HELPING FAMILIES MOVE INTO PRIMARY SCHOOL
FOR PRINCIPALS & SCHOOL STAFF

DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

Outreach to support learning at home
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**Acknowledgement**

The use of the words *parents* and *families* throughout this module refers to all types of home arrangements and parental figures, including carers and legal guardians, who care for and rear children.

Any images of people in this module do not indicate these people were in any way part of the project or are in agreement with any information contained in this module.

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Cover image: Courtesy of St Rita's School, South Johnstone, Queensland.
A child whose learning moves seamlessly between school and home will be better prepared for life. This relies on engagement between parents and their child’s school, a relationship that begins with inclusive and proactive school leaders.

- The principal’s role is to create a culture that fosters ongoing engagement between teachers and parents right from the first point of contact.
- An ideal teacher/parent relationship is positive and often expedites working through emerging concerns before they become problems.
- Principals are able to create healthy school cultures by encouraging and empowering teachers to recognise the value of Parent Engagement in Learning (PEiL) and building it into everyday teaching practice.
- Principals will build their teachers’ capacity to engage parents in learning by providing opportunities for collaboration that involve three-way conversations (teacher-student-parent), goal setting and monitoring.
- Principals will help build the capacity of parents to understand both the process of learning and the detail of what their children are learning (in real time) by providing them with strategies to support learning at home.

By welcoming parents’ participation in the education of their child, principals and teachers will create valuable partners who support and guide a lifetime of learning.

Children are the beneficiaries and welcome the partnership. The WA Commissioner for Children and Young People in 2018 reported that students want, “families to provide a home environment that supports learning. This included having positive relationships, structure, promoting wellbeing and an interest in the student and their education. Students suggested families can support positive relationships between home and school by influencing the attitude of the student/s, and by providing advice or advocating on behalf of student/s.”

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WHAT YOU CAN DO AS A PRINCIPAL

Outreach begins with leadership and support for teachers, parents and students. The role of leaders in schools includes:

- Leading whole school development of an environment and culture that values parent engagement in learning—inclusive of all people in the school community and members of the local community.

- Leading all teachers through building their capacity to engage with parents through positive feedback about their child from day one and throughout the child’s school journey. The building of trust through positive feedback enhances a relational approach to communication and helps to avoid teachers and parents only communicating if something goes wrong.

- Leading all teachers through building their capacity to value and engage with parents in developing positive relationships. These positive relationships provide further opportunity to enable parent engagement in learning from first point of contact and throughout the child’s school journey.

- Leading all teachers by building their capacity to engage parents in learning through two-way communication, and the provision of opportunities for learning at home.

- Encouraging positive relationships to enable authentic collaboration through three-way conversations, goal setting and monitoring as a team of three (teacher-student-parent).

- Leading teachers in recognising parent engagement as essential for best teaching and learning practice to achieve improved learning outcomes for students; where PEiL is integrated into planning, and interaction with parents is commonplace as part of everyday teaching practice.

- Building and recognising the capacity of parents to better understand the processes of learning (strategies, terminology, a common language) so they are better able to support and understand their child’s progress and learning challenges and goals.

- Sharing information with parents about what children are learning as they are learning (in real time, not after they have learned a topic and moved on) and providing tips or strategies in how parents can support learning at home.

- Welcoming parents as valued partners in developing the whole child (academic, social, spiritual, physical and emotional) so they understand their vital role as a support and guide for their child throughout their learning.
What you can do with your School Community

Some broader actions to facilitate positive impact on parent-child-school partnership and student wellbeing that you might take as principal could include:

