

Parent engagement 'unlocked' thanks to innovative research emerging from Queensland classrooms



The 'how to' of engaging parents in their child's learning and wellbeing – a concept known as parent engagement – is a step closer thanks to world-leading findings from a research project with independent schools.

Engaging Parents in Curriculum (EPIC) – an established collaboration between **Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ), Griffith University and Queensland Independent Schools Parents Network (QIS Parents Network)** – is innovative research which sees parent engagement experts **Dr Linda Willis and Professor Beryl Exley** working alongside independent school teachers and leaders as they hone their parent engagement practices.

EPIC's latest findings are contained in a report released in November 2022 titled *Pedagogies, practices, and processes for engaging parents and communities in children's learning and wellbeing*.

The findings have also been distilled into a suite of professional development videos and series of snapshot documents which will be made available to all ISQ member schools, to support them to effectively engage parents.

EPIC lead researcher Dr Linda Willis, of Griffith University, says the project's findings offer schools and families new ways of thinking and new practices. The findings advance decades of research cementing the 'why' of engaging parents in their child's learning – and converting it to the 'how'.

"Teachers have always known that parents have a rich well of knowledge and our EPIC findings not only show this but also illustrate how educators from early, middle and senior years can tap into that knowledge," Dr Willis says.

"This research gives teachers something we know they are seeking – 'how to' guidance for effectively engaging parents in their child's learning and wellbeing.

"We know unequivocally after two years of embedding ourselves in Queensland independent schools for this research – and in State and Catholic sectors since 2008 – that engaging parents not only works, it can be reasonably easy and also enriching for teachers' practice and wellbeing.

"When engaging parents happens well it means teachers and parents are working as partners for their child's education."

ISQ CEO Chris Mountford thanked the 22 teachers and school leaders from three ISQ member schools who participated in the 2022 research project.

"We are proud to say that EPIC is delivering real results," Mr Mountford says. "It's also giving our member schools what they are asking us for which is evidence-based guidance in how to effectively engage their most powerful allies - parents and carers."

QIS Parents Network Executive Officer Amanda Watt also welcomed the findings and the increasing elevation of parents from 'customers' to 'partners' in their child's education.

"EPIC 2022 confirms that teachers engaging parents only involves small tweaks to a teacher's curriculum planning and practice," Ms Watt says.

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Pedagogies, practices, and processes for engaging parents and communities in children's learning and wellbeing - EPIC 2022 Report

"We've also heard that parents are waiting in the wings and are very receptive to invitations from their child's teacher.

"As Dr Willis often says, parent engagement at its heart is a teacher asking themselves at every curriculum planning session: 'How can I bring what I'm teaching a child – and what a parent knows about what I'm teaching their child – closer together?'

"We now know that teachers and school leaders believe the dividends from investing in parent engagement far outweigh the effort involved.

"The research also shows parents are keen for invitations to be involved in their child's learning and wellbeing."

Parent engagement is an increasing focus of governments and policy makers and features in many schools' strategic plans.

EPIC will continue in 2023 in an expanded format.

Further information on parent engagement:

- *The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* states that: "Learning is a partnership with parents, carers and others in the community, all of whom have a role to play in nurturing the love of learning needed for success at school and in life".
- For school leaders, other influential documents include the *Australian Professional Standard for Principals* notably, Professional Practice 3—Leading improvement, innovation, and change, and Professional Practice 5—Engaging and working with the community.
- For teachers, preservice teachers, and higher education providers, these also include the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*, notably:
 - Standard 3.7—Engage parents/carers in the educative process;
 - Standard 5.5—Demonstrate strategies for reporting on student achievement to students and parents/carers;
 - Standard 7.3—Engage with parents/carers using effective strategies.
- The Australian Government's recent *Next Steps: Report of the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review* made 17 recommendations to improve teacher preparation and the teaching profession generally—two of which specifically refer to: Working with families/carers (Recommendation 7) and Supporting families and carers to engage with teachers (Recommendation 9).



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