PARENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT
AN IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE FOR SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

ARACY
Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth
Australian Parent Engagement Network

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GLOSSARY

Co-design / Co-creation

When schools harness diversity and build inclusion by bringing diverse people together to collectively generate ideas to design or create solutions to shared problems, together. Co-design or co-creation with families requires schools to value and harness what families bring. The approach involves asking questions, listening, empowering, sharing perspectives and information, partnering, implementing, and assessing new approaches and solutions, and supporting parent leadership and advocacy for educational equity and change.

Family efficacy

Families' confidence in their capacity to support their child's learning.

Family-School Partnerships

When families and schools work together to support the learning and wellbeing of children and young people.

Parent

Any adult with a significant caring responsibility of a child or young person, including a parent, carer, grandparent or other relative, or other adult. It may be a foster or kinship parent or carer. In many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities it can be the elders rather than birth parents who are performing the role of creating an environment that encourages and enhances the learning and wellbeing of children and young people.

(Parent and) family engagement in learning

Parent and family engagement in learning is the capacity of families, in partnership with schools, to support student learning and achievement by promoting interactions with children and young people that nurture positive attitudes towards learning, confidence as learners, and the development of subjective learning resources.

Parental self-efficacy

Confidence in one's ability to make a difference to their child's learning. Lower self-efficacy may impact on a parent's desire to engage in their child's learning.

Student agency

The level of autonomy and power that a student experiences in the learning environment, relating to having an active role in their learning through voice, and often a choice, in the process.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACDE   Australian Council of Deans of Education
ACER   Australian Council for Educational Research
ACSSO   Australian Council of State School Organisations
AITSL   Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
APC   Australian Parents Council
DoE   Australian Government Department of Education
ARACY   Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth
CSPA   Catholic School Parents Australia
MCRI   Murdoch Children's Research Institute
NSIT   National School Improvement Tool
PRC   Parenting Research Centre
PBL   Positive Behaviour for Learning
WSU   Western Sydney University

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome! The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) is pleased to present our new resource, **Parent and Family Engagement: An Implementation Guide for School Communities**.

Purpose of the guide

This resource aims to provide school communities with practical guidance on implementing successful parent and family engagement practices, focusing on the 'how' rather than just the 'why'. Throughout this guide we draw from a wide body of research to provide evidence and examples of how you can make parent and family engagement relevant to your school and community.

Why do we need a guide on parent and family engagement?

We know that parent and family engagement matters – 50 years of research evidence tells us that when parents and families engage in their children's learning we see positive impacts on student achievement and wellbeing outcomes. However, there is still a gap in how this translates to effective practice in schools and school communities. So then, what works? And, how?

Who is this guide for?

ARACY has developed this guide to assist school leaders and educators to better engage with the parents and families in their school communities – the key 'stakeholders' working together to support children's learning and wellbeing outcomes. We look forward to supporting your parent and family partnerships.

Research supporting this guide

This guide represents the practical culmination of a four-year project funded by the Australian Government Department of Education. In 2014, ARACY was commissioned to undertake a research project into parent (and family) engagement in learning.

The Project (2014-2018) aimed to build the profile of parent and family engagement in Australian schools, to explore options for consistent approaches to measuring the effects of parent and family engagement on student educational outcomes, and to build and share evidence about what works to encourage good practice.

Key achievements across the comprehensive program of research included:
- The establishment of the Australian Parent Engagement Network: https://www.aracy.org.au/the-nest-in-action/australian-parent-engagement-network
- The establishment of a Local Champion initiative: www.aracy.org.au/the-nest-in-action/parent-engagement-champions/parent-engagement-champions
- A national Parent Engagement Conference held in June 2017: www.pecaustralia.com/
- The development of a Parent Engagement survey tested in schools nationally, conducted by the Australian Council for Educational Research (in *Measuring Parent Engagement: Final Report to the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth*)
- A range of projects conducted by ARACY, including:

- A review of policy and parent engagement programs in Australia – *Parent Engagement: A Review Linking Policy and Programs*
- A study on the perspectives of young people – *Please Just Say You're Proud of Me: Perspectives of Young People on Parent Engagement and Doing Well at School*
- A case study project on parent engagement in career education www.schooltowork.employment.gov.au
- A range of projects conducted on behalf of ARACY, including by:
  - Australian Council of Deans of Education – *Promoting Parent Engagement in Learning Through Initial Teacher Education*
  - Australian Council for Educational Research – *Measuring Parent Engagement*
  - Parenting Research Centre:
    – *Data Audit of Parent Engagement Information*
    – *Needs Assessment of Parent Engagement Information*
    – *Ways Forward in Data Collection*
  - Western Sydney University – *Researching parent engagement: A qualitative field study*.

Throughout this project, ARACY worked with a range of schools and educators, agencies and practitioners, to learn, gather and understand, firsthand, what makes the difference when it comes to implementing successful parent and family engagement practices in school communities.

There are already parent and family engagement resources available. However, many of these are written for a non-Australian context, or for schools in a particular sector. Rather than presenting a new framework or set of practices, this resource aims to support schools by providing examples that showcase what we have learned from schools across Australia – examples from early childhood, primary and high schools, in every school sector.

Importantly, through our extensive work in the area of parent and family engagement over more than five years, we have learned that there is **no set way** for a school to adopt a culture of parent and family engagement. Each school represents a unique community, setting and context, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach. What we have also learned is that schools must **embed** appropriate structures and provide the resources and supports required by their staff (educators and others) to sustain family engagement practices over the long-term. In this guide we will take you through the necessary steps.

USING THIS GUIDE

This guide aims to help school leaders consider, plan, measure and evaluate their school's progress towards engaging with the school community, moving to a position where strong partnerships are evidenced in the achievement and wellbeing outcomes of the students in the school.

We have designed the guide around six sections, as follows:

1

Establishing some common ground

Firstly, we need to cover the 'what and why' of parent and family engagement in learning – what do we mean when we use this term? Why does it matter so much, and what are the benefits? We provide ARACY's definition of parent and family engagement, highlighting the different elements and how they are linked. We also consider the ages and stages of child development and the way family engagement in learning needs to evolve as children grow and seek independence, and of course, what this means for the strategies adopted by schools for supporting families. The section concludes with an exercise to help school leaders consider the unique context and setting of their school community.

2

School communities and parent and family engagement

In this section we consider parent and family engagement in the context of school improvement and professional standards. We expand on learnings about parent engagement and working with families, by touching on the challenges and enablers to engaging and addressing the need for actualising the capacity of all stakeholders (families and educators). We consider the thinking needed by schools to create a culture for effective parent and family engagement to be sustained, concluding with a set of overarching principles for schools to consider in adopting a whole-school plan for supporting families to engage in their child's learning, acknowledging them as a child's first and most influential teacher.

3

Preparing for parent and family engagement

In the third section we turn to planning. How does a school turn a vision for parent and family engagement into something embedded into the life of the school, rather than treated as an add-on, separate to core business? Laying the foundation for success starts with a commitment from the school leadership. We discuss the foundational work that school leadership teams need to do with staff, to bring them on the journey, before looking outwards to develop an engagement partnership with your school community. We have included several activities to assist with this stage. The section concludes with ideas for assembling a diverse Action Team to help your school keep up the momentum and help lead and implement the planning process.

4 Co-designing for parent and family engagement in learning

In section four we build on the foundational work considered in the previous section by turning to baselining, measurement and evaluation by presenting the key considerations for assessing where your school is currently at and where you would like to be. We discuss the use of surveys to understand what your school community sees as the issues that matter most and identifying priorities to create an action plan to achieve a shared vision over time – measuring and adjusting the course along the way using the Plan, Do, Assess, Review cycle.

5 Examples of effective practice in school communities

In section five we share some of the examples we have learned along the way, throughout the course of the four-year project funded by the Australian Government Department of Education. We focus specifically on the actions and activities that matter when building a school community that supports a culture of parent and family engagement, and those that make a difference when addressing specific challenges that might exist in your school and community.

6 A final note and suggested resources

In our final sections we provide a range of resources (reports, programs, survey questions, and references), to help with planning and tracking your journey.

Let's get started!

Important notes before we begin…

1. *In this guide, when we refer to 'parent' we mean any adult with a significant caring responsibility of a child or young person, including a parent, carer, grandparent or other relative, or other adult. It may be a foster or kinship parent or carer. In many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities it can be the Elders rather than birth parents who are performing the role of creating an environment that encourages and enhances the learning and wellbeing of children and young people.*

2. *Much of the literature uses the term 'parent or parental engagement'. Clearly, 'family' and 'families' are more inclusive terms. As previous research has traditionally referred to 'parent' engagement, we have retained that term but also included family, hence throughout this guide we refer to 'parent and family engagement' or 'family engagement'.*

1

ESTABLISHING SOME
COMMON GROUND

Fifty years of research tells us that parent engagement in children's learning makes a difference. When parents engage with their children's learning, particularly out of school, attendance increases, behaviour in school improves, homework return rates go up and, overall, children's achievement tends to improve.[1] Children achieve more in school when their families engage in activities such as reading, asking thoughtful questions, and providing the structure children need to complete assignments.[2]

Parent and family engagement in learning is based on an understanding that while children learn in all kinds of different environments, at the centre of these interrelated systems is the dynamic between parents and children. Child-parent interactions that nurture positive attitudes towards learning, confidence as learners, and the development of subjective learning resources, equip children to succeed.

Defining parent and family engagement

ARACY has conceptualised parent and family engagement as follows:

> *Parent and family engagement in learning is the capacity of families, in partnership with schools, to support student learning and achievement by promoting interactions with children and young people that nurture positive attitudes towards learning, confidence as learners, and the development of subjective learning resources.*

This definition has been developed to encompass three key dimensions of parent and family engagement:[3]
- A shared responsibility between families and schools for student education and learning
- The continuity of engagement from birth to young adulthood
- Cross-context activity (home, school and community).

Family engagement in learning can be visualised as a triangle, with students, families and schools at each point. Each party needs a strong relationship with the other two parties, working together to support the child or young person's learning.

Student
child or young person

External Support
parent, family, community

School
educators, leaders, other staff
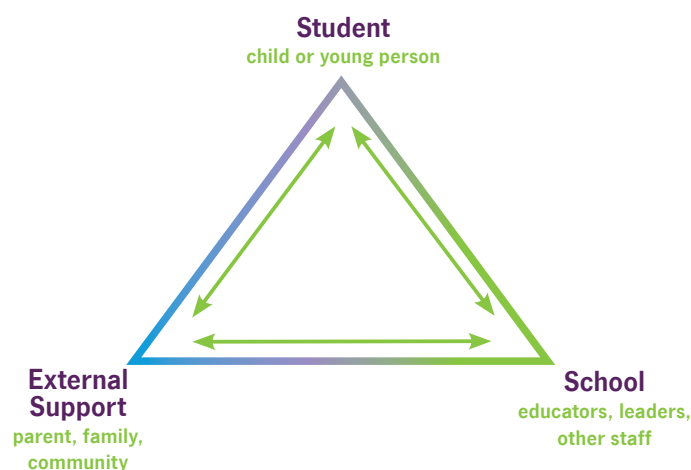
Figure 1: The Engagement Triangle

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1 J. Goodall (2018)

2 Center for Family Engagement and Global Family Research Project (2018)

3 Heather B. Weiss, Bouffard, Bridglall, and Gordon (2009); Pushor (2007)

Given that parent and family engagement is one of the most powerful predictors of children's development and educational attainment, it makes sense for schools and parents to work in tandem to improve educational achievement and reduce equity gaps. Equal partnerships between educators, students and parents provide the greatest opportunities to scaffold learning, especially among those most at risk of underachievement.

A *shared responsibility* means that parents share responsibility, with educators, for children's learning and we acknowledge that parent engagement happens both at home AND at school. Parents and schools interact in the best interests of that child, and in this sense are *equal partners*.

By *engagement in learning*, we are intentionally focused on schools supporting the interactions between parents and children that benefit learning outcomes. This is not about increasing attendance at parent/teacher meetings, or ensuring parents interact more with the school. The value of parent engagement is in supporting children's learning, and – although this sounds simple – may require a change in thinking for some schools, away from *supporting the school* to supporting *learning*, particularly in relation to the role of parents and families.[4]

> *By parent and family engagement in learning we are referring to the role of schools and educators as one of supporting families, understanding and leveraging how they interact with their child's learning, and supporting them to do that in equal partnership with the school.*

Involvement or Engagement?

Our focus is purposefully on actions by parents and families to facilitate learning, and on the partnership between families and schools. While research supports the notion that parent and family engagement in learning positively impacts student achievement there is an important distinction to be made between involving parents in or with schooling, and engaging parents in their child's learning; it is the latter that has been shown to have the greatest impact.

By **involvement** in or with schooling we are talking about actions undertaken by parents and families, often on school grounds and generally at the invitation of the school, such as volunteering in the classroom, attending parent-teacher conferences, fundraising for the school, and participating in school governance. Historically, discussions about the role of families in their child's education have tended to just focus on these actions, however, this underestimates the enormous impact families can have on the learning outcomes of their children.

The research evidence frequently indicates that most value comes from parents and families fostering a general atmosphere of learning and a supportive, motivating environment for children to undertake learning activities. For instance, communicating educational expectations, demonstrating (directly or indirectly) the value of learning, linking school work to current news and events, and providing a supportive and stimulating home environment.[5][6]

By parent and family **engagement in learning** we are talking about learning that happens in homes, in cars, in communities – anywhere that families spend time together, through everyday activities. This has been described as 'anywhere, anytime learning'.[7][8]

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4 Heather B. Weiss et al. (2009); Pushor (2007)

5 Emerson, Fear, Fox, and Sanders (2012)

6 Hill and Tyson (2009)

7 Lopez and Caspe (2014)

8 H.B. Weiss (2017)

The fundamental aspect of parent engagement – that many schools and educators understandably grapple with – is that by its very nature we are advocating for something that isn't always 'seen', as it tends to happen away from, or outside of, the school environment.

We now see much greater use of the term 'engagement', but in earlier literature parent 'involvement' was more prevalent. Though it only looks like a change in labels, what we're talking about is a change in thinking.

Rather than 'involvement' and 'engagement' being used interchangeably, these have been presented on a continuum, with the focus moving from parent involvement *with the school*, to parent involvement *with schooling*, to parent engagement *with learning*. This continuum is illustrated in the following, (Figure 2), adapted from Goodall.[10]

Increasing parental agency	Parental involvement with school			Decreasing school agency
	Reading in class	Volunteering in school	Parents' evening	
	Parental involvement with schooling			
	Helping with homework		Keeping track of coursework	
	Parental engagement with learning			
	Moral support	Guidance	Attitude toward learning in the home	
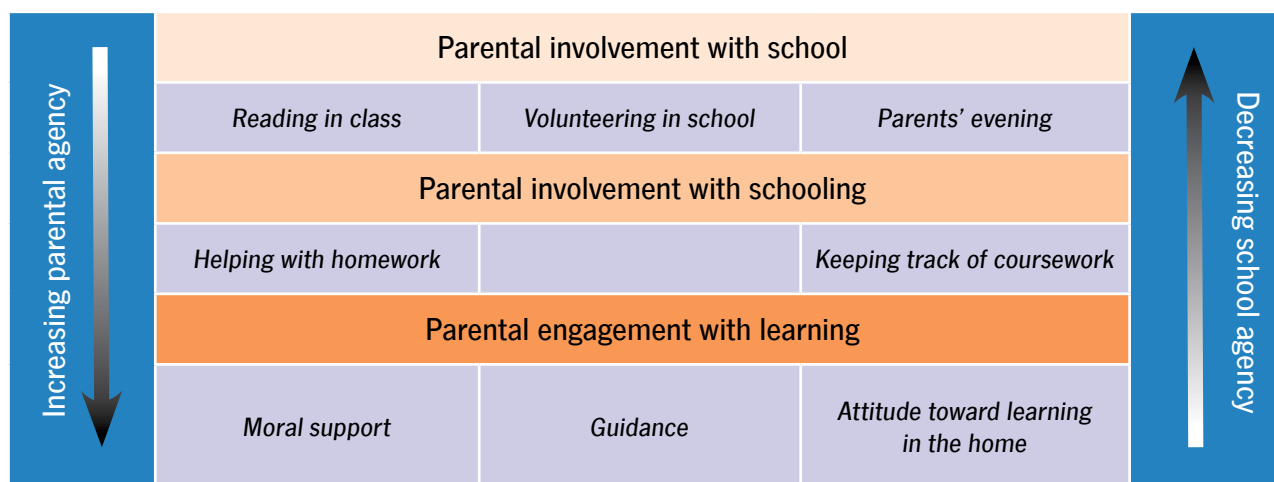
Figure 2: Parental Engagement Continuum (adapted from Goodall, 2017, p.93)

The difference is in outcomes. When schools are focused on actions that bring parents and families into the school, such as invitations to meetings, social or sporting events, for participation in governance, or to volunteer at/for the school, the impact is unlikely to influence the learning outcomes of children or young people. The outcomes of these actions or events are still important – they may have a strong impact on culture and resources of a school – but the link to student achievement is likely to be comparatively low.

Engaging parents and families is an **ongoing process**. Schools may find themselves at different points of the continuum with different activities, or with different parents/families. There is certainly no resting place where a school can say that they have achieved or 'completed' parent and family engagement. Each year brings a new cohort of families, students and even educators, into a school community; and additionally, children and young people change as they age, and parent engagement with their learning will necessarily need to adapt to these changes.

9 J. Goodall and Montgomery (2013)

10 Janet Goodall (2017)

It is important to emphasise that involving parents and families is an important and valuable endeavour in and of itself, because of the ways in which it can help parents and families build a sense of belonging to their school community, which in turn can demonstrate to a student that their family values and supports their education. In a nutshell, involving families can:

- Strengthen the social and emotional wellbeing of children and young people
- Help build parental networks
- Facilitate the development of positive relationships with teachers and other school staff
- Help families to understand school norms
- Build knowledge about the curriculum
- Be especially important for those parents who did not have positive experiences of school themselves, or who come from different cultural backgrounds, or who experience barriers to engaging in their child's learning.

Importantly, the continuum illustrated above (Figure 2) is cumulative; the activities in the upper 'involvement' levels ideally continue as parents and schools progress through the stages, with each building on the prior stage. The shift is from 'getting parents in' to 'supporting children's learning' through partnership with parents and families.[11] For true parent and family engagement to be occurring, the focus of activities needs to shift from being centred on the school to being centred on learning.

> *"Once that shift has been made, there will be a fundamental change even in the activities at the higher level of the continuum: they will shift from being school led and school centric to being focused on learning. This shift will also have profound effects on the relationships between parents/families and school staff."* (Goodall, 2017)

The influence of parenting and the home environment

Children thrive when they are supported by confident, engaged parents able to meet their children's needs. Parenting is the single most potent influence on the learning and development of young children and a continuing significant influence thereafter. A wide body of research confirms that families play powerful roles in both what and how children learn, thereby making family engagement in learning one of the most powerful predictors of children's development, educational attainment, and success in school and life.

In a previous study conducted on behalf of the ACT Education Directorate, ARACY documented what we see as the two key components to parent and family engagement – namely, **family-led learning** and **family-school partnerships**.[12] Family-led learning refers to the way in which families can support and encourage learning. Here we are focused on things like having 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 wellbeing.

What the research says about families is that it matters what they do with their children, not what level of education they have, or how much money they have. In fact, the quality of the home learning environment has been described as "more important for intellectual and social development than parental occupation, education or income. What parents do is more important than who parents are." [13]

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11 Janet Goodall (2017)

12 Fox and Olsen (2014)

13 Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, and Taggart (2004)
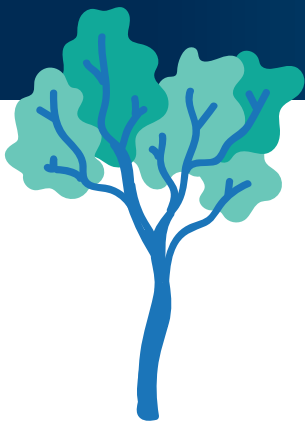
Family-led learning evolves as children develop and progress through their school years. The significance of parent and family engagement remains vitally important throughout.

PARENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT OVER TIME

There are three key "surges" in brain development in children – the early years, the middle years (around 8-11 years), and the teenage years/adolescence.

For schools this means that strategies adopted for supporting parents and families to engage in their child's learning will look different depending on the age and development stage of the student in question.

The early years

The period between birth and three years is a time of rapid cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional, and motor development. Explosive growth in vocabulary, for example, starts at around 15-18 months and continues into the preschool years. The ability to identify and regulate emotions in oneself and others is also well underway by the second year.

Language-rich, nurturing, and responsive caregiving fosters healthy development during this period, but not all children have such experiences. If enough rich stimulation is not provided, or there are barriers to opportunities for productive learning, children's development can fall behind. Unless there is specific intervention to help them catch up, the gap will usually persist.

How families support learning in the early years:
- Play and interacting at home
- Talking and singing
- Attending playgroup
- Visiting the library
- Reading together

"When you know what is happening at Kinder it is possible to tap into it at home."
(Parent, research participant) [14]

Interactive technologies are increasingly being used by early learning centres and preschools (parent-school wikis, blogs, and virtual chatrooms) to engage with parents and families. Virtual strategies allow parents to have regular contact with their child's educators and be aware of what is going on with their child's schooling, providing information to help support nuanced questions about at-school activities and leveraging engagement opportunities with learning in the home.

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14 Fong and Wade (2017)

Educators can help parents and families boost home-learning conditions by reinforcing:

- The impact that families can have on their child's development at this stage, that parents and families of children in the early years play the most important role as a child's first teacher in these foundation years and throughout life.
- That children learn by doing, through touching, tasting, smelling, seeing and hearing and through sharing their understanding of these things with others – playing and talking!
- The activities parents and carers can do with their child, including:
  - Playing together whenever you can, encouraging children to explore their surroundings, and sharing games and songs between the care setting and home
  - Talking with and listening to children as part of everyday, normal activities
  - Reading and counting with children every day
  - Involving children in the activities of daily family life, like shopping, cooking, or getting ready for work, school and daycare.

Further information is available in a suite of information sheets previously developed by ARACY on behalf of the ACT Government: https://www.aracy.org.au/the-nest-in-action/education-capital-act

The middle years (8-11 years)

The middle years are another critical time for brain growth. While all the building blocks of the brain are in place by around nine years of age, there is another intense burst of connection-building that lays the foundations for moving from concrete to abstract thinking and the beginnings of metacognition (the active monitoring and regulation of thinking processes). This period of brain growth marks the beginning of a person's executive functioning skills to do problem solving, think critically, plan, and control impulses. Children of this age are developing skills in deductive reasoning, problem solving, and generalising.

Parents are still likely to have many opportunities to engage with the school and their child's learning, even if they are no longer dropping off and collecting their child each day.

How families support learning in junior primary school (Kindergarten/Preparatory/Reception to Year 2)

- Communicating with their child's teacher
- Supporting literacy and numeracy
- Discussing school
- Structured routines
- Engaging with school community
- Encouraging learning at home
- Building interests outside school
- Using computers to enhance education

How families support learning in senior primary school (Year 3 to Year 6)

- Showing an interest in school
- Empowering children to lead learning
- Building responsibility and independence
- Supporting learning
- Encouraging learning outside school
- Using computers to enhance education

"I try to ask open questions – What was the most exciting thing you did today? What challenged you? What was the most fun?"
(Parent, research participant) [15]

Adolescence

During the adolescent years, the brain undergoes a period of remodelling. The neural connections no longer needed are pruned, and the connections that are activated most frequently are preserved and strengthened. It's a case of "use it or lose it." [16]

Adults think with the prefrontal cortex, the brain's rational part. This is the part of the brain that responds to situations with good judgment and an awareness of long-term consequences. Teens process information with the amygdala, the emotional part. The rational part of a teen's brain isn't fully developed and won't be until age 25 or so.

