

EDUCATION CAPITAL:

Progressing Parental Engagement Teacher Fact Sheet

Parental engagement involves partnerships between families and schools to promote children's learning and well-being.

It involves:

- family-led learning focused on high aspirations for children, shared reading, a positive environment for homework, parent-child conversation, a cognitively 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 recognises the important role that both parents and teachers play in developing positive attitudes towards learning and education for children, building their motivation and confidence as learners, and fostering their enjoyment of learning.

The impact parents can have

Research from the past 40 years has established that effective parental engagement can have the following impacts:

- Children can be more likely to enjoy learning and be motivated to do well
- Children can be more likely to have good social outcomes including better relationships, improved behaviour and greater confidence
- Children can do better at school and be more likely to graduate, go on to college, TAFE or university
- Children can have better school attendance
- There are simple things parents can do that have a big impact

Did you know?

Multiple studies and meta-analyses show that children whose parents are engaged in their learning have higher levels of academic achievement. Parental engagement in children's learning is a bigger predictor of how children do in school than a family's socio-economic status. Parental engagement in learning is one tool that can help to close the gap in achievement between children of different socio-economic backgrounds (Monti, Pomerantz, & Roisman, 2014).

Looking at the big picture, where does parental engagement fit in?

The ecological model of child development is a framework that highlights the multiple influences on children's learning and indicates why partnerships between families and schools are important for maximising children's outcomes (see Figure 1).

The model depicts the interconnected and dynamic connections between children's learning and their health, mental health, relationships, material well-being and safety (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Farrar, Goldfeld, & Moore, 2007).

Figure 1: The Common Approach, an ecological model of children development (ARACY, 2013)



"Any group can experience the advantages of parental engagement"
(Jeynes, 2005)

How does parental engagement work?

Recent evidence suggests that parental engagement does not affect child academic outcomes directly (e.g. through instruction, academic coaching or help with homework content). Instead, parental engagement appears to affect children indirectly through a few key mechanisms or processes. Parents appear to have the greatest impact when their engagement focuses on children's:

- Belief in the importance and value of education
- Motivation and engagement in learning
- Sense of self-efficacy for learning and persistence
- Sense of academic competence and confidence as a learner
- Underpinning skills for learning, like problem solving and developing as an autonomous learner
- Social and emotional well-being.

Types of parental engagement that aren't focused on these factors (like stressful interactions around homework and harsh feedback on children's efforts) appear to be much less effective, and in some cases can have negative impacts on children's achievement.

What is parental engagement?

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 involves:

- Family-led learning – the ways parents support learning through everyday activities and while children aren't at school (and the ways schools support parents to do this most effectively)
- Family-school partnerships – the ways families and schools work together to support children's academic achievement, to connect what children are learning at school with how they are learning at home; helping families respond early to children's learning challenges and extend children's learning about the things they're passionate about.

Parental engagement can involve many things, but current research suggests that 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.

"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)

"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)

Key behaviours and attitudes for effective family-led learning

Belief in the child's potential	Parents' belief in their child's ability to succeed at school, and their aspirations for their child's future, positively influences children's own confidence and aspirations.
Shared reading	Parent-child reading is strongly supported by evidence. It is particularly effective for younger children developing literacy skills, but continues to have an impact. The impact of shared reading is enhanced when parents receive guidance from the school about strategies and approaches that develop age-appropriate literacy skills. Importantly, shared reading doesn't have to be in English to have an impact.
Parent-child conversation	Conversations are an important contributor to children's learning and development. In addition to general discussion about everyday experiences, it is beneficial for parents to talk about topics children are learning at school, big ideas and social issues, as well as stories about family history and events.
Positive environment for homework	Recent research suggests that only some forms of parental engagement in homework have benefits. These include: providing a dedicated space for homework, having the same rules as the school around homework (combined with invitations for parents to ask questions and provide feedback on homework), positive parent-child interactions about homework, and supporting children's development as autonomous learners.
Support for social and emotional well-being	Parents play an important role in helping children to manage their social and emotional well-being, including negotiating peer relationships, helping them respond to negative experiences like bullying, and supporting them to build and maintain a positive relationship with their teacher.
Learning about the world	A stimulating and learning-rich home environment provides children with the opportunity to be exposed to new things, explore new areas of passion or interest, and participate in family, community and cultural activities. This can include everyday activities like cooking or grocery shopping, or going to events, museums or art galleries.

