



ACT
Government



EDUCATION CAPITAL:

Progressing Parental
Engagement





Minister's Message

Parental Engagement in the ACT

I am pleased to present *Education Capital: Progressing Parental Engagement*.

This work brings together research undertaken by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth in partnership with the Education and Training Directorate, Catholic Education Office and The Association of Independent Schools. Its development involved working with and listening to ACT parents, families and the community about what matters to them in their child's learning.

Parents play a critical role in their child's learning and through this publication we aim to highlight this role and the importance of developing strong and effective partnerships between schools and families.

The publication, based on local, national and international evidence provides a definition of what parental engagement is and the behaviours that best support learning outcomes for children. It is intended for use by families, schools and communities across the ACT in supporting a shared understanding of what parental engagement is, why it matters, how it works, and how best to foster it.

It aims to build on the positive relationships ACT schools already have with their families and communities and will equip parents and schools to strengthen these partnerships to better focus on children's learning and well-being.

I urge school boards and parent associations to use this document and the associated fact sheets to generate conversation about parental engagement and what it looks like in your school. I hope these conversations will energise and stimulate the already high level of parental engagement that exists in our community.

As Minister for Education I continue to be committed to our work in enabling strong, meaningful and sustainable connections between home and school that make significant and long lasting differences to our children, our families and our community.

Joy Burch MLA
Minister for Education and Training

1. Engaging ACT parents in their children's learning

Parental engagement recognises that both parents and teachers play an important role in children's learning, development and well-being – and that children generally do better when there are connections between the different spaces they learn in.

Parental engagement in children's learning is:

- **family-led learning focused** on high aspirations for children, shared reading, a positive environment for homework, parent-child conversation, a stimulating home environment and support for social and emotional well-being; and
- **family-school partnerships** that encourage positive parent-teacher relationships, communication about children's progress, and engagement in the school community, while equipping parents to effectively support and encourage their children's learning and well-being.

Parental engagement is most effective when it is focused on developing positive attitudes towards learning and education for children, building their motivation and confidence as learners and fostering their enjoyment of learning.

2. What's the difference between parent involvement and parental engagement?

Parent involvement refers to parent participation in formal and informal activities at the school such as attending parent group meetings, running a stall at the school fête or volunteering at the canteen.

Parental engagement refers to the broader role parents play in supporting their child's learning. Parental engagement recognises the important role that both parents and teachers play in children's learning and development. Although involvement in school activities is beneficial in many ways, especially in facilitating relationships between parents and teachers, how parents support children's learning at home has a bigger impact on academic outcomes than participation in school-based activities.

“It's also about encouraging them to have the right relationship with their teachers, for example. Being able to give proper attention to teachers, and having the right attitude to all that.”

(ACT Parent)

3. The impact parents can have

Parents and families are children's first teachers and they continue to help their children to learn and thrive throughout the school years. Parents as partners with school in supporting children's learning can have a significant and long lasting positive impact.

Research shows benefits of parental engagement include:

- improved academic outcomes
- greater engagement in learning
- 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
- enhanced relationships with others in the school community
- the development of effective partnerships - where families and schools can work together to address issues that may be impacting on children's well-being and achievement.

4. Parental engagement strategies that work

Parental engagement can involve many things, but current research suggests there is a range of specific activities and behaviours that appear to have a bigger impact – they involve positive, mutually respectful relationships between parents and teachers, an inclusive school culture and learning-rich everyday family activities.

Showing children that education is important, building their confidence and connecting with their school helps to shape children's learning and well-being.

There are simple things parents can do at home and with their school to help their child to do their best. At home, parents have the biggest impact on learning when they help children to believe in themselves and to enjoy learning new things.

“Just being interested in what your child is interested in – so when they show an interest in something, encouraging it, giving them opportunities to learn more, and try it and experiment. I think that’s really important.”

(ACT Parent)



5. What works at home

Research shows that the most effective strategies for family-led learning include:

- **Believing in children's potential** – The most powerful thing parents can do is to show children they believe in them and believe in their ability to be successful.
- **Reading together** - Reading together helps children to develop and practise their reading, writing and language skills. Telling stories and talking about things that children are interested in helps them enjoy learning.
- **Talking with children** - Conversations are an important contributor to children's learning and development. Just spending time talking with children helps them to learn and grow. Simple ways to do this include talking about what they're learning at school and what they enjoy or find difficult.
- **Supporting children to develop positive relationship with others** - Parents play an important role in supporting these relationships by helping children to build and maintain a positive relationship with their teacher, helping them negotiate with peers and respond appropriately to negative experiences they may encounter.