The high plasticity of the adolescent brain permits environmental influences to exert particularly strong effects. While this makes intellectual and emotional development possible, it also opens the door to potentially harmful influences.

In secondary school, young people will typically be travelling to and from school themselves, with fewer casual opportunities for parents to be on school grounds. Parents and schools will also have different expectations for young people around managing their own time and learning, in and out of school. The third side of the Family Engagement triangle, between school and family, may be weaker. Parents need to balance supporting their child's growing autonomy with staying connected with the school and their child's learning.

Schools can help by considering parents not only in their role as a student's family and support, but as individuals and members of the community in their own right. Parents and families are likely to have skills, connections and experience of value to the school beyond their parental role. Some of the case studies ARACY developed for the Parent Engagement in Career Education project, as part of the National Career Education Strategy (refer to: www.schooltowork.employment.gov.au), demonstrate ways parents add value to the school environment through connections with community and the world of work.

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15 Fong and Wade (2017)

16 Retrieved from: https://raisingchildren.net.au/pre-teens/development/understanding-your-pre-teen/brain-development-teens

ARACY's research into the types of support that young people in high school are seeking was informed by consultations with almost 100 senior secondary students (*Please Just Say You're Proud of Me: Perspectives of Young People on Parent Engagement and Doing Well at School*). We found that young people were clear about the need for loving, unconditional support from their parents and families. In many cases, they stated that their families did not understand the extent of the pressures they felt and had a narrower view of "success" that focused on achievement to the exclusion of being a well-rounded person. Schools can help by reinforcing with families that there is more than one pathway to career and life success and offering advice on supporting students through stressful periods like exam times.

How families support learning in secondary school

- Talking about school, work and careers
- Recognising there are multiple pathways to a successful career
- Showing interest in their child's learning
- Support and encouragement – recognising effort as well as achievement
- Practical assistance – with time management, planning projects, or just easing off on chores during exam time

"I need you to provide me with constructive criticism and tell me when I am being too hard on myself. Right now, I think that ATAR is the ultimate goal but that's not true and I need you to remind me." (Year 12 student, metropolitan school)[17]

How family roles change over the life course				
Leading learning	**Actively involved**	**Advocate for child**	**Trading influence for independence**	**Encouraging rather than involved**
Early Years	Kinder	Primary (F-2)	Primary (3-6)	Secondary
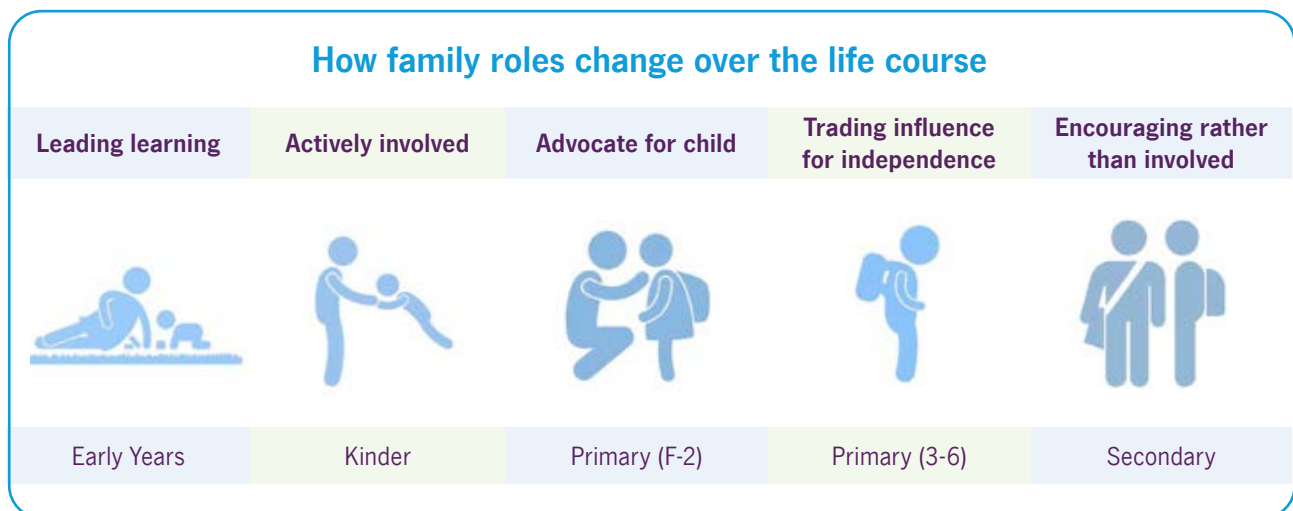
Figure 3: How family roles change over the life course (adapted from presentation to the 2017 Parent Engagement Conference "Engaging Families in Learning: A qualitative snapshot of how families and educators are supporting children's learning" **(Murdoch Children's Research Centre and Parenting Research Centre))**

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17 Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (2019)

IN SUMMARY

Key points

- When parents and families engage with their child's learning, attendance increases, behaviour in school improves, homework return rates go up and, overall, children's achievement tends to improve.
- There is no set way for a school to adopt a culture of parent engagement, no one-size-fits-all approach.
- Parent and family 'involvement at school' and 'engagement in learning' are separate concepts. Both have value, but only engagement in learning has an impact on achievement and wellbeing outcomes.
- Engaging parents and families in learning is an ongoing process.
- Children and young people learn 'anywhere, anytime'.
- Parent and family engagement can be described as a continuum of *cumulative* activity.
- What parents do is more important than *who* parents are.
- The strategies adopted for supporting parents and families to engage in their child's learning will look different depending on age and development stage.

TRY THIS #1:

Mapping the context and setting of your school community

As a starting point it is important for school leaders to consider how their school defines parent and family engagement. ARACY has developed a definition that encompasses three key dimensions, including:

a) a shared responsibility for children's education and learning between families and schools

b) the continuity of engagement from birth to young adulthood

c) cross-context activity (home, school and community).

School leaders, thinking about your school and community, what are some specific characteristics that are unique to your setting and context? For example:

- Where do your students sit on the life course (early years, primary, high school, etc)?
- What is the cultural composition of the school community? How many languages are represented among your students?
- Is the school located in an urban, suburban, regional, rural or remote setting?
- What are some of the key issues for your families?

Consider all the elements that combine to create the unique context of your school. Share your thoughts with others, perhaps those on the leadership team.

- Where does agreement tend to sit?
- Are there any differences of opinion?
- What implications might this have for the way your school defines and conceptualises parent and family engagement?

2

SCHOOL COMMUNITIES AND
PARENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

In this section we consider parent and family engagement in the context of school improvement and professional standards. We expand on learnings about parent engagement and working with families, by touching on the challenges and enablers to engaging and addressing the need for actualising the capacity of all stakeholders (families and educators). We consider the thinking needed by schools to create a culture for effective parent and family engagement to be sustained, concluding with a set of overarching principles for schools to consider in adopting a whole-school plan for supporting families to engage in their child's learning, acknowledging them as a child's first and most influential teacher.

Improvement context and professional standards

Schools and educators are compelled to embrace a culture of relationship-based engagement in both the context of school improvement and professional standards. In terms of professional standards, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership's **(AITSL) Australian Professional Standards for Teachers** include two standards that relate to parent and family engagement:

3.7 Engage parents/carers in the educative process

7.3 Engage with the parents/carers [18]

The descriptors for these standards (below) reflect the expectation that teachers will expand their skills in these areas as they develop in their roles and will need to evidence certain requirements of the Standards in order to become a registered teacher, or achieve Highly Accomplished and Lead certification.

3.7 Engage parents/carers in the educative process

Graduate	Proficient	Highly Accomplished	Lead
Describe a broad range of strategies for involving parents/carers in the educative process.	Plan for appropriate and contextually relevant opportunities for parents/carers to be involved in their children's learning.	Work with colleagues to provide appropriate and contextually relevant opportunities for parents/carers to be involved in their children's learning.	Initiate contextually relevant processes to establish programs that involve parents/carers in the education of their children and broader school priorities and activities.

7.3 Engage with the parents/carers

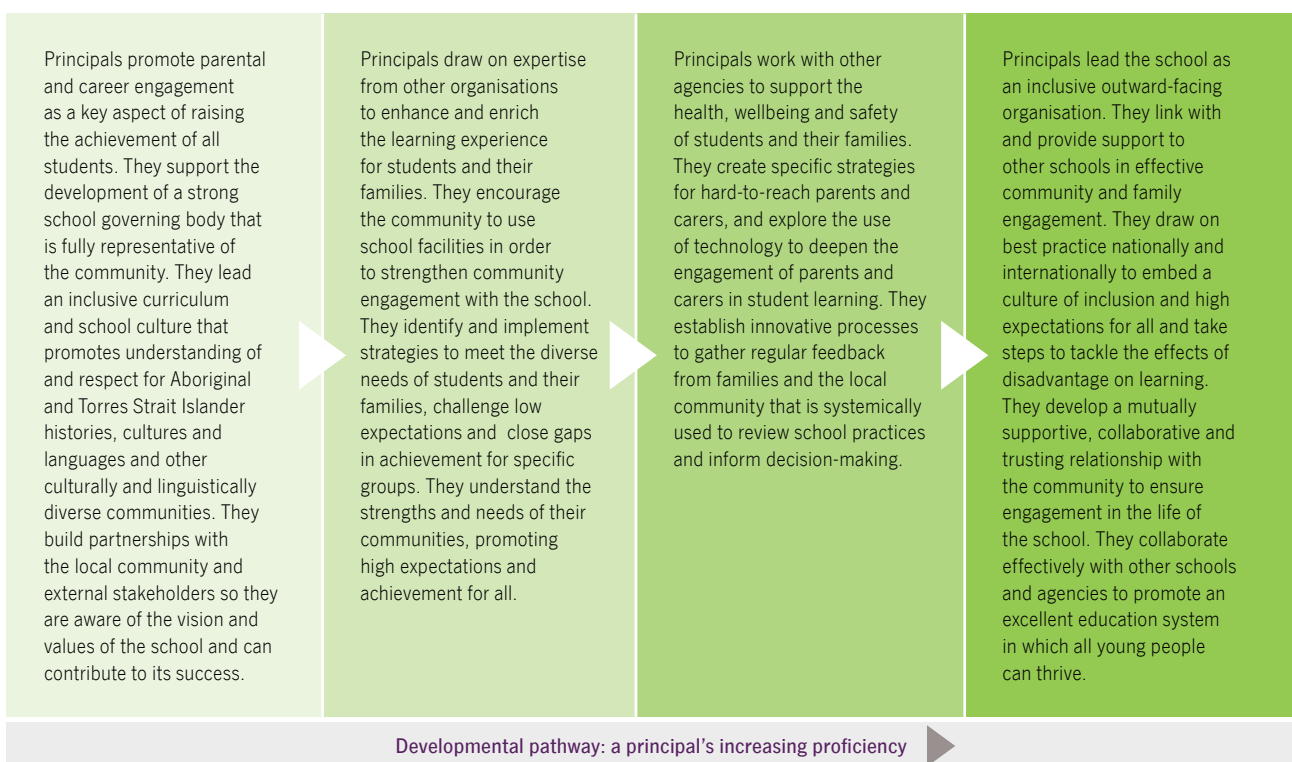| Graduate	Proficient	Highly Accomplished	Lead
Understand strategies for working effectively, sensitively and confidentially with parents/carers.	Establish and maintain respectful collaborative relationships with parents/carers regarding their children's learning and wellbeing.	Demonstrate responsiveness in all communications with parents/carers about their children's learning and wellbeing.	Identify, initiate and build on opportunities that engage parents/carers in both the progress of their children's learning and in the educational priorities of the school.

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18 Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2011)

The AITSL **Australian Professional Standards for Principals** contains family engagement in the *Professional Practice Engaging and Working with the Community,* which states:

> "Principals embrace inclusion and help build a culture of high expectations that takes account of the richness and diversity of the wider school community and the education systems and sectors. They develop and maintain positive partnerships with students, families and carers and all those associated with the wider school community… They recognise and support the needs of students, families and carers from communities facing complex challenges."[19]

The developmental pathway of a principal along the Leadership Profile for 'Engaging and working with the community' is illustrated below.

Principals promote parental and career engagement as a key aspect of raising the achievement of all students. They support the development of a strong school governing body that is fully representative of the community. They lead an inclusive curriculum and school culture that promotes understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages and other culturally and linguistically diverse communities. They build partnerships with the local community and external stakeholders so they are aware of the vision and values of the school and can contribute to its success.	Principals draw on expertise from other organisations to enhance and enrich the learning experience for students and their families. They encourage the community to use school facilities in order to strengthen community engagement with the school. They identify and implement strategies to meet the diverse needs of students and their families, challenge low expectations and close gaps in achievement for specific groups. They understand the strengths and needs of their communities, promoting high expectations and achievement for all.	Principals work with other agencies to support the health, wellbeing and safety of students and their families. They create specific strategies for hard-to-reach parents and carers, and explore the use of technology to deepen the engagement of parents and carers in student learning. They establish innovative processes to gather regular feedback from families and the local community that is systemically used to review school practices and inform decision-making.	Principals lead the school as an inclusive outward-facing organisation. They link with and provide support to other schools in effective community and family engagement. They draw on best practice nationally and internationally to embed a culture of inclusion and high expectations for all and take steps to tackle the effects of disadvantage on learning. They develop a mutually supportive, collaborative and trusting relationship with the community to ensure engagement in the life of the school. They collaborate effectively with other schools and agencies to promote an excellent education system in which all young people can thrive.

Developmental pathway: a principal's increasing proficiency

Figure 4: Developmental pathway along the AITSL Leadership Profile 'Engaging and working with the community' (Source: AITSL, 2014).

Clearly, there is an imperative for educators and school leaders to regularly reflect on these standards and embed them in practice and accountability regimes. Without these, a commitment to parent and family engagement in learning can easily slip off the radar.

In terms of the school improvement context, family and parent engagement is also a priority. The **National School Improvement Tool (NSIT)** allows schools to reflect, assess and plan for improvement, complementing system-led improvement frameworks and accountabilities.[20] Schools may use the NSIT in the development of school improvement, strategic or annual improvement planning.

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19 Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2014)

20 Masters (2016)

In the NSIT, highly effective schools place a high priority on building and maintaining 'positive and caring' relationships between staff, students and parents; there is a strong collegial culture of mutual trust and support among teachers and school leaders; and parents are treated as partners in the promotion of students learning and wellbeing, to achieve a 'culture that promotes learning' (Domain 3). Assessment of Domain 3 includes consideration of the extent to which, for example:

- The school views parents and families as integral members of the school community and partners in student learning, and

- All students and staff have an obvious sense of belonging, all parents are welcome, and all staff, students and parents speak highly of the school.

The NSIT reinforces the research evidence which affirms that parent and community engagement contributes to significant and sustained school improvement and turnaround.[21]

Family engagement in learning is a deliberate and integral strategy for supporting the learning and wellbeing of children and young people. It forms a necessary part of school improvement processes. School leaders and teachers will continue to be accountable for planning, implementing and measuring the impact of their school, family and community engagement efforts.

Barriers to engagement

Family engagement comes down to effective partnerships between families and schools. But what ARACY has learned over the course of our Project is that there are obstacles that often make it challenging for families and educators to join together to support the learning and development of children and young people.

Where do these obstacles come from? For families, parental self-efficacy – confidence in their ability to make a difference to their child's learning – can play a role in whether they will engage. That is, parents need to know **what** to do, and to **believe** they can do it effectively. Educators know parents are the first and continuing teachers of their child, but a parent may not feel they have the capacity to fulfil that role. Parental self-efficacy is influenced by many things, including childhood experiences, external messages, experiences of parenting, and degree of cognitive or behavioural preparation for the parental role.

> Parents and families need to know how important their continued support for learning is, and that as the experts in their child they are an extremely valuable resource to be harnessed. Educators have a vital role to play here.

Another key thing we've learned is that despite the priority family engagement is given in professional standards and tools, most educators have received none or very little specific training in forming relationships with families for the benefit of supporting children's learning. In general, parent and family engagement is not extensively covered in initial teacher preparation. We know from our study with the Australian Council of Deans of Education that there are growing numbers of university courses providing coursework in this area, but this has been a relatively recent change.

The next section outlines how schools can strengthen parent and family engagement.

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21 Bryk (2010); Caldwell and Spinks (2013); Jensen and Sonnemann (2014); Hattie (2009); Leithwood, Harris, and Strauss (2010)

Enabling effective engagement through capacity building

It is now understood that unless schools have a process in place to build staff capacity for engaging and promoting family efficacy (families' confidence in their capacity for supporting their child's learning), the process cannot be sustained over time.

Parent and family engagement is not about families 'showing up' for parent/teacher meetings. We know, for example, that all the stakeholders in the engagement equation need to build the knowledge and skills to cultivate and sustain family-school partnerships. As Karen Mapp (Harvard Graduate School of Education) asserts, we need to provide the various stakeholders the opportunity to build the capacity to engage in effective partnerships.[22]

A fundamental part of this is ensuring a commitment to a school-wide plan for, or whole-school approach to, parent and family engagement. This largely boils down to training and discussions with **all school staff** – anyone who comes into contact with family members – about the need for understanding the value and meaning of parent and family engagement with their child's learning.

Parent and family engagement has been described as "an *intentional* and *systemic* partnership of educators, families and community members… [who] share responsibility for a student's preparation for school, work and life, from the time the child is born to young adulthood."[23] Here we highlight the words 'intentional' and 'systemic' to emphasise that school staff, families and other stakeholders in a child's learning journey need to develop the knowledge and skills to work together, and schools must purposefully integrate this engagement with the goals for students' learning and thriving.

Making collaborations work

We also know that there may be some changes needed by schools to create a culture for effective parent and family engagement to be sustained.

Below, we present some considerations for the changes that may need to occur for collaborations to work successfully. It is also worth considering the goals and outcomes of parent and family engagement with all the other strategies and programs happening within the school. We know that schools are incredibly busy places! Rather than existing in isolation, it is important that where there are initiatives with similar goals and outcomes being implemented, that these are aligned. Building a culture that values and supports good parent and family engagement will also support other school priorities like positive behaviour and readiness for learning.

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22 Karen. L. Mapp, Carver, and Lander (2017)
23 H. B. Weiss, Lopez, M.E., Rosenberg, H. (2010)

As well as prioritising the time and resources for this work, a significant change in thinking may be required due to the implicit biases and stereotypes held that may affect thinking about and engaging with families.

Confronting one's associations, beliefs, values and attitudes can be challenging, but this is an essential part of taking full advantage of all that parents and families have to offer in terms of a child's learning, development and achievement. It requires due consideration of the following:[24] [25]

1. **Mindsets**: shifting from doing *to* and *for* families to co-creating *with* them: asking questions, listening, empowering, sharing perspectives and information, partnering, codesigning, implementing, taking risks, supporting parent leadership and advocacy, avoiding stereotypes about families and seeking a true understanding of how families experience their children's learning and growth and the conditions that enhance or inhibit those aspirations.

2. **Perceptions about how families live**: especially those struggling with socioeconomic disadvantage, which significantly restricts the ability to buy books and educational toys or to expose children to enrichment activities. Importantly, it involves debunking the myth that low-income families are less engaged and invested than middle-class families in their children's learning; in fact, there are a range of implied and often unrecognised ways that families are engaged in children's learning and we need to value them rather than adopting a paternalistic approach that views parents as passive recipients of professional expertise.

3. **Organisational narratives**: getting schools and other organisations working with families to support student success and creating the organisational conditions that enable their engagement. This happens when organisations build relational trust — ties and bonds among all community stakeholders – and genuinely share decision-making power. In schools, relational trust and shared power are built upon a fundamental belief that children's learning is a shared responsibility among families, schools, and communities. *From this perspective, engaging families is not about them supporting school goals and priorities; rather, it is about creating a mutual responsibility for supporting students' academic success.*

4. **Accountability mechanisms** for all educators, principals and others involved in education to include parent and family engagement. If family engagement is not on the list of Key Performance Indicators, it will not receive appropriate "headspace" or on-the-ground activities. It needs to be included in evaluation and reporting responsibilities since it is still true that "what gets measured, gets done."

5. **Skill development for educators and families**: It is important to invest in building the knowledge and skills of parents AND educators. When working with parents and communities, especially those characterised by entrenched disadvantage and marginalisation, it is essential to have school staff who have the skills and qualities to interact with and inspire others, participate in collaboration and co-design, and to share power in planning and decision-making. Parents may need skills in collaboration and partnership development, and some, especially those with low educational and literacy levels, may need help understanding the dynamics of schools and how they operate. Supporting parents and families to develop these skills is important in building engagement.

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24 H.B. Weiss, Lopez, and Caspe (2018)

25 Pekel, Roehlkepartain, Syvertsen, and Scales (2015)

6. **Flexibility**: Educators and families need to be prepared for, and committed to, embracing the change that often accompanies parent and family engagement in learning. Schools need to be prepared for parents to be more empowered, requesting information on how decisions are made and how resources available are used. Parents and families need to be prepared to take on co-design and decision-making responsibilities.

Some of the approaches to meeting the challenges of embedding parent and family engagement are presented in a Search Institute report.[26] These are summarised below:

From a primary focus on...	Toward an emphasis on...
1. Starting with messaging to families	1. Starting with listening to families
2. Providing programs for families	2. Building relationships with families
3. Buying into negative stereotypes of families	3. Highlighting families' strengths, even amid challenges
4. Giving families expert advice about what to do	4. Encouraging families to experiment with new practices
5. Focusing on parenting as a set of techniques	5. Emphasising parenting as a relationship
6. Building coalitions of formal systems to support children's success	6. Engaging families in strengthening relationships as a critical component of community coalitions

Figure 5: Six shifts in emphasis needed for better family engagement (Adapted from: Pekel et al. (2015))

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26 Pekel et al. (2015)

Creating the conditions for engagement

Recent research by the FrameWorks Institute, in partnership with the National Association for Family, School and Community Engagement (USA), tells us that the way we frame discussions and messages about family engagement in learning matters enormously.[27] Traditionally, there has been a tendency to think about engagement in highly personalised terms that exclude formal and more intitutionalised ways of promoting engagement. So, rather than seeing family engagement in learning as being about every adult in a child or young person's life working together to help them reach their potential, it has been seen as coming down to a 'caring teacher' or a 'great principal' or boiling down to relationships between individuals.

The research emphasises that to grow support for family engagement, everyone must understand why it's so important to children's success. Here are some ideas for consideration.[28]

Unhelpful thinking	Why that matters	Tip
Only teachers and parents who care about their kids get involved. Adults who aren't involved don't care.	Linking engagement to individuals who care prevents people from understanding that engagement can happen intentionally – through structured programs and strategic planning.	It is best to talk about how engagement is similar to an idea like Mission Control during a space launch. Just like a space launch needs engineers, mathematicians, etc. to work together to send astronauts into space; families, schools and communities need to work together for children's learning to take off.
Certain people just won't engage. It's not in their culture.	People think that 'disadvantaged families' do not engage because they don't value education as much as everyone else. This perception of poverty prevents the public from connecting engagement and equity with student success.	It is best to emphasise the importance of inclusiveness and equity by talking about opportunity for all.
Parents only get involved when their kid is in trouble or if they failed a test. If the student is doing ok, there's no reason for families to be involved.	When people see engagement as purely a response to crisis, they can't see the purpose of engaging early and often, to help their children prepare for success.	It is best to emphasise that engagement requires regular, ongoing, and purposeful interaction.
It's up to the teacher to get parents involved. If the teacher needs parents, they will ask parents to be involved.	When people see 'school' as nothing more than a teacher and their students, they fail to see the role the broader system plays in the success of children.	It's best to talk about how families, schools, and communities work together for the success of each and every child.

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27 Pineau, L'Hôte, Davis, and Volmert (2019)

28 National Association for Family and FrameWorks Institute (2019)

Not more, just differently

When it comes to schools and educators adopting a culture of parent and family engagement in learning, there is clearly an investment required, particularly by teachers. However, it is worth remembering that the research shows that engaging families can make a teacher's role easier and more fulfilling. It may seem like extra work, however for those that have adopted the practice successfully, it can become an integral part of teaching practice.

