Center for Universal Education at BROOKINGS

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MAKING FAMILY, SCHOOL, AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT INTEGRAL TO ZANZIBAR'S LEARNING ECOSYSTEM

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Executive summary

Over the past four decades, the Government of Zanzibar, a semi-autonomous region in Tanzania, has recognized the importance of family engagement in the learning and development of children in its education policies, plans, and frameworks. Yet, family engagement is often positioned as an add-on activity, rather than as a vital component embedded at all education levels—from pre-primary to secondary—and in all areas of the education system, including in the teaching and learning of academic, life, civic, and other skills. The vision of family, school, and community engagement (FSCE) in guiding education frameworks, which includes plans, policies, and guidelines, is largely concentrated on the representation of families on decision-making bodies in schools, and particularly in school management committees (SMCs) as opposed to the many other possible forms of engagement documented globally.

This siloed vision of FSCE and the lack of a comprehensive approach or vision for the role of families within these education frameworks are due to three interrelated reasons. First, there is no clear definition and vision for FSCE at the central level of the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MoEVT), and consequently, education frameworks do not reflect comprehensive practices for ensuring families are centered in education policies, plans, and practices. Second, there is no unit, department, or person within MoEVT officially responsible for championing and overseeing FSCE across the basic education system, which extends from pre-primary to four years of secondary school. Third, FSCE efforts have been largely implemented through projects and when funding and programming ceases, activities slow or halt.

The purpose of this policy report is to present findings on the current state of FSCE in Zanzibar and to identify promising strategies and practices to support an integrated approach to family engagement across education levels. This report starts with a policy analysis of key education frameworks governing Zanzibar's education

system across all education levels, followed by a presentation of empirical research conducted with government secondary school families, students, and educators in nine of Zanzibar's eleven districts. The research was conducted between 2022 and 2023 in collaboration with the Milele Zanzibar Foundation (referred to as "Milele") and the Center for Universal Education (CUE) at the Brookings Institution. The research methodology used was CUE's Conversation Starter Tools, a participatory community-driven approach, which includes surveys and focus group discussions in school communities.

The report then shares four key findings and recommendations that emerged through this research, which are outlined in Table 1. The recommendations in this report are directed at MoEVT, including central as well as district and school leaders, responsible for designing and implementing family and community engagement. Recommendations are also relevant for civil society organizations and donors supporting the education sector in Zanzibar.

TABLE 1

Key findings and recommendations

Findings	Recommendations
Defining and conceptualizing FSCE in policies and plans	
1. Families, educators, students, and education leaders have different understandings of what family, school, and community engagement means and should look like in schools.	1. Ensure policies and plans include a comprehensive definition of family, school, and community engagement across the basic education system, with actionable guidance for implementing and monitoring meaningful engagement in districts and schools.
2. The most important motivation for families in engaging with schools is their children's learning and development. The role of families in their children's education is not clearly laid out in Zanzibar's education policy, plans, or curricula.	2. Consult families and students in developing a vision of FSCE for the secondary school level to ensure guidance is responsive to their beliefs, context, and types of engagement.
Building an ethos of partnerships into school practice	
3. Every school is mandated to have a school management committee (SMC) or board composed of educators, families, and community members, but few pre-primary and primary schools have parent teacher associations (PTAs), and no secondary schools have PTAs to date.	3. Operationalize a plan for establishing PTAs in not only pre-primary and primary schools, but also secondary schools as family and school partnerships continue to be important across the educational trajectories of students.
4. Families and students reported high levels of trust in educators, but few opportunities to interact and communicate with educators. Families faced many structural barriers to building family, school, and community engagement, such as financial constraints, lack of time, and transportation.	4. Decouple family, school, and community engagement efforts and practices from financial asks. Encourage schools to create greater two-way communication between families and schools, including opportunities to listen to families to build greater relational trust and partnerships.

Family, school, and community engagement in Zanzibar's education system

FAMILY, SCHOOL, AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Family, school, and community engagement (FSCE) is a critical component of thriving education systems and in ensuring that schools are meeting the learning and developmental needs of students. FSCE is critical across the lifespan of a young person's schooling, although there is often greater engagement in the early years of schooling in the pre-primary and primary grades.[1] Box 1 lays out CUE's global definition of FSCE alongside some of the research behind the importance of engagement in the lives of students, families, and schools.

BOX 1

The importance of FSCE[2]

Family, school, and community engagement encompasses the many ways that families, educators, and community groups work together to promote student learning and development.[3] Families include all individuals who play a leading role in caregiving and educating their children, including caregivers, guardians, and extended family members—from grandparents to aunts, uncles, or cousins—and those beyond biological relationships.[4]

While family, school, and community engagement varies depending on the context, the intention is to support greater collaborations and partnerships that ensure teaching and learning is equitable, inclusive, high-quality, and relevant. When there are strong home and school partnerships, families feel included and welcomed and are better equipped to support their children's learning and collaborate with schools.[5] Educators also benefit from strong family, school, and community partnerships. When they see families as valuable assets rather than as barriers to collaboration, they have greater professional satisfaction and success. Partnerships also strengthen education systems, as they create the conditions necessary for meaningful and sustainable reforms and transformations.[6]

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1 Andrea Otero-Mayer et al., "Family Involvement in Early Childhood Education: A Systematic Review of Its Measurement," *Early Childhood Education Journal* (2025), https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-025-02024-4; Joyce L. Epstein, "Parent Involvement: What Research Says to Administrators," *Education and Urban Society* 19, no. 2 (1987): 119-136, https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124587019002002; Maša Đurišić, and Mila Bunijevac, "Parental Involvement as an Important Factor for Successful Education." *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal* 7, no. 3 (2017): 137-153. https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.291.

2 The definition language in Box 1 is consistent across all of the publications in the series "Policy Recommendations on Building Family-centered Education Systems." Additional common language includes Box 2, the description of the Conversation Starter Tools Methodology. Original source is Emily M. Morris and Laura Nóra, *Six Global Lessons on How Family, School, and Community Engagement Can Transform Education* (Brookings Institution, 2024).

3 Geert Driessen et al., "Parental Involvement and Educational Achievement," *British Educational Research Journal* 31, no. 4 (2005): 509–32, https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920500148713; Leilane Henriette Barreto Chiappetta-Santana et al., "Learning Motivation, Socioemotional Skills and School Achievement in Elementary School Students," *Paideía Ribeirão Preto* 32, (2022), https://doi.org/10.1590/1982-4327e3232; Mauricio Saracostti et al., "Influence of Family Involvement and Children's Socioemotional Development on the Learning Outcomes of Chilean Students," *Frontiers in Psychology* 10, (2019): 335, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00335; Abdul Waheed Mughal et al., "Perspectives of Dropped-Out Children on Their Dropping Out from Public Secondary Schools in Rural Pakistan," *International Journal of Educational Development* 66, (2019): 52–61, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2019.02.004; Loizos Symeou et al., "Dropping out of High School in Cyprus: Do Parents and the Family Matter?," *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth* 19, no 1 (2012): 113–31, https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2012.717899.

4 Emily M. Morris and Laura Nóra, *Six Global Lessons on How Family, School, and Community Engagement Can Transform Education* (Brookings Institution, 2024).

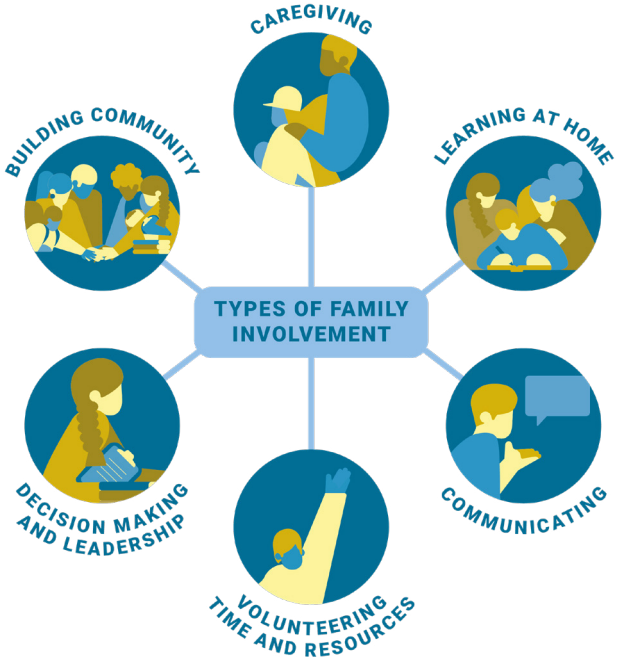
5 Shulamit Natan Ritblatt, Audrey Hokada, and Felicia V. Black. "Creating Connections with Families of Young Children Using Trauma-Informed Approaches." *Family Community Partnerships: Promising Practices for Teachers and Teacher Educators* (Emerald Publishing, 2023): 65-72.

6 Rebecca Winthrop et al., *Collaborating to Transform and Improve Education Systems: A Playbook for Family-School Engagement* (Brookings Institution, 2021).

There are six main types of family involvement and engagement outlined in the literature. Two of these types of engagement, caregiving and supporting learning at home, are largely enacted within households. Other types of involvement and engagement take place in relation to the school, such as communicating with teachers and staff, volunteering time and resources, and participating in decision making and leadership—such as SMCs and parent teacher associations. All of these types of family involvement and engagement are critical to ensuring education systems are responsive to families, students, and educators and are outlined in Figure 1.[7]

FIGURE 1

Types of family involvement and engagement



THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF FAMILIES IN ZANZIBAR'S EDUCATION FRAMEWORKS

Zanzibar's basic education system extends from two years of pre-primary through four years of ordinary-level secondary school and is governed by MoEVT under the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar (RGZ). Zanzibar's pre-primary and primary education system is independent of that of mainland Tanzania; however, ordinary-level secondary schooling (Forms 1 to 4) shares a common curriculum and final examination (Form 4) with the mainland.

The roles families are intended to play in these education frameworks are often more symbolic than impactful, for example fulfilling a parent/caregiver quota on a school committee or remaining informed about policy changes. A policy analysis was conducted to identify the different roles and responsibilities designated to families and communities in the various education frameworks to understand how education leaders and decision makers envision family, school and community engagement in the education system. These five different roles and responsibilities are outlined in Box 2.

[7] Figure 1 from Morris and Nóra, 2024. Based on Joyce L. Epstein et al., *School, Family, and Community Partnerships* (Corwin, 2018).