- **Learning together** – Engagement in everyday activities at home like cooking or grocery shopping, or going to community events, or museums or libraries or just spending time learning with the family provides children with the opportunity to be exposed to new things, explore new areas of passion or interest and learn about their family and culture.
- **Creating a positive homework environment** – It is important to provide a dedicated space and time for homework, have the same rules as the school about homework and ensure parent-child interactions about homework are positive.

“The school teacher can’t be there all the time ... in our proverb from our country ... the parent is the first teacher.”

(ACT Parent)



6. What works at school

At school, teachers are experts in learning and provide families with strategies that can help children best achieve. Partnerships between schools and parents are critical in supporting parental engagement in education. Keeping open and clear communication between families and schools is an important starting point in developing effective family-school partnerships.

- Parent-school communication** - Communication between families and teachers about children's well-being, their progress and how parents can assist is central to enabling parents to engage effectively with their children's learning. One way to do this is to include positive news about their everyday learning as well as when children need extra help.
- Involvement in the school community** – One way schools can do this is through developing and facilitating opportunities for parents to connect with the school community by attending events at school, building social networks with other parents, volunteering at school, or participating in school governance. Parents don't need to participate in activities at school to be engaged in their children's learning. How parents support children's learning at home has the biggest impact on academic outcomes. Schools can also work with parents to equip them in supporting learning at home.



“I think of it as a triangle – the student, the school and the parents/family. The child has the daily interaction with the school and we have daily interaction with the child, but it’s about keeping the lines of communication open between the school and the parents.”

(ACT Parent)

7. What does this mean for families and schools?

Many parents feel they should be doing more at school. For parents who are busy, it is important to remember that supporting learning at home matters. Providing opportunities for children to learn new things, reading and supporting their interests makes a big difference. Parents don't need to be an expert; supporting and encouraging learning is enough.

Creating positive partnerships through open communication will enable families and schools to best meet the needs of children.

“The sign of a good school is if children are encouraged to learn, whether they’re at school or outside the classroom. If they’re learning something that they want to keep learning about once they’re home, asking more questions, and being supported in doing that at home.”

(ACT Parent)

8. Our partners

The ACT Education and Training Directorate partnered with the non-profit Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY), the Catholic Education Office of the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn, the Association of Independent Schools of the ACT, the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, the Catholic School Parents Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn and the Association of Parents and Friends of ACT Schools. Together, the alliance developed a shared understanding of parental engagement in the ACT, based on what the evidence shows has the biggest impact and the things that matter most to ACT families and schools. The international evidence has been reviewed and parents and teachers have been consulted on what is important to them.

9. Where to next?

Progressing Parental Engagement in the ACT is intended to provide a strong and evidence-informed foundation for strengthening parental engagement in ACT schools. The release of the Parental Engagement in the ACT publication is the first step in this important work.

Future work includes:

- fostering the development of a shared understanding between families, schools and administrators about what parental engagement is and why it matters;
- producing evidence-informed resources for families and schools to equip them to strengthen their parental engagement practice; and
- developing a framework for measuring parental engagement, including a survey schools can use to measure current levels of engagement in their community and track progress over time.

Resources and strategies to support schools and families to strengthen parental engagement will be available in 2015.

Resources for parents

Fact sheets that outline the role of parents and schools as partners in education based on the project are available through the ACT Education and Training Directorate.

Other resources for teachers and schools

Parent involvement toolkit – Information on parental engagement and family-school partnerships
www.peopleforeducation.ca/how-does-education-work/training-and-resources/helping-children-succeed-the-parent-engagement-toolkit/

Raising children – Ideas for learning and play with primary school aged children
http://raisingchildren.net.au/play_learning/school_age_play_learning.html

Schoolatoz: Practical help for parents – A comprehensive guide for parents of school aged children
www.schoolatoz.nsw.edu.au/

Harvard Family Research Program
<http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/publications-resources>

Strengthening Family and Community Engagement
<http://www.familyschool.org.au/s/strengthening-family-and-community-engagement-student-learning-resource/>

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