It is also important to remember that we are advocating for practices that work. Not for those that are ineffective! In our next section, we discuss the importance of schools evaluating how effective their parent and family engagement practices are, and if they are not working, to try something else.

Guiding principles of parent and family engagement

To conclude this section, we would like to highlight a recent set of principles of research and practice for building family and community engagement, as identified by the Global Family Research Project.[29]

1. Families matter when it comes to children's development and learning, from birth, into and throughout adolescence.

2. Family engagement is a shared responsibility among families, schools, and communities, and is an essential ingredient – along with leadership, coherent instructional systems, professional learning efforts, and student-centered learning climates – in any effort to ensure the success of low-income children.

3. Family engagement pathways must begin early, persist across time, and transform according to age and context.

4. Family engagement takes place across a variety of settings, including homes, schools, and community spaces, as well as libraries, after-school programs, and museums.

5. Family engagement builds on families' strengths and culture and creates equity.

6. Family engagement interventions, when part of a larger, comprehensive initiative, can make a difference for children and families.

7. Family engagement recognises that families play multiple roles in students' development and learning.

8. Family engagement is most effective when it brings families, educators, and communities together to co-create strategies that achieve mutually agreed upon outcomes for children, families, schools, and communities.

9. Family engagement requires shifts in the mindsets of families, teachers, and others who work with children, changes in organisations' policies, and broader public understanding of the importance of family engagement and what it entails in their community.

Where to from here? Let's now turn to planning, measuring and evaluating. How does a school turn a vision for parent and family engagement into 'business as usual', embedded into the life of the school, rather than treated as an add-on, something separate to core business?

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29 H.B. Weiss et al. (2018)

IN SUMMARY

Key points

- In general, parent and family engagement is not covered in initial teacher preparation.
- All the stakeholders in the engagement equation need to build the knowledge and skills to cultivate and sustain family-school partnerships.
- Parents and families need to know how important their continued support for learning is, and that as the experts in their child they are an extremely valuable resource to be harnessed. Educators have a vital role to play here.
- A fundamental part of this is ensuring a commitment to a school-wide plan for, or whole-school approach to, parent and family engagement.
- Schools need to prioritise the time and resources for this work, and recognise that this will involve significant shifts in thinking. However, it is worth remembering that this 'work' leads to better student achievement and outcomes.
- Building a culture that values and supports good parent and family engagement will also support other school priorities like positive behaviour and readiness for learning.

TRY THIS #2:
Looking inward

This section has outlined some of the personal and school reflection required by schools and their staff for collaborations to have a better chance of success.

This is an important stage for all school staff. Time spent 'looking inward' is beneficial for examining and confronting our own beliefs about families and family engagement, particularly before it is possible to develop authentic and respectful partnerships with families. Here are some thoughts to consider:

- Think back to your own childhood and own school experience. How was your family connected or not connected to your school and educational experience?
- How might these past experiences, positive or negative, shape your beliefs, as a staff member or educator, about parent and family engagement?
- What fears, hesitation, or apprehensions do you have about your work? What barriers will you have to overcome?
- What passions, beliefs, and commitments do you bring that will help you do this work?

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30 Karen. L. Mapp et al. (2017)

3

PLANNING FOR PARENT
AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

In the third section we turn to planning. How does a school turn a vision for parent and family engagement into something embedded into the life of the school, rather than treated as an add-on, separate to core business? Laying the foundation for success starts with a commitment from the school leadership. We discuss the foundational work that school leadership teams need to do with staff, to bring them on the journey, before looking outwards to develop an engagement partnership with your school community. We have included several activities to assist with this stage. The section concludes with ideas for assembling a diverse Action Team to help your school keep up the momentum and help lead and implement the planning process.

Let's look at what this involves.

Figure 6: A whole-school approach to implementing PFE: an example

1 - UNDERSTANDING PARENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT (PFE)

GOALS
- Recognition that this is the new ground for most educators
- Sense of how PFE can contribute to school improvement (purpose & benefits)

TASKS

Leadership commitment
- Mapping the context & setting of our school community (Try This #1)
- Looking inward to challenge beliefs (Try This #2)
- Aligning goals with other activities – braiding (Try This #4)

Bringing staff on the journey (achieving buy-in)
- Exploring perceived barriers to PFE, e.g. time & resources (Try This #3, 4, 5, 6)
- Challenging assumptions about families (Try This #7)
- Drafting a PFE vision statement together (Try This #8)

Building an Action Team – collaborating for success

Casting the net wide across all stakeholder groups, including:
- School leadership and staff
- Family members, students
- External stakeholders (e.g. local community-based institutions & agencies)

OUTCOMES
- Reiteration /confirmation of the school's commitment to embedding PFE.
- Sense of how PFE can contribute to school improvement (purpose & benefits)

2 - ACTION TEAM CO-DESIGN

GOALS
- To maintain momentum and to help lead and implement the planning process for PFE through a diverse and inclusive Action Team.

TASKS

Kicking off
- How will we work as a team? (Try This #9)
  - Logistics & barriers (requirements for child care, interpreters, transport, etc)
  - Times & availability
  - How & to whom do we report?
  - What capacity to we need to build within the Action Team?
- Revisiting the draft PFE vision statement – is everyone in agreement?
- Stakeholder mapping – who have we missed?
- Checking assumptions about families (e.g. reflection on core beliefs)
- Alignment with other goals – braiding activity completed?

Bringing staff on the journey (achieving buy-in)
- What works? What doesn't work? Consider using an Audit Tool (Try This #10)
- Need to gather some data? See what we've learned from conducting school surveys (page 56)
- Use results to identify PFE priorities
- Building on strengths and remember to celebrate and share the positives with the whole community.

OUTCOMES
- A flexible Action Team which has invested time in considering the functional and logistical aspects to their role.
- An Action Team that shares stories and celebrates successes, and uses feedback from families and educators to make improvements to actions and activities.

3 - ACTION TEAM PLANNING

GOALS
- Baselining activities to determine priorities
- Continuous improvement using the Plan, Do, Assess, Review cycle

TASKS

Plan, Do, Assess, Review
- Take priorities (Try This #4)
- Brainstorm and agree actions (using SMARTT goals)
- Assign responsibilities (SMARTT)
- How/when will we know (monitoring)

Evaluation – is it working?
- There are lots of options – repeat surveys, revisit audit tools, ask families.
- Conduct progress checks and end of year evaluations (Try This #11)

Adjusting and Continuing
- Keep the doors open for new stakeholders
- Looks for success stories and advocates
- Plan for sustainability
- Remember to share stories and celebrate successes!

OUTCOMES
- An Action Team that plans for sustainability of PFE by using the continuous improvement cycle.

LEADERSHIP AND COMMITMENT – BRINGING STAFF ON THE JOURNEY

Creating and fostering a culture of relationship-based engagement, underpinned by strong family-school partnerships, begins with leadership. In practice this looks like the enthusiastic and active support of the school principal and/or members of the executive or leadership team, who are committed to the belief that engaging families in their child's learning is core business for the school. Including a commitment to family-school partnerships as a strategic priority in formal school plans will help create, embed and strengthen these partnerships.

This commitment from leadership then needs to translate to **each member of staff**. Adopting a whole-school approach to family engagement means that all staff – not only teachers, but anyone who comes into contact with family members – understand the value and meaning of engaging parents and families in learning. It means that capacity building must be a key focus of the school.

The first step is ensuring that all staff understand the value of parent and family engagement and commit to implementing it in their school. To do this, the executive or leadership team need to give staff:

- An understanding of the purpose and benefits of a whole-school commitment to family engagement in learning
- A clear sense of how family engagement in learning can contribute to school goals
- Recognition that this is likely to be new ground for most staff, which will require professional development opportunities to build capacity.

Where are we and where do we want to be?

A recent Evidence for Learning guidance report offers schools and teachers recommendations to support parental engagement in children's learning.[31]   The report ndicates that a plan for how a school works with parents and families should address the support, resources, and time required for all the staff who are involved – whether they be classroom teachers, receptionists, teaching assistants, or other staff. This may include:

- Having a clear expectation of what is, and is not, expected of different staff members in relation to family engagement and communication, and ensuring corresponding amounts of time are available.
- Being clear about how family engagement is intended to contribute towards overall school improvement priorities, so that all staff understand the potential benefits for both the school and students.
- Ensuring an understanding of both the barriers to engagement and the strategies to address these – noting that this is likely to require explicit training and follow-on support.
- Providing leadership support and training for individual staff members where parent and family engagement becomes challenging or difficult.

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31 Evidence for Learning (2019)

TRY THIS #3:
Staff Workshops

Organise dedicated meetings or workshops with staff to discuss how they see the current environment with regards to family engagement in learning, and where they would like it to be. There are many ways of thinking about this. Allow for time and space to consider the different aspects that may be raised in the discussion.

This will be a good opportunity to start drafting a **vision statement** with all staff. There are some examples and an activity later in this section.

An important element of this discussion will be the opportunity to reflect on what may currently be 'getting in the way' of successful engagement with families. Spend some time discussing whether there are any concerns or barriers to engaging with families, and what these may be.

Some guiding questions to generate some discussion among the staff group might be:
- What is your experience with building partnerships with families of your students?
- What works well?
- What doesn't work as well?
- What is most fulfilling about developing strong partnerships with families of your students?
- What is least fulfilling?

We recommend spending time discussing some possible areas that may present barriers. For example, the sorts of things we hear can generally be grouped into the following areas:
- **Time and resources**, e.g. feeling under pressure with other professional commitments
- **Professional development**, e.g. families presenting issues that are unfamiliar or uncomfortable for educators ("What if we don't speak the same language?")
- **Assumptions about families**, e.g. parents don't seem to have time.
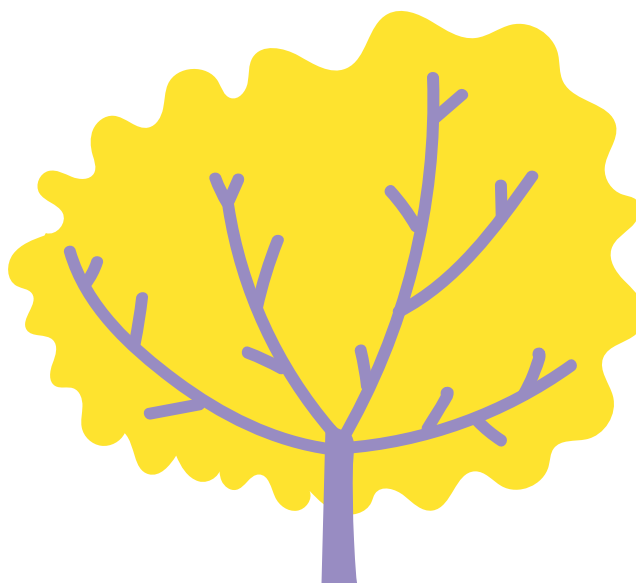
Try using conversation starter statements to encourage discussion among the staff group. For example:

Time and resources	**Statement**: *"Partnering/engaging with families means extra work."* • Research shows that the 'extra' work in partnering with families ultimately *decreases* workload and makes educator's roles more enjoyable and fulfilling.[32] • Reconsider traditional ways of thinking about families and the role family members play in their child's education. Rather than families being something to manage, consider ways to welcome them as full partners in reaching the teaching and learning goals of your school and students. • Look ahead (see next section, 'Time and Resources') for some further discussion on this topic, and consideration of the concept of **braiding**.
Professional development	**Statement**: *"I've been a teacher for five years. I don't need to learn how to have a relationship with parents/families."* • Where strong family engagement relies on individual staff, schools are vulnerable when people move on or retire. Recruit experienced teachers as allies to share their knowledge and embed a systemic approach to family engagement in learning. • Challenge these attitudes indirectly by asking questions about building relationships with families typically considered 'harder to reach' or posing hypothetical questions and asking how the person would advise a new teacher in that situation. • Look ahead (see section on page 42, 'Professional Development') for some further consideration about this issue, and suggested activities.
Assumptions about families	**Statement**: *"Families don't have time."* OR *"Certain families just won't engage."* • Discuss the definition of parent and family engagement in learning (see Glossary) and generate ideas about engagement in learning that happens outside the school gate. How would staff identify whether that engagement takes place and what form it might take? How could it be supported from school? • The perception of families experiencing disadvantage as those who 'don't engage' prevents us from connecting engagement and equity with student success. Research illustrates the need to emphasise the importance of inclusiveness and opening up discussion about equity by talking about family engagement as an opportunity for all.[33] • Consider how your school (or a hypothetical school) might inadvertently cause barriers to engagement at/in school. Look ahead (see section on page 44, 'Challenging our assumptions about families') for some common barriers and talk about how these could be addressed for your school community.

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32 Karen. L. Mapp et al. (2017)

33 National Association for Family and FrameWorks Institute (2019)

Let's consider these points further.

Time and Resources

Schools are busy places, and we know that teachers have a lot to manage in their roles. We also know that for some, the idea of engaging all families in learning is compelling, but they feel unsure about what this means for their role or see it as an optional extra, a 'nice to have' that they have insufficient time and/or resources for.

Most, if not all, schools will have multiple initiatives and programs underway at any one time. These may include positive behaviour programs, literacy or numeracy initiatives, school improvement plan activities, mandated reporting requirements or transition activities between feeder or zoned schools.

A powerful way to manage these multiple demands is to consider and explicitly identify where they align. Efforts towards one program or initiative may have a positive impact on another, helping schools to prioritise their activity where it will give the most benefit.

Work put into supporting engagement with families may also help the goals of relationship-based positive behaviour programs, for example, or support the transition of each year's new cohort into the school.

In cases where multiple initiatives with similar goals and outcomes are being implemented, it may be useful to use an overarching framework as a vehicle for organising and prioritising these initiatives. An overarching framework can support the analysis of multiple initiatives to identify the common values, outcomes and measurements.

The Nest is one example of an overarching framework for all aspects of wellbeing, which can assist in identifying opportunities for braiding interventions in an integrated and holistic way.[34] The Nest provides a conceptual framework to think about children's wellbeing as a set of overlapping and interdependent domains. Further information on the Nest is available on ARACY's website, at: https://www.aracy.org.au/projects/the-nest.

TRY THIS #4:
Braiding exercise

Many of the initiatives and activities schools and teachers are expected to conduct or incorporate into their work can have similar or complementary goals. Explicitly identifying and prioritising these common goals ensures the best use of resources – thereby increasing efficiency and ensuring effectiveness as well as reducing the burden of implementation on school staff.

The integration of mutually supportive programs, referred to as 'braiding', is well regarded for the sustainability of initiatives in schools. Kent McIntosh, Director of Educational and Community Supports, a research unit in the College of Education, University of Oregon, asserts that connecting a school-wide initiative (in his example, Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports, or PBIS), to other initiatives and explicitly 'braiding' them together, will help to ensure that the intervention is not simply an add-on but integrated as a successful component of the school-wide initiative.[35]
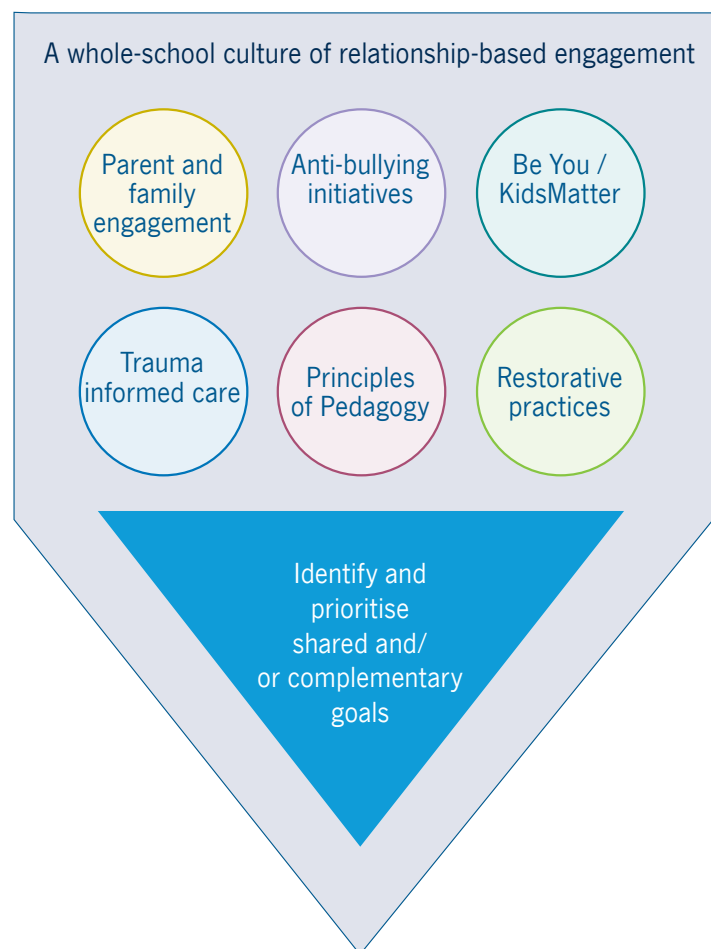
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34 Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (2014)

35 McIntosh (2015)

Connecting a whole-school culture of relationship-based engagement to other initiatives by 'braiding' them can help to ensure that all initiatives are integrated successfully. McIntosh identifies three necessary stages in braiding initiatives:

- Identify shared, valued outcomes (what are our goals?)
- Defend against activities that don't help to meet those goals
- Find common structures and language that can be integrated (teams, data, professional development).

A visual representation of possible initiatives with common or complementary values and outcomes within the relationship-based engagement "envelope" is shown in Figure 7.

A whole-school culture of relationship-based engagement

Parent and family engagement

Anti-bullying initiatives

Be You / KidsMatter

Trauma informed care

Principles of Pedagogy

Restorative practices

Identify and prioritise shared and/ or complementary goals

Figure 7: Braiding: examples of programs and initiatives with common or complementary values within the relationship-based engagement envelope (adapted from McIntosh, 2015)

Braiding exercise example

This example shows how three different initiatives in common use in Australian schools – the National School Improvement Tool (NSIT), Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL) and principles of pedagogy – have mutually complementary goals that can be supported by the school's commitment to Parent Engagement in Learning.

National School Improvement Tool (NSIT)	Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL)	Principles of Pedagogy (Indicators of Contextualisation)
The National School Improvement Tool (NSIT) provides schools with a framework of nine interrelated domains to use in assessing their quality and progress. **3. A culture that promotes learning** • The school views parents and families are recognised as integral members of the school community and partners in student learning; • Interactions between staff, students, parents and families are caring, polite and inclusive; • All students and staff have an obvious sense of belonging, all parents are welcomed and all staff, students and parents speak highly of the school. **9. School-community partnerships** Assesses the extent to which: • The school builds partnerships with parents, families, local businesses and community organisations … to improve opportunities and outcomes for students; • Adequate resources are committed to ensure the effectiveness and success of partnerships • The school's partnerships are sustainable and have become an accepted part of the culture. Reference: National School Improvement Tool, ACER, 2012 https://www.acer.org/files/NSIT.pdf	Positive Behaviour for Learning as implemented in NSW addresses the importance of family engagement, below: "Communicating regularly with families about their children's activities, lessons, projects and celebrations will them better understand and support the PBL process. Benefits of family involvement in PBL: • school staff can help families support their children and young people at home in learning and developing academic, social-emotional and behavioural skills. • families learn how to use similar strategies at home for teaching and supporting their children's social and behaviour skills • School staff encourage family members to connect with the school and be involved in ways that support both the school and family." Reference: https://pbl.schools.nsw.gov.au/families.html	The teacher: 1. begins activities with what students already know from home, community, and school 2. designs instructional activities that are meaningful to students in terms of local community norms and knowledge 3. acquires knowledge of local norms and knowledge by talking to students, parents/ family members, and community members 4. assists students to connect and apply their learning to home and community 5. plans jointly with students to design community-based learning activities 6. provides opportunities for parents or families to participate in classroom instructional activities 7. varies activities to include students' preferences 8. varies styles of conversation and participation to include students' cultural preferences. Reference: https://www.tolerance.org/professional-development/five-standards-of-effective-pedagogy

The school leadership team are then able to prioritise activities that will meet more than one goal or outcome, and capture these in their school planning. For example, an action in the School Improvement Plan could be "Set up a Google Classroom for each year group".

The Google Classroom would provide a conduit for information about teaching and learning strategies, classroom activities each week, and extension activities to connect and apply learning at home. It would also give parents and families an additional communication channel back into the school. This single action supports:

- Items 3 and 9 of the National School Improvement Tool
- Three elements of the Positive Behaviour for Learning framework
- Item 4 of the Principles of Pedagogy (Indicators of Contextualisation)
- Item 3.7 and 7.3 of the AITSL Australian Professional Standards for Teachers
- The engagement of parents and carers as required by the AITSL Australian Professional Standards for Principals.

Case Study: A Braiding Example

A Year 1 teaching group invited families to participate in teaching geography by giving a session to the three Year 1 classes on a country they had a strong association with – e.g. had lived there or that represented their heritage. Sessions were open-ended and flexible. One parent taught the children how to make German pretzels. Another gave a lesson in Scottish dancing. A grandparent taught the children how to say their name and give a greeting in Columbian Spanish, and told stories of growing up in Columbia.

Parents were able to observe the teachers guiding and extending the learning with questions and links back to what the children had been learning in class, giving insight into teaching methods and content. Parents could also observe the strategies teachers used to manage the children's behaviour during an exciting and novel activity, bringing life to the social learning and behaviour management framework the school used.

Teachers were able to deepen their knowledge and understanding not only of the participating families, but other families in the class as children shared their own experiences in the context of the parent-led sessions.

By taking photos and sharing write-ups of the session through the normal classroom communication channels (including the weekly class newsletter and e-bulletin) other parents were able to see their children's learning and also see good parent engagement modelled by both teachers and other families. The write-ups included extension questions and conversational prompts for families to use at home to talk about their own family histories, geographical backgrounds, and rituals and cultural identities.

This single activity increased learner engagement with the geography topic and provided valuable evaluation evidence for:

- Items 3 and 9 of the National School Improvement Tool
- Four elements of the Positive Behaviour for Learning framework
- Items 3, 4 and 6 of the Principles of Pedagogy (Indicators of Contextualisation)
- Item 3.7 and 7.3 of the AITSL Australian Professional Standards for Teachers
- The engagement of parents and carers as required by the AITSL Australian Professional Standards for Principals
- Multiple elements of practice in the Family-School Partnerships Framework School Assessment Tool including "Respect and celebrate the diversity within the school community", "Acknowledge the critical role families play in their child's learning", and "Support families to engage in student learning activities".

Professional development

We know that for some teachers the idea of engaging families in learning is compelling, but they may feel unsure about what this means for their role or see it as something additional that they may not have enough time for. These views can be valid.

Initial and continuing teacher training may not delve deeply into the importance of forming relationships with the parents and families for the benefit of supporting their child's learning, meaning teachers and other staff may not have the training or confidence to work with parents and families in this way.

The professional capacity of school staff is a vital consideration in the success of whole-school approaches to family engagement in learning. Building the skills required for engaging with families is an ongoing journey, something that develops over time with practice and reflection. It requires time and space.

"You would not expect staff to be able to teach a new curriculum without support and training… So why would we expect staff who are highly trained, competent professionals in one area, to be competent in another without further knowledge and training? Working with parents or other adults requires knowledge and skills that teachers need to acquire, just as they did the knowledge and skills for working with young people."
(J. Goodall, 2019)

Options can include training opportunities within school teams or between a group or cluster of schools. We know, for example, that staff often learn best from each other, so a peer network for teachers and other members of staff to share and consider good practice is ideal.

School leaders can provide vital support by helping make the time available to staff for professional learning to occur.

TRY THIS #5:

Professional Learning Option – messages from the Parent Engagement Conference

In 2017, ARACY hosted a Parent Engagement Conference in Melbourne. All the resources from the conference are available at www.pecaustralia.com.