BOX 2

Roles and responsibilities of families in education frameworks

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

According to the policy analysis, family and community engagement has been a notable component of different education plans and strategies, starting with the Education Act Number 6 of 1982 and the 1993 amendment. The amendment laid out the importance of engaging students, teachers, communities (including families), and government representatives in school committees that govern school decisions and implementation.[8] School/education boards were designed to "promote healthy relations among the pupils, teachers, parents, guardians, and the public in general in that district."[9] An early education policy, the Education Policy of 1991, also spoke of the importance of parents in caregiving and educating their children, and providing resources for education and schools. In this policy, educators were assigned an active role in communicating and advising families about children's learning and development so parents/caregivers can "join hands" in partnership.[10] The education plan that operationalized this policy, the Zanzibar Education Master Plan (1995-2005) had four key strategies, one of which was the "promotion of school based management, parent teacher associations and community and local government support,"[11] thereby establishing the importance of parents/caregivers in informing decision making and leadership in schools.

The same language used in the Zanzibar Education Master Plan on promoting parent teacher associations PTAs was repeated in the Education Policy of 2006 (still in effect at the time of this publication), and again in Zanzibar Education Development Plan (ZEDP I) (2008/09-2015/16), the first of three educational plans operationalizing

[8] RGZ, Education Act No. 6, 1982 (RGZ).
[9] RGZ, The Education (Amendment) Act No. 4 of 1993 (RGZ), 12.
[10] MoE, *Sera ya elimu Zanzibar* [Zanzibar Education Policy] (RGZ, 1991), 36.
[11] MoEVT, *Education Policy*, 2006 (RGZ, 2006), 1.

the 2006 policy. The Education Policy of 2006 and ZEDP I also noted that families were to provide resources and support to schools and partner with schools to ensure children were in attendance and that their nutrition, health, and special needs were being met.

Subsequent education plans, namely the Zanzibar Education Development Plan (ZEDP II) (2017/2018-2021/2022) and the Zanzibar Education Sector Transformation Plan (ZESTP) (2023/24-2029/30) continued to emphasize the need for family involvement to achieve their ambitious vision of equitable access to high-quality education. The ZEDP II aimed to inform and educate families and communities of the benefits of pre-primary and primary education and proposed establishing clear and formal roles for families in school decision making and leadership through management committees. In the ZESTP, MoEVT set a target of establishing PTAs for pre-primary, primary, and secondary schools, but there are no further details on what that will entail. There was initial support to create PTAs[12] in Zanzibar modeled after those on the mainland, Ushirikiano wa Wazazi, Walimu na Jamii (UWAWAJA), or Family, Teacher, and Community Partnerships for pre-primary and Ushirikiano wa Wazazi na Walimu (UWAWA), or Family-Teacher Partnerships for primary; however, this effort was impacted by the elimination of funding by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in 2025. The Guide for Establishing PTAs/UWAWAJA in Pre-Primary Schools in Zanzibar (2023) outlines these partnerships.

In addition to the PTA guidance, there are two different guideline versions, the School Committee Responsibilities (2009) and the more recent School Committee Responsibilities (2022), which lay out the role of school committees—of which families are critical members. Currently there are no finalized PTA/Parent Teacher Partnership (PTP) guidelines covering the secondary school level in Zanzibar. Given that secondary school provision is unified between the islands and mainland, the Guideline on Parent Teacher Partnership (2022)—written for mainland secondary schools—was analyzed for this report. The Korea International Cooperation Agency meanwhile has funded efforts to strengthen SMCs in secondary schools in Zanzibar, among other civil society organization collaborations.

Finally, Zanzibar's leading curriculum for pre-primary and primary-level—the Pre-Primary and Primary Education Curriculum Framework—was analyzed to understand the role assigned to families. The curriculum envisions a role for families as key stakeholders in supporting learning and being informed about their children's academic progress through continuous and summative assessments, including examinations. Although the curriculum covering secondary schools on the mainland and Zanzibar[13] was still under revision at the time this report was written, there is no detailed role for families beyond ensuring schools are held accountable for delivering the curriculum. Roles and responsibilities were analyzed in nine of the education frameworks, as outlined in Table 2 and detailed in Appendix A.

[12] MoEVT has referred to both terms–parent teacher associations and parent teacher partnerships in their documents–but the terms in Swahili, UWAWAJA and UWAWA are most commonly used.

[13] The secondary level curriculum covers both Zanzibar and mainland Tanzania, while the pre-primary and primary curriculum in Zanzibar is distinct from that of the mainland.

TABLE 2

Roles and responsibilities assigned to families in education frameworks

Education frameworks	Roles and responsibilities of families
Policies, curricula, plans, and programs	
Education Policy (2006-2026): lays out the goals, strategies, and programs of Zanzibar's national education system covering pre-primary, primary, and secondary education, as well as nonformal and adult education.[14]	• Implementation of policies and practices • Decision making and leadership • Being informed • Providing resources • Shifting mindsets
The Zanzibar Education Sector Transformation Plan (ZESTP) (2023/24-2029/30): outlines the implementation for the *Education Policy's* goals, programs, and strategies (3rd plan).[15]	• Decision making and leadership • Being informed
The Zanzibar Education Development Plan (ZEDP) II (2017/2018-2021/2022): outlines the implementation for the *Education Policy's* goals, programs, and strategies (2nd plan).[16]	• Decision making and leadership • Being informed • Providing resources
Pre-Primary and Primary Education Curriculum Framework (2022): lays out the competency-based curriculum for early grades in Zanzibar.[17]	• Implementation of policies and practices • Being informed
Curriculum for Ordinary Secondary Education Forms 1-4 (2023): lays out the competency-based curriculum covering the mainland and Zanzibar.[18]	• Implementation of policies and practices
Guide for Establishing PTAs/UWAWAJA in Pre-Primary Schools in Zanzibar (2023): provides guidance on how to establish, manage, and operate PTAs/UWAWAJA for pre-primary schools in Zanzibar.[19]	• Implementation of policies and practices • Decision making and leadership • Being informed • Providing resources • Shifting mindsets
School Management Committee Responsibilities Guide (2022): provides guidance on how to establish, manage, and operate SMCs (latest version).[20]	• Implementation of policies and practices • Decision making and leadership • Being informed • Providing resources • Shifting mindsets

[14] MoEVT, 2006.
[15] MoEVT, *Zanzibar Education Sector Transformation Plan (Fiscal Year 2023/24-2029/30)* (RGZ, 2024).
[16] MoEVT, *Zanzibar Education Development Plan II (2017/2018–2021/2022)* (RGZ, 2017).
[17] MoEVT and Zanzibar Institute of Education [ZIE], *Pre-Primary and Primary Education Curriculum Framework* (RGZ, 2022).
[18] MoEST, *Curriculum for Ordinary Secondary Education Forms 1-4* (Tanzania Institute of Education 2023).
[19] MoEVT, *Mwongozo wa Kuanzisha Ushirikiano wa Wazazi, Walimu na Jamii (Uwawaja) Katika Skuli za Maandalizi Zanzibar* [Guide for Establishing PTAs/Uwawaja in Pre-Primary Schools in Zanzibar] (RGZ, 2023).
[20] MoEVT, *Mwongozo wa Majukumu ya Kamati ya Skuli* [School Management Committee Responsibilities Guide] (RGZ, 2022).

School Management Committee Responsibilities (2009): provides guidance on how to establish, manage, and operate SMCs (earlier version).[21]	• Implementation of policies and practices • Decision making and leadership • Being informed • Providing resources • Shifting mindsets
Guideline On Parent Teacher Partnership (2022): provides guidance on how to establish, manage, and operate PTAs for secondary schools in mainland Tanzania.[22]	• Implementation of policies and practices • Being informed • Shifting mindsets

Across the nine education frameworks, parents/caregivers are expected to play five key roles. The clearest is a role in *decision making and leadership*, namely through participation in SMCs—sometimes referred to as school boards in private and/or specialized secondary schools. Each government school is required to have an SMC or school board, with three out of the 10 members being parents/caregivers to ensure family representation. The other SMC members are leaders in the school and local community, as well as the student body leader. These committees oversee school plans and budgets and are responsible for accountability and ensuring schools have the resources, personnel, and infrastructure needed to support learning (see more details in Appendix A). In addition to SMCs or school boards, schools are to have PTAs. According to the Education Policy of 2006 and the education plans, PTAs are to extend across the compulsory basic education system and provide an opportunity for direct family involvement in various roles and responsibilities, from decision making to supporting teaching and learning in schools. SMCs are managing bodies that involve a few parent/caregiver representatives. In contrast, PTAs are intended to be bodies largely comprised of parents/caregivers who work with teachers and school staff to ensure student success and development.

Families are also assigned minor roles in *implementation of policies and practices*. These include ensuring children are enrolled in school, supporting their learning at home, and working collaboratively with schools to ensure nutrition and other needs are met. Frameworks further mention the importance of *being informed*, namely monitoring learning and progress, and ensuring schools are reaching marginalized children. In three of the frameworks, families are tasked with *providing resources*, which includes contributions, human resources, and engagement of community leaders and groups to ensure there is adequate infrastructure, materials, teachers, and technology. Finally, families are to play a role in *shifting mindsets* in three education frameworks, which means ensuring enrollment and participation of vulnerable children and youth—named in the Education Policy of 2006 as children with disabilities, girls at risk of pregnancy and early marriage, and children living with HIV/AIDS.

Although all frameworks, including every iteration of the school plans, repeat the same script that families are critical to the learning and development of children and youth, and vital to ensuring schools are resourced and serving the community, this intention to deeply engage families in education systems has not been fully delivered in practice as will further be explored in the findings.

[21] MoEVT, *Majukumu ya Kamati ya Skuli* [School Management Committee Responsibilities] (Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar, 2009).
[22] MoEST, *Guideline on Parent Teacher Partnership* (United Republic of Tanzania, 2022).

Research design

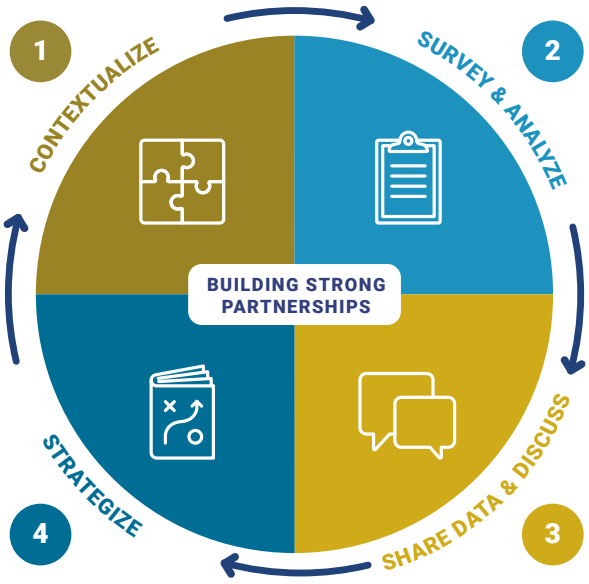
CONVERSATION STARTER TOOLS METHODOLOGY[23]

The findings and recommendations in this policy brief are based on the document analysis presented above as well as data collected through the Conversation Starter Tools research methodology. The goal of this community-driven research is to guide schools, districts, and civil society organizations in examining the landscape of family, school, and community engagement in their contexts and to develop a shared vision of how to build stronger family, school, and community partnerships. The process is not intended to judge or assess schools or districts but rather to foster greater relational trust between families, educators, and students.

