



Australian Government
Department of Education and Training

Family-School Partnerships Framework—

A guide for schools and families

Fact sheets

The *Family-School Partnerships Framework* supports parent engagement in education for improved student learning. A series of materials have been developed to support the framework, including the following factsheets:

1. Parent engagement in learning
2. Learning at home
3. Partnerships
4. Building partnerships

The *Family-School Partnerships Framework* was developed by The Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau with support from the Australian Government.

The Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau was a partnership between the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) and the Australian Parents Council (APC). For further information visit www.education.gov.au/parent-information.



Australian Parents Council

Fact Sheet: Parent engagement in learning

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Improving student learning through parent engagement

Parent engagement in learning is known to lead to improved outcomes for students of all ages. Parents play an essential role as the first educators of children, and ongoing, active engagement of parents, families and communities has a major impact on a child's success at school.

Teachers and schools can support parent engagement in learning by building partnerships to connect learning at home and school.

Parent engagement and involvement

The *Family-School Partnerships Framework* focuses on parent engagement in learning, rather than parent involvement in schools.

Parent involvement in schools includes attending events, volunteering in class or other activities, and serving on school councils and parent committees.

Parent engagement in learning encompasses parent involvement in schooling as well as a broader range of activities, including parent support for children's learning at home, at school and in community contexts—recognising the cultural and social diversity of families and communities.

Parental engagement in learning underpins children and young people's cognitive and social and emotional development, shapes family practices and behaviours, and can impact the nature of the school community and the experience of schooling. Parental engagement is therefore a highly significant leverage point for enhancing the academic attainment and wellbeing of children and young people (Emerson, Fear, Fox & Sanders, 2012, p. 34).

In schooling contexts, parent engagement is described as:

An intentional and collaborative strategy to support and leverage the knowledge, capacities and social capital of families to improve learning and wellbeing outcomes for all children and young people. (Family-School & Community Partnerships Bureau, 2014).

The ACT Government defines parent engagement in two parts—family-led learning and family-school partnerships:

- *Family-led learning focused on 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; and*
- *family-school partnerships that encourage positive parent-teacher relationships, communication about children’s progress, and engagement in the school community, while equipping parents to effectively support and encourage their children’s learning and wellbeing (ACT Government, 2014).*

Home-school and family-school partnerships feature strongly in definitions and understanding of parent engagement. Such partnerships are recognised as an effective strategy for supporting active parent engagement in different ways.

Why is parent engagement in learning important?

There is strong evidence that parent engagement is associated with improvements in academic attainment for students of all ages. This includes early literacy, school adjustment and student attendance, motivation, self-regulatory behaviour, social skills, retention and graduation rates. This evidence confirms the importance of valuing and supporting parent engagement in learning.

The evidence suggests that parental engagement strategies have the greatest impact when they are focused on linking behaviours of families, teachers and students to learning outcomes, when there is a clear understanding of the roles of parents and teachers in learning, when family behaviours are conducive to learning, and when there are consistent, positive relations between the school and parents (Emerson, Fear, Fox & Sanders, 2012, p. 32).

When schools implement parent engagement as an intentional and collaborative strategy, they can draw on and benefit from the world views, knowledge, capacities and diversity of families. In turn, this enables families to gain vital information and support to help their children succeed.

School effectiveness research has identified positive home-school relations as a characteristic of schools with high academic standards, regardless of student background variables. Highly effective schools regard parents as partners in education and promote home-school partnerships.

One characteristic of highly effective schools is that they form partnerships to enhance student learning and wellbeing. This includes partnering with parents and families (Masters, 2015).

Research has also highlighted the importance of understanding which aspects of engagement are most beneficial. It has shown that good parenting, including providing a safe, secure and intellectually stimulating home environment, and modelling educational values and aspirations, has ‘a significant and positive effect on achievement and adjustment even after all other factors shaping attainment have been taken out of the equation’ (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003, p. 4).

Home-based parent engagement has been shown to have a greater effect on academic attainment than school-based parent involvement in activities. However, school-based parent involvement is still very important, and helps create good relationships between schools and families, facilitating positive teacher-child interactions.

Developed by the Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau. The Bureau is a partnership between the Australian Council of State School Organisations and the Australian Parents Council, with support from the Australian Government. Visit the [Department of Education and Training website](#) for more information.

Fact Sheet: Learning at home

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Supporting and encouraging learning at home

Parent engagement in learning and everyday positive parenting are major contributors to children's learning, and can build children's confidence, motivation, capability and competence as learners.

Schools and teachers can support family-based learning by communicating effectively, building trust and sharing information and resources that families can use in the home.