- Conducting daily meet and greets at the school gate - involving a member of the school leadership team and a teacher – morning muster.
- Connecting with parents by sending home positive learning happenings at school (postcards designed by the students is one approach) and asking parents to share back – sharing parent knowledge of the child with the school.
- Building understanding in parents and teachers about where learning happens – not only at school but all around us.
- Supporting parents to understand simple ways to seek teachable moments that link with what their children are currently learning at school.
- Building understanding in parents and teachers of the difference between parent involvement (parents doing things for the school) and parents engaging in their child’s learning.
- Promoting learning through play and the ways parents might interact and engage in learning through play at home with their children.
- Providing learning opportunities linked with learning at school – maths games, activities linked with everyday living, e.g. shopping, playing sport, learning in the local community and environment.
- Setting up displays in the school foyer and/or the local library linked with inquiry and other topics being learned at school – to encourage a love of reading and connecting with the community resources that impact student learning and support parent engagement.
- Developing projects that provide parents the opportunity to share parent knowledge and professional knowledge and provide opportunity to work alongside teachers and students in the planning of these – e.g. project based learning in STEM.
“Parents and families are children’s first teachers and they continue to help their children to learn and thrive throughout the school years. When their family’s love and support is combined with the expert knowledge of teachers, it can have a significant and lasting impact:

- Children can be more likely to enjoy learning and be motivated to do well.
- Children can have better relationships with other children, improved behaviour and greater confidence.
- Children can do better at school and are more likely to graduate and go on to college, TAFE or university.
- Children can be less likely to miss days at school.”


Researchers highlight that the family and effective parenting are central to children’s mental health. Parenting practices and the quality of the parent-child relationship have implications for children’s development in the early years as well as their academic achievement, social competence and behaviour at school.

Understanding the range of changes a child is likely to encounter as they transition from early childhood education and care into school, can enhance parental confidence and in turn, also enhance children’s confidence. (Hirst, Jervis, Visagie, Sojo & Cavanagh, 2011).
As a principal, you can provide the resources that will help both parents and teachers to support learning at home. This begins in the months leading up to a child commencing school. Following are a number of resources you might find helpful.

**How you can help prepare your child for school?**


**Boosting School Readiness through Effective Family Engagement.**

Learn how meaningful family engagement contributes to children’s school readiness and healthy development. School readiness is the process of early learning when children gain the skills and attitudes to learn and thrive in school. Early learning is rooted in strong parent-child relationships and family wellbeing. Explore the research on the link between family engagement and school readiness. Find strategies and additional resources to support staff and programs in boosting their family engagement and school readiness practices.

[Family Engagement and School Readiness](#)

**Supporting parents to collaborate in early education opportunities.**

This resource helps parents and carers support the development of their children’s literacy and numeracy, and can be a valuable resource for teachers to support students in their education and development when they’re not at school. Literacy and Numeracy Tips to Help your Child Every Day provides families with fun, inexpensive, accessible and practical ways to help children develop the literacy and numeracy skills they need in life, in preparation for school and to keep them progressing until the end of Year 6.

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SOME IDEAS AND RESOURCES CONT’D

Supporting early math development. Families and educators must share responsibility for supporting early math development and families need guidance and ideas for how to support this. Educators in a variety of settings (such as teachers, home-based providers, and librarians) can provide families with tips and ideas to encourage math learning. An excellent Early Math Learning resource (Global Family Research Project, August 2017) is available through the Global Learning Research Project and can be accessed through the link below:

Engaging Families in Early Math Learning - Global Family Research

Thirty-eight (38) resources on family engagement as part of the Global Family Research Project (1983–2017).

https://globalfrp.org/Articles

Welcoming Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in kindergarten.


Transcript of the video embedded in above link (July 2014) is available in the link below:


A guide to engaging with families of children with a disability.

Parental Engagement: Engaging with families of children with a disability

Australian Government - Learning Potential

Learning Potential is a free app and website for parents, families, and carers packed with useful tips and inspiring ways parents can be more involved in their child’s learning. It is designed to help parents be part of their child's learning and make the most of the time they spend together, from the high chair to high school. Visit the Learning Potential website, or download the app for free from the App Store or Google Play. (Department of Education & Training, 2018).


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The following quotes are taken from interviews conducted as part of the Re-Energising Parent Engagement in Australian Primary and Secondary Schools Project.

“Our whole approach that guides everything we do here is this understanding of a life fully lived. So we position ourselves as a partner with parents in helping them raise their children for a life fully lived.”
(Primary principal, metropolitan school, Victoria).

“Usually it was an iPad, but it was more that at night-time they would bring work home, which enabled the parents to see what was going on, and sometimes it was ... parent input as well, and that’s a more authentic model than just the old homework, you know, the books coming home for parents to see what’s going on, because it actually showed them very clearly what was happening in the classroom, and perhaps where they could contribute as well.”
(Primary principal, metropolitan school, Australian Capital Territory).