The Conversation Starter Tools were developed by the Family, School, and Community Engagement in Education initiative at CUE in collaboration with school and civil society organization teams around the world, including Milele Zanzibar Foundation. This approach guides school teams through the process of collecting survey **data** with families, educators, and students, using data as a springboard for **dialogues**, and ultimately generating strategies and new **directions** that can be integrated into school practices and policies. As seen in Figure 2,[24] this mixed-methods suite includes surveys, focus group discussion guides, and other protocols to enhance data, dialogue, and directions on how to strengthen collaboration and partnerships between families, schools, and communities.

FIGURE 2

Conversation Starter Tools process



[23] Between 2022 and 2024, the Conversation Starter Tools research teams surveyed 9,473 families, 2,726 educators, and 9,963 students in 235 schools across 16 countries. Hundreds of subsequent dialogues on strategies for strengthening partnerships were then held across these schools. See Morris and Nóra, 2024.

[24] Emily M. Morris et al., *Conversation Starter Tools: A Participatory Research Guide to Building Stronger Family, School, and Community Partnerships* (Brookings Institution, 2024).

RESEARCH PROCESS

During the 2022 school year, Milele used the Conversation Starter Tools to survey government and private ordinary secondary school teachers, education leaders, families (parents/caregivers), and students in 16 schools in nine of Zanzibar's 11 districts in Pemba and Unguja islands. The Conversation Starter Tools surveys were orally administered in Swahili, the vast majority in-person, and a small proportion on the phone. Offering the surveys orally helped ensure that families with low literacy levels and limited access to technology were included. Approximately 954 parents/caregivers, 65.7% of targeted families, participated in the surveys. Among teachers, surveys were administered either orally, or through a virtual link or paper copy they could complete independently, depending on the preference of the teacher. All school educators, which included teachers, head teachers, and other school staff who work directly with students, were invited to participate in the surveys. A total of 210 educators answered the surveys, roughly 47% of the entire population of educators in these schools.

Secondary school students were also critical participants in this research. The survey was extended to all students in Forms 1 to 3 at each of the 16 schools. Youth researchers studying at local universities conducted surveys at each school through regularly scheduled classroom activities. The youth researchers led 1,139 students, 78.4% of targeted students, through the survey by reading the questions out loud and having students independently record their responses. The survey data from families, educators, and students were analyzed and synthesized into brief summaries designed for low-literacy audiences.

Milele then shared the data with each school and held 48 intergenerational conversations among parents/caregivers, students, and educators who participated in the surveys. Through the conversations, participants identified strategies to improve FSCE practices at the schools. These conversations also provided a mechanism for building relational trust and identifying new strategies and directions that schools could employ for strengthening family, school, and community partnerships.

In February 2024, the research was shared with directors and education leaders at MoEVT. Milele and CUE then worked together on refining the key recommendations and findings. These final recommendations and findings were also shared with select directors at MoEVT through in-depth one-on-one conversations.

Background to the research

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

The sample intentionally targeted districts in both Unguja and Pemba islands where Milele was working; nine schools were located in Unguja and seven in Pemba. Of the respondents, nearly two-thirds were from rural areas (61.4%). Roughly half of the parents/caregivers (54.2%) and educators (47.6%) were female. Two-thirds of participating students were female (64.3%), reflecting Zanzibar's female-majority secondary school enrollment of 54.5%.[25]

Only 5.3% of the family participants reported having a child with a disability (CWD). This percentage was slightly higher among student respondents, with 7.9% reporting a disability. Both proportions are below the estimated 10% of people globally with a disability,[26] and the estimated 11% of Zanzibaris over the age of 7 who have a disability according to the census.[27]

[25] MoEVT, *Education Statistical Abstract: 2020–2024 Data* (RGZ, 2025).
[26] UNICEF, *Seen, Counted, Included: Using Data to Shed Light on the Well-Being of Children with Disabilities* (UNICEF Data, 2021).
[27] Office of the Chief Government Statistician (OCGS), Zanzibar. *Integrated Labour Force Survey, 2020/21, Zanzibar Analytical Report* (RGZ, 2022).

TABLE 3

Participant demographics by geography, gender, and disability status

Participants	Islands		Geography		Gender		CWD	
	Pemba	Unguja	Rural	Urban	Female	Male	Yes	No
Families (*n* = 954)	42.2%	57.8%	58.2%	41.8%	54.2%	45.8%	5.3%	94.7%
Students (*n* = 1,139)	43.7%	56.3%	63.1%	36.9%	64.3%	35.7%	7.9%	92.1%
Educators (*n* = 210)	36.7%	63.3%	66.7%	33.3%	47.6%	52.4%	n/a	n/a

Socioeconomic status (SES) of families was captured by the ability to meet basic needs and educational levels, two variables that are often correlated in education research. More than half (53.6%) of parents/caregivers had not finished secondary school. Families and educators were also asked their SES level, or "Are you able to cover basic food and living expenses?" on a scale of 1 to 4 (1 being "never" and 4 being "always"). Nearly one-third (60.8%) were "never" or "sometimes" able to meet their basic needs.[28] This signals that nearly half of the population was struggling to get by and that their children would be the first in their families to complete/attend secondary school. Education levels and SES were slightly higher in urban households than in rural ones. Zanzibar-wide data suggests that 25.7% of families are living below the basic needs poverty line of 66,313 Tanzanian shillings per month in 2019/20 (equivalent to $25-26).[29]

TABLE 4

Participant demographics, by education levels and socioeconomic status

Participants	Education levels			SES (Percent meeting basic needs)			
	No education	Primary	Secondary or above	Never	Sometimes	Mostly	Always
Rural							
Families (*n* = 555)	16.0%	37.6%	46.4%	11.0%	49.8%	18.2%	19.6%
Educators (*n* = 140)	0%	0%	100%	10.9%	40.9%	22.6%	25.5%
Urban							
Families (*n* = 399)	6.0%	26.3%	67.7%	8.5%	44.1%	17.3%	29.3%
Educators (*n* = 70)	0%	0%	100%	2.9%	39.1%	26.1%	31.9%

[28] This number may be inflated if respondents assumed some sort of assistance for participation in the survey.

[29] Basic needs poverty line estimates the food and non-food needs for maintaining a healthy life and carrying out light physical activity. World Bank, *Towards a More Inclusive Zanzibar Economy: Zanzibar Poverty Assessment 2022* (World Bank, 2022).

Participants	Education levels			SES (Percent meeting basic needs)			
	No education	Primary	Secondary or above	Never	Sometimes	Mostly	Always
Total							
Families (*n* = 954)	11.8%	32.9%	55.3%	10.2%	47.7%	18.1%	24.0%
Educators (*n* = 210)	0%	0%	100%	8.3%	40.3%	23.8%	27.7%

NOTE: The category of primary education may include some secondary education, but participants did not complete secondary school.

Swahili was the primary language used in the majority of homes, with 100% of families and educators, and 99% of students, reporting this as the main language used with their families. The language of instruction in secondary school is officially English, but children learn in Swahili for the majority of pre-primary and primary grades through Standard 4.

Findings and recommendations

Finding 1: Families, educators, students, and education leaders have different understandings of what family, school, and community engagement means and should look like in schools.

MoEVT does not have an official definition of FSCE. However, engagement of parents/caregivers is often described in Zanzibar's education frameworks as involvement in school committees or groups—such as SMCs and PTAs—and parents/caregivers are grouped under a category of community engagement. Families' roles in supporting learning at home is less clearly designated in education frameworks, even though this is the most prominent role of engagement for parents/caregivers, as reported during the research. Table 5 outlines how families are engaged in their children's learning or schools, as reported by participant groups. Families and students reported that parents'/caregivers' primary forms of engagement were supporting learning at home and caregiving (71.4% and 77.8%, respectively).

According to educators, the top form of family engagement was communicating with the school (63.8%). Common forms of communication with school and staff—as reported by educators, families, and students—included phone calls and written communication delivered to families by students. Globally, educators often judge family engagement by whether families are communicating with them and participating in school activities, so this finding was consistent with other countries.[30] Families rated communication as their second most common type of engagement (63.3%), after financial contributions (69.4%).

Although participation in decision making and leadership is an essential form of FSCE, fewer than 6.8% of families reported participating in a school committee. Given that family members on SMCs and PTAs represent only a few families, SMC or PTA participation should not be considered the main form of FSCE in education frameworks.

[30] Morris and Nóra, 2024.

TABLE 5

Types of family involvement and engagement, by participant groups and geography

Type of family involvement and engagement	Participant groups	Total	Across geography		
			Urban	Rural	*p* value
Caregiving and supporting learning at home					
Supporting learning	Families (*n* = 954)	71.4%	71.4%	71.4%	
	Educators (*n* = 210)	46.2%	48.6%	45.0%	
	Students (*n* = 1,071)	77.8%	87.6%	72.0%	***
Communicating					
Communicating with teachers and school staff	Families	63.3%	67.7%	60.2%	*
	Educators	63.8%	65.7%	62.9%	
	Students	60.5%	74.8%	52.2%	***
Following school news	Families	55.6%	59.4%	52.8%	*
	Educators	41.9%	41.4%	42.1%	
	Students	66.6%	79.3%	59.2%	***
Attending school events	Families	44.8%	46.9%	43.2%	
	Educators	45.2%	44.3%	45.7%	
	Students	52.1%	66.4%	43.7%	*
Volunteering time and resources					
Donations (financial contributions)	Families	69.4%	68.7%	69.9%	
	Educators	44.8%	35.7%	49.3%	
	Students	56.3%	58.1%	55.2%	
Volunteering in school activities	Families	25.3%	19.8%	29.2%	**
	Educators	24.8%	17.1%	28.6%	
	Students	33.2%	32.1%	33.8%	
Decision making and leadership					
Providing feedback on school decisions	Families	20.3%	22.8%	18.6%	
	Educators	35.7%	32.9%	37.1%	
	Students	36.3%	37.4%	35.6%	

Type of family involvement and engagement	Participant groups	Total	Across geography		
			Urban	Rural	*p* value
Leadership role in a parent association	Families	6.8%	3.3%	9.4%	**
	Educators	24.8%	25.70%	24.3%	
	Students	11.5%	8.6%	13.2%	*
Not involved					
Not involved	Families	0.8%	0.8%	0.9%	
	Educators	5.2%	2.9%	6.4%	
	Students	1.3%	0.5%	1.8%	

NOTE: Responses were "select all" and do not equal 100%. Bolded percentages are top 2 selections for each group. For significance, *= p <0.05 (significant); **p < 0.01 (highly significant); ***p < 0.001 (very highly significant).

