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## Lessons from the Dining Room Classroom for Parent Engagement in Student Learning

Queensland’s short-term home learning period could have long-term benefits for school and family partnerships and student outcomes, according to a new issues paper by Griffith University academics commissioned by Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ).

The ISQ Our Schools - Our Future paper, *Engaging parents in their child’s learning and wellbeing: Change, continuity, and COVID-19*, brings together decades of parent engagement research and findings with current insights and school experiences from Queensland’s home-learning period.

ISQ Executive Director David Robertson said more than 50 years of research confirmed students had higher academic outcomes and improved attendance, behaviour, confidence and motivation when their parents were not simply “involved in their school”, but were actively “engaged in supporting their learning”.

Mr Robertson said during the home learning period independent schools and their families re-imagined how to learn and connect using new and existing communication tools and strategies such as weekly wellbeing check-ins, virtual parent-teacher meetings and whole-school online physical challenges.

“Technology, when it was available, brought teachers into their students’ homes and families into classrooms with their children’s teachers. It was only a short period – between three and five weeks depending on the child’s year level – but important lessons for school delivery and parent-teacher partnerships were learned that could benefit Queensland’s education system,” he said.

Authors, leading Griffith University-based researchers on parent engagement, Dr Linda Willis and Professor Beryl Exley, said COVID-19 upended schooling, giving teachers and parents greater appreciation for each other’s roles and bringing parents closer to their children’s learning than ever before.

“The imperative of the COVID-19 crisis meant that engaging parents in their child’s learning and wellbeing needed to be prioritised if student progress and development at school were to continue without significant disruption. The question of parent engagement therefore was not one of *if* or *when*, but *how*,” Dr Willis and Professor Exley wrote.

Their paper examines how the home learning period strengthened parent engagement in six areas under the CHANGE acronym: Connections; Home-school alignment; Agency; New and different roles for parents; Generative collaboration among teachers; and Empathy.

Dr Willis and Professor Exley said the home learning period put the important, but sometimes overlooked, role of parents in supporting student learning centre stage.

“What more might be achieved in student learning and wellbeing if, by *design*, rather than through upheaval, future learning and teaching included a stronger, more careful, and deliberate focus on this aspect of parent engagement?”

ISQ and the Queensland Independent Schools Parents Network work in partnership to enhance parent and community engagement in independent schools.

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