“In next fortnight’s newsletter, I’m actually writing a little bit of an editorial about the importance of reading to children, and even when they can read for themselves, the importance, still, of reading to children at home. And I’m backing it up with current research. So I see a big part of my role is to help educate and support parents in their role as parents.”
(Primary principal, metropolitan school, Queensland).

“We’ve had parents coming in and working with our maths leaders on a term by term basis learning about particular maths topics that they obviously see in their children’s home learning program, homework programs that they want to be more knowledgeable about so that they can help with those sorts of tasks.”
(Primary principal, metropolitan school, Victoria).
“… in the newsletter every fortnight are parenting ideas from Michael Gross. So, we really do put a lot out there. I’ve got two LEAP teachers, one in English, one in maths, they always put in something about what you can do for your child. ... So, it’s not flicking it back on parents, it’s basically saying parents, we’re in this together, and you do this at home and your child will benefit. We do this at school, obviously, because that’s our job, but we need – yeah, if you want your child to flourish, then you need to be a part of this.”

(Primary principal, regional school, New South Wales).

“So the parents are both working or they’re FIFO and – that means that student is being cared for by someone else during the day and what I’ve found is that we cannot assume that the children have had that prior learning at home especially in the areas of pre-literacy, that we can’t assume that the children will have had books read to them of a night time.”

(Primary principal, regional school, Western Australia).

“We’re very conscious of the professional development that not just our staff need here at school but that we can pass on to our parents.”

(Primary principal, regional school, Tasmania).

“So we realise that we have to actually take the classroom to the family, so whether it’s a blog on the internet or the website, whatever it might be, we have homework where we send the homework home, we take photos through ClassDojo, teachers send photos home of what the children are doing in the classroom for the day, you know, there’s lots of those ways that we can actually bring the classroom to the families and I think parents appreciate that.”

(Primary principal, regional school, Queensland).
The following quotes are taken from interviews conducted as part of the Re-Energising Parent Engagement in Australian Primary and Secondary Schools Project.

“I want my children to be happy at school, and yeah, whatever I need to do to help them achieve that, to support them, support the teacher, I think that’s quite important by trying to maintain the learning at home. ... I figure if they’re happy at school, they’re going to learn.”

(Parent, regional primary school, Victoria).

“They also try to do information sessions on various things ... like it might be mathematics information sessions. So they are trying to reach out and engage parents on different topics and even parenting and nutrition for children and that kind of thing.”

(Parent, metropolitan primary school, Queensland).

“In the newsletter every week, they advertise what the students on various year levels have been working on, so there is an inkling about, you know, in maths they’re doing quadrangles or whatever ... I value that they're making the attempt so I can, at least check in and go, yeah, this is happening in English.”

(Parent, regional primary school, Victoria).
“Gains in learning are most prominent when parents and school staff work together to facilitate a supportive learning environment in both the home and the school.”
(Emerson, Fear, Fox and Sanders, 2012).

“Principals frequently cited examples where they provided opportunities for parents to connect and engage with the school and its staff ... while many of these aligned more with parent involvement - for instance at whole-of-school events - there was still benefit in terms of increasing comfort and familiarity of parents in the school environment and breaking down some of the relational barriers that can be in play between parents and teachers. In this case, involvement can be seen to act as a precursor to potential engagement.”
(Stafford, Barker and Ladewig, 2018).

“By engaging parents, the school has become more embedded in the community. Engagement has increased through joint learning activities for both parents and students. Increased communication and home visits have helped students with specific problems. ... As a result, parents feel more confident and welcome at the school. Volunteering has increased, along with parental expectations. Parents are now more engaged in what students are learning and how they are progressing where it was once enough that their child simply went to school.”
(Jensen, February, 2014).


SOME USEFUL BOOKS ON PARENT ENGAGEMENT

Please click here to peruse a list of useful books on parent engagement
REFERENCES

Commissioner for Children and Young People. (2018). Speaking out about school and learning - The views of WA children and young people on factors that support their engagement in school and learning. Western Australia, Perth.


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