Greater consensus on what family and community engagement should look like would enhance the implementation of clear, comprehensive efforts to build stronger partnerships across all levels of the basic education system. According to global research, family engagement often shifts across a child's education, with less overall research and effort dedicated to FSCE for middle and secondary school students.[31] As seen in Zanzibar's education frameworks, FSCE has received more attention and effort at the pre-primary and primary levels, with less clarity and vision at the secondary school level.

In summary, the different conceptualizations of FSCE, and the idea that family engagement is more critical in the early years, inhibits the implementation of clear and comprehensive efforts to build stronger partnerships across the basic education system. Family engagement is interrelated with, but also distinct from, community engagement, both of which are critical to supporting schools and students.

Recommendation 1: Ensure policies and plans include a comprehensive definition of family, school, and community engagement across the basic education system, with actionable guidance for implementing and monitoring meaningful engagement in districts and schools.

It is important for MoEVT and schools to have a comprehensive definition and vision of FSCE that spans the entire basic education system, from pre-primary to secondary, and encompasses the six types of parental/caregiver involvement and engagement—caregiving, supporting learning at home, communicating (with teachers and school staff), volunteering time and resources, contributing to decision making and leadership, and building community. This vision should include clear roles and responsibilities for families, educators, and students. As shared in Box 1: "Family, school, and community engagement encompasses the many ways that families, educators, and community groups work together to promote student learning and development. Families include all individuals who play a leading role in caregiving and educating their children, including caregivers, guardians, and extended family members—from grandparents to aunts, uncles, or cousins—and those beyond biological relationships." A comprehensive definition and vision of what this looks like in Zanzibar across age levels will help ensure guidance is clear and implementable.

Zanzibar has guidance for pre-primary school, a draft for primary school, but no guidance for secondary schools. Guidance should cover pre-primary, primary, and secondary levels and include age-appropriate strategies for

[31] Morris and Nóra, 2024.

engagement that will help schools and districts plan and monitor family engagement. This guidance, accompanied by strategies for monitoring engagement, should be designed to be inclusive of rural, semi-urban, and urban schools that may have nuanced strategies for engaging families in communication, volunteering, and other areas. When guidance is tailored to two audiences, a school and a family-facing version, this ensures that teachers and parents/caregivers alike have a common understanding of engagement.

In guidance across all levels, there should be clear strategies for building two-way communication. Families need to have clear expectations on how to communicate with schools about progress in their children's learning and development and how to support them at home. For example, schools can ensure that parents/caregivers have access to information on their children's learning and development and that there are two-way channels of communication with the school so families can communicate questions and concerns. This is especially critical for parents/caregivers who have little to no education and who may feel less confident in engaging with teachers and the school community.

Zanzibar has already put into place school-facing guidance for pre-primary. The Guide for Establishing PTAs/UWAJAJA in Pre-Primary Schools in Zanzibar outlines a comprehensive vision of family engagement for pre-primary education, although the guide could provide a clearer definition and more clarity on promising practices aligned with research and tangible strategies schools can use to build partnerships, such as home visits in the early years and family-to-family mentorship for new families.[32] More connection to the CBC would also enhance the framework. A simplified family-facing version of the guidance would help ensure families know how to engage with schools.

To ensure that FSCE includes secondary school families, there should be clear guidance on the roles and responsibilities for secondary school families as their children reach adolescence and begin to navigate transitions post-secondary. One example of a comprehensive framework for FSCE that covers primary and secondary schooling is Kenya's Guidelines on Parental Empowerment and Engagement published alongside their Competency Based Curriculum. Kenya's guidelines outline a vision of partnership between families and educators to support student learning and school development that includes secondary school students.[33] Another framework, which integrates primary and secondary school levels, is South Africa's School-Parent-Community Engagement Framework, with strategies for engaging with parents/caregivers and communities to work collectively to promote student learning and development.[34] A parent-facing framework was also developed by South Africa, which provides helpful information to families on their roles and responsibilities in their children's education and offers simple strategies to enable their involvement and engagement.[35] The educator and family-facing frameworks ensure that there is a shared understanding of family-school partnerships from primary to secondary school grades.

Families are a foundation of school communities and need unique strategies and approaches that recognize their vested interest as parents/caregivers and their diverse and varied experiences with school. Intentional partnerships with families are critical to improving quality, access, inclusion, and well-being in schools and are unique from more general community engagement and partnerships. Community engagement, which often involves collaboration with representatives from religious or civil society organizations and other local groups like collectives

[32] Brookings Institution, "Case Study: Improving Girls' Access Through Transforming Education (Igate)," accessed April 6, 2026 https://www.brookings.edu/articles/case-study-improving-girls-access-through-transforming-education-igate/; Brookings Institution, "Case Study: Ongoing Teacher Home Visits," accessed April 6, 2026 https://www.brookings.edu/articles/case-study-akanksha-foundation-schools/; Laura Nóra and Emily M. Morris, *Convivência Escolar: Positioning Families as Partners in Strengthening Education Systems and Schools in Brazil* (Brookings Institution, 2025).

[33] Ministry of Education, *Competency Based Curriculum: Guidelines on Parental Empowerment and Engagement* (Government of Kenya, 2019).

[34] Department of Basic Education, *School-Parent-Community Engagement Framework* (Republic of South Africa, 2016b).

[35] Department of Basic Education, *Practical Guidelines: How Parents can Contribute Meaningfully to the Success of their Children in Schools* (Republic of South Africa, 2016a).

and private sector businesses, should complement family engagement, not encapsulate it. Examples of community engagement highlighted in this research include the provision of school feeding programs or STEM clubs.

In summary, a comprehensive definition and framework of FCSE with accompanying guidance that is both school and family-facing would ensure that families are positioned as assets and partners in their children's learning and development. This definition should encompass and honor all the different types of involvement and engagement, and guidance should lay out clear roles and responsibilities for families in education policies and plans on how to enact these different types of involvement and engagement across pre-primary to secondary schools. Guidance with comprehensive strategies would ensure that educators and families alike have the knowledge, skills, and mindsets to partner across education levels. Community engagement should also be part of the definition and guidance but given a distinct role from that of families with a vested interest in their children's learning.

Finding 2: The most important motivation for families in engaging with schools is their children's learning and development. The role of families in their children's education is not clearly laid out in Zanzibar's education policy, plans, or curricula.

Over half (53.6%) of parents/caregivers in the research had not completed secondary school. Yet, they had high hopes that their children/grandchildren would finish Form 4 or beyond and become the first generation in their families to complete ordinary-level secondary school. Free and compulsory basic education through ordinary-level secondary school was only put into effect as of the *Education Policy* of 2006; therefore, family engagement for secondary school students is still a new concept for many families. As was revealed in conversations, when thinking about their beliefs and hopes for education, families expressed their expectation that more schooling would translate into greater social mobility. As one student noted, "An education helps ensure young people will have a better life." A parent/caregiver emphasized that school "builds their education and professional skills for their future life" so that one day young people can help their families in return.

When asked what the most important purpose of school was, or the extrinsic role of education in society, most families (54.3%) in this study said academic learning or "to prepare for further education," such as higher levels of secondary education or vocational, technical, or tertiary learning. The students gave the same pattern of responses as their parents/caregivers; nearly half of the students (47.7%) also named academic learning as the main purpose of schooling.

Educators were more varied in their responses. They were split between the most important purpose of school, with one-third (36.5%) choosing "to develop skills for work," or economic learning, and another third (36.5%) selecting "to be active citizens and community members," or civic learning. Educator perspectives echoed the vision of education in the Education Policy of 2006, where the outcomes were civic engagement as well as economic success and academic mastery, alongside lifelong learning. As the policy stresses, the purpose of education is to ensure "a democratic and peaceful society enjoying a high quality of education and livelihood and committed to lifelong learning to effectively respond to development challenges."[36] As a teacher commented, education enables a young person "to become a good citizen and to enable them to be economically independent later on."

[36] MoEVT, 2006, 4.

TABLE 6

Beliefs on the purpose of school and satisfaction with school, by participant groups

Participant group	Beliefs	Academic learning	Economic learning	Civic learning	Social and emotional learning
Families (*n* = 940)	Purpose	**54.3%**	24.4%	10.7%	10.6%
	Satisfaction	**64.4%**	12.4%	7.1%	16.1%
Educators (*n* = 209)	Purpose	13.9%	**36.5%**	**36.5%**	13.0%
	Satisfaction	**49.3%**	21.5%	17.20%	12.0%
Students (*n* = 1,134)	Purpose	**47.7%**	25.9%	17.4%	9.0%
	Satisfaction	**70.0%**	13.3%	7.8%	8.9%

NOTE: Bolded percentages are the top responses for each participant group.

When asked when they were most satisfied with education, close to two-thirds of the families (64.4%) and students (70.0%) and half of the educators (49.3%) surveyed said academic learning, or when students were "getting good marks on subjects/exams." Even though families, educators, and students saw education as having multiple purposes, particularly when children were young, the heavy emphasis on examinations influenced them to feel motivated or satisfied by "good marks."

Beliefs on the extrinsic purpose of school and the intrinsic satisfaction with the actual education a child receives are connected to teaching and learning. What students learn—the set curriculum—and how the curriculum is taught—pedagogy—reflect education leaders' and teachers' beliefs on education, and what content should be learned and how. Curricula from pre-primary to secondary school were analyzed to understand the embedded purpose of school. In the Pre-Primary and Primary Education Curriculum Framework, the vision of education is broad and includes multiple purposes of education critical for children's holistic development and emphasizes the development of social, emotional, civic, physical, and religious learning in addition to literacy, numeracy, environmental science, and other academic subject areas.[37] Yet as noted in the pre-primary and primary curricula, "parents, communities and teachers are still very much in favour of the type of fairly traditional learning which occurs under subject areas,"[38] which they believe will help children succeed in and through school and on exams. By secondary school, the vision of education in Curriculum for Ordinary Secondary Education Forms 1-4 is concentrated around academic learning, where teachers and students devote disproportionate instructional time to preparing for the Form 2 and Form 4 exams.[39] In the secondary curriculum, there is little to no mention of family engagement and the roles that families and educators should play to work together to ensure that students are getting the skills they need.

