

Teachers and parents: a two-way exchange of knowledge and support

SAMFORD VALLEY STEINER SCHOOL



Teachers Chris Jack and Melissa Croker

Samford Valley Steiner School teachers Chris Jack and Melissa Croker have been on a unique journey due to their participation in the *Engaging Parents in Curriculum (EPIC)* research project.

As well as being Mr Jack's teaching colleague, Mrs Croker is a parent of a child in Mr Jack's Class Three and the pair have been attending the same EPIC professional development sessions throughout 2022.

It's gifted Mrs Croker the unique perspective of not only changing her own pedagogy to better engage parents in her class, but also allowed her to watch Mr Jack fold shared learnings into his planning and communication.

"It's been really nice as a parent to be included on the journey that is taking place with EPIC and seeing how the little changes Chris has made in the program have impacted parents and also children," Mrs Croker says.

"Chris has been very clever in his communication and from a parent's perspective, that's really helped build a connection between myself as the parent and Chris as a teacher.

"He hasn't just told us what the children are doing in the classroom; he's giving us a holistic picture of 'this is how it looks in the classroom and this is why they're doing this' in terms of the philosophy.

"I feel that's helped (my child) to build their confidence (in conversation with us), not just at the dinner table but also in the car and with his brother and sister as well.

"(My child) is more engaged and his skill set to communicate what is happening in his life has been given a positive twist. This year I've seen him really grow as a child."

EPIC: a new perspective

EPIC is a collaboration between Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ), Griffith University and Queensland Independent Schools Parents Network (QIS Parents Network) and sees Griffith University parent engagement experts Dr Linda Willis and Professor Beryl Exley work side-by-side with teachers and school leaders as they explore new ways to engage parents.

EPIC has been running since 2021 in an intensive way in three schools and in EPIC 2023 the research team will work with nine independent schools.

A shift in communicating with parents

For Mr Jack, the biggest change to his practice as a result of EPIC has been his consciousness around parent communication.

"The parent and teacher work together for the benefit of the children," Mr Jack says.

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High school teacher Andy Currey

"I think one of the important things as a teacher is to reflect on your practice and that applies equally to parent engagement. Try something - if it works, celebrate. If it doesn't work, go back to the drawing board and try something different."

"My advice to other teachers regarding parent engagement is to communicate regularly with parents, get to know them as best you can and engage them in the learning of their children."

Results equally effective in high school

In Samford Valley Steiner School's high school, EPIC teacher participant Andy Currey - a teacher of Class 7 to 12 - is also on a new path of parent engagement thanks to the knowledge gained from EPIC in 2022.

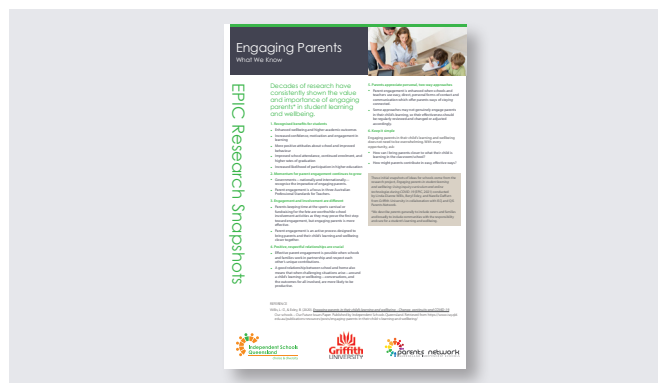
"What EPIC gave to me was some cold, hard data and advice on how to improve the communications and appreciate the actual tangible benefits of interactivity with parents," Mr Currey says.

"It didn't require much more work, it's just been changing the way I worked to bring parents in."

His parent engagement strategies have had a marked improvement on some students.

Intellectually it also just makes sense to Mr Currey.

"If students can hold a conversation about a topic knowledgeably and the more they practise those conversations, the more likely they are to be able to understand and engage from different angles. If they practise those conversations at home they're getting twice as much exposure than just in a 90-minute lesson."



EPIC Research Snapshots – Engaging Parents: What We Know

Extract* from EPIC Research Snapshots: Engaging Parents: What We Know

What is parent engagement?

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

What can I do to encourage parent engagement?

1. Articulate clearly and early to parents what engaging in their child's learning and wellbeing means. (see 'Engaging Parents: What we Know' snapshot* for more information)
2. Share from research the benefits of parent engagement for children's school and life success. (see Engaging Parents: What We Know snapshot for more information)
3. Establish regular times and spaces to dialogue cogeneratively with colleagues about engaging parents in the curriculum

4. Network with parents to find out more about them, what they know and can do, and use this knowledge as inspiration for inquiry projects

5. Lead by example, sharing your personal stories so parents come to appreciate the power of personal connections in their child's learning

6. Build knowledge about curriculum inquiry projects and their associated pedagogies so there is a genuine opportunity for student agency and parent engagement.

* 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.



Read the research www.isq.qld.edu.au/EPIC_research and find the 2022 EPIC final report www.isq.qld.edu.au or www.parentsnetwork.qld.edu.au