View keynote presentations

Consider watching some of the keynote presentations delivered by the following speakers:

- **Dr Debbie Pushor** (University of Saskatchewan, Canada): *The critical use of parent knowledge in the engagement of parents* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-h0v1b_53I (36 mins)
- **Dr Karen Mapp** (Harvard Graduate School of Education, USA): *The dual-capacity framework for family-school partnerships* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5YXH8VfZ89Y (31 mins)
- **Ms Jenni Brasington** (Scholastic Education, USA): *How effective are your family engagement initiatives, strategies, and practices?* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HP0ADQLu1zA (19 mins)
- **Dr Heather B. Weiss** (Global Family Research Project, USA): Envisioning and building family and community engagement 2.0 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TI_xrDHWI2E (38 mins)
- **Dr Tim Moore** (Murdoch Children's Research Institute): *The nature and role of the relationship at the heart of effective practice* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p1uF3CwhZx4. (34 mins)

Listen to concurrent presentations

You can also listen to the audio recordings from the concurrent streams by following these steps:

1. View the program to choose a presentation you are interested in: https://www.aracy.org.au/documents/item/307

2. Click on the 'Speakers' tab (along the top of the page)

3. Scroll down and click on the day that your chosen presentation was delivered

4. Scroll down and find the session that your chosen presentation was delivered in

5. Click on 'Steam Session' in the title of the stream to hear the presentations delivered in that sessions (you may need to spend a moment 'locating' your presentation, depending on the order of presentations in that session. Each presentation was approximately 20 mins duration).

6. Speakers bios and presentation PDFs can also be viewed, where available.

Challenging our assumptions about families

Sometimes educators and families can be unaware of their own core beliefs or make assumptions about the beliefs of others. Core beliefs can impact the success of family-school partnerships and efforts made towards improving family engagement practices.

We often hear educators use a positive, or strengths-based lens when referring to families and their engagement in learning through, for example:

"Knowing my families makes my job more fulfilling."

"Parents care, but so many are also time-poor and are looking for advice on how to best support their child's learning."

"When parents are engaged, student engagement improves."

Sometimes we hear educators and school staff referring to families through a less positive lens, for example:

"Parents don't care about engaging in learning once their kids are in high school."

"We invite families, but they don't show up, or the same people show up each time."

"Parents only contact us when there's a problem with their child's marks."

To develop authentic and respectful partnerships with families, staff need to take time to reflect and challenge their own views and beliefs about families and family engagement. This is particularly important if staff come from a racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, or religious background that is different from that of students' families.

Without due consideration of our assumptions about families, it is possible that the ideas about 'new' ways of doing things may not be that different at all.

"When we move on too quickly to developing new plans to reach out to families and communities without this deeper exploration of who we are in relation to families, and how and why we want to reach out to them, we end up doing the same old things we have always done; we just dress them up in new ways. The new ways may appear more appealing than the old, but they are likely to be no more effective." [36]

TRY THIS #7:

Looking inward, checking assumptions

Looking inward as an intentional practice is a valuable exercise in a group. Through team discussions we can become aware of our own and others' experiences, hopes, fears and concerns.

Harvard Family Engagement expert, Dr Karen Mapp, has written a set of 'core beliefs' about families that she developed for the well-known book on family engagement, *Beyond the Bake Sale*.[37] These core beliefs are useful prompts for discussions with staff and can be a starting point to discussing our own assumptions and experiences. How do your staff respond to the statements below?

1. All families have dreams for their children and want the best for them.

2. All families have the capacity to support their children's learning.

3. Families and school staff are equal partners.

4. The responsibility for cultivating and sustaining partnerships among school, home, and community rests primarily with school staff, especially school leaders.

When ready, move from the general to the specific. Ask your team to reflect on the personal questions below and discuss:[38]

- Think back to your own childhood and own school experience. How was your family connected or not connected to your school and educational experience?

- How might these past experiences, positive or negative, shape your beliefs, as a staff member or educator, about parent and family engagement?

- What fears, hesitation, or apprehensions do you have about your work? What barriers will you have to overcome?

- What passions, beliefs, and commitments do you bring that will help you do this work?

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36 Pushor (2011)
37 Henderson et al. (2007)
38 Karen. L. Mapp et al. (2017)
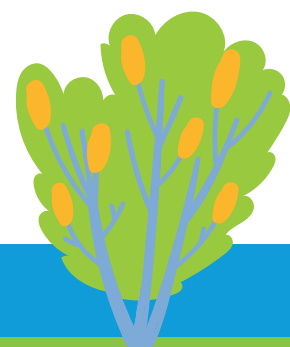
Busting barriers

Consider some of the barriers to family engagement practices – have you noticed that they are often comments made about parents and families? Have your ever heard yourself or other school staff make similar comments? How could you counteract some of these?

Parents don't care/ aren't interested	• Could it be that parents are interested in their child's learning, but not as interested in interacting with the school? The two are not the same. • In high school family engagement is more likely to be happening at home, through conversation, in the car, and during times when families are together. Schools might not 'see' this.
Parents don't show up, or the same people show up each time	• Consider carefully the times and venues chosen for school-led activities. • Try asking parents themselves, although take care to consider how this may be interpreted. (Invest time in building a relationship first). Ask parents who do attend things regularly why others may not.
Parents only contact us when there's a problem	• Many families may feel the same way when their child's school contacts them! • Parents and families are partners: it is important to invest the time early on to form bonds, so that any challenges that arise can be addressed from a position of mutual understanding.

Confirming the commitment and a (draft) vision statement

Investing in this time with all school staff will provide a platform from which school leaders can reiterate a commitment to parent and family engagement in learning. It will help ensure staff 'buy-in', which is important for the success of any actions or activities that are planned.

From here, staff will be ready to draft a **vision statement**. This is an early clarification of your team's current thinking, which can later be taken to the wider school community for further development.

This vision statement expresses the desired end-state, where your team would like to be in terms of parent and family engagement in learning for your school.

Sample vision statements

These are some examples of vision statements for family engagement in learning.

1	Families and staff at our school work together as partners in the education of children and young people.
2	Families are partners in learning. Every day at our school you will see: • a welcoming and inclusive non-judgmental environment • valuing of expertise and knowledge and many ways of belonging, being and becoming • educators spending time with families • good, clear, respectful and reciprocal communication.
3	All educators and families at our school will be knowledgeable and confident to work as partners and share responsibility for student learning.
4	At our school we: • have a culture that engages every family • communicate effectively and build relationships with every family • empower every family • engage every family in decision-making • engage the wider community.
5	At this school we recognise parents and families as integral members of the school community and partners in their children's education.
6	At this school we aim to build and strengthen positive community engagement support through family led learning and family school partnerships.

TRY THIS #8:

Developing a draft vision statement

Discuss what the vision statement for family engagement in learning for your school might look like. Remind participants that this exercise is designed to clarify your current thinking. The final version will be developed in partnership with your stakeholders in a later stage of the process.

Consider the example vision statements provided (above).

Reflect on the specific characteristics that are unique to your school's setting and context, then ask this question:

When our school has outstanding family engagement in learning, what will it look like?

For each stakeholder group, consider the following questions:
- What will they know or be able to do?
- How will they feel?
- What will they be doing?
  When you have drafted your vision statement, consider how it might be received:
- Will it resonate with all families?
- Does it include a potential role for all stakeholders?
- Does it serve to inspire all stakeholders?

Building an Action Team – collaborating for success

Developing and building successful parent and family engagement strategies in your school needs the right mix of people who reflect the diversity of your school community and can celebrate what that means.

This group (here we call it an 'Action Team') can keep up the momentum and help lead and implement the planning process for creating and fostering a culture of relationship-based family engagement in your school community.

The Action Team should include representatives from all your school's key stakeholder groups. Members of the school staff, including leadership and/or executive team as well as teachers, specialist teaching staff, and non-teaching staff must be represented.

Other stakeholders to recruit will include:
- Parents and family members
- Students
- Members of local community-based institutions or agencies
- Members of your School Board.

You will want to cast your net wider than the 'usual' stakeholders. This may include industry and local businesses. Your usual stakeholders may be connected to a large network, so they may be able to suggest good linkages. Building your Action Team can be an ongoing process – it is fine to start where you are and bring others on board as you go.

Some questions to consider in bringing together a diverse and inclusive team include:

- Is there someone on staff who has been successful in engaging diverse families before, either at this school or elsewhere?
- Who is influential in the community who could help promote family engagement activities?
- Who will be able to bring the perspectives of teachers and other staff to the team?
- Can you identify parent or family members of students in programs that could bring their perspectives (e.g. Special Education, English learner programs)?
- Have you identified prospective 'parent leaders' who are representative of your diverse families? Have you considered all forms of diversity, such as socio-economic, ethnic and cultural, linguistic, gender identity, disability, and family definition (e.g. foster families, same sex parent families)?
- Does the final list of prospective team members reflect the diversity of the community?

Congratulations! Now you're ready to start co-designing for family engagement in your school community!

IN SUMMARY

Key points

- Embedding a culture of relationship-based engagement needs a firm commitment from school leadership.
- Staff need to be brought on the journey – this requires clear purpose, aligned goals, and awareness that professional development will be required.
- Bring staff together to canvass perceived barriers such as time and resources, professional development, and assumptions about families.
- Try the braiding exercise to identify where your efforts can support more than one outcome.
- Reiterate your school's commitment to embedding a culture of relationship-based engagement and draft a vision statement of family engagement in learning.
- Aim to draw together a diverse and inclusive 'Action Team' that can keep up the momentum and help lead and implement the planning process for creating and fostering a culture of relationship-based family engagement in your school community.
- Cast the net far and wide to include a strong mix of people in your Action Team. Consider the diverse skills, knowledge and connections that can be brought to the group. And don't delay starting until you have the "right" mix – start with what you have and aim to grow as you go.

4

CO-DESIGNING FOR PARENT AND **FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN LEARNING**

In section four we build on the foundational work considered in the previous section by turning to baselining, measurement and evaluation by presenting the key considerations for assessing where your school is currently at and where you would like to be. We discuss the use of surveys to understand what your school community sees as the issues that matter most and identifying priorities to create an action plan to achieve a shared vision over time – measuring and adjusting the course along the way using the Plan, Do, Assess, Review cycle.

Let's look at some of the options.

ACTION TEAM CO-DESIGN

Kicking off

Bringing about the change you have envisioned for your school needs the support of stakeholders. It can't be done successfully without including the school community. If we are serious about moving to a position of genuine relationship-based engagement with parents and families, then families must be included in decision-making from the beginning. Through communication and collaboration with the wider community, ideas can be generated that are much more likely to reach success.

TRY THIS #9:

Kick-off meeting with the Action Team

Once an Action Team has been established the group will need to spend time addressing several issues. Having clarified your thinking around parent and family engagement as a school team in the previous section, it is time to expand those activities with the full group, deepening and broadening your understanding. You will also need to consider the practicalities and logistics or working together as a combined team.

- How will we work together? (see functional and logistical points for consideration below)
- Stakeholder mapping – who have we missed? Revisit the bullet points on page 48 as a team to help check how diverse and inclusive the Action Team is.
- Give the new members of your Action Team the same opportunity to look inward and consider their assumptions and beliefs about family engagement in learning (section on page 44, 'Challenging our assumptions about families'). Be aware this may be confronting for some groups members and may need sensitive facilitation.
- Vision check – share the draft vision statement but make it clear this is a starting point. Ask the group to further develop the vision statement to ensure it resonates with all stakeholders.
- Discuss the alignment with other goals and activities within your school – consider revisiting the braiding exercise on page 39 for further input from the wider group.
- What capacity do we need to build? Share the information provided on the website for the Parent Engagement Conference (www.pecaustralia.com) and invite the group to watch some of the keynote addresses (see links provided above) – these may be used as a discussion prompt.

Some of the functional and logistical issues to consider include:

- What are the clear and common aims for the team?
- Who will be responsible for decision-making, and/or who will lead the team?
- Who will the team report to?
- How often will the team meet, and will meetings be held at convenient and realistic times for all members?
- Do you need to consider transportation, childcare or translation/interpreting services for any team members?

IMPORTANT NOTE: Be aware that in this early stage there will be a range of decisions to be made and differing viewpoints to consider. Appointing a staff member with accountability and responsibility for progressing the efforts of the Action Team will help ensure success.

Baselining

There may already be family engagement initiatives underway in your school, activities that have been done in a certain way for some time or that have been implemented recently. There will also be activities that contribute to family engagement that may not be badged as such. Before you can begin to plan for strengthening family-school partnerships and further engaging your families in their child's learning, it is important to assess where you are now. Investigating the current situation will provide valuable data to determine your strengths, challenges and priorities.

There are several ways to determine where you are now. You may already have access to some recent metrics or system survey data. Other options you may want to draw on include:

- An **audit tool** to help examine your current practice in relation to family engagement in learning
- A **survey** to provide all stakeholders in the school community with an opportunity to have their say.

Let's take a closer look at these options.

Audit Tools

It can be helpful to examine your current practice in relation to family engagement in learning using a framework that looks at various aspects of the concept.

In 2008, the Australian Government, in partnership with the national parent bodies in Australia – e.g. the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) and the Australian Parents Council (APC) – and other key stakeholders, including State and Territory government and non-government school authorities, and school principals' associations, developed the **Family-School Partnerships Framework and School Assessment Tool Reflection Matrix**.[39] [40] Both were refreshed and republished in 2017.

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39 Australian Government Department of Education and Training (2017 & 2008a)

40 Australian Government Department of Education and Training (2017 & 2008b)

The Family-School Partnerships Framework provides a vision and set of principles for developing partnerships. Additionally, it provides elements or dimensions as guidelines for planning partnership activities. The seven Key Dimensions are:

1. Communicating

2. Connecting learning at home and school

3. Building community and identity

4. Recognising the role of the family

5. Consultative decision-making

6. Collaborating beyond the school

7. Participating.

The School Assessment Tool Reflection Matrix is structured on these Key Dimensions and can help schools identify areas of strength and focus areas for further work.

TRY THIS #10:

School Assessment Tool Reflection Matrix individual and group exercise

The School Assessment Tool Reflection Matrix is likely to be most effective when different stakeholders in the school community participate.[41] If your Action Team is suitably diverse and includes students, families, school staff and members of the community, then you will benefit from working through the School Assessment Tool Reflection Matrix individually and then coming together to conduct a group exercise to work through the results as a group.

1. The *Analysing Current Practice Proforma* (see page 12 of the Tool) gives everyone a chance to become familiar with each of the Dimensions and to make note of any current practices that are working well and those that need more work. This information will be useful when working through priorities for further action.

2. The Individual Assessment should be completed by all members of the Action Team, one Key Dimension at a time, for all seven Dimensions (see above). For each Dimension, team members can review the four separate elements of effective practice (examples are provided in each), to decide which stage of engagement they feel the school has reached so far (developing, building, or sustaining).

3. Finally, each team member needs to decide on an overall rating for each Dimension depending on the stage they have selected most frequently for the elements of effective practice. All information can be put into the *Individual Assessment Sheet Proforma* (see page 13 of the Tool).

The results can be collated onto the *Group Assessment Proforma* (see page 14 of the Tool) to gauge the overall picture that emerges for each Dimension. Where there are differing opinions about where the school currently sits in relation to different Dimensions, a consensus may need to be reached. It may be useful to appoint a dedicated team member to facilitate working through the perspectives of different stakeholders.

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41 The School Assessment Tool Reflection Matrix can be accessed here: **https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/school_assessment_tool.pdf**

As a final task, the Action Team should discuss the following to help determine next steps for action:

• Which Dimension/s is the school already addressing well?

• Are there any Dimensions where the school has not yet reached the 'developing stage' (i.e. not there yet)? What are they?

• Are there any Dimensions where the group was unable to offer an opinion (i.e. Don't know)?

• What conclusions can be drawn from the results?

• Which Dimension/s should be a priority for action?

A note about Audit Tools:

A range of tools are available for schools to help assess their current practice regarding family engagement. We have recommended the School Assessment Tool Reflection Matrix because it is endorsed by a range of Australian stakeholders, including the key parent organisations, ACSSO and APC, and the Australian Government. Other available tools may use different categories or scales for rating current practice against elements of engagement being rated. By way of example, we have seen 'establishing/ enhancing/ extending' or 'not yet/ almost there/ nailed it'. However, what is probably more important is determining what it is you are rating (i.e. the elements of engagement you are looking to measure), and the Action Team needs to agree on this.

Surveys

Surveys are a powerful way of ensuring that all members of your school community can have their voice included in any information gathering you do. The results can provide a snapshot at a point in time, shining a light on practices, and helping to highlight strengths to build on and areas for improvement.

Conducting surveys on a regular basis, e.g. once or twice per year, can also help track trends and impacts of actions taken. Questions can be tailored for different target audiences, such as school staff or parents and families.

ARACY has conducted several surveys on parent and family engagement in learning, in partnership with the Australian Council for Educational Research and with the ACT Government.[42] [43] We have developed and tested a range of survey questions that are available to use for your school's purposes. These include separate surveys for both teachers and parents. These are provided in the Appendices.

Remember that not everyone will agree to respond to a survey (for various reasons). Importantly, the data collected only represents those who did respond, so it is worth considering whether those motivated to respond may hold differing perspectives to those in the community who did not participate.

In other words, we might think that our focus is on what the survey tells us, but it is just as important to consider what the survey doesn't tell us (and who the results might not speak for, or represent). You may also want to consider this question: do people who agree to respond to a survey tend to be more positive in their responses?

It may be useful to host discussion groups for parents and families to discuss the survey findings so that you might hear from a wider range of perspectives and can use the results to 'unpack' or 'tease out' even more views.

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42 Australian Council for Educational Research (2018)

43 Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (2015)

What have we learned from conducting school surveys?

We are aware that many school opinion surveys already contain a number of items relating to family engagement, however it may be useful to conduct a more focused survey to delve into a topic that isn't covered in a system-wide survey, or to the depth you would like.
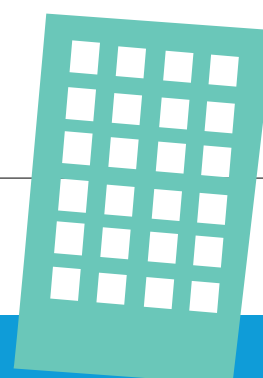
As a method of data collection, surveys have many benefits but there are factors that should be considered to ensure you get the most out of the exercise. Designing a survey is best done with the help of research experts, as it is easy to introduce bias in the wording of questions. Appropriate testing should be conducted to ensure the survey is measuring what you are intending to measure.

Survey design goes hand in hand with other important considerations to help ensure the process is successful. Below we present some of our learnings from conducting a range of school surveys into the area of parent and family engagement in learning.

Survey length	• Keep it short. If a survey is too long it may impact the number of survey completions due to survey fatigue. It is best to aim for no more than 25-30 items, or 10-15 minutes in length.
Accessibility	• To maximise your response rates, be flexible with your accessibility options and provide your survey in multiple formats. • Online options are often preferred by families, so it is important that the survey is optimised for handheld devices such as mobile phones and tablets. • We have also found that it is useful to have hardcopy/paper forms easily available as they can be handed out during conversations and done on the spot. This can also allow staff to guide or 'walk through' survey questions with respondents as necessary. • For staff, it can be optimal to provide time in an all-staff meeting for everyone to complete their survey. • Depending on the diversity of your school community, you may need to consider offering interpreters or translating surveys into relevant languages.
Voluntary and Confidential	• Ensure that respondents are aware that participation is voluntary and confidential; that there are no wrong or right answers; and that their participation is not part of their child's schoolwork and will not influence their learning or grades in any way.
Timing	• Carefully consider the ideal time for your school community to have a survey – we have found that Terms 2 or 3 are more suitable than in Term 1 or 4 (these being more difficult times of the year to conduct research in school), and it is generally preferable to have only <u>one</u> survey happening at any time. • Ensure that the survey window (how long a survey is open for) is just right – approx. 4 to 5 weeks is optimal. Less is too short, and more than 6 weeks will impact the accuracy of the data collected.

Communications	• Clearly communicate when the survey is opening and when it will close. • Use social media and other forms of communication to promote the survey. • Send reminders strategically – not too often but with increasing urgency towards the closing-off day. • Consider using a communications kit to help promote the survey –postcards home in schoolbags, posters, school newsletter reminders, digital and social media content and a hard copy rationale on the purpose of the survey are all useful.
Boosting response rates	• Face to face engagement with parents and families is a key strategy for boosting survey completions – have surveys ready! Remember this only works for families who are already visiting the school. • It may be productive to latch on to events that also bring families to the school, such as assemblies, parent-teacher meetings or learning journeys. • Another option is to invite families to come in to complete their survey – perhaps by offering a warm beverage and a quiet space.
Incentives	• The use of incentives may boost response rates. It has been found that offering incentives can have a significant positive effect on both response and incompletion rates.[44] • Incentives can take many shapes, therefore understanding what motivates people to take part in a survey is helpful. • It may be because they feel it will make a difference, so for them messages about what the data will inform (i.e. what you will be able to know and do as a result of the findings) will be impactful and motivating. • Some will prefer a sense of reward, so perhaps consider offering something that might be valued by families at the school, e.g. the principal doing something funny or students being able to participate in a fun activity, if a certain number of responses are received. • For individual rewards, you may decide to offer prizes, such as free tickets to a school event or performance. • If the survey is completed online, it may be possible to maintain the confidentiality of the results and provide an option to record an email address or other contact details for those wanting to go into a prize draw
Appreciation	• When parents and families respond to a school survey, they are giving the gifts of their precious time and valuable perspectives. Let them know you appreciate their support and contribution, and how the aggregated data will be used to help make a difference. Remember to keep families in the loop.

44 Laguilles, Williams, and Saunders (2010)

Using results to identify priorities

The key reason it is vital to conduct a baselining stage is to help determine the key priorities going forward. Without this information it will be impossible to know whether any efforts taken to strengthen the culture of relationship-based engagement in your school is having a positive impact.

At this stage it may feel overwhelming to determine the priorities that emerge for your school. Some members of your Action Team may need reassurance and encouragement. Remember, this is a journey, a longer-term process.

Look for quick wins to start with — you may want to commence with some good news that has emerged from your baselining stage. Build on these strengths by celebrating and sharing the positive, good news with the whole school community.

The Family Engagement Matrix

There are two key dimensions to family engagement. Together these are referred to as the Family Engagement Matrix.[45] Use these to help determine the priorities your Action Team will focus on.

The two complementary dimensions are:

- **Trusting relationships between educators and families**
- **Connections to student learning**.

Trusting relationships are strong/weak when:

Strong	Weak
Educators are culturally responsive and reach out to families to build partnerships	Educators make assumptions that some families don't value education or are not interested in supporting student learning
All families feel welcome and respected at their child's school	Educators do not communicate effectively with families
Educators and family leaders jointly plan and lead family engagement activities	Families do not feel welcome at their child's school and do not attend events at the school

Connections to student learning are strong/weak when:

Strong	Weak
Family engagement activities are aligned with district goals for student outcomes[46]	Educators do not know how to engage families to support student learning
Families and educators engage in two-way communication about what students are learning at school	Families do not feel knowledgeable or confident about how to provide support for learning
Family engagement activities help families to provide support at home for learning	Family engagement activities are not related to student learning outcomes

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45 California Department of Education (2017)

46 The original reference (California Department of Education, 2017) refers to 'district' goals for student outcomes. This term could be replaced with 'jurisdiction', 'cluster, 'sector' or another relevant term, depending on the individual school.

When these dimensions are weak we tend to see more of what we describe as parent 'involvement' activities, such as invitations to attend information nights, meet the teacher meetings, volunteering for the school – things that tend to be one-directional, with the school deciding how and when parents and families will play a part in their child's learning. We see schools being invitational and welcoming, but if the agenda is still held by the school, and educators position themselves and their knowledge as central, then we are not really changing anything.