In order to understand families', educators', and students' beliefs on how students should learn, they were asked to describe ideal pedagogical approaches for secondary school students. Students and families were asked to choose a school where they would like to learn (their children to learn) based on the teaching and learning approaches used. Educators were asked to choose a school where they would like to teach. They were given six different teaching and learning approaches: teacher-centered, student-centered, experiential learning, tech-

[37] MoEVT and ZIE, 2022.
[38] MoEVT and ZIE, 2022, 24.
[39] MoEST, 2023.

nology-based, and play-based learning, as well as funds of knowledge, or drawing on home cultures. (Survey questions and response options are in Appendix B). As shown in Table 7, their beliefs on teaching and learning were nuanced. Nearly three-quarters of families (72.9%) and educators (72.9%) said they preferred their children/students to be engaged in experiential learning—such as learning in real-life settings—because they were concerned about their children gaining relevant skills they needed to succeed. Three-quarters of students (74.7%) emphasized learner-centered curricula in their classrooms, giving them some level of agency in determining what they were learning and how. Through the conversations, it was clear that educators, families, and students often had different ideas of what experiential learning meant. For families, it meant more hands-on learning and building confidence and creativity. For educators, experiential learning meant gaining practical skills that students could use for work and learning relevant to the lives of young people. Students often described experiential learning as trying out things for themselves—more learner-centered—explaining, "We do the experiment/activity/project on a particular topic ourselves, and the teacher lets us know if we are doing it correctly or not." This indicates that while school communities have varying ideas on what teaching should look like, they were generally united around ensuring children were getting the breadth of skills—both academic and durable (or "hard" and "soft")—that they needed to succeed in life.

TABLE 7

Beliefs on teaching and learning approaches, by participant groups

Pedagogy	Families (*n* = 940)	Educators (*n* = 209)	Students (*n* = 1,134)
Teacher-centered pedagogy	57.7%	30.0%	62.7%
Learner-centered pedagogy	59.4%	57.1%	**74.7%**
Experiential learning	**72.9%**	**72.9%**	64.7%
Technology-based instruction	60.0%	61.4%	35.4%
Play-based learning	10.0%	16.7%	19.0%
Funds of knowledge	16.5%	17.6%	29.1%

NOTE: Participants were asked to "select top 3." Responses do not equal 100%. Bolded percentages are the top responses for each participant group.

Students noted that experiential learning, however implemented, had to be linked to examinations and helping students master content for exams. This highlighted the reality that high-stakes exams in secondary school often forced schools to implement more teacher-centered pedagogy. The conversations also revealed that families, educators, and students had few opportunities to discuss beliefs on education or to come to a common vision on teaching and learning—making it difficult for families to know how to support their children at home and to ensure that their children were engaged in school. Research on young people and the factors that push and pull them out of secondary school in Zanzibar indicates that this heavy emphasis on testing, instead of ensuring they have the skills and competencies needed to navigate different aspects of their lives—including livelihoods, familial, and community roles and responsibilities—leads students to discontinue their basic education before completion.[40] A lack of a clear vision on the roles and responsibilities of families in secondary schools and in supporting their children's learning and development is a lost opportunity for ensuring that schools and families are working together to keep young people in school and to ensure they are meeting their educational goals and aspirations for their future.

[40] Emily M. Morris, *Resisting Pushout: Chasing the Promise of Education in Zanzibar* (Oxford University Press, 2027).

In summary, while families, educators, and students recognize the importance of different purposes of education beyond just academic learning, the strong emphasis on high-stakes exams and teaching to the test is inhibiting secondary schools from transforming learning to be focused on experiential and learner-centered approaches. While young people are encouraged to gain holistic skills in pre-primary and primary school, by secondary school there is a narrow focus on mastery of content on high-stakes exams.[41] The role of families in their children's education is not clearly laid out in Zanzibar's education policy, plans, or curricula. Families and students do not have a clear role in developing a shared vision of education and ensuring that schools are providing children with the learning and development they need to succeed in their future pathways.

Recommendation 2: Consult families and students in developing a vision of FSCE for the secondary school level to ensure guidance is responsive to their beliefs, context, and types of engagement.

Ideally, the development of guidance on FSCE at the secondary school level would involve families and students, as well as educators. Where feasible, this approach can be used and replicated in other education frameworks—from policy to curricula. Surveys, interviews, and focus groups were held with families, educators, and students during the development of the Pre-Primary and Primary Education Curriculum Framework, and a similar process could be used for developing secondary school guidance. It is important for families and students to weigh how schools can work with families and community organizations to ensure students have the skills and supports they need to thrive in school and beyond. It is also important that education leaders have an opportunity to understand parents'/caregivers' different beliefs on education and the ways they engage with their children's learning to make sure policy, curriculum, and other education frameworks position families as partners in a child's educational journey.

In addition to expanding the representation and voice of families and students in the development of education frameworks, it is important that guidance for families helps them understand how to support their children's journey in education in ways that reflect their lived experiences and that goes beyond engagement around the exam. In the research, families described how much of their interactions with schools were about national examinations—including how to prepare, costs, studying, results—as opposed to other aspects of their learning and development and how to partner on post-secondary transitions. Although students are completing secondary school at higher rates than in previous years (58.9% in 2025),[42] obtaining a certificate does not guarantee young people sustainable livelihoods or employment, or ensure they are prepared for the familial and civic roles ahead.[43] Livelihoods and post-schooling pathways look different for rural, semi-urban, and urban families, so consulting with a wide range of parents/caregivers across geography, gender, disability status, and education level is critical, as is creating FSCE strategies around these transitions.

Given the concentration on academic learning in secondary schools, consulting with families reinforces the importance of strengthening two-way communication noted in Recommendation 1. Families, students, and educators need to have multiple ways to communicate about student progress as well as have different strategies so that families can support learning at home. This communication should be carefully designed to support *all* parents/caregivers. For example, special communication strategies are needed for parents/caregivers who have not finished secondary school and may not have the same comfort level and knowledge of how to engage with schools. In addition, different communication strategies may be needed for families of children with disabilities who have the pressing need to communicate regularly with teachers and school staff.

In summary, although there are broad purposes of education noted in policies and early-grade curricula, by secondary school, the strong emphasis on examinations as a determinant of educational attainment impacts

41 Morris, 2027.
42 MoEVT, 2025, 51.
43 Morris, 2027.

families', students', and educators' beliefs on education, teaching, and learning. Interactions between families and schools become increasingly concentrated on the exam rather than on aspects of learning and development. Involving families in the development of education frameworks and engagement strategies is critical to ensuring that FSCE during secondary school does not revolve around high-stakes exams. FSCE should be designed inclusively *with* families and not *for* them, incorporating their diverse beliefs and perspectives. Families need to have clear guidance on how they should be supporting learning at home and how they should communicate with teachers about their children's learning.

Finding 3: Every school is mandated to have a school management committee or board composed of educators, families, and community members, but few pre-primary and primary schools have parent teacher associations (PTAs), and no secondary schools have PTAs to date.

According to the *Education Act No. 5* of 1982 amended in 1993, all schools are to have committees composed of family representatives in addition to student, teacher, and local government representatives, as well as head teachers. The role of these committees is to contribute to decision making as well as to provide resources and accountability to schools and to ensure other families are informed about policies, rights, and academic progress.[44] At the pre-primary and primary levels, these governing bodies are referred to as SMCs and at the secondary level, either SMCs or school boards.

SMCs and school boards are the main mechanism for parental/caregiver involvement in the education frameworks. These committees are responsible for overseeing school plans, budgets, and other executive decisions. When asked, most families and schools will report that school committees serve an important role in school management,[45] yet it is not often clear to what extent these parent/caregiver representatives can convey the diverse and complex needs of *all* families. Although in each school three parent/caregiver representatives are officially elected by other families to represent them on committees, families' role in leadership is often more symbolic than substantial according to conversations. Furthermore, parent/caregiver representatives are more often appointed rather than elected, as the policy calls for.[46] SMCs and school boards are often led by the head teacher, and in consequence parents'/caregivers' voices are often muted or compromised given power dynamics. Additionally, families often have lower levels of education than educators and are not experts on schools, making it hard for them to weigh in on decision making to the same extent as other committee members. On the other hand, parent/caregiver representatives nominated to serve on committees often have higher education levels and more positive connections to school leaders and teachers compared to other families.[47] Across the world, parental representation in school decision-making bodies is often dominated by families that feel the most comfortable interacting in schools, and rarely represent families from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, education levels, ethnicities and/or races, gender, and disability status.[48]

PTAs are first noted in the *Zanzibar Education Master Plan* and the *Education Policy* of 2006 and the subsequent education plans. They are meant to serve as a critical pillar across the pre-primary, primary, and secondary education levels to ensure that families and educators are collaborating with teachers to support children's learning.

[44] RGZ, 1993.

[45] Ussi Jecha Haji and Henry Mung'ong'o, "The Contribution of the School Parents Committee on Teaching and Learning in Public Secondary Schools in the South District in Unguja Zanzibar." *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*, 5 no. 5 (2023): 1-15. https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2023.v05i05.6675.

[46] MoEVT, 2006, 48.

[47] Annette Lareau, "Social Class Differences in Family-School Relationships: The Importance of Cultural Capital," *Sociology of education* 60, no. 2 (1987): 73-85. https://doi.org/10.2307/2112583; Kathleen V. Hoover-Dempsey and Howard M. Sandler, "Why Do Parents Become Involved in Their Children's Education?," *Review of Educational Research* 67, no. 1 (1997): 3-42. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543067001003; Nancy E. Hill and Lorraine C. Taylor, "Parental School Involvement and Children's Academic Achievement: Pragmatics and Issues," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 13, no. 4 (2004): 161-64. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0963-7214.2004.00298.

[48] National Center for Families Learning, *Parent Advisory Councils: Elevating Family Voice and Leadership in Education [Research Brief]* (National Center for Families Learning, 2025).

PTAs act as a formal structure to bridge the school, including the parents/caregivers, educators, and students, with the wider community. For example, in pre-primary classrooms, PTA representatives in Zanzibar volunteered during snack time and bathroom breaks to help teachers during busy transition times and helped raise money for learning materials. In other countries, PTAs have helped organize intensive study sessions pre-exam or organized employment/livelihoods fairs and activities.

The parent/caregiver leaders in Zanzibar's PTAs are to be elected at the beginning of the school year and are intended to represent parents'/caregivers' voices and needs and to help solve critical challenges at schools—from infrastructure problems to high student absenteeism. As stated in the *ZESTP*, one of the roles of PTAs is to "discuss progress in implementation of the school plan as well as student performance focusing on learning outcomes."[49] As noted under the policy analysis, PTAs have not yet been rolled out across Zanzibar in secondary schools. MoEVT commitment, alongside financial and human resources, are required to implement these parental decision-making bodies in reality.

PTAs (known as UWAWAJA and UWAWA as detailed in Appendix A) were mobilized and established in pre-primary and primary schools across Zanzibar during the early 2020s. PTAs support and organize parents/caregivers in critical roles in a variety of ways. One important role of PTAs was to provide families with strategies to support learning at home. These strategies included following up on homework, engaging in literacy and numeracy learning, and other learning activities. Families also served as an important resource for schools outside of supporting learning at home. PTAs mobilized families to ensure children were attending school—including conducting home visits—and they volunteered in different ways—for example supporting morning feeding and bathroom breaks in pre-primary schools. In primary schools, PTA members helped manage students during the changes of school shifts and ensured infrastructure met MoEVT's standards. Unfortunately, these associations have not received monitoring, attention, and follow-up since USAID funds ceased at the end of 2024, according to conversations with educators. One of the major challenges noted in this research was donor support. USAID, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), and Korea International Cooperation Agency have supported SMC and PTA training and development. Without their financial contributions, MoEVT has many other competing priorities.