Alongside families, many other relationships and factors also influence children through adolescence to adulthood. In this way, school education is a shared responsibility, and partnerships between families, schools and communities are important.

Family engagement is a shared responsibility of families and schools, and communities for student learning and achievement; it is continuous from birth to young adulthood; and it occurs across multiple settings where children learn (Weiss, Lopez & Rosenberg, 2010, p. 3).

Different parents may have different levels of confidence in their role as first educators, and their ability to partner with schools and teachers.

By building relationships and partnerships, schools can encourage and inspire parents to confidently engage in their children's education and to feel included, valued and influential in school life.

The beliefs and attitudes of school communities about the role of parents, and their engagement strategies, have a significant influence on parent engagement. The attitudes, relationships and communication from teachers, and the ways in which schools show their support for students and families, influence parent engagement both in the home and at school.

As teachers we can merge what we know about children, teaching and learning with what parents know, working in relationship to enhance our curriculum for children, to attend to the family's agenda as well as our own, and to ensure everyone is strengthened in the process (Pushor, 2013, p. 10).

Research and good practice points to some specific things parents, families, schools and teachers can focus on to support and facilitate home-based learning. The ideas below are a starting point.

For teachers and schools

- Create and take advantage of opportunities to better understand the experiences, capabilities, needs and expectations of parents and families.
- Understand family aspirations for their children, and build trust with families to share responsibility for education.
- Clearly communicate what is expected of parents and listen to families' expectations of schools.
- Communicate how parents and families can support and collaborate in learning.
- Enable time for parent and family interaction at school that helps build relationships.
- Engage with parents and families to explore their role in learning, and how they support learning at home.
- Provide resources and opportunities to support and facilitate home-based learning.
- Develop an understanding of contemporary learning in home and school contexts.
- Recognise and use learning opportunities in home environments.
- Proactively communicate and discuss children's contributions, progress and performance with parents.
- Integrate family engagement into curriculum planning.
- Reduce sources of conflict in school-home relationships and create safe places for teachers and parents to share information and solve problems together.
- Encourage and expect teachers to consider parent concerns as valuable feedback and make meaningful interventions or changes where possible and necessary.
- Provide development and training opportunities that bring teachers and families together and develop partnership capacity.

For parents and families

- Build supportive relationships with children and work hard to maintain these when circumstances are difficult.
- Communicate the value of education and the importance of schooling.
- Encourage educational aspirations and career goals; make plans with children for their future.
- Regularly ask children what they are learning and doing at school, and praise real effort and achievements.
- Take an interest in homework, provide help where needed and offer encouragement and support for children to solve problems for themselves.
- Have high expectations for children's academic success and their behaviour.
- Encourage physical activity and set reasonable boundaries for television, electronic games and online socialising.
- Engage children in meaningful conversations about everyday life and topical issues, and encourage critical thinking and the development of ideas.
- Have positive interactions with teachers; share knowledge, ideas and concerns.
- Participate in class-based, year level or co-curricular activities to show support for children's learning at school and build relationships with teachers and other parents.

Fact Sheet: Partnerships

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Supporting positive parent engagement in learning

Partnerships are an effective way to support and empower positive parent engagement, and bring together family and community resources to enrich student learning and wellbeing.

Family-school partnerships

Family-school partnerships are collaborative relationships between families and school staff, focused on student learning and development.

Through these partnerships, parents and families can participate in purposeful and productive relationships that expand their interests, knowledge, needs and resources.

Family-school partnerships may be created at a whole school, year or class level, for a particular learning or subject area, or to support an individual student. They connect home to school and might focus on students in transition, student and family wellbeing, a particular topic like science.

Family-school and community partnerships are re-defining the boundaries and functions of education. They enlarge parental and community capacity; they create conditions in which children learn more effectively. In these ways, they take education beyond the school gates (Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau, 2009, p. 6).

School-community partnerships

Similar to family-school partnerships, school-community partnerships are underpinned by shared and sincere interest in improving student learning, wellbeing, opportunities and outcomes. Students, families, schools, community members and organisations can all benefit from these partnerships.

Engaging with the community is not just about school-directed efforts to develop partnerships. It involves the broader community, including businesses and other organisations, working with schools, parents and students to create and expand networks to build capacity.

To the extent that schools develop respectful, caring alliances with stakeholders, learn from and with them in dialogue, and include their voices in setting agendas, there will be progress toward sharing power (Auerbach, 2012, p.39).

Partnerships are effective when the different strengths of partners are valued and used to best advantage. A collective effort to improve student learning and wellbeing can provide a positive outcome for the whole community.

