment on their beliefs on education than they think, even though they perceive that they are further apart. As the correlational analyses demonstrated, the more parents/caregivers and teachers perceive they are aligned in their beliefs on what constitutes a good education, the greater their relational trust. Taking time to unpack beliefs and reflect on gaps in both perceptions is an important step in building relationships and trust.

As observed in Colombia, conversations provided an opportunity for parents/caregivers, teachers, students, and community members to discuss their diverse viewpoints and a platform to shift power and structures (Meadows, 1999). Using praxis and dialogical approaches (Freire, 1974) where all voices can be heard and equity and inclusion are prioritized, the Conversation Starter tools and methodology prompted parents/caregivers and families to reflect on their education beliefs and perceptions of each other and begin to formulate and act on strategies that were responsive to the context, culture, and ethos of their school and communities. The case study in Colombia demonstrated that conversations provide a much needed space for praxis, where school teams could co-construct responsive and innovative family, school, and community engagement strategies that can be implemented in the short-, medium-, and long-term. Having conversations is vital to building trust and developing responsive strategies, and conversations are a critical leverage point in systems change and transformation (Meadows, 1999 in Winthrop et al,, 2021a).

This research recommends three critical recommendations for teams who are seeking to develop greater family, school, and community engagement. First, understand teachers' and parents'/caregivers' beliefs on the purpose of school and their level of relational trust, whether through a survey or other method. Second, make time to facilitate inclusive, meaningful, and intentional conversations between schools and families and ensure that historically excluded and marginalized families feel welcome in conversations. Holding honest conversations requires confronting both power dynamics and hierarchies that influence participation. Third, make sure that the conversations lead to strategy development and action. Have school and family teams define collective goals and work towards strategies that are realistic

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and meaningful. These recommendations provide a springboard for improving and transforming education systems, and ensuring schools are responsive to the needs and hopes of learners, educators, and families.

Going forward, this research will be expanded to more jurisdictions in the Global South and Global North with attention to understanding how beliefs and relational trust varies between historically marginalized groups in different contexts, which was not sufficiently analyzed in this study. Additionally, this research will scrutinize more intentionally how barriers and opportunities to family, school, and community engagement can vary across demographic groups and how building relational trust must take into consideration these historical barriers. Efforts to discuss barriers more intentionally through conversations are not only vital to school teams, but are an important contribution to the larger field. While the COVID-19 pandemic devastated many educational systems and communities around the world, it has also demonstrated a pressing need for schools, families, and communities to work together to transform education systems. The paper both calls for and lays out a methodology for leading intentional and meaningful conversations and co-constructing family, school, and community engagement strategies that will ensure schools are places where all students, families, and teachers thrive.

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