



Press Release

HKU study suggests Parental Communication and Relationship with the Child are Key to Student Well-being in School and at Home in the New Normal

A team of researchers led by Professor Nancy Law, Deputy Director of the Centre of Information Technology in Education, and Dr Tan Cheng Yong, Associate Professor, Academic Unit of Social Contexts and Policies of Education of the Faculty of Education, the University of Hong Kong (HKU), released their fifth report for the eCitizen Education 360 study this afternoon (March 30). The latest research results focus on parenting practices before and during the pandemic, how different parenting practices impact students' learning and socio-emotional wellbeing, and how these may be correlated with parental background and school factors. The findings reveal which practices are more beneficial and what support may be helpful to different parents.

Key research findings

Parents were invited to complete a survey through students participating in the study. A total of 1,613 and 770 valid responses were received from parents of secondary and primary students respectively. Unfortunately, only 932 (58%) secondary and 186 (24%) primary parent surveys can be matched with their children's survey responses for the purpose of relational analysis. The parent survey asked about parent-child interactions and parent-school interactions before and during the school suspension, as well as the parents' general stress level and worries about their children's learning due to school suspension. The survey was conducted from mid-June to mid-July 2020.

1. Good parent-child relationship is the single most important supportive and protective factor for the child's wellbeing

The analyses reveal great diversity in the extent of parents' interactions with their children and the schools. Four patterns of parenting behaviour are identified from secondary parents' responses: *very low engagement* in all kinds of interactions, primarily maintaining *child-focused communication*, providing above average levels of *child-centred support* (monitoring of online activities and help with school work), and *comprehensive support* (high levels of engagement with both the child and the school). For primary parents, the overall involvement levels are higher and the four patterns are similar to those of secondary parents, except that there was some level of help provided to the child in all of the four patterns.

The relationship between various parenting variables and the child's academic and socio-emotional wellbeing during school suspension was also examined. Maintaining a good parent-child relationship is the single most beneficial factor for the child. Parents' perceived closeness of relationship with their children predicts the most self-reported benefits by their children during school suspension: self-efficacy for online learning, increase in digital skills, participation in online learning activities and perceived usefulness of online learning tools. The strength of parent-child relationship also predicts lower levels of child-reported use of digital tools for socialising and entertainment. Parents helping with school work during school suspension predicts their children's lower levels of perceived usefulness of online learning tools. This should not be taken as a causal relationship, but an indication that parental intervention may not bring desired outcomes.

2. Parental participation in school activities predicts children's participation in online learning and perceived usefulness of online learning tools.

The analysis of the secondary level data shows statistically significant benefits in parental participation in school activities. Parental participation in school activities during school suspension predicts children's participation in online learning activities and their perceptions of usefulness of online learning tools. This could be due to parents being more able to provide appropriate online learning support through a better

understanding of the schools' plans and arrangements. The analysis also shows that parent-teacher interactions during school suspension predict the extent to which children encountered obstacles in online learning. This possibly indicates that teachers reached out to parents or vice versa when they observe children's difficulties in online learning.

3. Parents from lower socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds are more likely to engage in school activities and interact with teachers.

Only parents of the *Comprehensive Support* group showed substantial involvement with schools and teachers. At both secondary and primary levels, there was a higher probability for this group of parents to experience hardship during school suspension. This indicates that parents from lower SES background are more likely to rely on schools for parenting support.

4. Teachers' online teaching preparedness and their priority for student-centred pedagogy reduce their students' worries and likelihood of cyberbullying during school suspension.

Significant between-school differences were found in three student-wellbeing-related variables pertaining to the school-suspension period: frequency of participation in online learning interactions, worries about school resumption, and the probability of experiencing cyberbullying. Further analysis shows that at the school level, teachers' self-efficacy in the design and implementation of online learning and teaching predicts lower levels of students' worries about school resumption; teachers' priority for student-centred pedagogy predicts students' online learning interaction frequency; and teachers' use of instant messaging/videoconferencing for teaching and communication predicts students' online learning interaction frequency and also their probability of having encountered cyberbullying. The latter result is not causal, but indicates that teachers are more likely to initiate communication when they detect possible problems.

5. Secondary schools with stronger e-learning plans and strategies predict higher likelihood of parent-teacher interactions before the pandemic.

Significant between-school differences in the level of parent-teacher interactions before school suspension were found. This difference is predicted by the strength of the school's e-learning plan and strategy.

Recommendations

Based on the above research findings, the team recommends the following for different stakeholders under the New Normal:

1. For parents: their understanding, empathy, socio-emotional support and encouragement are more important for their children's wellbeing than specific guidance or coaching on their school work. Focus on communication with children, their teachers and schools.
2. For schools: strengthen e-learning strategy and support teacher professional development for student-centred pedagogy; communicate with parents on school e-learning arrangements and expectations, work with NGOs and community partners to provide "digital parenting" education. This is especially important to parents who are from lower SES background and are in need of support.
3. For students: communicate with parents and reach out to teachers and school leaders when there are difficulties with online learning or cyber-risks.
4. For parent-teacher associations: identify need areas in parenting support provisions and good practices; solicit government and community resources for (digital) parenting education and support.
5. For NGOs: communicate and cooperate with different stakeholders to help parents adapt to the New Normal.
6. For policy makers: provide more parenting support as needed for the New Normal by establishing a database of different support services for parents (by the government and NGOs), and publicising them, and by promoting parental engagement with schools and teachers.

About "eCitizen Education 360"

The prolonged period of fight against COVID-19 and school suspension has posed huge challenges to every member of the education community. The tremendous effort of schools in sustaining learning online has not only overcome limits presented by social distancing, but inspire a new chapter of educational transformation as schools resume. The project is a comprehensive 360-degree survey study with widespread support from academia, parents, professionals and community organisations. By gathering information about the

experiences and needs of primary and secondary schools during the periods of school suspension and resumption, we aim to enhance our comprehensive capacities to act as a community to improve the education opportunities, digital competence and well-being of students. These would also enable them to cope with various aspects of life in the fast-changing world in which digital technology plays a pervasive role.

The findings are based on the data collected during school resumption from June to July 2020, in a study entitled “**eCitizen Education 360**”. The first four batches of research findings were released on July 20, August 25, November 3, 2020 and January 19, 2021 respectively.

For more details of the “e-Citizen Education 360” Project and the report, please visit <https://ecitizen.hk/360>. To view the e-version of this press release, download related photos, presentation file and further reference materials, please visit <http://web.edu.hku.hk/press>.

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