Key behaviours and attitudes for effective family-school partnerships	
Parent-school communication	Communication between families and teachers about children's well-being, their progress (including positive news about their everyday learning as well as when children need extra help) and how parents can assist is central to enabling parents to engage effectively with their children's learning. Creating opportunities and clear avenues for communication means teachers can be aware of any circumstances that may impact on children in the classroom. To be effective, this communication needs to be grounded in positive relationships, mutual respect and understanding of each other's role, knowledge and expertise.
A school community that encourages belonging and engagement	<p>One of the most significant mechanisms through which parental engagement translates into improvements in academic outcomes is through parents showing and telling their children that they value education and learning. One way parents do this is through engaging in their school community - by attending events at school, building social networks with other parents, volunteering at school, or participating in school governance. When parents are able to come to school, it gives teachers an opportunity to get to know them – parents are more likely to feel comfortable asking questions and discussing their child's needs if they have a good relationship with the teacher.</p> <p>But parents don't need to participate in events 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.</p>

“Parents’ involvement enhances children’s achievement because it provides children with a variety of motivational resources (e.g. intrinsic reasons for pursuing academics, a sense of control over academic performance, positive perceptions of academic competence) that foster children’s engagement in school”

(Pomerantz, Moorman and Litwick, 2007).

What do ACT parents think?

Research on what ACT parents currently believe, know and do in relation to parental engagement identified strong support for working in partnership with teachers and schools, and parents' desire for more information from schools about what they can do to help their children's learning.

"I'm willing and open to learning more about how my child learns but don't know where to start."

"The school teacher can't be there all the time ... in our proverb from our country ... the parent is the first teacher."

"...I earn a good wage but I can't afford to stay home, no way, and I think sometimes they think ... that engagement is how much you're at the school but it's not, it's about - are you engaged in your child's learning journey in your home?"

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.

What influences parents' engagement and do schools have a role?

There is a broad range of factors that influence how, when and where parents engage in their children's learning. Researchers have identified four important drivers of engagement:

- Parents' role construction – beliefs about the appropriate role for parents in supporting children's learning, where children learn and who is responsible for children's learning
- Parents' self-efficacy – their confidence that they have the skills and knowledge to have a positive impact
- Invitations to engage from children and schools – communication from children and especially teachers and schools that shows parents' engagement is both welcome and valued, and provides opportunities to engage in achievable and appropriate ways
- Life circumstances that enable engagement – when parents have the time, energy and resources to be engaged

These are all factors that schools can influence – by helping to build parents' knowledge and skills; through communication that invites parents' engagement, builds confidence and develops parents' role construction; and recognising parents' circumstances and responding appropriately.

Further resources supporting schools to continue strengthening parental engagement will be available in 2015.

Benefits of parental engagement for teachers and schools

- Improved child well-being and behaviour
- Greater engagement in learning
- Improved academic outcomes
- Parents as partners to help address learning and behavioural challenges as well as exchange ideas on how to support child motivation and engagement
- More engagement in the school community
- More opportunities to work with families to address issues that may be impacting on children's well-being and achievement
- Help to close the education gap for families from low socio-economic backgrounds and families from a language background other than English.

Resources for teachers and schools

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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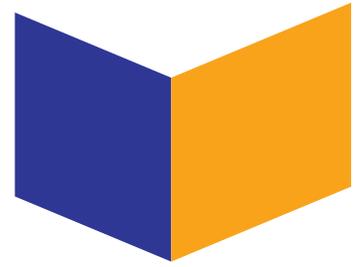
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Our Partners

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.

More resources will be available in 2015.



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