When these two dimensions are strong, we see a change in how families are engaged in their children's learning. A new agenda emerges, one that is mutually determined and mutually beneficial. As schools move from the old ways of family involvement to the new ways of family engagement, parents are enabled to take their place alongside educators in the schooling of their children.[47]

Figure 8 describes the two dimensions and their relationship.

STRONG

Connections to Student Learning

WEAK

Educators organise maths nights and give information to families, but there are limited opportunities for dialogue and few families attend.

Educators and family leaders jointly plan interactive trainings for family members on how to support post-school pathway readiness.

Examples

Educators send out announcements about meetings and information on school social events via email, text, and social media.

Families are comfortable participating and volunteering for social events, fundraising, etc., but don't have opportunities to develop skills or knowledge to support student learning.

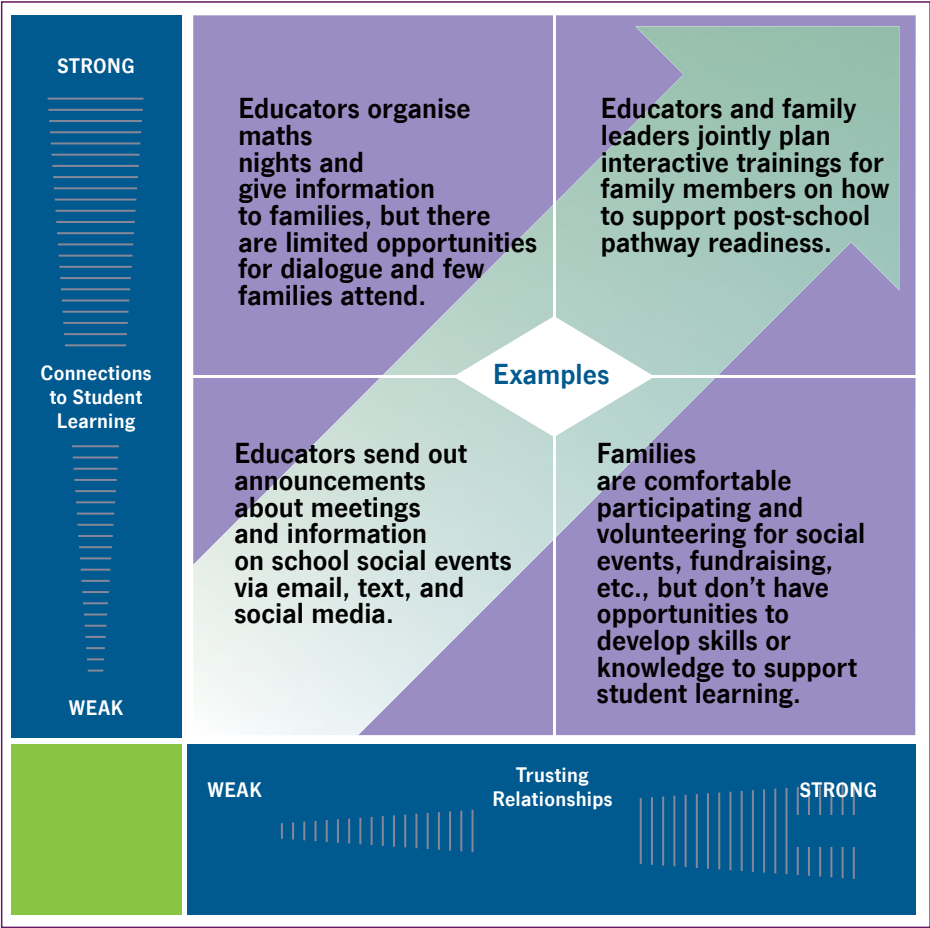**WEAK**   **Trusting Relationships**   **STRONG**

Figure 8: The Family Engagement Matrix (adapted from California Department of Education, 2017)

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47 Pushor (2011)

PLANNING FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

When you have identified your priorities and determined your actions, how will you know what is working? Your Action Team will need data.

Collecting data to measure outcomes helps to drive improved practice. Data collection is part of a continual quality improvement cycle. It is important that this process is integrated with broader school improvement, strategic planning and reporting requirements. The exercise in Section 3 to align your activities will help identify and prioritise the information you want to collect.

A simple framework is the Plan, Do, Assess, Review cycle, as illustrated in Figure 9:
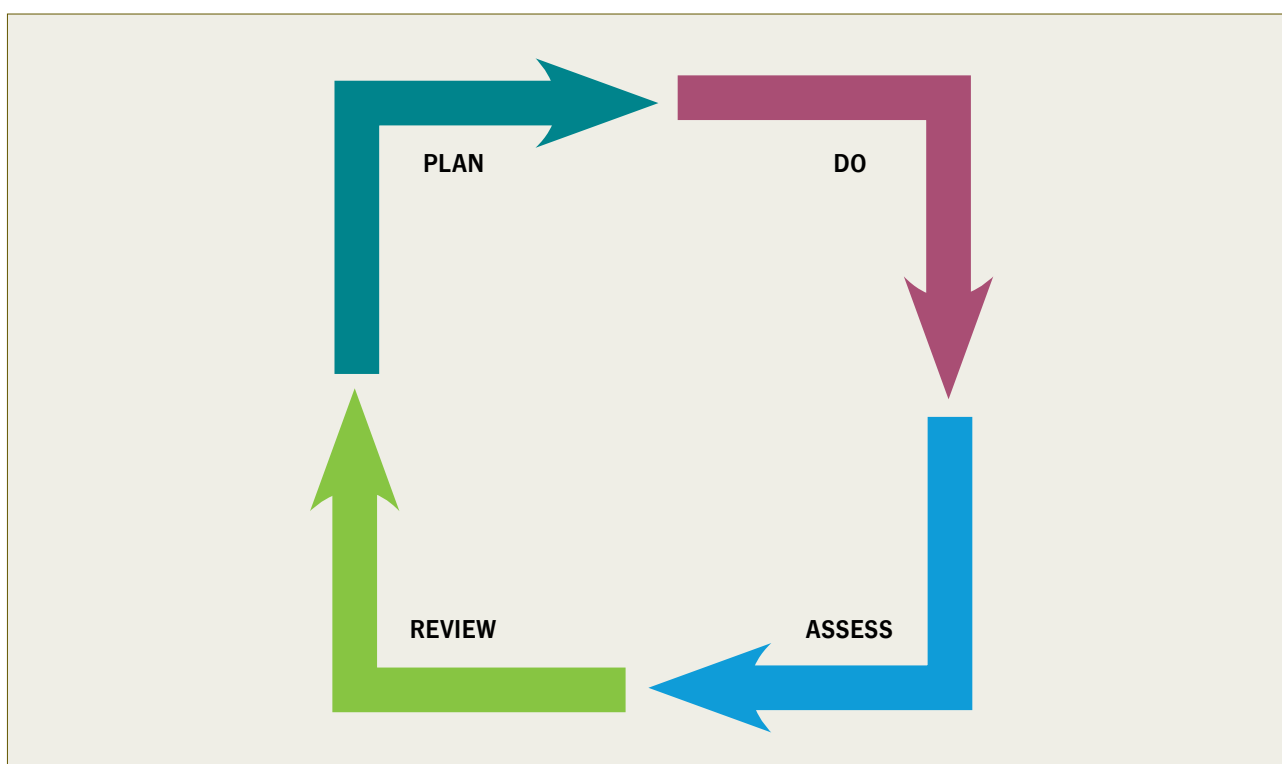
Figure 9: The Plan, Do, Assess, Review cycle

- **Plan**: identify the desired impact of family engagement strategies and how this can be measured.
- **Do**: implement engagement-focused activities, strategies or programs, and collect information on outcome indicators.
- **Assess**: assess the information collected, making sense of the data and draw conclusions about outcomes.
- **Review**: communicate impact, learn from the findings and use them for improving work and ongoing strategic planning including the setting of target.

The cycle of continuous improvement aligns with what we know about engaging parents and families in learning as an **ongoing process**. Schools can never be 'finished' when it comes to supporting parent engagement with learning – each year brings a new cohort of families, students and even educators, into a school community; and additionally, children and young people change as they age, and parent engagement with their learning will necessarily need to adapt to these changes.

The focus should always be on building the capacity of school staff and families and strengthening the two critical dimensions of family engagement (connections to learning and building trusting relationships with families).

This cycle provides a way of continually moving towards goals which have been agreed on, whether they be shorter or longer term, and it builds in time and space to allow for adjustment and refining to help keep things steering in the right direction.

Let's look at each of the four stages separately.

PLAN

After gathering evidence and assessing the current situation in relation to family engagement, the Action Team can move on to make informed decisions about what needs to be done to strengthen family engagement in learning practices and how to do it.

Thorough planning can make the difference in whether family engagement activities engage most of the families in the school community and support student learning, or only a few families and with limited impact on learning.

We suggest that schools consider using **The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships** which is focused on building the capacity of both educators and families, through thoughtfully planned activities.[48] The Framework was recently revised following several years' use by numerous organisations to guide their work on family-school partnerships. The most fundamental change in Version 2 is reflected in the flow and direction of the graphic. The movement indicates a shift from ineffective to effective partnerships, and a coming together of families and educators for the benefit of students and schools. Figure 10 presents the recently revised Framework (Version 2).[49]

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48 Karen L. Mapp and Kuttner (2013)

49 The previous Framework can be accessed here: **http://www.sedl.org/pubs/framework/**

The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships
(Version 2)

The Challenge	Essential Conditions	Policy and Program Goals	Capacity Outcomes

EDUCATORS
- Have not been exposed to strong examples of family engagement
- Have received minimal training
- May not see partnership as an essential practice
- May have developed deficit mindsets

FAMILIES
- Have not been exposed to strong examples of family engagement
- Have had negative past experiences with schools and educators
- May not feel invited to contribute to their children's education
- May feel disrespected, unheard, and unvalued

PROCESS CONDITIONS
- Relational: built on mutual trust
- Linked to learning and development
- Asset-based
- Culturally responsive and respectful
- Interactive

ORGANIZATIONAL CONDITIONS
- Systemic: embraced by leadership across the organisation
- Integrated: embedded in all strategies
- Sustained: with resources and infrastructure

BUILD AND ENHANCE THE CAPACITY OF EDUCATORS AND FAMILIES IN THE "4 C" AREAS:
- Capabilities (skills-knowledge)
- Connections (networks)
- Cognition (shifts in beliefs and values)
- Confidence (self-efficacy)

EDUCATORS ARE EMPOWERED TO:
- Connect family engagement to learning and development
- Engage families as co-creators
- Honor family funds of knowledge
- Create welcoming cultures

FAMILIES ENGAGE IN DIVERSE ROLES:
- Co-creators • Monitors
- Supporters • Advocates
- Encouragers • Models

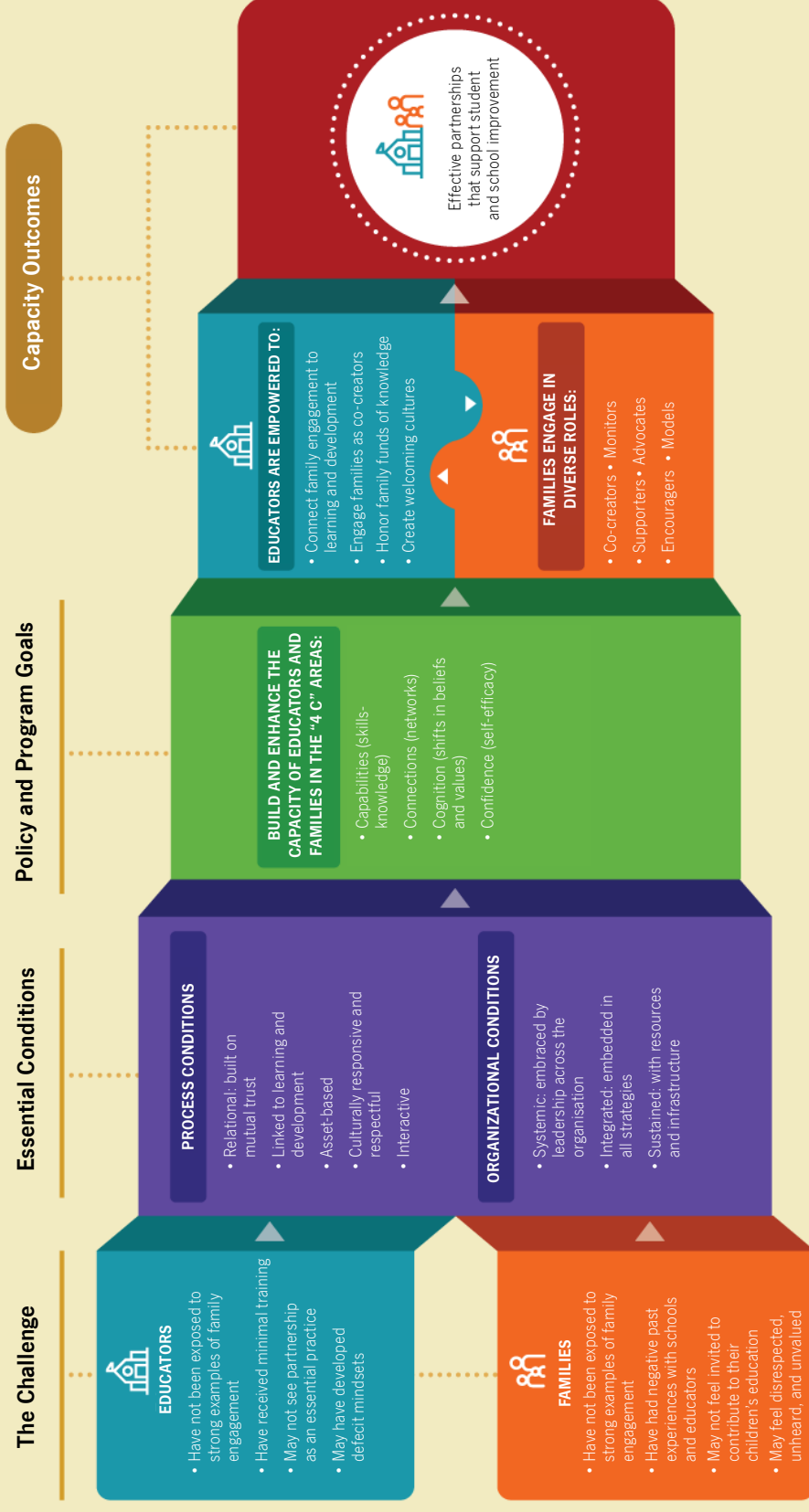Effective partnerships that support student and school improvement

Figure 10: The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships, Version 2 (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013)

The Framework is comprised of the following elements:

- **The Challenge**: Aims to help shed light on the reasons why educators and families have struggled to build trusting and effective partnerships by identifying some of the most prominent barriers to effective partnerships. Please note that the statements for educators and families are generalised and therefore do not apply to all. It acknowledges that educators and families can start in distant positions and that there are historical explanations for this.

- **Essential Conditions**: Previously named 'Opportunity Conditions', these offer research-based guidance for best practice to cultivate and sustain partnerships. Relational trust has been moved to the top of the list to highlight its indispensability. Asset-based and Culturally Responsive and Respectful have been added. Organisational Conditions now acknowledge the significance of leadership across the system.

- **Policy and Program Goals**: Highlights the goals and outcomes that should emerge for educators and families when the Essential Conditions are met. This section remains largely unchanged. It is acknowledged that the 4C's (see below) are helpful for conceptualising and evaluating effective practice.

- **Capacity Outcomes**: Now split into two sections, this element highlights how improvements in capacity lead to educators and families working in mutually supportive ways, leading to student and school improvements. A newly illustrated reciprocal exchange highlights the power of educators and families to support one another's continued growth; secondly the last part of the graphic underscores the goal of improved educator-family partnerships – improvements for students and schools.

Building capacity

The Dual Capacity-Building Framework builds on existing research suggesting that partnerships between home and school can only thrive if both educators and families have the **collective capacity** to engage in partnership. It asserts that policies and programs directed at improving family engagement must focus on building the capacities of both staff and families to engage in partnerships. These are divided into four "C" areas:

- Capabilities (skills and knowledge)
- Connections (networks)
- Cognition (beliefs, values)
- Confidence (self-efficacy).

Building the capability – the skills and knowledge of both educators (and school staff) and families – should be a major priority for schools determining priorities for action.

When assessing the findings from the baselining stage, there are some key questions that will help determine what some of the **goals or objectives** will be for the two dimensions in the Family Engagement Matrix, discussed earlier. These key questions are:

- What do educators need to *know*?
- What do educators need to *be able to do*?
- What do family members need to *know*?
- What do family members need to *be able to do*?

Together as a team, brainstorm and agree on actions and activities that are not only being responsive to the needs of the community, but which also follow guidelines for designing partnership opportunities:

- Focus on empowering and enabling participants to be confident, active, knowledgeable, and informed – don't limit family engagement to providing supports and services to families

- Bring families and school staff together for shared learning that promotes networking (this builds the social capital of families and staff)
- Make activities interactive, so participants have an opportunity to try out new skills; don't limit activities to disseminating information.

The main thing here is to consider **where** you want to be in the future, and **how** you will get there, then the team can then begin to consider the intervening steps, charting milestones, when you expect to reach those milestones, and who will be in charge of steering progress towards those goals.

SMARTT Goals

It is important to be clear about what you want to achieve. This clarity can greatly impact the chances of achieving your aims. When planning actions and activities, consider whether the goals for these are SMARTT (Specific, Measurable, Assignable, Realistic, Timely and Trackable).

Having vague goals about doing something, such as 'being more welcoming to families', means that this is unlikely to happen. SMARTT goals will help ensure that you have pinned down the details, so that 'being more welcoming to families' might become 'each teacher will handwrite a 'Welcome to Our Class' postcard to each student, in time for them to be addressed, stamped and posted by the school office, and received by families in a two week period before the school year commences.'

As this is specific (welcoming, positive contact), measurable (all children in a class receive a postcard), assignable (all teachers write to their own class), realistic and time limited (just before the school year commences), and trackable (monitored from year to year), the chances of this goal being reached is far more likely.

DO

In this stage, the focus will be on implementing engagement-focused activities, strategies or programs, and collecting information on outcome indicators.

Outcome indicators are the information that will be needed for the next stage as we reflect or assess our efforts and impacts. Before commencing any activity, it is vital to work out in advance how you will monitor anything implemented. We do this to determine whether something is working.

Knowing whether something is working comes down to considerations about how you will know. When we think about outcomes, we are interested in a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the impact of family engagement efforts.

We should be less interested in quantitative 'outputs' (e.g. the number of events the school has organised, the number of times teachers contact parents), and more interested in the impact of these efforts on educators and families. For example, what sorts of impacts have activities had on parents' families' beliefs about their role in their child's education, their confidence to support their child's learning, and the actions they take as a result?

A note about causality – you may be asked to provide, or want to find, evidence that family engagement activities are improving student learning outcomes. We suggest using caution in this regard because we know that it is generally very difficult to isolate one activity or range of activities as the causal factor for student learning improving. Clearly a whole range of factors can impact on student learning, e.g. school climate, school leadership, quality of teaching, etc., and family engagement is just one of these.

ASSESS

In this stage, the focus will be on assessing the information collected, making sense of the data and drawing conclusions about outcomes. This stage provides a crucial moment in which to reflect on your efforts and our impacts – whether what was planned occurred, and perhaps more importantly, as mentioned above, what effect or impact those efforts had on educators and families.

If you have set up your actions or strategies to be able to monitor and then assess them, you will be able to determine whether it has had any impact and is worth repeating. To determine the answer, you may want to revisit your audit tool, repeat your survey, or talk to participants and non-participants.

Reflection is an essential phase because it allows us to consider which activities worked well and how they might be adapted or expanded if they are continued. Activities that didn't work well may need to be discontinued or improvements made to ensure they are more effective next time.

Some family engagement activities may be very effective with one group of families and less effective with another. Having diverse team members reflect together may provide valuable feedback about variations and how best to reach different groups.

Ideally, Action Teams should be able to draw on several data sources to inform the assessment phase, including system survey results (e.g. jurisdiction-level school climate survey), results from family engagement surveys conducted during the baselining stage, and other evaluation avenues (e.g. feedback forms used at activities).

TRY THIS #11:

Progress checks and end of year evaluations

Reflection can be built in throughout the year in the form of periodic progress checks and included at the end of the year as an annual evaluation.[50] Data and insights from the team's reflection need to be shared with families and the broader school community, to get their feedback and to continue building trust between educators and families.

Action teams can use progress checks to gain feedback that can be used immediately to adjust or improve activities during the school year.

Some key questions for **reflection on progress** include:
- Are the planned activities being implemented?
- Are they being implemented as envisioned?
- If the activities are not being implemented, why not? Are there problems with outreach, logistics, or other factors?
- How effective are the activities that have been implemented?

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50 California Department of Education (2017)

TRY THIS #11: (continued)

Some key questions for an **end of year evaluation** include:

- Did we do the activities we planned?
- How well did the activities strengthen trusting relationships and how well did they connect to student learning? (use the Family Engagement Matrix on page 60 when reflecting on this question)
- If the activities did not have the desired outcomes, what got in the way? Were there problems with outreach, logistics or other factors?
- Have we increased the relevant knowledge and skills of our educators?
- Have we increased the relevant knowledge and skills of our families?
- How well did we work together as an Action Team?
- What are some indications that family engagement activities may be contributing to improved student learning?
- It is also important to consider how well you are reaching the families you are intending to – so, which families are participating in the activities we planned? How did feedback on activities vary between activities and different elements of the school community?

REVIEW

In the fourth stage of continuous assessment, it is important to communicate impact, learn from the findings and use them for improving work and ongoing strategic planning including the setting of further targets. In other words, it is time to adjust and keep going!

TRY THIS #12:

Share the news

Sometimes it is easy to get so focused on how to improve or what to do next that we can forget to pause and celebrate. An important task is to communicate to the school community how things are going and where they are up to. Action teams can **share stories** and **celebrate successes**. A valuable way to build trust is to show that feedback from families and educators and other staff is valued and is used to make improvements throughout the Plan, Do, Assess, Review cycle. It is important to celebrate both progress and accomplishments, as well as to acknowledge when objectives are not met, activities are not effective, or unforeseen obstacles arise. It is also a good opportunity to identify the lessons learned when efforts towards strengthening family engagement in learning don't reach the results that are planned for.

A final note

- Keep the doors open for new stakeholders to join the Action Team – members may stay or move on, so it will be important to remain flexible to new members joining and contributing.
- Look for success stories and advocates – find the wins and share them widely. Use your advocates to create and snowball success.
- Plan for sustainability – this is a long-term journey. Think carefully about how to keep the team working towards the perennial goal of strengthening family engagement in learning, always bearing in mind that schools can never be 'finished' when it comes to supporting parent engagement with learning – each year brings a new cohort of families, students and even educators, into a school community; and additionally, children and young people change as they age, and parent engagement with their learning will necessarily need to adapt to these changes.

IN SUMMARY

Key points

- Action teams need to invest time in considering the functional and logistical aspects to their work – leadership, accountability, frequency of meetings, accessibility of meetings, etc – as well as considering other aspects such as the vision, individual core values, and alignment with other goals.
- Baselining activities are vital for determining priorities in strengthening family engagement in learning – some options include audit tools and school surveys.
- Continuous improvement involves the Plan, Do, Assess, Review cycle.
- Action Teams should share stories and celebrate successes. Trust is built when families and educators and other staff see that their feedback is valued and used to make improvements to actions and activities.

5

EXAMPLES OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE
IN PARENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

In this section we share some of the examples we have learned along the way, throughout the course of the four-year project funded by the Australian Government. We focus specifically on the actions and activities that matter most when building a school community that supports a culture of parent and family engagement, and those that make a difference when addressing specific challenges that might exist in your school and community.

The section starts with some general actions and activities that are applicable to any school. Next we look at actions and activities suitable for different age groups, and finally consider activities that can support engagement with families from different cultural backgrounds.

All schools, all ages

To start with, here's some simple ideas to help foster learning environments that help to honour families and recognise the importance of building a relationship-based culture of engagement.

