

# Engaging Parents

Ideas for School Leaders



## Building Knowledge

Be clear about what parent\* engagement means

Engaging parents is an active process designed to bring parents and their child's learning process and wellbeing closer together.

How can I embed knowledge of parent engagement in my school?

1. Co-develop with your students, parents, teachers and community a *philosophical and pedagogical statement* for guiding ways to engage all groups
2. Model how that statement works in practice in your school at every opportunity, e.g., on assembly
3. Make the statement friendly for students, parents and teachers so it can be easily understood and applied by everyone in the school community
4. Importantly, recognise the uniqueness of your context and setting, and consider how this uniqueness affects opportunities and possibilities for engaging parents.

## Leading the Way

Why is it important that school leaders are proactive and model how to engage parents?

School leaders play a key role in engaging parents as they set the tone and establish a culture of parent engagement at all levels of the school.

How do I start?

1. Create leadership roles with a specific focus on engaging parents
2. Identify parent engagement *champions* from among parents, teachers and community members to support these leaders
3. Build teachers' professional learning for engaging parents through opportunities to learn with and alongside parents
4. Identify barriers to engaging parents at your school and develop plans to address or minimise these.
5. Capitalise on knowledge and insights of engaging parents from learning at home during the COVID-19

pandemic (e.g., using online platforms to speak directly to parents and students about aspects of learning, rather than only to students)

6. [Re]consider the design of school buildings and spaces (physically and virtually) for increasing the quality, frequency, ease and convenience of engaging parents
7. Ensure parent engagement opportunities are part of the school's pedagogical framework and curriculum planning templates.

## Connecting and Communicating

How can I embed knowledge of parent engagement in my school?

1. Make the distinction between engaging parents and involving parents clear in what is said and written at your school
2. Ensure school leaders are not only visible and accessible to parents (e.g., in the playground, at the school gate), but also that parents perceive this access as always available and safe
3. Establish clear, regular lines of communication to parents based on your context and setting, e.g., taking account of cultural and social diversity
4. Ensure communication to parents includes *feedback loops* to encourage dialogic conversations to parents and *from* parents
5. Focus on relationship-building with parents, e.g., set up a parent community group to listen to parents' wants and needs for their children
6. Share the outcomes of these discussions with the school community through newsletters and social media to encourage student and parent ownership of initiatives

These initial snapshots of ideas for schools come from the research project, *Engaging parents in student learning and wellbeing: Using inquiry curriculum and online technologies during COVID-19* (EPIC, 2021) conducted by Linda-Dianne Willis, Beryl Exley, and Narelle Daffurn from Griffith University in collaboration with ISQ and QIS Parents Network.

\*We describe *parents* generally to include carers and families and broadly to include communities with the responsibility and care for a student's learning and wellbeing.

## REFERENCE

Willis, L.-D., Exley, B., & Daffurn, N. with Independent Schools Queensland and Queensland Independent Schools Parents Network. (2021). *Engaging parents in student learning and wellbeing: Using inquiry curriculum and online technologies during COVID-19*. Griffith University, ISQ, & QIS Parents Network, Brisbane, Australia.