In summary, since the initial *Education Act* in the 1980s, parent/caregiver leadership and contributions to decision making, school climate, and infrastructure have been hallmark commitments by MoEVT in educational plans and policies. Conversations with educators revealed that existing PTAs did support schools in improving school conditions and helping families understand how to support their children's learning at home. However, operationalizing and sustaining PTAs across all levels of basic education and ensuring meaningful leadership of families in SMCs and school boards is still a critical need that needs championing by MoEVT.

Recommendation 3: Operationalize a plan for establishing PTAs in not only pre-primary and primary schools, but also secondary schools as family and school partnerships continue to be important across the educational trajectories of students.

As MoEVT continues to develop a comprehensive vision of FSCE, plans to roll out PTAs across government schools, a comprehensive strategy that extends across pre-primary to secondary levels, will ensure that family partnerships are embedded at every step of a child's education. Family engagement strategies and practices shift across the developmental level of a child, for example, by secondary school the student begins to mediate the relationship between home and school as they are more independent in doing schoolwork, giving them an important role in decisions and communication between families and educators.[50] PTAs and family partnerships are still important in secondary school as they ensure adults at home and school are in regular communication, especially in

[49] MoEVT, 2024, 88.
[50] Viki Katz, *Kids in the Middle: How Children of Immigrants Negotiate Community Interactions for the Families* (Rutgers, 2014).

cases where a young person faces a challenge or crisis. For example, if a young person is struggling mentally or physically to keep up in school, or experiences a death in the family impacting concentration and well-being, these family and school partnerships are critical.[51] Putting into place PTAs and parent teacher expectations across the basic education system helps ensure there is an ecosystem of support for young people, and that schools have the resources and community needed to thrive.

From this research as well as other research on school bodies in similar contexts,[52] a few recommendations stand out on how to equitably implement PTAs and ensure parent/caregiver voices are heard. First, clear expectations and guidance on how the role of PTAs is distinctive from that of the SMCs or school boards, and how they should collaborate, should be included in existing guides. Second, measures should be put in place to ensure families choose parents/caregivers to represent them free of the influence of education or community leaders, and that all families are encouraged to participate in electing representatives. Diverse representation, including families with lower education levels, who have children with disabilities, and with different household arrangements (e.g., mother or grandparent-led households) is important to ensure that PTAs reflect the different needs of children and families. Third, a plan should be put into place to ensure that PTAs have a low-cost and sustainable training model to provide family leaders with the knowledge and skills to harness the voices of other parents/caregivers.

In summary, although MoEVT has many competing priorities, PTAs are critical to ensuring that quality, inclusion, and equity are achieved in schools. It is important for MoEVT to continue to seek resources to achieve this goal and to maintain the efforts made to establish UWAWAJA and UWAWA in pre-primary and primary schools. Low-cost efforts to roll out PTAs should also be sought, as family engagement is critical to efforts to ensure completion of education and to connect young people to sustainable livelihoods.

Finding 4: Families and students reported high levels of trust in educators, but few opportunities to interact and communicate with educators. Families faced many structural barriers to building family, school, and community engagement, such as financial constraints, lack of time, and transportation.

Families and students across all the schools in this research reported that they trusted their teachers and had high regard for their knowledge and skills. Yet during conversations with families, they described how negative the interactions were when students were falling behind academically, were chronically absent, or when families had not paid exam or other fees. Communication was often centered around punitive measures and problems, rather than making sure conditions were in place to protect and support children. As families, students, and educators alike described, there were too few opportunities to come together to celebrate and promote children's learning and development in positive ways.

As noted in Finding 1, families are involved and engaged in their children's education in diverse ways, namely supporting learning at home, communicating with teachers and staff, and making financial contributions. Families, students, and educators were asked to name the top barriers families face in engaging with schools. The top barriers to family engagement were expectations to make financial contributions and lack of time. Although mandatory family contributions have been officially eliminated for pre-primary and primary education, secondary school parents/caregivers often contribute to schools in different ways, such as through exam fees. According to global research, these are the two most common barriers to family engagement across the world, especially for rural and working-class families engaged in the informal economy.[53]

[51] Morris, 2027.
[52] Emily M. Morris et al., *Alianza Familia-Escuela: How to Transform Family Engagement Policies into Impactful Partnerships in Colombia's Schools* (Brookings Institution, 2025); Richaa Hoysala and Emily M. Morris, *Leveraging Families as Assets and Champions to Promote Secondary School Completion and Success* (Brookings Institution, 2025).
[53] Morris and Nóra, 2024.

As shown in Table 8, one in three families (36.5%) said that pressure to make financial contributions negatively impacted their engagement with the school, with a slightly higher proportion of rural families citing this as a barrier. As a secondary school student in Pemba observed, there are many challenges families face when engaging with schools. The main challenge is the expectation to make financial contributions for books, paper, exams, and other costs. As a student described, "when a parent does not have money, and you tell them they are not contributing, it is disheartening and discouraging," and they avoid communicating with the school, breaking any efforts to facilitate two-way communication. Intertwined with this barrier was a lack of time, as families were unable to take time away from informal economic activities and caregiving to attend meetings, events, and activities organized by the school.

TABLE 8

Barriers to family involvement and engagement, by participant groups and geography

Barriers	Participant group	Total	Across geographies		
			Urban	Rural	*p* value
Structural barriers					
Transportation	Families (*n* = 954)	20.1%	22.1%	18.7%	
	Educators (*n* = 210)	22.9%	30.0%	19.3%	
	Students (*n* = 1,071)	25.3%	34.8%	19.8%	***
Not welcoming or unsafe environment	Families	2.8%	1.5%	3.8%	*
	Educators	13.8%	11.4%	15.0%	
	Students	3.6%	4.5%	3.1%	
Insufficient communication	Families	0.2%	0.0%	0.4%	
	Educators	n/a	n/a	n/a	
	Students	n/a	n/a	n/a	
Situational barriers					
Lack of interest	Families	2.6%	2.3%	2.9%	
	Educators	14.3%	2.9%	20.0%	**
	Students	2.5%	2.4%	2.5%	
Health, well-being, or disability	Families	0.2%	0.3%	0.2%	
	Educators	n/a	n/a	n/a	
	Students	n/a	n/a	n/a	

Barriers	Participant group	Total	Across geographies		
			Urban	Rural	*p* value
Overlapping barriers					
Financial constraints	Families	**36.5%**	29.1%	41.8%	***
	Educators	**56.7%**	38.6%	65.7%	**
	Students	**40.9%**	47.6%	37.0%	**
Lack of time	Families	**32.3%**	27.1%	36.0%	**
	Educators	**61.0%**	61.4%	60.7%	
	Students	**40.4%**	47.6%	36.2%	**
Lack of technology	Families	8.5%	8.5%	8.5%	
	Educators	26.2%	20.0%	29.3%	
	Students	9.7%	7.9%	10.7%	
Literacy, language, and cultural barriers	Families	9.4%	4.8%	12.8%	***
	Educators	21.9%	14.3%	25.7%	
	Students	13.4%	11.9%	14.2%	
No challenges	Families	40.4%	45.6%	36.6%	**
	Educators	9.5%	15.7%	6.4%	*
	Students	29.6%	24.5%	32.6%	**

NOTE: Participants were asked to "select all." Responses do not equal 100%. Bolded percentages are top 2 selections for each group. For significance, *= p <0.05 (significant); **p < 0.01 (highly significant); ***p < 0.001 (very highly significant).

Over one-third of families reported there were no barriers to family engagement, but during conversations, families said they selected that option because they did not have a clear idea of what family engagement entailed for secondary school students, and that barriers did, in fact, exist. As a teacher emphasized, "I imagine there are challenges at schools with family engagement. It is possible a parent answered this way [that there are no challenges] because engagement is so low at these schools." This reiterates the need for a clear definition of FSCE and expectations for families across grade levels to help ensure parents/caregivers know how to best support their children, as detailed in Finding and Recommendation 1.

In summary, poverty, limited resources, and lack of employment opportunities strain families' ability to pay for various educational costs in secondary school, which subsequently impacts their communication and engagement in their children's schooling. Busy work schedules leave little time for families to engage in school activities. Given most families are resource-constrained, and over half of parents/caregivers have not completed secondary education themselves, it is important to build family, school, and community engagement opportunities and strategies that take into consideration the demographics and barriers of families. These barriers, coupled with the lack of a clear vision of what FSCE should entail among secondary school students, mean that families do not have clear strategies on how to engage with schools or best support their children's learning and development.

Recommendation 4: Decouple family, school, and community engagement efforts and practices from financial asks. Encourage schools to create greater two-way communication between families and schools, including opportunities to listen to families to build greater relational trust and partnerships.

Given the prominence of poverty and financial constraints among families, disconnecting family involvement from financial contributions is critical to encouraging more families to participate in school activities. Centering school communication around students' learning and development, as opposed to fees and financial asks, will encourage families to be in closer communication with teachers.

As found in similar research in other parts of the world, namely Sierra Leone, families are more likely to attend school events and activities when there is not a financial ask and the engagement centers around student learning, skills, or celebration.[54] Families also appreciate opportunities to be heard. For example, a back to school night that features the work and hopes of students and opens opportunities to listen to families, or one-on-one teacher-parent meetings where student progress is discussed, are examples of family-friendly strategies.[55] Arts (plays, poetry), sports, clubs (English language and STEM) events, and other activities that showcase student skills and talents are also places to bring families and educators together to celebrate young people and shift family engagement from only meeting when there is a challenge, problem, or pressing need. Leaning on families to identify the ways they can contribute to schools, instead of the school listing demands, also helps encourage ownership and common responsibility. Learning from the community mobilization efforts with pre-primary Tucheze Tujifunze centers, parents/caregivers came together to support the centers when they were able to show up in different ways, for example, "volunteering, making porridge, making teaching and learning resources using locally available materials, fixing broken windows or doors. There's a sense of ownership, of helping, of working together, of the government working with families to support the development of their children."[56]

Scheduling events at convenient times is important for family participation—especially for families who work in the informal economy with varying schedules. Convenient times include following afternoon prayers when fathers/male caregivers are returning from the mosque, or in the early morning before families start their agricultural, small business, or cooking/domestic activities. Holding events or meetings near more informal and communal spaces, such as near central mosques, markets, and transportation hubs, instead of in the school, can also help families feel more comfortable in meeting and speaking up.[57] As school spaces are often seen as under the leadership of head teachers and teachers, it can be hard to break the power dynamics and empower parents/caregivers of different genders, educational backgrounds, and other demographics to share their perspectives. Shifting to a more communal space can signal an intent to meet families where they are at.