Ideas and examples of how schools can support family engagement

A welcoming school environment	• How warm and welcoming is the signage that 'greets' students, families and others as they enter?
	• What sorts of messages are being sent to the community about how your school values its families?
	• Consider the importance of front desk staff and the atmosphere of the reception/ foyer area as critical to creating a family-friendly school, conveying that it is a fun, safe and important place to be.
	• Schools doing well in this area see their buildings as an extension of family life and a rich resource for community use.
	• Is there an opportunity for families to linger and chat, with teachers or with other families? Some schools have family or community rooms with tea and coffee facilities, and a comfy couch. Others arrange for a coffee van to be parked at the school at drop-off, on a regular basis, to encourage this connection.

Inclusive communities	• How many different languages are represented in your school community? There are lots of simple ways to celebrate the diversity of your school community and demonstrate to all families they are welcomed and that their cultural heritage is valued. • Put up a plaque or sign in your reception area recognising the traditional owners of the land your school sits on, and acknowledging their elders past, present and emerging. • Ask parents and students to help you create and compile a set of signs in their own languages for the school (e.g. 'welcome', 'reception'). • Ask parents and families to compile some common phrases in their own languages – these can be displayed, and staff can be encouraged to use these when greeting students and their families. • Parents who don't have English as their first language may find it harder to interact with teachers and can end up feeling distanced from their child's school life. Schools can try to employ staff (or seek volunteers that speak the local languages) from the local community where possible so that local languages are reflected on staff.
Communication	• Try to use accessible and inclusive language in all communications. • Use the communication channels that families have let you know they prefer, such as digital platforms. • Provide targeted information to help scaffold and enrich parent-child conversations about their child's learning, e.g. providing classroom access to parents via digital platforms in real time or a time that suits family commitments or providing parents with a list of topics and suggested scaffolding questions, to help support targeted, learning-focused conversation. • Invest in the capability and capacity of teaching staff in the functionality of your chosen digital platform to ensure families receive quality information as well as a thorough understanding of the school's approach to teaching and learning.
Positive connection	• In building trusting relationships, schools can emphasise the importance of frequent positive feedback. This is sometimes called 'filling the emotional bank accounts' of parents and families: an analogy where "making deposits" of positive feedback and interactions create a strong base for when "withdrawals" of negative feedback or difficult conversations are required.[51] Parents and families like to hear the good things (as well as the not-so-good). • Teachers can be encouraged and supported to make regular contact with their parents and families, particularly those not regularly making face to face contact at the school.

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51 Stephen Covey (author of The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, 1989) used the metaphor of the Emotional Bank Account (EBA) to describe the amount of trust built up in a relationship. He asserted that it is possible to strengthen relationships and improve communication by making deposits into the EBA and advised avoiding 'withdrawals' that damage relationships and hamper communication. Watch Covey discuss these themes: **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrUTIHW1_lw** (10 mins)

Parent and family 'learning' walks	• Consider taking families on a walk around the school and to classrooms to see the student learning that is happening, both in their own children's classes and other classes. • This type of 'learning' walk allows families to witness what real learning looks like. This in turn creates an opportunity to build, improve and strengthen parent and family engagement in learning, thereby creating opportunities for authentic family-school partnerships. • School transition programs (into and through school) offer an ideal opportunity to invite new parents and families into the school to be led on a facilitated and structured walk of the school/ classrooms during the school day.
Community coordinator/ liaison role See case study: *Family Engagement and Teacher Practice*	• A particularly effective strategy to help build and maintain family-school partnerships and leverage relationships with community organisations is the role of a community coordinator or liaison officer. • This role can be central to the ongoing communication between the school and families, but also among families themselves. • Supporting a staff member to take on this dedicated role will be instrumental in supporting and enhancing educator and family capacity to communicate with one another. • Ideally this role supports families, particularly connecting them with services where appropriate, but also engages with the school community and broader community for the benefit of the school's students.
Partnering with community organisations See case studies: *Doveton College* *Parent engagement in communities with low socioeconomic status*	• Resource pressure on schools, particularly those schools working in communities facing disadvantage, can reduce the ability of educators to focus on parent and family engagement strategies. • Partnerships with community organisations can address this resource pressure, increase family support and better enable to development of family-school partnerships. These organisations can work with schools and families to overcome the barriers of disadvantage for students. • In turn this makes it easier for schools to focus their time and resources on creating a whole-school approach that values and supports family-led learning, while families have the capacity to enhance and expand upon their existing practices. • Establishing the school as a central hub increases the extent to which it is integrated in the wider community, increasing each family's sense of belonging, further enhancing family-school partnerships.
Partnering to bridge learning across settings	• Partnering with community organisations offering out-of-school learning activities, such as libraries, community centres and afterschool programs, can help to bridge learning that happens across settings.

Case Study: Family Engagement and Teacher Practice – Building teacher confidence through action research

Sue Brown, Cluster Engagement Leader, SMAG Cluster – St Mary's, St Anthony's, St Gerard's Primary Schools, Vic

In her role as Cluster Engagement Leader, Sue is responsible for the implementation of professional teacher learning programs in family engagement with staff at a cluster of Catholic primary schools in the City of Greater Dandenong (Vic). The training encourages teachers to build relationships with families with a focus on their child's learning. Across a school year teachers are asked to design and implement actions to engage families and then to report on these plans and actions at regular professional learning days. This reflection then forms the basis for the next action research cycle.

What emerges from the investigation of family engagement by teachers is the strength of discussing 'the gap' between what teachers say that they will do and what they actually do. This becomes a powerful tool to uncover teacher reluctance and anxiety in engaging with parents in different ways. Reassuring teachers that this is normal, expected and not a reflection of a lack of professionalism, just a lack of skills and experience, has a uniformly positive impact on teacher confidence. This has also raised expectations in schools regarding teacher outreach to parents and families.

For further information, watch Sue's ARACY webinar presentation and hear the Q&A session **here** (delivered May 2018). (59 mins)

Case Study: Doveton College – engaging the whole family to benefit student outcomes

Doveton College believes that when enrolling a student, they enrol the family. The innovative state school, which was created through a unique partnership between the philanthropic Colman Foundation and the Victorian state government, aims to tackle long-term disadvantage by providing health, education and social services for families.

The P-9 school runs adult learning programs, a community garden and digital literacy programs for parents. It also hosts weekly sewing and craft groups, playgroups and fitness classes for adults in the school gym. "If we get parents involved in education our young people will see it for what it is, and that is something that is extremely important." (Principal, Greg McMahon)

Parents have created a social enterprise which prepares take-away meals for time-poor families, while others have set up a vegetable buying co-op which buys fresh produce from the market in bulk and then sells it to families at a cheaper price.

For further information, visit the **school website**, read **'We don't enrol a student, we enrol the family': how schools are trying to win over parents** (The Standard, Feb 2017), or view the student voice video produced for the 2017 Parent Engagement Conference: **Doveton students talk about parent engagement**.

Case Study: Parent engagement in communities with low socioeconomic status

In 2016 ARACY partnered with Western Sydney University in a study which investigated parent engagement in a range of communities with low socioeconomic status. The study found that successful education plays an important role in disrupting the cycle of disadvantage, however parents and families with a low socioeconomic status (low-SES) also face a number of challenges that can impact their capacity to engage in and support their child's education.

The research suggests that valuing family-led learning and drawing on the support of community organisations could help schools find a clearer path to enhancing parent engagement. Families in low-SES communities may have a focus on 'safety, survival and vulnerability' because of their economically precarious situation, which can reduce the time and capacity to work with their children to create an environment of learning.

However, many parents engage in informal learning with their children through activities such as cooking, shopping, letter-writing and playing games, but may not recognise them as 'family-led learning'. Schools and educators can validate and encourage these activities to increase parental confidence, improve parent-teacher relationships and potentially increase the extent to which family-led learning occurs.

For further information, read the **research summary** or full report, **Researching Parent Engagement: A Qualitative Field Study**.

Learning in the Early Years and Junior Primary School (Birth to Year 2)

In early childhood, engagement can be focused on collaborating with families in ways that facilitate children learning language and social skills. Early childhood programs can establish parent and family engagement in learning and help set shared expectations with families before children reach primary school. This prepares parents and families to take an active role in their child's learning journey and sets the stage for a collaborative relationship between families and school.

Early childhood educators can provide practical instruction and model activities, involve other services as applicable, and offer parenting training and education. In Kindergarten, schools often share documentation of a child's learning and provide opportunities for families to engage and share their culture.

Parents and families are a critical source of knowledge about their child's strengths, abilities and needs, and through strong family engagement practices, this knowledge can be harnessed and leveraged by the school for student success.

Ideas and examples of how schools can support family engagement

How was your day?	• Schools and early learning settings can provide families with lots of ideas for scaffolding the 'how was your day' question – which is often met with a one-word or grunt response, especially from tired little learners.
	• Schools can source or create some alternative questions that may yield some more interesting answers and discussions for parents and families (e.g. What made you laugh the most today? Who did you eat your recess with? What did you learn today that you didn't know yesterday?).
	• Schools can refer parents and families to the Australian Government's *Learning Potential* website, for articles such as this: https://www.learningpotential.gov.au/how-was-school-today-good
	• In research young people have often stated that being asked about their day means they knew that person cared about them, so schools can pass on reminders to parents and families that may be helpful, such as:
	– Little learners are often tired after school and may need some time to relax and unwind when they come home.
	– Checking in with them is positive but asking too many questions to a child may not be fruitful.
	– Even if responses are not extensive it is valuable to check in. This ensures children know that you care about their learning journey.

Loose Parts Play	• The importance of play-based learning can be encouraged through concepts such as Loose Parts Play. Children are given a range of materials with no specific set of directions, that can be used alone or combined with other items to be moved, carried, combined, redesigned, lined up, and taken apart and put back together in multiple ways. Loose Parts Play supports invention, divergent thinking, problem solving and teamwork.
	
	The list of possible loose parts is endless but can include things like:
	  – natural resources – e.g. straw, mud and pine cones
	  – building materials and tools – e.g. planks, nails, hammers
	  – scrap materials – e.g. old tyres, off-cuts of guttering and, most essentially, random found objects.
	• Introducing parents and families to the concept, e.g. through a family fun day, allows them to experience the joy of playing with the materials with their child, which can provide opportunities to build strong family-school partnerships.
	• Opportunities can be offered to parents and families to inspire the creation of this form of play at home, and to understand its implementation as part of curriculum delivery.
	• Sessions for parents and families can demonstrate the importance of free play, and how children are supported by explicit teaching of safety and risk, hazards, benefits and precautions, and by teaching skills that are specific to available materials, such as cubby-making and handling of sticks.

Reading cafes	• Read with Me cafés, a dedicated time and venue for family reading, can be set up to encourage families to attend the school library on a set day each week, e.g. Friday mornings before school starts. This might be accompanied by some form of food 'treat', such as pikelets to help encourage families to attend. • By sharing a story with their child, parents and carers can model literacy skills while developing strong parent-child and family-school relationships. • Schools can set up the reading café in the library or another space – the main ingredients are lots of books, comfortable spots to read (e.g. blankets, cushions, beanbags, couches, armchairs) and something tasty to encourage families to join in.

Peace Table	• Peace Table is a restorative practice that provides an opportunity for children to have a voice when issues arise. It is a concept developed by Montessori that helps children to resolve conflict through mediation.
	• The approach guides teachers, children and parents to build, maintain and restore relationships. All participants are encouraged to articulate their feelings and tell their side of the story, mediated by the adult facilitator. Children are then encouraged to develop their own solutions, acknowledge the part they played in the conflict, and come up with alternative strategies to use in the future. It encourages children to play a part in 'repairing the harm', teaches them to self-regulate their behaviour, and contributes to a positive learning experience.
	• By encouraging families to come into the school/classroom they can ask questions, watch as children demonstrate the process, and hear how research guides the practice. At home, children might use the language of Peace Table, and feel more empowered to talk about issues at school with their families. Families may also adopt Peace Table techniques in their own interactions, for example to help children mediate arguments with siblings.
Intergenerational connections	• A growing body of research illustrates the benefits of intergenerational activities; bringing older and younger generations together, particularly through care systems.
	• These activities bring children and seniors together for select structured activities that enrich the lives of both groups. For participants (both young and old) involved in a community program that embraces engagement with different population groups, it may provide their only opportunity to develop intergenerational connections.
	• One program we've come across draws on the gardening skills of members of a neighbouring retirement village, offering students the opportunity to learn about gardening and spend time with a positive role model.

Holiday postcards	• Just before school starts for the year, schools can send a handwritten or signed postcard to every child enrolled at the school, from their teacher. • This ensures children have a reminder about school starting and lets them know their teacher is enthusiastic about the year ahead together. It also encourages positive communication between the teacher and the family. • This type of activity requires an investment of time and dedication by schools and educators but provides a sound example of how schools can foster positive partnerships with all families.
Class parent representatives	• Common to many schools is the appointment of class-parent representatives ('class carers'), with the aim of creating a welcoming, informal network of support. • This role can also help to promote communication between families and the school, and a means to encourage further communication and collaboration between families themselves.
Games nights See case study: *Maths Podcasts*	• Inviting families to play games with other families is an ideal way for schools to create a fun, friendly environment that supports learning. Family games help parents and children to practice and reinforce essential skills like taking turns, problem solving and language development. • Educators can use this type of event to showcase age-appropriate games that families can use at home to build literacy and numeracy.
Holiday learning	• Just because the school term has ended, learning doesn't stop, however families may not be aware that it often slips during these times. Rest and relaxation is important, but schools can provide stimulating and fun ideas to encourage the upkeep of learning during longer (e.g. summer) breaks. • Keep the ideas simple, not too onerous, with a focus on learning, e.g. activities like cooking or playing board games together, and recognising the value of conversation. • Provide families with suggestions on how they can build maths and literacy into their shared activities, e.g. through cooking. Ideas can be sourced from the Australian Government's *Learning Potential* website, from articles such as this: https://www.learningpotential.gov.au/summer-treats. • It may be helpful to provide a list of free or inexpensive activities available in the local area over the break, and to encourage families to find out what is happening at local libraries.

52   https://theconversation.com/combining-daycare-for-children-and-elderly-people-benefits-all-generations-70724

Case Study: Maths Podcasts

Fraser Primary School, ACT

Teachers at Fraser Primary School in Canberra found parents and families were consistently telling them how much techniques for teaching and learning mathematics had changed.

The school responded by creating a series of five Math Techniques podcasts as a learning resource. Designed to be easily accessible, convenient and creative, the podcasts helped students reinforce their classroom learning and improve their mathematics ability, and helped parents in understanding the new techniques used to teach mathematics to their children.

The podcasts were located on the school's website to be accessible wherever internet access is available.

Former Principal, Sue Norton, described the podcasts as being a way of enhancing parental understanding of current teaching techniques. *"By showing what has changed, and how children may be working out math problems differently to how parents did when they were in school will hopefully make the link between home and school learning easier."*

Learning in Upper/Senior Primary School (Years 3 to 6)

Throughout the middle years, there is a stronger emphasis on schools and educators providing more emphasis on learning and collaborating, through technology and student-run activities.

Ideas and examples of how schools can support family engagement

Positive contact See case study: *Harnessing students to encourage family engagement*	• Teachers can be encouraged to make regular contact with their parents and families, particularly those not regularly making face to face contact at the school. • Contact should not be limited to times when there is a problem or issue – look for opportunities to share good news and celebrate success. • Recognise and accept that some families will only contact the school when there is a problem perceived at their end – it is up to the school to take the lead and model frequent and positive communication.
Family expectations and aspirations See case study: *Students as Teachers, Families as Experts*	• As students approach the high school years, family-led, home-based aspects of family engagement in learning have more impact than families having direct involvement in the content of their child's schoolwork. • Schools can share information with families about approaches to supporting learning at home, e.g. providing a general atmosphere and environment for learning, and discussing what is being learned at school. • Schools can encourage that families to use the 'student-as-teacher' model, which allows the child to 'teach' what is being taught in school (see case study: Students as Teachers, Families as Experts). • Invite families to observe teaching strategies so that they can assist students at home. • Provide opportunities for students to showcase their learning to their families and friends through exhibitions, presentations, panels and debates. Provide context on how the skills and knowledge gained will help with future goals and aspirations. • Make use of technology – apps like Google Classrooms and Seesaw are a way for time-poor parents to stay connected. Remember to always provide a range of communication mechanisms.
Start career education early	• Support aspiration by starting conversations about career education early. See www.schooltowork.employment.gov.au for cases studies and research into career education in the primary years.
Student-led conferences	• Many schools are looking to alternative options to the traditional parent-teacher meetings. In a bid to increase student agency schools can host student-led conferences with parents where their child discusses their report. Teachers ideally facilitate rather than lead the exchange.
Prepare for transition to secondary school	• Include families in planning for transition to secondary school. • Consider the changing nature of family engagement as children age. This is particularly important in the transition between primary and secondary school, as schools and families seek to balance the benefits of engagement with a child's growing need for autonomy. • See the Transitions section (page 88) for more ideas.

Case Study: Students as Teachers, Families as Experts

This engagement strategy asks students to first ask an adult family member to be a 'student' and allow the child to teach him or her what is being taught in school. Then that family member is asked to be an 'expert' and give feedback to the child's teacher on how confident their child was in teaching the material.

The model draws on the saying that the best way to understand a concept is to explain it to someone else. The second step of providing feedback enables teachers to receive valuable information from the adults who know their students best.

In addition, families can gain a solid idea of not only what their child is learning, but how it is being taught. Students have the opportunity not only to teach academic concepts to their families, but to model (and be supported in) socio-emotional learning competencies like persisting when struggling and keeping a growth mindset about learning.

Many homework tasks can be turned into teaching opportunities for students, and a simple feedback sheet for families, using a Likert scale or "thumbs up, thumbs down" graphic, can capture their input on how well the student has grasped the concepts and applied them to the task.

US company PowerMyLearning has taken the student-as-teacher model a step further with their Family Playlist technology, which provides an app-based platform for viewing tasks and providing feedback. The results of the Family Playlist pilot (in a low SES area of New York City) showed 91% of families participated in Family Playlists. A surprising 84% of participating families chose to submit personal feedback to their child's teacher that was filled with pride and emotion (e.g., "I enjoyed working with my son on this assignment; I am very proud of my son's accomplishment"). The intervention demonstrated a significant improvement in the learning relationships between students, teachers, and families, with 100% of participating families agreeing that the program helped them understand what their child was learning in school.

While Family Playlist is not available in Australia, schools could consider experimenting with existing and free technology such as Google Classrooms or SurveyMonkey as additional ways for families to access the tasks and give their feedback.

While some family communication can put parents and carers into the role of compliance enforcer ('I see from the parent portal that you have not turned in this assignment yet – why not?'), the student-as-teacher model puts families into the role of teammate and supporter. It is particularly well suited for upper primary students, as they increasingly take responsibility for and direct their own learning.

See an example task, overleaf.

TASK

1. Use a pack of playing cards to set out five number cards in a row. (If you don't have any playing cards handy, just write some numbers on bits of paper.)

2. Teach your Family Partner how to find the **mean** by adding up the numbers of the cards and dividing by the total number of cards (5).

3. Rearrange the cards from lowest value to highest. Show your partner how to find the **median** by identifying the middle card.

4. Teach your partner how to find the **mode** of a set of numbers, by finding the value that occurs most frequently. Remember that data sets can have more than one mode, or no mode at all!

5. Show your partner how to find the **range** of values, by finding the difference between the highest and lowest values.

   Eg, if your lowest value is 2 and your highest value is 9, the range will be

   9-2=7

6. The mean, median and mode are all ways to think about how common or shared a certain value is. Talk to your partner about situations when you would use one or another to get a sense of "what it's like for most of the group".

   You might need to prompt your partner to think about "outliers" – values that are much higher or lower than most of the values in the group.

FEEDBACK

Family Partner, please share your thoughts on this activity. Your feedback does not affect your child's grade, and your feedback helps us support your child better.

1. My child seemed to understand the content of this task.

A little …………………… A lot

2. My child and I enjoyed the activity.

A little …………………… A lot

3. This activity helped me understand what my child is learning in class.

A little …………………… A lot

Ms Barker would love to know your thoughts on this activity! Please write your comments or questions in the space below.

Case Study: Harnessing students to encourage family engagement

Warnerville State School, QLD

In a study conducted by the University of Queensland for the Queensland Department of Education and Training, [53] researchers looked at what high performing school principals did that gave them an edge in family engagement. At Warnerville State School, the principal highlighted the importance of student agency as a parent-school-community engagement strategy.

The Principal recognised the role of students to create reciprocal connections between their learning at home and in school. The recognition of their role as agents of parent-school engagement was reflected in the school's myriad practices. These included enthusiastically encouraging traditional forms of parent involvement (e.g., attending sports days) as well as instituting strategies such as three-way goal-setting sessions in which students, parents, and teachers participated.

"Obviously the messages they (students) take home to the parents are important, but also, just as equally as important, is using the kids to get the parents to come in and actually see what's going on is really critically important".

Teachers at the school also described ways they harnessed student agency to enable parent-school engagement. For example, some teachers encouraged parents to bring their children with them to discuss their Semester 1 reports. The teachers discussed three-way goal-setting sessions. Organised by the school toward the end of Term 1, these sessions were well attended by parents and students and informed by conversations between teachers and students over several weeks beforehand about the learning goals students wanted to achieve.

The Principal employed numerous other engagement strategies that included sending personalised invitations to events to parents and personally taking new families on tours of the school. Students and parents reported that school office staff were welcoming, friendly, and built connections with them and their families. One parent explained that the office administrators: *"Know all the kids. I walk in and they're like, 'Oh yes, you're their mum,' and I'm like, 'Yeah'. They're very approachable"* (Participant, Parent, non-P&C Focus Group). Another parent commented: *"I don't think there's ever a day… that we walk away from this school and don't go, 'I love that school!'"* (Participant, Parent, non-P&C Focus Group).

The Principal described his approach to parent-school-community engagement in these words: *"Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success".*

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53 Willis, Povey, Hodges, Carroll, and Campbell (2018)

Learning in High School

The practice of effective parent and family engagement changes within the context of secondary school education. As a young person's drive for autonomy and independence increases, family engagement becomes less about face to face contact with the school and more about family/child conversations regarding the curriculum, linking education to future success (pathways to further learning or the workforce), and scaffolding independence and providing structure at home (talking about school, showing interest in a child's learning, providing support and encouragement, and offering practical assistance). This shift in engagement style is sometimes referred to as 'letting go, staying close'.[54]

Ideas and examples of how schools can support family engagement

Parent Forums See case study: *Parents as Career Transition Support (PACTS)*	• A range of forums can be held throughout the year to encourage families to be aware of issues such as new technologies in education, career pathways for students, changes in the Australian Curriculum, and assessment and reporting. • Schools have acknowledged it is critical for all staff to be engaged in the process and for forums to not just be delivered by the executive, as families want to hear from and work with teachers who see their child every day. • Forums can also be held as required, driven by current issues and identified needs of the school community, e.g. mental health, social media. • A Year 7 'Meet the Teacher' evening where parents follow a mini-timetable and visit each of their student's classes offers the opportunity to share and discuss learning expectations and for parents and families to become familiar with the high school environment.
Building relationships with families	• Start building relationships early in a students' school life to build trust and rapport, making it easier to manage any issues down the line. • Listen and be sensitive to context and need in building up relationships with families. A weekly phone home initiative, for example, allows families to talk about their own situation and flag any challenges or concerns. • Set clear, realistic protocols that are achievable for staff. For example, allowing time to communicate with parents on a weekly basis is essential for this type of initiative to be successful. • Be conscious of equity and support parents of students with disability, learning difficulties, complex needs or challenging behaviour in engaging with their child's specific learning plans and program.

