

Engaging families in lifting student outcomes

A guide for
school leaders
to support
implementation
of FISO 2.0



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Introduction

Purpose of this guide

This guide will assist schools with the implementation of the [Framework for Improving Student Outcomes \(FISO\) 2.0](#). It brings together key information, related resources and policies to support school leaders to effectively partner with families in improving student learning and wellbeing outcomes.

The focus of this guide is on strengthening family engagement in learning and wellbeing, rather than broader involvement in schooling or increasing attendance of families at school-run events. The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth¹ defines family engagement in learning as “the capacity of families, in partnership with schools, to support student learning and achievement by promoting interactions with children and young people that nurture positive attitudes towards learning, confidence as learners, and the development of subjective learning resources.”

By engaging and partnering with families in learning, and by families taking an active and positive interest in their children’s learning, outcomes can be further supported.

Please note:

- The term ‘families’ is used to include the parents, grandparents, carers, and kin of all students. When considering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students it is important to be mindful of kinship structures and the broader understandings of family and community.
- This guide is targeted at partnering with all families, including those who have found it difficult to partner with schools.
- Learning occurs wherever students are, so partnering in learning focusses on recognising and enhancing the capacity of families to engage with their child’s learning at home or in other out-of-school environments.
- For specific advice on how to engage effectively with School Councils, please refer to the [Policy and Advisory Library School Council](#) policy and guidance.
- For specific advice on promoting respectful behaviours, and support for when parent/carer behaviours are not respectful, please refer to the [Respectful Behaviours Within the School Community Policy, Work-Related Violence Procedure: 4. Risk controls – parent/carer behaviours](#), and consider department services available to [support the wellbeing of staff](#).

1. Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, 2202, [Parent and Family Engagement An implementation guide for school communities](#)

Benefits

Why engage and partner with families in learning?

A wealth of research indicates the powerful association between positive family engagement in learning and improved student learning and wellbeing outcomes². Effective family engagement also plays an important role in developing a welcoming and inclusive school community.

Children’s education begins from birth, with parents/carers as their first educators and role models. Throughout their school years, children and young people spend less than twenty percent of their waking hours at school, so schools cannot lift student outcomes alone. Families play a critical role in providing a learning bridge between school and the home, and vice-versa. This was in evidence in many school communities during remote and flexible learning. Families can nurture positive attitudes toward learning in their children and build their children’s confidence as learners.

Importantly, engaging in learning is a two-way process; families learn from schools and schools learn from families. This brings together both teacher and family knowledge which in turn leads to a more inclusive education and greater opportunities to improve student outcomes.

Many whole-of-government and departmental policies recognise the importance of engaging families in improving outcomes for young people, including for Koorie students³, for students with English as An Additional Language and from culturally diverse backgrounds⁴, for students with disability and additional needs⁵, and students from other priority cohorts.

Engaging families and FISO 2.0

FISO 2.0 sets out five core elements that together realise the goals of excellence and equity through developing the learning and wellbeing of every student (see Figure 1).

When integrated, these elements build a positive environment through strong relationships that enables all students to become happy, healthy, and resilient; successful lifelong learners; and active, informed members of just and sustainable communities.

This resource complements the [Using FISO 2.0 to plan school improvement](#) guide.

Active partnerships with families can contribute to each of the five FISO 2.0 core elements. The table on the following page provides examples of how each core element can connect with partnering with families.

Figure 1: FISO 2.0



2. See, for example, Henderson and Mapp, 2002; Harris, Andrew-Power and Goodall, 2009; Weiss, 2009, Pushor, 2007; [Beyond Blue Professional Learning — Family Partnerships: Supporting evidence](#)

3. [Marrung: Aboriginal Education Plan 2016 to 2026](#)

4. [Multicultural education programs and resources](#)

5. [Students with Disability: Policy](#)

Leadership

Building a genuine culture of effective family-school partnering benefits from whole-school leadership.

Teaching and learning

Families' lived experiences can inform the teaching and learning program to ensure responsive, authentic and meaningful teaching practices and curriculum programs. Additionally, when teachers are aware of what is happening in the daily lives of their students, they can provide more effective teaching and learning, including any required supports as needed.

Assessment

Families can provide valuable feedback and information to inform assessments of student learning and wellbeing needs. This could include families sharing their observations on what their child finds interesting and where they may require additional support.

Engagement

Engagement with families builds connectedness to school and the development of trusting relationships between families, their children and the school. It therefore promotes a sense of belonging for both students and their families.

Support and resources

Additional resources and support for learning can be provided by and for families when they are aware of what their child is learning and how they can support learning at home. Families can also provide critical support for young people experiencing wellbeing concerns and, where appropriate, having families work together with a school's wellbeing team can help promote a consistent approach to care and support for a young person.

The remote and flexible learning experiences during 2020 and 2021 provided rich examples for many schools of the value of effectively partnering with families in the delivery of schooling. The necessity for teachers to share in advance what and how students were learning broke down many of the barriers between home and school. The impacts of COVID-19 have highlighted the importance of families engaging in their children's learning, wellbeing, and development across all five of the FISO 2.0 core elements, and the critical roles school can play in partnering with families in supporting learning and wellbeing.