Structuring informal conversations with families, opportunities to connect over tea for example, are also important in developing a culture of listening and two-way communication.[58] As one student described, "Through the different forms of communication between families and teachers, trust is built…so if something happens, that trust helps the parent/caregiver and teacher to work together to support the student's development." In addition to in-person meetings, formalizing ways that parents/caregivers can be in contact with educators through text messages and other formats is also important.

[54] Emily M. Morris et al., *Building Partnerships where Families, Schools, and Communities Stand Together in Sierra Leone* (Brookings Institution, 2024).

[55] Emily M. Morris and Rini D'Souza, "Starting Conversations on Social and Emotional Learning with Parents and Teachers is Critical for Building Family Engagement: An Analysis with Schools in Mumbai and Pune," *Education Plus Development* (blog), Brookings Institution, May 31, 2022, https://www.brookings.edu/articles/starting-conversations-on-social-and-emotional-learning-with-parents-and-teachers-is-critical-for-building-family-engagement/.

[56] Global Partnership for Education, MoEVT, and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, *Zanzibar: Prioritizing Young Learners to Develop Foundational Skills* (Global Partnership for Education, 2024), https://www.globalpartnership.org/results/country-journeys/zanzibar-prioritizing-young-learners-develop-foundational-skills.

[57] Morris et al., 2024; Nóra and Morris, 2025.

[58] Morris et al., 2025; Morris and D'Souza, May 31, 2022.

In summary, families are more likely to engage with schools when interactions center around the learning, skills, and needs of their children and are decoupled from financial asks or exclusively negative topics like chronic absenteeism. Co-designing family engagement with students and diverse family representatives can help ensure ownership and inclusion, and that opportunities are designed around the needs of families—especially those who may feel less comfortable engaging with schools, including families who have not completed secondary school and are single-parent headed households. District education offices can support head teachers and schools in developing engagement strategies that are inclusive and that focus on collaboration and two-way communication with families.

Conclusion

According to the Zanzibar Education Sector Transformation Plan (ZESTP) (2024), "Schools need to act as communities of learning where the entire community participates in ensuring the school plan is achieved through set goals and school-level KPIs (key performance indicators). These may include ensuring expanded enrollment, no absenteeism, improved student performance as well as contributing in-kind or financially to school development projects."59 However, as this research indicates, "communities of learning" should be mutually responsive and involve families and students, as well as educators, in creating a vision of FSCE that is responsive to the barriers and opportunities for engagement and to the developmental stage of students. As was revealed in surveys and conversations, the vision for FSCE is largely defined and set by school and education leaders. Opportunities to engage are often symbolic—such as parent/caregiver representation on an SMC or school board—and does not reflect promising practices, such as two-way communication focused on the learning and development of children. A comprehensive definition and vision should be built using evidence, promising practices, and contributions by families and students. In this vision of family engagement in education, it is important to understand the diverse beliefs that families, students, and educators bring to school and to recognize how the high-stakes examination system creates tension in relationships between secondary school teachers, students, and families. Efforts to transform learning and relationships—such as implementing more project-based and experiential learning—often feel unattainable given that the curriculum must be aligned to the examination.

Although MoEVT has named the goal of operationalizing PTAs across the compulsory basic education system in the Education Policy of 2006 and the related series of plans, this has not yet been achieved primarily because of human, financial, and other resource constraints. As noted in the ZESTP (2024), "Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) will be revived so that parents can directly participate in school projects."[60] It is important to keep setting PTA support as a goal and eventually identifying an existing team in MoEVT that can champion this effort as resources are being secured. PTAs are important mechanisms for building cohesion among families and communities and giving them a space for sharing their voices.

Most families described how they were doing their best to support their children's learning at home by providing motivation and encouragement, tracking attendance and progress, checking homework, and enrolling children in after-school tuition (tutoring) when they could afford it. Yet they often felt that schools did not recognize their contributions to learning, and one-way communication from the school that focused solely on poor attendance or academic performance discouraged them from interacting with schools. Families, students, and educators alike wanted a more robust vision of how to support children's learning and development and more diverse strategies to build trust and collaboration. One important step toward this vision is strengthening two-way communication around student learning and developing and decoupling family engagement from financial contributions. Efforts to engage families should be designed around families working in the informal economy with limited time and low education levels to build their confidence and trust in engaging with schools.

59 MoEVT, 2024, 41.
60 MoEVT, 2024, 41.

Zanzibar has a strong ethos of community and family engagement in education, and the government has repeatedly named this ethos in its education frameworks. In order to operationalize the ethos and plans for building family, school, and community engagement, MoEVT needs not only resources for this effort but also commitment and clear leadership that extends across the different grade levels. Families, students, and educators expressed their mutual willingness and hopes for stronger partnerships; they just need the vision, guidance, leadership, and resources to do so.

Appendix A

AN IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF ZANZIBAR'S EDUCATION FRAMEWORKS IS PRESENTED BELOW

The **Education Policy** (2006)[61] is the governing framework for the education sector and establishes a vision and key strategies to achieve equitable access to quality education and lifelong learning. The policy recognizes the important role of families in children's education as their first educators and assigns several roles to parents/caregivers as well as broader community members.

The primary role assigned to families is *providing resources*. The policy highlights that "parental contribution in a variety of forms is essential,"[62] and calls for clear guidelines to ensure there is transparency in how these contributions are utilized. Community contributions—which include those from nongovernmental organizations and private sector entities—are also encouraged to support a variety of areas, such as construction and repair of schools and libraries, provision of materials, support for children with special needs, and offering sports and physical education.[63] Mandatory parental contributions in pre-primary and primary school have been made illegal in subsequent frameworks; however, they are still common in secondary schools, especially for examination fees.[64]

Shifting mindsets is another prominent role assigned to families. The policy outlines the need to mobilize families and community members to work together to promote "proper knowledge about adolescent sexual and reproductive health"[65] and curb child labor and child abuse[66] among other areas.

The policy also points to limited roles of families and community members in *decision making and leadership*, namely through their participation in school management committees (SMCs). The description of the functions of the SMCs or the roles that families will play in SMCs is limited. However, the policy notes that "the duties and functions of school committees are not clearly understood" and that most members "are appointed and not elected."[67] The policy also refers to PTAs in one reference, noting that the "promotion of school-based management, parent teacher associations and community and local government support" is one of the four guiding strategies adopted under the Zanzibar Education Master Plan.[68]

Families' roles in *implementation of policies and practices* are limited to ensuring children are enrolled in school and ensuring safety. The framework recommends "establishing links" between parents and school committees (e.g., school management committees, school boards) with other groups such as district education offices and civil society and faith-based organizations. It does not clarify what role parents would play in many of these partnerships with the exception of early childhood development, where parents/caregivers and educators are to partner "to improve child's health, nutrition, growth, and development."[69] Finally, the policy highlights the importance of families and communities *being informed* about the use and benefits of information and communications technology in promoting access to lifelong learning opportunities and how to make sure their children are in school.

[61] MoEVT, 2006, 70.
[62] MoEVT, 2006, 70.
[63] MoEVT, 2006, 31, 39, 69-70.
[64] MoEVT, 2017.
[65] MoEVT, 2006, 55.
[66] MoEVT, 2006, 62, 63.
[67] MoEVT, 2006, 48.
[68] MoEVT, 2006, 1.
[69] MoEVT, 2006, 10.

The **Zanzibar Education Sector Transformation Plan (ZESTP)** (2024) is a comprehensive plan that describes the programs and strategies for the education sector from 2023-2030.[70] The plan recognizes the importance of family involvement in ensuring equitable access to education for all children. Family, school, and community engagement was featured more prominently in the previous sector plan, the Zanzibar Education Development Plan II, with a commitment to promoting "school-based management, parent teacher associations and community and local government support,"[71] the same language used in the Education Policy. Promoting "knowledge creation amongst students, teachers, parents, community and private sector"[72] is a key goal articulated in the ZESTP.

Families are assigned two roles in *ZESTP— decision making and leadership* and *being informed*. The plan describes three main mechanisms for families to support decision making and leadership at the school: SMCs (primary), school boards (secondary), and PTAs (all levels). SMCs are the main bodies in pre-primary and primary schools, which include parent/caregiver and teacher representatives and serve as "a connection between the school and community."[73] SMCs represent families' interests in "decisions about school development;"[74] however the full scope of the SMCs' functions and families' roles within them are not described in detail. The plan calls for a review of SMC roles, regulations, and composition. School boards are the main bodies in secondary schools with similar responsibilities; however, it is unclear what roles are assigned to families, if any.

PTAs are established in all schools across pre-primary, primary, and secondary levels to "discuss progress in implementation of the school plan as well as student performance focusing on learning outcomes."[75]

Being informed about the changes to education policy and curriculum is another key role assigned to families. The plan proposes an education advocacy program and "communication strategy in order to ensure that the public, and in particular, parents support and participate in the rollout exercise as well as understand the reasons as to why" changes are implemented in policies and curricula.[76]

Finally, *ZESTP, like the Education Policy*, identifies lack of family support as a key cause of student dropout after primary school, but it does not include any roles for families to promote enrollment in secondary schools.

The Zanzibar Education Development Plan II (ZEDP II) (2017) represents the second comprehensive sector-wide strategic plan for education. Unlike ZEDP I, this second plan involves a countrywide consultative preparation process, actively engaging parents, teachers, students, and other stakeholders in achieving access and equity in education.[77] Although families' roles vary across different education levels, the roles assigned are *decision making and leadership, being informed and providing resources*.

The plan features more prominent roles in the pre-primary level, compared to the primary and secondary levels. At the pre-primary levels, families' roles include *being informed* about the importance of beginning pre-primary education at "the right age"[78] and *decision making and leadership* through SMCs. The plan proposes the development of "manuals for management responsibility" for the "community, parents, committees, [and] school heads."[79] At the primary level, families' roles are limited to *being informed* about the "benefits of schooling"[80] through an advocacy campaign to improve enrollment. At the secondary level, families' roles include participating in *decision mak-*

[70] MoEVT, 2006, 2024.
[71] MoEVT, 2017, 11.
[72] MoEVT, 2024, 43.
[73] MoEVT, 2024, 87.
[74] MoEVT, 2024, 87.
[75] MoEVT, 2024, 88.
[76] MoEVT, 2024, 95-96.
[77] MoEVT, 2017, 15.
[78] MoEVT, 2017, 37.
[79] MoEVT, 2017, 38.
[80] MoEVT, 2017, 38.

ing and leadership roles through management committees. The plan aims to develop "clear roles and functions, reporting and accountability" for "improved leadership and management of schools with communities, students, teachers and principals."[81] Another role assigned to families at the secondary level is *providing resources* in the form of voluntary contributions, but it recognizes a paradox with these contributions. MoEVT states, "Removing voluntary contributions at the pre-primary level should mean that children from poorer families can more easily access pre-primary education and enter primary school; however, parental contributions remain at the secondary level, which may contribute to drop-outs after the final year of primary and beyond."[82]

Zanzibar's **Pre-Primary And Primary Education Curriculum Framework (2022)** is a holistic curriculum covering public and private schools that "guides schools on how to organise curriculum implementation and ensures coherence in the delivery of the curriculum throughout the schools in Zanzibar."[83] The curriculum was developed with multiple stakeholders, including parents, community leaders, children, and educators in government schools. Parents'/caregivers' perspectives informed the final learning outcomes and approaches. The underlying philosophy regarding families and communities is that "the whole community has a part to play in delivery of the curriculum. …Teacher training in support of the curriculum will emphasise the need for a partnership between school, family and community."[84]

The main role assigned to families is *being informed*, which largely means reporting on continuous and summative assessment results so they know their children's academic progress. Zanzibar's Pre-Primary and Primary Education Curriculum Framework notes how critical it is for families of children with disabilities to be made aware of their children's learning needs so they can intervene as early as possible and be referred for further assessment.