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54 https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/15/05/letting-go-staying-close

Phone home initiatives	• At the commencement of each school year, Year 7 Tutor Group teachers can phone their student's parents or carers to initiate a potential four-year relationship with the family (six years if the school is a 7-12 school).
	• Tutor Group teachers in other year groups can phone or email families at the commencement of the school year to initiate the relationship for the year.
Support parent engagement behaviours in the home See case study: *Woonona High School (NSW)*	• Education programs or workshops for parents can help to improve their capacity to support their child's learning in developmentally appropriate ways (e.g. family communication, parent-child relationships, time management, learning strategies, further education and career pathways discussions).
	• Schools can provide access to advice and services for parents and families to support adolescent health and wellbeing more broadly (e.g. sleep, screen time, behavioural and emotional challenges, substance use, sexual behaviours).
	• Consider communicating examples of quality research or media that can spark conversations with children. You might also consider what students are watching and/or talking about at school. Be conscious of cultural values, relevance and topicality.

Case Study: Woonona High School (NSW)

In 2017 Belinda Wall (previously) Principal of Woonona High School, was invited to present a keynote address at the Parent Engagement Conference, to share the story of how her school had turned their HSC results around through the strengthening of parent and family engagement in whole school decision-making, and building family capacity to support student aspirations.

To understand the issues impacting the poor HSC results, the school interviewed parents, staff and students. The result highlighted two priority areas as communication with parents, and quality of teaching and learning.

The school developed the HSC Strategy, Raising Achievement, which was aimed at supporting, mentoring and tracking senior students, in partnership with parents, to allow students to achieve their very best HSC.

Parent workshops were established at the start of each term from Term 4 in Year 11, where teachers laid out clearly the language of the HSC, expectations and requirements, and advice on how to prepare for exams.

"The parents sit down with students and teachers and get an understanding of what they should see their child doing at home, what they should hear them talking about, and giving them the language to engage with their child's study." (Belinda Wall, Principal).

"We say to the parents, it's a partnership, our kids can't succeed without us all working really hard together." (Belinda Wall, Principal).

Attendance at first "wasn't fantastic", but word of mouth spread in the community about how useful the sessions were, and Principal Wall said four years on, the expectation was that every child and their parent or carer would attend each workshop.

Through Gonski funding the school also created an HSC study centre in the library, run by an experienced former Head Teacher in a newly created position of Senior Student Coordinator.

Teachers were also given extra training to improve their effectiveness. This training was based on the professional development research of UK Emeritus Professor Dylan Wiliam, in addition to working with Australian researcher Anne McIntyre from the University of Stanford in California. This training provided students with information and tools to improve their learning as they progressed, enabling them to advance to the next level (a coaching style also known as 'feedforward').

"We have high expectations for everyone." (Belinda Wall, Principal).

In 2012, when Belinda commenced her role at the school, 15 per cent of the HSC students went on to study at university. By 2015, that figure had risen to 59 per cent. In recognition of these results, Belinda was awarded a Teaching Fellowship at the 2017 Commonwealth Bank Teaching Awards, one of only 12 Australian educators to receive this accolade.

For further information, watch Belinda Wall's keynote presentation (2 mins) at the 2017 Parent Engagement Conference (from 1:38 onwards), or view the presentation slides. You can also read these media articles, How Woonona High School turned around its HSC results and Woonona High School principal's winning formula.

Case Study: Parents as Career Transition Support (PACTS)

Narre Warren South P-12 College, Vic

Studies into career education have highlighted parents' lack of knowledge about career transition information. PACTS looks for ways to improve this understanding by assisting parents and families experiencing a form of disadvantage to support their children through key transitional points.

PACTS provides parents with up-to-date information about career transition pathways that enables them to support their teenager when they are making career transition decisions, and equips them with the skills to have supportive career conversations at home.

Narre Warren South P-12 College has a multicultural school community with at least 50 cultural groups represented, speaking 64 languages. More than half of students are from language backgrounds other than English, and around 50 percent qualify for the English as Additional Language (EAL) program. Over a quarter of the school's students come from Afghanistan — many of whom are refugees.

PACTS has been delivered to parents from Afghan backgrounds, with children attending Years 9 and 10. This group had identified as having a low understanding of, and familiarity with, the Australian education system, particularly VCAL and VCE pathways.

The presentation to parents was translated into Dari language and delivered by the school's multicultural education aide (MEA) who is a PACTS trained facilitator and fluent Dari speaker. About 40-50 parents attended the most recent presentation. The school's career practitioner is present to answer questions.

Critical enablers include:
- Providing clear and ongoing communication about the event.
- Following up on invitations to parents with phone calls, explaining what the presentation is about and ensuring their attendance. A vital component of the success of the event was having a translator and someone from the school community (the school's MEA) coordinating and running the event.
- Providing a comfortable and accessible environment. Creating an informal environment (encouraging parents and carers to bring their young children) and providing food/refreshments.
- Ensuring clear, accurate and accessible career information is available.

For further information, see ARACY's case study and report at www.schooltowork.employment.gov.au.

Transitions

When considering transitions, the key aim is to maintain connections between schools and families and leverage the relationships that have been forged in the outgoing school or facility to get the incoming school off on the right foot.

Schools should also consider the changing nature of family engagement as children age – particularly important in the transition between primary and secondary school, as schools and families seek to balance the benefits of engagement with a child's growing need for autonomy.

Finally, family engagement during, and in preparation for, the transition out of school should not be forgotten! See the Timboon P-12 School case study (page 90) for innovative ways in which families are contributing to career advice and development.

Ideas and examples of how schools can support family engagement

Make local connections	• Build ongoing links with local preschools and daycare providers. • Ask staff from the outgoing school to provide personal introductions or facilitated meetings for families with higher needs.
Prepare in advance See Case Studies: *Koori Preschools ACT* *Timboon Agriculture Project (TAP)*	• Establish transition planning structures or teams with outgoing and receiving schools, centralised support teams, relevant community groups (e.g. local out of school hours care providers). • Be aware that new families' perceptions and willingness to engage will be influenced by the school's welcoming experience and what they learn from other parents.[55] • Actively look for links, needs, and potential engagement opportunities with new families, including facilitating links with other parents and families. • Consider using holistic, strengths-based frameworks such as ARACY's The Common Approach to structure information sharing that gives a full picture of a child and family.
Communicate processes and expectations	• Share detailed information on the school website about transition "housekeeping" and opportunities for family engagement. • Include family input to enhance student information shared between outgoing and receiving schools.
Open the doors	• Hold meet and greet sessions and events at the new school, jointly hosted or attended by staff from the outgoing school or provider. • Make follow-up phone calls home early on during a family's first term at the school, to check in with their transition experience.

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55 Catholic School Parents Australia (2019)

Case Study: Supporting a successful transition into School – Koori Preschools ACT

The ACT Education Directorate operates Koori Preschools in five sites across the ACT. Each Koori Preschool operates over two days and provides high quality play-based experiences aligned with the Early Years Learning Framework in a culturally safe environment that includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives across the curriculum.

Children from birth to three years can attend a Koori Preschool when accompanied by a parent or guardian, enabling greater family engagement and building community links and relationships.

The Koori Preschool Program works closely with the ACT Child and Family Centres to develop strong partnerships with families, support family engagement in children's learning, increase enrolment and attendance, and link families with other programs that strengthen community and cultural connections.

Each Koori preschool offers programs that meet the needs of its local community. Sites offer general access programs such as Stories and More, Move and Groove, Read to Me Café, and Community Breakfasts. They may also offer co-located or mobile services: in one preschool, long day care, a family support worker and a Maternal and Child Health (MACH) nurse are co-located on the school site. These agencies collaborate to meet the needs of families in a one-stop-shop model. For example, the community coordinator, MACH nurse and long day care manager liaise to support mothers with post-natal depression to access health, childcare and parenting support services. In another example, early childhood teachers attend the new parents' group to promote early literacy development.

In addition to enrolment in Koori Preschool, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children can enrol in their local preschool. The combined preschool offering expands the range of experiences and social connections available to both the child and the family, and can increase confidence when it comes time to move up to "big school". Both the Koori preschool and the local preschool work with the receiving primary school to plan the transition, link families into the school community, and ensure families feel confident that their transition experience recognises their culture and identity.

The National Quality Framework (NQF) applies to the long day care, outside school hours care and public preschool components of Early Childhood Schools. The National Quality Standard is a key aspect of the National Quality Framework, and includes seven key quality areas including *QA6 Collaborative partnerships with families and communities*. The Koori Preschool program's commitment to broadening family engagement and opening up the service to community partnerships helps it meet this standard.

For further information, contact the ACT Education Directorate's **Koori Preschools team**.

Case Study: Timboon Agriculture Project (TAP)

The Timboon Agriculture Project (TAP) brings together Timboon P-12 School with local industry personnel, vets, farmers, business operators, former students, field officers, and parents hailing from the rural centre, located in a rich dairy area in the Western District of Victoria. The production of milk, cheese and butter is central to the local economy, and many of the school's students from prep to Year 12 are from families involved in the local agricultural industry.

The TAP was formed in 2012 to address low retention rates from primary to secondary school, improve student and family engagement, increase the uptake of STEM subjects, and promote awareness of agricultural career opportunities.

The program involves incorporating applied learning experiences into the classroom, with a specific focus on local primary industries. Although the initial focus was on dairy and agricultural related careers and professions, this was extended to include other local businesses and industries such as tourism, food processing and hospitality. In addition, the initial focus on classroom content for STEM subjects was extended to include other subjects. For instance, the establishment and running of a lavender farm, existing as a school-run agricultural enterprise, was incorporated into the school's legal/commerce class.

In the early stages of the TAP, parents were an important source of initial connections and expertise, with some joining the TAP Steering Committee. Parents and family members continue to be an important asset to the program, with their skillsets and knowledge contributing directly or indirectly to the associated activities and units. Parents volunteer their time in undertaking a range of activities, such as providing access to their property or small business to students for field trips, working with teachers on lessons plans, presenting as a guest speaker, or delivering professional development to teachers.

Parents were at first wary of the program, concerned that the focus on the agricultural/dairy sector would mean a focus on low-level jobs. The program's expansion to a broad range of professions, involving a range of educational and vocational pathways, and the communication of this expanded focus responded to and addressed this concern.

The premise of the TAP is about 'TAPping' into the community and benefitting from the expertise and knowledge of the local community and industries. Through building pride in their local area, it is hoped that students will either remain or return to the region with skills to help build the Timboon community. The TAP is a partnership between the school, the agricultural industry, the businesses and the surrounding community.

Between August 2012 and December 2018 (over six years since commencement), more than 370 industry personnel have provided direct curriculum content and teacher professional development; 99 of these contributing in 2018 alone. TAP presenters and involved teachers have highlighted that this has been a two-way learning opportunity – with industry specialists (who are often parents of students) gaining a greater appreciation of the level of work involved in creating lessons plans, and teachers learning more about their local environment and community.

Anecdotally, parents and staff link this closely connected sense of community to several positive outcomes for students once they leave school. It was perceived that it gave them a greater sense of support and perspective around what pathways are available, taking the pressure off needing to make the 'right' choice; and it provided a network of potential employers that could be used to provide opportunities such as school-based apprenticeships or work placement after school or tertiary qualifications were gained. Importantly, these are often locally-based opportunities, increasing the ability of students or former students to find employment in the Timboon area.

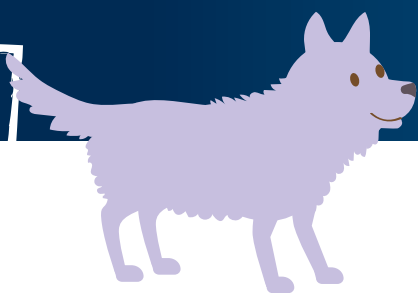For further information see ARACY's case study and report at www.schooltowork.employment.gov.au.

Diversity

Adopting a strong culture of relationship-based engagement means seeking to engage with **every** family and their child. No two families are the same, which means ensuring that any opportunity for meaningful engagement both sensitively and respectfully values all aspects of diversity – cultural background, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background, disability status, and socio-economic background, among many. Below are some ideas and resources for consideration.

Ideas and examples of how schools can support family engagement

Make the effort to communicate in culturally responsive ways See case study: *Schools and Families of Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in Partnership*	• When it comes to engaging with families from diverse cultural backgrounds, if parents and families are contacted in their first language, they will realise that the school is making an effort to recognise their language needs. • Using translation services, or even just learning a few key phrases and greetings, goes a long way towards establishing trust and good relations. • Refer to ideas and examples under 'Inclusive communities' (see page 71). • Even if staff feel inadequately resourced or prepared, making the effort to engage with parents in their first language is nearly always appreciated. • Parents and carers may be competent speaking their own language but may not be literate in that language – don't rely on written communication alone. • Talk directly to the parent or carer if you are working with an interpreter, rather than only to the interpreter. • Families and students from refugee backgrounds may require specialised support to engage. In addition to experiencing the trauma of war and displacement, there is likely to be an unfamiliarity with the Australian school system in addition to limited literacy and numeracy skills in their first language. • Consider the use of tailored resources designed to assist schools and educators, such as the Guide to Engaging Families from Refugee Backgrounds in their Children's Learning.[56]

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56 Foundation House (2015)

Consider value systems See case studies: *Enhancing parent engagement in high Aboriginal enrolment schools* *Aboriginal Community Engagement in Primary Schooling: Promoting Learning through a Cross-Cultural Lens* *Schools and Families of Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in Partnership*	• Different communities and cultural groups bring different values and views towards education, learning and schools. For instance, the CultuRecode six year research program into Aboriginal Parenting Goals found clear and significant differences between Aboriginal parenting goals and practices and Western goals and practices. • School staff may like to start with some reading and research on a particular culture, and then validate their findings through conversations with relevant families and carers to learn their views. • Students are a good source of information about how values around education and learning are lived and expressed at home (ensuring of course that conversations and class discussions are safe and respectful of differences). • Use what you learn about values to tailor your engagement and communication with families – if some families highly value structured learning and textbooks, they may benefit from a more detailed discussion of your school's homework policy, for instance.
Strong community links See case study: *Inclusiveness in Teaching Practices to Improve Outcomes for Indigenous Learners*	• Invite community leaders into the school for talks and presentations about their culture and community. • Take note of celebrations and special events relevant to your local community groups, and host events in the school to celebrate them. • Plan lessons that give students the opportunity to talk about their culture. • Ask families and community leaders for their advice on adding cultural dishes to the canteen menu, or greetings or farewells in language to school assemblies.
Additional resources	• Where feasible, schools may consider putting additional resources into supporting family engagement. • Bilingual teachers, community liaison officers and translation services have been shown to support better engagement of culturally and linguistically diverse families.[57] • School staff may benefit from additional professional development in communication with diverse audiences.

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57 Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (2016b)

Consider the impact on family relationships	• It is important for schools and educators to be aware that families feeling disconnected from the school can affect the relationships between students and their families and even lead to power imbalances. • Students may use family disconnection to hide their activities or keep poor results from their parents, especially where academic performance is highly valued in the family. • Stronger family engagement and relationships between family and school mean grades and test results can be put in context and concerns allayed or joint actions taken. • Some schools hand out semester reports at interpreter-facilitated parent-teacher events to encourage participation, ensure reports make it home, and that results are talked about and contextualised.[58]
Families of students with special needs	• In order to provide truly accessible education for students with special needs, schools must operate as inclusive, holistic, child-centred places. To fully engage these students in learning, it is necessary to engage their families, recognising their role in the student's education as well as their knowledge and expertise of their child's needs and behaviours. • Where feasible, school staff may benefit from professional learning and development to improve skills and knowledge in how best to engage with families of students with special needs. • Where feasible, schools may benefit from a specified staff member to act as liaison/advocate between the school, service system and family. • Consider the use of tailored resources designed to assist schools and educators, such as the Engaging with families of children with disability fact sheet.

58 Centre for Multicultural Youth (2015)

Case Study: Aboriginal Community Engagement in Primary Schooling: Promoting Learning through a Cross-Cultural Lens[59]

A principal-initiated project that brought together local Elders, a team of researchers, Parks and Wildlife Services, and the school is a good example both of casting the net wide for stakeholders and explicitly aligning goals across several programs or initiatives ("braiding").

At a primary school in rural New South Wales there was an expressed aspiration to foster greater understanding of local Aboriginal culture, historical perspectives and knowledge systems within the school. Local Gumbaynggirr Elders were invited to work with the school, creating a space for the sharing of social capital. From these early discussions, the school learned that their school grounds, already valued as an important source of green space and biodiversity, were also culturally important to the traditional owners of the land and a source of many plants used for food and medicine.

A community stakeholder group was brought together to consider what could be done to share the Elders' knowledge with the community more widely and make the grounds a welcoming place for all that recognised their cultural and environmental importance. The local Parks and Wildlife rangers were invited to contribute, as were researchers from a nearby university. Together, the group designed a proposal to create a Bush Tucker Garden and a 'Pathway of Knowledge' that provided users of the grounds with information about their significance and different uses. The group successfully applied for a grant to fund the project.

Teacher cultural knowledge and understanding was strengthened, enriching the students' learning experience. Close links were forged with the different stakeholder groups, leading to ongoing visits from Elders and rangers and their active involvement in the life of the school. The researchers presented their results to the community and students, inspiring and educating by celebrating their achievements.

Through the project, the school explicitly identified and connected the goals and requirements the project could contribute to. These included:

- Community and family engagement, building enduring bonds that benefited both the school and the community
- Teacher professional development for an identified area of need (teachers previously felt under-equipped to teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture)
- Meeting cross-curriculum perspectives in the Australian Curriculum (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and knowledge)
- Effective management of the school grounds
- Fostering environmental awareness in the student body and the local community
- Fostering better understanding of and respect for traditional ownership and land management practices.

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59 Turner (2017)

Case Study: Inclusiveness in Teaching Practices to Improve Outcomes for Indigenous Learners

Dr Esme Bamblett, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI)

At the 2107 Parent Engagement Conference hosted by ARACY, Dr Esme Bamblett presented a discussion of inclusiveness in learning environments, what this means for teachers and students, and how it can be a driving force to increase student and parental engagement in education.

The presentation provided practical strategies for inclusivity regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and perspectives in learning environments for teachers and schools, such as:

- Drawing on curriculum resources, such as the VAEAI's Koorie Education Calendar, developed to help educators and learners in focusing on and location information about Victorian Koorie cultures, histories and perspectives
- Flying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags
- Displaying a plaque that acknowledges the Country on which the school or learning facility is located
- Displaying a Reconciliation Action Plan
- Consulting with a local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (LAECG) about incorporating local Aboriginal knowledge into teaching.

For further information, view the presentation slides from 2017 Parent Engagement Conference, and listen to the presentation audio (from 01:40 to 19:10).

Case Study: Enhancing parent engagement in high Aboriginal enrolment schools

In 2016 ARACY partnered with Western Sydney University in a study which investigated parent engagement in different types of communities. The study found that a significant barrier to the engagement of Aboriginal parents in high Aboriginal enrolment schools is the cultural disconnect between parents and teachers.

Aboriginal parents and educators in high Aboriginal enrolment schools had similar views on what 'success' in education looked like, but often had different perspectives on learning. Many teachers lack skills and confidence to understand the different perspectives on learning that Aboriginal families have. This lack of awareness prevents parents from feeling included in the school community, thereby reducing their involvement in their child's education.

Families identified school education as important, but only in relation to all other learning. Learning exists within a broad view of time and place that has a focus on extended families, community, and country, as well as learning about the ancestral past through story, Elders and place-based knowledge.

In most cases teachers did not identify a significant difference between the ways Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parents view their child's education. Educators placed an equal emphasis on home and school that, according to the researchers, suggested a lack of knowledge, confidence and skills in relation to Aboriginal families.

Parents and teachers outlined a broad range of enablers, categorised into four key themes, including:

• Establishing relationships
• Educational support of, and for, parents and families
• Programs with outside agencies
• Cultural and out-of-school learning.

For further information, read the research summary or full report, Researching Parent Engagement: A Qualitative Field Study.

Case Study: Schools and Families of Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in Partnership

In 2016 ARACY partnered with Western Sydney University in a study which investigated parent engagement in different types of communities. The **study** found that schools with successful engagement with families of cultural and linguistic (CALD) backgrounds tended to offer or have:

- Translation services to help families engage in their child's learning
- Professional development for educators in this area
- Community liaison staff at the school
- Bilingual teaching staff as teacher-parent liaison
- Strong community links
- A family engagement model that is responsive to the local community.

A separate study by Foundation House into how schools can engage with families of refugee background looked at barriers and facilitators to engagement across a range of topics, including use of interpreters/translations, multicultural education aides, transitions, parent/teacher interviews, helping in the classroom and at home, school tours/learning walks, careers/pathways, student management; and school governance. Foundation House developed a **resource** for schools from this study.

For further information, read the WSU report, **Researching Parent Engagement: A Qualitative Field Study**.

6

A FINAL
NOTE...

A FINAL NOTE

When parents and families engage with their child's learning, attendance increases, behaviour in school improves, homework return rates go up and, overall, children's achievement tends to improve.

However, the challenge for school communities is making parent and family engagement relevant to *their* school and community – put simply, there is no set way for a school to adopt a culture of parent engagement, no one-size-fits-all approach. Added to that, the strategies adopted for supporting parents and families to engage in their child's learning will look different depending on age and development stage of that child.

In this guide we have aimed to provide not only an understanding of *why* engaging families in their children's learning matters, but more than that, to provide school communities with a clear picture of the how. We know that a vital and important step is the firm commitment from school leadership.

At its heart, parent and family engagement in learning is about relationships; family engagement will always need to stem from a personalised, relationships-based approach, contextualised for each setting, that changes and develops as families move through school. For this to happen successfully, schools need to embed appropriate structures, and provide the resources and supports required by their staff (educators and others) to sustain engagement practices.

As schools prioritise the time and resources for this work, we emphasise that what matters most is: a clear purpose, aligned goals, and an awareness that professional development will likely be required. We recommend schools bring staff together to engage in reflection and discuss any perceived barriers such as time and resources, professional development, and assumptions often made about families.

We have discussed the importance of drawing together a diverse and inclusive 'Action Team' that can keep up the momentum and help lead and implement the planning process for creating and fostering a culture of relationship-based family engagement in a school community. We recommend casting the net far and wide to include a strong mix of people in the team, considering the diverse skills, knowledge and connections that can be brought to the group.

Baselining activities are vital for determining priorities in strengthening family engagement in learning. This guide takes school communities through the process for taking stock and assessing the current situation before taking steps to plan for continuous improvement through the Plan, Do, Assess, Review cycle.

As with any long-term journey, we encourage school communities to plan for sustainability. The goal of strengthening family engagement in learning is a perennial one – schools can never be 'finished' when it comes to supporting parent engagement with learning, as each year brings a new cohort of families, students and even educators, into a school community; and additionally, children and young people change as they age, and family engagement with their learning will necessarily need to adapt to these changes.

Finally, this guide encourages Action Teams to share stories and celebrate successes along the way, as trust is built when families and educators and other staff see that their feedback is valued and used to make improvements to actions and activities.

Parent and family engagement in learning is one of the most promising ways to achieve significant gains in educational excellence in Australian schools. We hope this guide has gone some way towards helping you as school leaders and educators understand the why, the how and the what of family engagement, and provided advice and inspiration on how every school can work towards better partnerships with families.

We wish you well in your endeavours to strengthen parent and family engagement in learning in your school community.

APPENDICES

Resources, Surveys and Programs

APPENDIX 1 – RESOURCES

In this final section we provide a range of resources, many that have been referred to throughout this guide.