Building effective partnerships

Whether informal or formal, simple or complex, effective partnerships draw on the knowledge, expertise and resources that partners bring to the relationship. These partnerships help to create an environment where children can be supported to reach their full potential.

We believe that when schools and families effectively partner across contexts of development and domains of learning, our children will truly be on a path to academic, social and emotional success (Albright & Weissberg, 2010, p. 261).

The *Family-School Partnerships Framework* provides information and resources to support schools to build and sustain effective partnerships with families and communities. This includes core principles, key dimensions and characteristics of effective partnerships, as well as practical tools to help create, evaluate and improve partnerships. These materials can help school communities reflect on their current culture and practices, and plan for further improvements.

Core principles for developing partnerships

The core principles that underpin effective partnerships are:

- parents and families are the first and continuing educators of their children
- learning is lifelong and occurs in multiple settings
- partnerships and school communities flourish when the diversity and strengths of families are valued and leveraged
- community engagement expands responsibility and resources
- partnerships grow from mutual trust, respect and responsibility
- partnerships need committed, collaborative and creative leadership.

Key dimensions of family-school partnerships

The *Family-School Partnerships Framework* identifies the seven key dimensions that frame the elements of relationship and partnership building. These dimensions are:

- communicate
- connect learning at home and school
- build community and identity
- recognise the role of the family
- consult on decision-making
- collaborate beyond the school
- participate.

Characteristics of effective partners

Effective partnerships display the following characteristics:

- responsive to student and family needs and aspirations
- purposefully co-design with clear goals
- commitment to collaboration
- mutual trust and respect
- equal valuing of the different roles in the partnership
- sharing of responsibility and influence
- open dialogue and effective communication
- appropriate and adequate resources.

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Fact Sheet: Building partnerships

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Building family-school partnerships

Schools and teachers can support parent engagement by building and sustaining partnerships to connect learning at home and school.

However, moving towards a family-school partnership approach typically requires a significant change in school and family attitudes, and in school culture.

Schools vary considerably in the commitment, energy and skills they apply to family-school partnerships. Building partnerships requires a good understanding of the research and a desire to see cultural change.

A solid platform is needed at the whole-school level to support family-school partnerships, including:

1. **Committed leaders** who are familiar with research and good practice in engagement and partnerships, and who model relationship building and collaboration.
2. **An engagement or partnership policy** that clearly references the links between parent/family engagement and learning outcomes, and integrates the principles, dimensions and characteristics of effective partnerships.
3. **A capacity building strategy** to strengthen and build the knowledge, skills and confidence of families and school staff, and in the action team to lead and engage in partnership work.
4. **An engagement or partnership action team**, comprising school leaders, teachers, parents and community members, that consults and collaborates widely to agree on priorities, goals, strategies and measures.
5. **Effective school-community communication**, reporting and feedback processes, and direct links between the action team and the school board/council, school curriculum and school planning leaders, and parent groups/representatives.
6. **A support network** to tap into family and community knowledge and expertise, and to solve problems and share ideas.

7. **Adequate resourcing** to support the engagement or partnership policy, related plans and capacity building strategy.
8. **Good governance**, which includes a process for documenting actions, outcomes, learning and additional ideas for action.

Changing culture requires a series of actions, operations and procedures that are part of any initiative within the broader strategy. Such initiatives should be:

- linked to learning—align with school and system achievement goals, and connect families to the teaching and learning goals for the students
- developmental—focus on building the intellectual, social and human capital of stakeholders engaged in the program
- collaborative—conduct learning in group settings and focus on building networks and learning communities
- relational—build respectful and trusting relationships between home and school
- interactive—give participants opportunities to test out and apply new skills; skill mastery requires coaching and practice.

Using research and evidence

A good understanding of the [research and evidence](#) about parent engagement informs sustainable partnership strategies that bring partners together to focus on achieving the desired outcomes.

Parent engagement in the home has a significant effect on children’s learning. The evidence also shows that to effectively support children’s learning in school partnership, strategies need to be intentional, flexible and well supported.

Using the framework and resources

The *Family-School Partnerships Framework* provides information and resources to support schools to build and sustain effective partnerships with families and communities. This includes resources outlining the core principles, key dimensions and characteristics of effective partnerships, as well as practical tools to help create, evaluate and improve partnerships. These materials can help school communities reflect on their current culture and practices, and plan for further improvements.

Schools are well placed to lead partnership-building. However, this may also be initiated by parents, other family members and community organisations. Partnerships take many forms because student and family needs, local contexts and available resources vary. Good practice is useful to draw on, but defining and building a strategy that best fits local context will prove most successful.

To see how Australian schools have developed partnership strategies and put them into action, read the *Family-School Partnerships Framework* case studies.

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