There is also a commitment to ensuring that parents/caregivers and community members play an important role in *implementing* and delivering the curriculum. Although there is no detail as to how this might happen, it does direct that family and community involvement in delivery should be built into training.

The national **Curriculum for Ordinary Secondary Education Forms 1-4 (2023)** is "based on an educational vision that aims to prepare Tanzanians who are educated and have knowledge, skills and positive attitudes who value equality, justice and lifelong learning to bring about sustainable national and international development."[85] Mainland Tanzania and Zanzibar share the curriculum and jointly administer the ordinary-level secondary school exit exam in Form 4. There is little mention of families in the curriculum, except for a symbolic reference that "the participation of parents or guardians and other educational stakeholders is essential for the successful implementation of this curriculum. Secondary schools will collaborate with these stakeholders to achieve the intended objectives in the provision of secondary education"[86] It is also suggested that families and community members, as key stakeholders, should also serve a role in school accountability, ensuring that the academic calendar and weekly timetable is implemented with fidelity and integrity, hinting at a minor role in ensuring schools are implementing the curriculum according to design. The **Guide for Establishing PTAs/UWAWAJA in Pre-Primary Schools in Zanzibar** (2023) is a comprehensive guide covering how to establish PTAs—Ushirikiano wa Wazazi, Walimu, na Jamii (UWAWAJA)—and SMCs in Zanzibar's pre-primary schools and centers. "The purpose of this guide is to motivate, encourage, and engage parents and the community in early childhood education," so they understand how to support early childhood education to enable children "to grow and learn effectively."[87] "The main goal of UWAWAJA is to help the child learn in the classroom, to stimulate classroom activities that enable learning, and to strengthen relationships between the classroom and the entire community. UWAWAJA enhances collaboration

81 MoEVT, 2017, 48.
82 MoEVT, 2017, 57.
83 MoEVT and ZIE, 2022, viii.
84 MoEVT and ZIE, 2022, 4.
85 MoEST, 2023, viii.
86 MoEST, 2023, viii.
87 MoEVT, 2023, 1.

between teachers, parents, and the community. It also helps build relationships with other parents as they share knowledge about what is happening in the classroom."[88]

The **Guide for Establishing PTAs/UWAWAJA** covers all five key family responsibilities. The document lays out how to foster close relationships between parents/caregivers and teachers to support children's learning, how to build two-way, effective communication, and how to ensure families and educators are working together to provide quality education for children—all forms of *implementation of policies and practices*. This includes helping to ensure systems are in place for clear communication, setting standards for parent/caregiver-teacher meetings on student progress, and supporting learning at home. There is also guidance on how to ensure families receive updates on learning progress (*being informed*) and how families can mobilize other parents/caregivers to support children who are not attending school to ensure all children have access to quality education (*shifting mindsets*). The guidance also lays out procedures for creating SMCs (that comprise up to three parent/caregiver positions) at pre-primary centers. Guidance on SMCs includes protocols for membership, structure, funding, and other details (*decision making*). Guidance calls for parents/caregivers and community members to support the UWAWAJA and SMCs by volunteering and *providing resources*—including human, technical, and financial—toward infrastructure improvement projects and other efforts.

The **School Committee Responsibilities Guide** (2022) lays out the role of communities in ensuring schools are reaching, serving, and operating according to laws and policies, and lays out the rules and procedures for school management committees (SMCs). It succeeds the earlier 2009 guide also analyzed for this report, as the 2022 version includes very little mention of families and tends to roll the responsibilities of communities and families into a singular category of "jamii" (community) and "jumuiya" (society). The effort was funded partially by the Korea International Cooperation Agency's Good Neighbors initiative.

In the 2022 guide, communities and society are intended to support education in three ways: (a) to help obtain important materials/resources in the provision of education, (b) monitoring the development of teaching and learning and the results of student exams, (c) monitoring student, teacher, and staff behavior when they are not at school. SMCs should have no more than 10 members and be composed of: (a) a chairperson, appointed by the district commissioner; (b) a secretary, who is the head teacher; (c) a representative from the local government, appointed by the local government representative (Sheha); (d) two members, recommended by the head teacher and confirmed by the District Education Officer; (e) up to three representatives, representing gender, children with disabilities, and one chosen by parent representatives (note it does not say parent/caregiver representatives but is assumed to be so); (f) one community representative chosen by the local ward counsellor; (g) the student body leader. Family representatives play a limited role in school *decision making and leadership* through the SMC, and their roles are very general in the 2022 version. SMC members serve a five-year term, with the option for re-election or re-appointment.

In both versions of the guide, SMCs, with parents/caregivers as representatives, are expected to support schools in *providing resources and implementation of policies and practices*, which includes playing a critical role in ensuring adequate infrastructure (bathrooms, classrooms, libraries, teacher quarters), services (clean water, first aid), people/staffing (guards, sufficient teachers), environment (clean, safe), materials (books, other equipment), and money (managing finances and budgets). SMCs should also be aware of school safety and other concerns and ensure families are *being informed* about their children's progress. The SMCs are given a symbolic role in *shifting mindsets* and ensuring that children with special needs, are at risk of early marriage, are HIV+, and other vulnerable groups are enrolled in schools and that families know their children's rights to an education. Finally, SMCs are to coordinate with parent/caregiver and teacher bodies, such as the UWAWAJA and UWAWA.

[88] MoEVT, 2023, 24.

The earlier version of the **School Committee Responsibilities** (2009) is similar to the later guide, but outlined a clearer role for family representatives and was designed to serve as a training manual for orienting schools and communities on the roles of school committees. The composition of the SMCs was largely the same, but the 2009 version allowed up to 15 SMC members, depending on the size of the school, and it was clear that the three community representatives were to be parents/caregivers.

There was more clarity in the 2009 SMC guidelines on the roles of parents/caregivers, who were responsible for *being informed*, which included monitoring their children's learning and development; they were also to be aware of when attendance was an issue or when a child stopped attending/dropped out of school. The guide also assigned all parents/caregivers responsibility for ensuring their children were meeting learning objectives and being in communication with teachers and schools when they were concerned about their children's progress (both as a responsibility and a right). Families were also to ensure that children had sufficient nutrition, uniforms and clothing, and support for learning at home. They were also instructed to have a practice of communicating with their child about their learning, progress, and any challenges. Although managing parental/family contributions was noted in the 2009 version, contributions of families in pre- and primary schooling are no longer permitted.

SMCs were also expected to help establish two-way communication (in-person, letters, phone) and build relationships between school and community, which is still an ethos of the 2022 version but with less clarity. According to the 2009 guidance, parents/caregivers were also supposed to have a culture of listening and inquiring about their child's progress—both with the child directly and with their teachers. This included making sure homework is complete, checking notebooks and marks, and verifying that children have done their schoolwork carefully and diligently. Families were also expected to monitor school and student performance on exams, teaching quality, and ensure that schools and children are protected against health risks, such as drugs. The 2009 guide also pointed out that teachers are to be accountable not only to the head teacher, MoEVT authorities, and students, but also to the families, who have a right to inquire about their children's progress and any teaching and learning questions or concerns.

Mainland Tanzania's **Guideline On Parent Teacher Partnership** (2022) does not cover Zanzibar but serves as a guiding framework on how to design and implement partner teacher partnerships, as briefly noted in the *Education Policy* of 2006 and education plans. "Parent Teacher Partnerships (PTPs) are designed as class-based groups of parents and teachers to bring parents closer to the classroom so as to improve community engagement in school activities."[89] "The purpose of establishing PTPs is to increase parents' involvement and participation in order to develop stronger home-school partnerships hence improving community engagement in school activities."[90] The conceptual underpinning of stronger partnerships will ensure student attendance, safety, and completion, and mitigate dropout and other risks to student participation. The PTPs are meant to support SMCs and school boards.

The structure of the PTPs is eight parents per ordinary-level grade in secondary school, two parents (one female, one male) from every grade (Form 1-4); schools with Form 1-6 will have 12 parents/caregivers. Teachers from each class are also part of the PTP along with the head teacher and a parent/caregiver representative from the school board. Leadership (chairperson and vice chairperson) is held by parent/caregiver leaders, and secretary and deputy secretary general are held by a class teacher. Parent/caregiver representatives are meant to be diverse, from across different ethnicities, SES, religious and political affiliations, and disability status, but they are to have a "clear understanding on school challenges," be "respected by other community members," and "participate

[89] MoEST, 2022, iv.
[90] MoEST, 2022, 1.

in various community development activities."[91] Representatives are to be chosen at the start of the school year by the parents/caregivers for each class. Teacher representatives are chosen through collaboration between the head teacher and classroom teachers. Head teachers coordinate the meetings at least twice a year, one per term, with a quorum of at least 50% in attendance. Parents/caregivers can be re-elected if their child remains in the school.

The roles of the PTP include *implementation of policies and practices*, namely plans, approved by the SMC or school board, as well as facilitating extracurricular activities such as sports and arts and ensuring school health, hygiene, and safety, as well as soliciting and *providing resources* for school development (infrastructure, financial resources, supplies) and participating in "self-reliance projects." PTPs are also responsible for *shifting mindsets*, including sensitizing the community on enrollment, truancy, and follow-up, and ensuring that children with disabilities, as well as other vulnerable children, are accessing education and performing well.

[91] MoEST, 2022, 4.

Appendix B

TABLE 9

Survey question and response options on preferred pedagogies in the families' survey

You are visiting different classrooms to choose the school where you want your child to study/where you want to teach. Which teaching and learning practices are most important in your choice?"	
Response options	**Code**
Teacher leads all instruction	Teacher-centered pedagogy
Student participation is central to learning	Learner-centered pedagogy
Experiences and projects are central to learning	Experiential learning
Technology is central to learning	Technology-based instruction
Play is central to learning	Play-based learning
Home cultures and languages are central to learning	Funds of knowledge

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