ARACY resources

Parent Engagement Project

- 2017 Parent Engagement Conference materials: www.pecaustralia.com
- A review of policy and parent engagement programs in Australia – *Parent Engagement: A Review Linking Policy and Programs*
- A study on the perspectives of young people – *Please Just Say You're Proud of Me: Perspectives of Young People on Parent Engagement and Doing Well at School*
- A case study project on parent engagement in career education www.schooltowork.employment.gov.au
- Australian Council of Deans of Education – *Families Welcome: Promoting Parent Engagement in Learning Through Initial Teacher Education*
- Australian Council for Educational Research – *Measuring Parent Engagement*
- Parenting Research Centre:
  - *Data Audit of Parent Engagement Information*
  - *Needs Assessment of Parent Engagement Information*
  - *Ways Forward in Data Collection*
- Western Sydney University – Researching parent engagement: A qualitative field study **report** and **presentation**
- Dr Debbie Pushor speaking on ABC Canberra Radio about the role of parent engagement in learning (June 2017): https://www.aracy.org.au/publications-resources/area?command=record&id=254
- Dr Heather B. Weiss speaking on ABC Radio Melbourne about parent engagement and teacher home visits (June 2017): https://www.aracy.org.au/publications-resources/area?command=record&id=251
- A series of **family engagement-themed webinars** presented on behalf of ARACY:
  - Dr Debbie Pushor, University of Saskatchewan (CAN): *The critical use of parent knowledge to improve learning outcomes*
  - Dr Tim Moore, Murdoch Children's Research Institute: *Authentic Engagement – the nature and role of relationships at the heart of effective practice*
  - Sue Brown, Cluster Engagement Leader: *Family Engagement and Teacher Practice – Building teacher confidence through action research*
  - Paul Prichard (MCRI), M'Lynda Stubbs (Tasmanian Government) and Alison Gatehouse (Participating parent): *Parents as contributors to service design*
  - Rachel Saliba, Director, Practically Learning: *How do we inspire and support our children to achieve their best?*
  - Dominique Smith: *A community-led approach to empowering parents to be their child's first educators*

ARACY reports and materials

- **In Their Words: ACT Schools Share Their Parent Engagement Practice** (June 2017)
- **Parent Engagement in ACT School: Good Practice Case Studies report** (June 2017)
- Progressing Parental Engagement in the ACT project (2014-16) **https://www.aracy.org.au/the-nest-in-action/education-capital-act**
  - Technical Reports
    - Technical Report: Our Evidence Base – Progressing Parental Engagement
    - Technical Report: Our Evidence Base – Defining Parental Engagement
    - Technical Report: Our Evidence Base – Measuring Parental Engagement
    - Progressing Parental Engagement in the ACT: Our Evidence Base – Survey Pilot and Recommendations
  - Parent Factsheets
    - Education Capital: Parent fact sheet
    - Parental Engagement: Communicating with your child's school
    - Parental Engagement: Family-led learning – engaging the whole family
    - Parental Engagement: What you can do at home – Parental Engagement in Primary school
    - Parental Engagement: What you can do at home – Parental Engagement in Early childhood
    - Parental Engagement: Parental Engagement in High School
  - School Factsheets
    - Education Capital: Teacher fact sheet
    - Parent Engagement in High School fact sheet
    - Parental Engagement: Supporting children's learning at home
    - Parental Engagement: Building a strong culture of parent-school engagement
    - Parental Engagement: Supporting parents to get engaged with the school community
    - Parental Engagement: Engaging with families of children with a disability
    - Parental Engagement: Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian families
    - Parental Engagement: Engaging with families for whom English is an additional language or dialect
- Parental engagement in learning and schooling: Lessons from research (Report, 2012) **https://www.aracy.org.au/publications-resources/area?command=record&id=10**

Measurement and evaluation

Baselining Tools

- The Family-School Partnerships Framework
- The School Assessment Tool Reflection Matrix
  - Reflection Matrix
  - Analysing Current Practice Proforma
  - Individual Assessment
  - Group Assessment Proforma

APPENDIX 2 – SCHOOL SURVEYS

School Community Surveys

Questionnaires

In developing this guide, ARACY commissioned the **Australian Council for Educational Research** (ACER) to conduct a national trial to test a survey aimed at measuring levels of engagement within school communities, and to assist with monitoring changes over time. This trial aimed to test the quality of the questions for parents/carers. The survey includes both a teacher and parent version. A copy of these questionnaires is available overleaf.

Communications Kit

In a previous study undertaken on behalf of the **ACT Education Directorate**, ARACY also conducted a pilot survey of parent engagement in a sample of ACT schools. ARACY developed a communications kit for schools to use in promoting their surveys. A copy of this kit is contained in this Appendix.

PARENT SURVEY

As you complete this survey, please consider your responses based on one child only. Even if you have more than one child at this school and your experiences are different for each child, please keep one child in mind for all of your responses. This will make it easier for you to complete the survey.

1 Please select your child's school from the list as you start typing.   Drop down list of preloaded school/s

2 What year level is this child in? Please enter whole years only

3 How long has this child been enrolled in this school? Please enter whole years only

4 What is this child's gender?

❑ Male

❑ Female

❑ Other

5 What is your relationship to the child?

❑ Parent   ❑ Guardian

6 What is your gender?

❑ Male

❑ Female

❑ Other

7 Is this child of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?

❑ No

❑ Yes, Aboriginal

❑ Yes, Torres Strait Islander

❑ Both, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin

8 What is the main language you speak at home?

❑ English   ❑ Other, please specify

9 Does this child have a physical or intellectual disability?

❑ No

❑ Yes, intellectual

❑ Yes, physical

❑ Yes, both physical and intellectual

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	N/A
10 My child's school gives me clear information on how my child is getting on						
11 I feel comfortable communicating with the school about my child's learning and progress						
12 My child's teachers respond in a timely manner to my questions						
13 Teachers at this school take time to help me understand what my child is learning						
14 I believe it is my responsibility to regularly communicate with my child's teacher(s)						
15 When my child's teacher contacts me, it is usually about something positive						
16 My child's school provides clear and easy to access opportunities for two-way communication between parents and school staff						
17 I feel comfortable visiting my child's school						
18 I am greeted warmly when I call my child's school						
19 I am greeted warmly when I visit my child's school						
20 The principal of this school is very supportive of parents and the role we play in our children's education						
21 This school encourages feedback from me as a member of the school community						

22 My child's school offers positive parenting courses/information that helps me support my child's learning.					
23 Teachers at this school help me to support my child's learning					
24 Parents and teachers at this school think of each other as partners in educating our children					
25 My child's teacher(s) pay attention to my suggestions about my child's learning					
26 Teachers at this school encourage my family to contribute to my child's learning goals					
27 This school provides sufficient opportunities and time to build a trusting relationship with me					
28 Teachers at school work closely with me to meet my child's learning needs					
29 The school gives me helpful information about resources that I can use to support my child's learning					
30 A child's education is.. ❑ totally the parents' responsibility ❑ mostly the parents' responsibility ❑ equal responsibility between the parents and teachers ❑ mostly the teacher's responsibility ❑ totally the teacher's responsibility					

31 I often don't understand the work/projects/ assignments given to my child					
32 I know how to help my child do well at school					
33 As a parent I have little or no impact on my child's academic success					
34 I enjoy talking to my child about what they are learning at school and how it applies to the real world					

35   Do you have any additional comments about the nature or significance of parent engagement?

TEACHER SURVEY

Please select your school from the list as you start typing. Drop down list

What type of school do you teach in?

❑ Primary school

❑ Secondary school

❑ Combined primary/secondary school

❑ Senior college (11-12 or 10-12 only)

❑ Specialist/support school

What is your role in the school where you currently teach? (include primary or secondary where appropriate)
Please select all that apply.
If you teach a composite/multi-grade class, please select all year levels that you teach.

❑ Foundation

❑ Year 1 teacher

❑ Year 2 teacher

❑ Year 3 teacher

❑ Year 4 teacher

❑ Year 5 teacher

❑ Year 6 teacher

❑ Year 7 teacher

❑ Ungraded teacher

❑ Subject specialist

❑ Special needs

❑ Indigenous/Cultural Liaison

❑ School Counsellor

❑ Teacher/Librarian

❑ TESOL

❑ Assistant Principal

❑ Principal

❑ Other, please specify

What is your role in the school where you currently teach? (include primary or secondary where appropriate)
Please select all that apply.

❏ Year 7-10/8-10 teacher

❏ Year 11-12 teacher

❏ Year 7-12/8-12 teacher

❏ Special needs

❏ Indigenous/Cultural Liaison

❏ School Counsellor

❏ Teacher/Librarian

❏ TESOL

❏ Head of Faculty/Faculty Coordinator

❏ Pastoral Care Leader/Year Level Coordinator

❏ Assistant Principal

❏ Principal

❏ Other, please specify

What is your role in the school where you currently teach? (include primary or secondary where appropriate)
Please select all that apply.
If you teach a composite/multi-grade class, please select all year levels that you teach.

❏ Foundation

❏ Year 1 teacher

❏ Year 2 teacher

❏ Year 3 teacher

❏ Year 4 teacher

❏ Year 5 teacher

❏ Year 6 teacher

❑ Year 7 teacher

❑ Year 7-10/8-10 teacher

❑ Year 11-12 teacher

❑ Year 7-12/8-12 teacher

❑ Ungraded teacher

❑ Subject specialist

❑ Special needs

❑ Indigenous/Cultural Liaison

❑ School Counsellor

❑ Teacher/Librarian

❑ TESOL

❑ Head of Faculty/Faculty Coordinator

❑ Pastoral Care Leader/Year Level Coordinator

❑ Assistant Principal

❑ Principal

❑ Other, please specify

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	N/A
This school gives parents clear information on how children are getting on						
This school provides parents with timely information about their children's learning and progress						
Teachers at this school respond in a timely manner to parents' inquiries						
I understand my school's policy/approach to engaging with parents to support their children's learning outcomes						
I am confident that I have the cultural competencies to engage with families from diverse backgrounds						
I am confident that I have the cultural competency to engage with families of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background						
I believe that it is my role to communicate with parents about their children's progress						
This school provides clear and easy to access opportunities for two-way communication of information between teachers and parents						
Parents are greeted warmly when they contact the school						
Parents are greeted warmly when they visit the school						
The principal of this school is very supportive of parents and the role they play in their children's education						
This school encourages feedback from parents and the wider school community						
Parents are invited to engage with their children's learning at the school						
This school offers positive parenting courses/information that can help families support their children's learning						

I work hard to build trusting relationships with the families of my students					
As a teacher, I am confident I know how to help parents support their children's learning					
I feel confident in my ability to build effective relationships with the families of the children I teach					
Teachers at this school work with parents to discuss their children's individual needs					
This school discusses the parent engagement expectations required of staff on a regular basis					
Teachers at this school encourage parents to contribute to their children's learning goals					
A child's education is: ❑ Totally the parents' responsibility ❑ Mostly the parents' responsibility ❑ Equal responsibility between parents and teachers ❑ Mostly the teacher's responsibility ❑ Totally the teacher's responsibility					

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	N/A
Most parents understand the work/projects/assignments I give to their children						
Most parents of the children that I teach know how to support their children's learning						
Parents pay attention to my suggestions about how they can help or support their children's learning						
Most parents of the children I teach reinforce at home what their children learn in class						
Teachers at this school give parents practical information they can use at home to support their children's learning						

How many years of teaching experience do you have?
Whole numbers only. Include this year as a full year.

How many years have you been at this school?
Whole numbers only. Include this year as a full year.

Have you done any professional development in the last 12 months that is specifically related to engaging with families and communities?

❏ Yes, please specify

❏ No

❏ Don't know

Do you have any additional comments about the nature or significance of parent engagement?

COMMUNICATIONS KIT FOR PROMOTION OF A FAMILY ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

ARACY developed a Communication Kit for schools participating in our parent engagement survey pilot (2015), to help promote the survey within their school communities.

1. What is the Family and School Survey and why is it important?

The ACT Government is the driving force behind new research into ways families and schools can best work together to support learning outcomes for children.

Parent engagement in learning is seen as a crucial factor in raising standards across schools, placing it in the same category as quality teaching and school infrastructure.

The Family and Schools Survey is part of the ACT Government school review and development process. The survey has been developed to help schools understand and measure parental engagement beliefs and practice in their community, and as a tool to measure the impact of their activities to build family and school collaboration over time.

2. So how can schools promote it?

These ideas have been put together to help your school get the most out of this opportunity to find out what parental engagement in your school looks like right now. The more data, the better!

2.1 Hard copy

Key Messages

- Help inform decisions about how your school partners with its families to help support children's learning
- How do you think schools and parents can work together to boost children's learning?
- Your views are valuable and will help your school improve on this important partnership
- Have your say!
- Voluntary, confidential, at a time convenient to you
- Quick and easy – online, mobile, or hardcopy options
- Only takes 10-15 minutes

Newsletter text

The Family and Schools Survey

[Insert school name] is taking part in a study and we need you to be involved!

The Family and Schools Survey will help us understand how families and schools can best work together to support learning outcomes for our children. Between weeks 3 and 8 (Term 3), we will be encouraging all parents to complete a quick survey (no more than 10-15 mins).

Have your say! It's voluntary, confidential, quick and easy, comes in various formats (online, mobile devices, hardcopy) and can be completed at a time that's convenient to you.

2.2 Digital

You can promote the survey via your digital channels:

Your school app

TV Screen at reception

School Facebook page

Tweets

Example tweets schools that can be used to promote the Family-School survey to parents:

- parent-survey.com.au is now open! Quick & confidential, your views will help us to improve how we partner with families to boost children's learning & wellbeing – 160 characters
- Only one week left to tell us how you think parents & schools can work together to boost children's learning parent-survey.com.au – 129 characters
- Only one week left to tell us what you think about #parentengagement at your school parent-survey.com.au – 104 characters
- There's still time to have your say about #parentengagement at your school but be quick - parent-survey.com.au closes tomorrow! – 127 characters
- Today is your last chance to tell us how you think parents & schools can work together to boost children's learning parent-survey.com.au – 136 characters
- Today is your last chance to have your say about #parentengagement at your school parent-survey.com.au – 102 characters
- Your thoughts will guide the way we partner with families to boost children's learning & wellbeing! Have your say today parent-survey.com.au – 140 characters
- We need YOU! Help strengthen the Australian evidence base by sharing your thoughts on #parentengagement at your school parent-survey.com.au – 139 characters
- Help us to improve how we partner with families to boost children's learning & wellbeing – 88 characters
- Add parent-survey.com.au to your to do list today! – 50 characters

- Children are more likely to excel at school when families & schools work together. How do you think this should happen? parent-survey.com.au – 140 characters
- Be part of Australian first research! Tell us how you think parents & schools can work together to boost children's learning – 123 characters
- We need YOU! Tell us what you think about parent engagement at your school - parent-survey.com.au is quick & confidential – 121 characters
- Tell us how you think parents & schools can work together to boost children's learning parent-survey.com.au – 107 characters
- Waiting for the bus? Our parent-survey.com.au only takes 10 mins. Your thoughts are valuable and will make a real difference to our school! – 139 characters
- Have your say about #parentengagement at your school! Your views are valuable and will make a real difference parent-survey.com.au – 130 characters

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Direct email to families

Dear [insert]

We appreciate families are busy, but we'd really like your help in understanding more about how our school partners with its families to help support children's learning.

You may have read that [Insert school name] is taking part in Family and Schools Survey.

Please find the time to take the survey before 4 September (Week 8).

It's voluntary, confidential, quick and easy (no more than 10-15 mins).

Thanks very much for helping out.

2.3 In person

Staff champions

Have you thought of appointing a staff champion to mobilise the parent community and coordinate efforts to maximise engagement with the survey? Remember, the higher the number of parents and carers completing the survey, the more robust the results will be for your school.

Face-to-face

Perhaps talk about the survey using the Key Messages at assembly, morning teas, in the Community Hub, in the car park, @ before and after school care, during class meetings with parents, at the P&C meeting, or anytime parents are visiting the school – have an iPad, laptop or paper copies of the survey at the ready!

Learning Journey visits (Week 8) – these are a great opportunity to engage parents while they are already at the school! Again, have an iPad, laptop or paper copies of the survey at the ready!

APPENDIX 3 – FAMILY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMS

Family engagement programs

In ARACY's *Parent Engagement: A Review Linking Policy and Programs*, the appendices contain an overview table of key features and outcomes of programs related to family engagement in learning.[60]

Compendium of family engagement programs

There are a range of programs which focus on parent and family engagement in learning, or on learning resources for adults and children. Some of these are available in Australia, others are emerging or best practice in comparator countries such as the UK and USA. They are useful for consideration, both as potential implementation in a school environment, and for research into developing an approach to parent engagement that adapts requirements to fit individual school and community contexts. The compendium also identifies different models of school-community partnerships in use in Australia.

PROGRAMS AND MODELS IN USE IN AUSTRALIA

Family Partnership Model[61]

In recent years health professionals have recognised that a critical factor underpinning successful interventions with parents of young children is their capacity to promote and support a positive parent-child relationship through a partnership approach.[62]

The Family Partnership Model, developed in the UK in the 1980s by Hilton Davis and his colleagues at the Centre for Parent and Child Support, is based on an explicit model of how specific helper qualities and skills, when used in partnership, enable parents and families to overcome their difficulties, build strengths and resilience and fulfil their goals more effectively.

This model emphasises the need to adopt a facilitative role when assisting parents and enabling them to extend their problem-solving abilities, self-esteem, self-efficacy and interactions with their children, thereby fostering parental development and wellbeing.[63] The impact and outcomes of the model have been evaluated in a number of successful randomised and comparative trials over a 20-year period.[64]

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60   Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (2016a)

61   McDonald, M., O'Byrne, M., & Prichard, P. (2015). Using the Family Partnership Model to engage communities: Lessons from Tasmanian Child and Family Centres. Parkville, Victoria: Centre for Community Child Health at the Murdoch Childrens Research Centre and the Royal Children's Hospital; Davis, H., & Rushton, R. (1991). Counselling and supporting parents of children with developmental delay: a research evaluation. Journal of Mental Deficiency Research, 35, 89-112; David, H, Day, C and Bidmead, C (2002). *Working in Partnership with Parents: The Parent Adviser Model.* London: Harcourt Assessment; David, H, Day, C, Bidmead, C, MacGrath, M and Ellis, M (2007). *Current Family Partnership Model.* NHS Foundation Trust. www.cpcs.org.uk/index.php?page=about-family-partnership-model.

62   Fowler, C., McMahon, C. and Barnett, B. 2002. Working with families: a relationship-based approach. *The Journal of the Child and Family Health Nurses Association (NSW) Inc,* 13(2):1-6.

63   Keating, D, Fowler, C, Briggs, C, Evaluating the Family Partnership Model (FPM) program and implementation in practice in New South Wales, Australia. *Australian Journal Of Advanced Nursing* Volume 25 Number 2 28 www.oecd.org/governance/observatory-public-sector-innovation/innovations/page/thefamilypartnershipmodelinpracticeinnewsouthwalesworkingwithfamilieswithcomplexneedstomakeadifference.htm

64   Davis, H, Dusoir, T, Papadopoulou, K et al. 2005, 'Child and family outcomes of the European Early Promotion Project', *International Journal of Mental Health Promotion*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 63–81.

Child and Family Centres (CFC)

In 2008, the Tasmanian Government committed $91 million to the establishment of 30 Child and Family Centres (CFCs) in areas of significant disadvantage. The CFCs are places where families with young children (0-5 years) can gather informally to spend time together, spend time with other families and access a range of services without an appointment. CFCs employ Community Inclusion Workers and established Local Enabling Groups to ensure community partnership in all decision making.

An evaluation of the CFCs undertaken by Telethon Kids concluded CFCs had a positive impact on parents' use and experiences of services and supports for young children:[65]

"… the Centre model is making a difference to the use and experiences of early years' services and supports for children in communities where new ways of thinking and doing are needed to improve education and health inequalities and buck the trend of concentrated socioeconomic disadvantage."

Triple P – Positive Parenting Program[66]

The Triple P Positive Parenting Program is a multilevel system or suite of parenting and family support strategies for families with children from birth to age 12, with extensions to families with teenagers aged 13 to 16. Developed for use with families from many cultural groups, Triple P is designed to prevent social, emotional, behavioural, and developmental problems in children by enhancing their parents' knowledge, skills, and confidence.

Triple P has five intervention levels of increasing intensity to meet family's unique needs. Each level includes and builds upon strategies used at previous levels. Variations of some Triple P levels are available for parents of young children with developmental disabilities (Stepping Stones Triple P) and families at risk for child abuse and/or neglect (Pathways Triple P).

CREATE

CREATE (**C**ollaborative; **R**elationships-driven; **E**arly in the pathway; **A**ccountable; **T**raining-focused; **E**vidence-driven) is a place-based approach engaging parents and children priority setting, planning programs and service delivery approaches and implementation. Central to the effectiveness of CREATE is a prevention support system that provides human and electronic resources to help Communities for Children (CfCs) move from coordination to collaboration, to agree on measurable goals for children, to develop action plans underpinned by an evidence-based theory of change, to share data on family participation and outcomes and to select and implement with fidelity evidence-based programs.[67]

65 Telethon Kids, *CFC Report.* https://www.telethonkids.org.au/our-research/brain-and-behaviour/mental-health-and-youth/human-capability/engaging-supporting-and-working/cfc-report/

66 Be You. *Triple P: Positive Parenting Program* https://beyou.edu.au/resources/programs-directory/triple-p---positive-parenting-program

67 https://www.griffith.edu.au/criminology-institute/our-research/major-research-projects/creating-pathways-prevention

Parents as Teachers (PAT)

Parents as Teachers is an early childhood parent education, family support, and school readiness home visiting model. Parents as Teachers involves the training and certification of parent educators who work with families using a comprehensive curriculum to strengthen protective factors and ensure that young children are healthy, safe, and ready to learn.

PAT results have been tested by rigorous peer-reviewed studies (note the majority of these were undertaken in the US) which identified good results in early detection of developmental delays and health problems; improvements in achievement, language ability, social development, persistence in task mastery and other cognitive abilities; reduction of the achievement gap between low-income and more advantaged children at kindergarten entry; and significant improvements in parent knowledge, parenting behaviour and parenting attitudes.

School-Community partnerships

Schools as community hubs, often referred to as school-community partnerships – "collaboration between school education systems and the other sectors (community, business, local government and philanthropy) to support the learning and wellbeing of young people, especially those facing disadvantage."[68] – are still in the early stages in Australia. However, there is growing interest in this concept.

Models of school-community partnerships include:[69]

1) Schools as community hubs

Provide a range of social services in a school or in collaboration with a school. Promote access to necessary support and services, with a focus on children who are at a disadvantage and at risk.

2) Schools as community learning centres

Seek to establish connections and links with educational institutions and corresponding social supports aimed at everyone in the community, not just children and their families, with opportunities to pursue further learning.

3) Schools as centres for learning excellence

Facilitate the provision of support systems and services with the objective of high performance. Supplementary services enhance educational participation but differs from the community hubs model as it focuses on all students.

4) Extended service school model

Formation of partnerships, networks and collaborative relationship are at the centre of this initiative and the school is the focal point, and works to integrate these connections.

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68 Black, R. (2008). *Beyond the classroom: building new school networks.* Victoria: Australian Council for Educational Research.

69 The Royal Children's Hospital Centre for Community Child Health and the Murdoch Children's Research Institute. (2012). *Primary schools as community hubs: A review of the literature.*

The Common Approach®

The Common Approach is way for educators to provide students and parents with an empowering, positive and consistent experience when discussing students' wellbeing. It supports educators, and all who work with young people, to have strengths-based, student-centered, holistic, and collaborative conversations with students and their families. The Common Approach has shown to improve relationships between families and school, to increase ability to make earlier identification of the needs and strengths of students and to help more quickly identify the causes of problematic behaviour.

The Common Approach is currently being implemented across education, health, allied health, community, and social service organisations throughout Australia; government and non-government. It can help educators prepare for conversations with a student and/or family, provides a framework for families to develop next steps, gives a common language, and a means of recording discussions for better continuity between interactions. The Common Approach is supported by a suite of resources that facilitates conversations with families and students. It is not a standardised risk assessment tool, but rather a simple, versatile way of working that enables student-led and student-focused discussion across all areas of wellbeing.

©ARACY 2019. All Common Approach resources can be used following Common Approach training.
Please visit https://www.aracy.org.au for more information.

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