What does effective engagement with families look like?

Core beliefs for effective engagement and partnering⁶

The following core beliefs underpin effective engagement and partnering with families:

- All families and school staff want the best for children and young people.
- All families have the capacity to support their children's learning and wellbeing, however different families may have different capacities for support.
- Families and school staff are equal partners (we do "with" families not "to" families).
- Partnering starts with building relational trust.
- The responsibility for cultivating and sustaining partnerships among school and home is one shared between school staff and leaders and families.

These core beliefs encourage a strengths-based views of families and support the identification of opportunities for families to make meaningful contributions to the learning and wellbeing of their students at school.

To support further improvements in student outcomes, we need to view partnering with families as a way of doing our work — that is, it is core to what we do in improving student, learning and wellbeing, not an add-on for if or when we have time. Increased family communication and engagement will also often be required in relation to vulnerable students, for example students with disability and Autistic students.

Some examples of what this might look like at the school level are included on the following pages.

6. Adapted from Mapp K, Carver I & Lander J, 2017, *Powerful Partnerships: A Teacher's Guide to Engaging Families for Student Success* 5

Primary school examples⁷



“Meet the Families” day

At the start of the year make time for a “Meet the Families” day where teachers ask families about their hopes and dreams for their child, what makes their child special, what concerns they may have, how they would like to work with the teacher to support their child’s learning and development and what and how is the best way to communicate with each other. This may range from being regularly informed on how their child is progressing — both the good news and not just the areas for improvement — to a more two-way relationship where families actively share their thoughts and ideas about their child’s learning and wellbeing. The purpose of this conversation is to reinforce to families that teachers need their help to best support their child. A corresponding outreach strategy also needs to be developed to ensure that those families who are unable to come into the school also have the same opportunity to talk with their child’s teacher. Regular reporting or other agreed methods of communication, help in ensuring that all families are included through the use of oral as well as written communication and the use of translation services where needed.



Student-led learning walks

Student-led learning walks where students take their family member through the school and explain their learning through their (the students’) eyes. If family members are unable to attend the school the learning walk could be videoed and sent home via a QR code.



Literacy and numeracy tips

Teachers, families and students engaging with strategies to improve literacy and numeracy using, for example, [DE’s Literacy and Numeracy Tips to Help Your Child Every Day: a guide for parents of children aged 0-12](#).



Prompt questions

Providing prompt questions to families about what students are learning in the classroom that can assist families in having conversations that support student learning.



Good news stories

Sharing good news stories (for example, student successes) through phone calls home, post cards etc.

7. See Australian Education Research Organisation, 2021, [“Evidence based practices for family, engagement, primary school, teachers and leaders: evidence based practices for family, engagement, Primary School teachers and leaders”](#), for further examples.

Secondary school examples⁸



Two-way communication strategies

Strategies that enable two-way communication that explicitly draws on the knowledge and expertise of families as well as teachers about student learning needs and achievements via, for example, regular reporting or other agreed methods of communication, ensuring that families are included through the use of oral as well as written communication and the use of translation services where needed.



Focus groups and forums

Family focus groups or other forums where families can provide input into specific student engagement and/or achievement strategies, or ideas on how the school can more effectively reach those families with whom they are not yet engaging. These focus groups can be accessed from or utilise existing structures (e.g., parent, clubs or associations), open to all members of the school community (either face-to-face or on-line), or organised by local community leaders or influencers (which can be particularly helpful when working with multicultural communities).



Career transition pathways

Providing families with the opportunity to access and discuss up-to-date information regarding career transition pathways with schools and teachers to enable families to have supportive career conversations with their young person.



Information sessions

Providing families with the opportunity to attend information sessions on areas of common parenting concern, including cyber-security and bullying, drug and alcohol use, and when out-of-school tutoring may be appropriate and where it may be unnecessary or detrimental.



Collaborative knowledge sharing

Designing school parent/carer information evenings to be interactive and collaborative knowledge sharing sessions where families can discuss and share home learning and engagement practices and tips.



Positive feedback on academic progress

Taking opportunities to share positive feedback on student academic progress with families.



Wellbeing and mental health

Considering family inclusive wellbeing and mental health supports. Specifically, by inviting families to be involved in whole-school wellbeing and mental health prevention and promotion activities or encouraging the school's Mental Health Practitioner to consider including families in the care and support of a student experiencing mental health difficulties.

8. See [Australian Education Research Organisation](#), 2021, for further examples

Primary and Secondary school examples⁶



Koorie community engagement

Proactively engaging with the local Koorie community in support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Specifically, this could be done by connecting and building relationships with the Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (LAECG), or other formal or informal family and community groups. LAECGs can be contacted through the [Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated](#) (VAEAI).



Collaborative planning

Collaborative planning such as family-teacher-student need identification and goal setting, and strategies for achieving these goals, including discussing learning opportunities and the supports that families and teachers will provide — this could be face-to-face or conducted remotely. As families are most often the conduit between supports provided outside of school and approaches being taken within schools for students, especially those with additional needs such as Autistic students, this can ensure the effective alignment of goals and strategies across home and school.



Transparent processes

Ensuring there are known processes in place that enable families to raise issues or concerns about their young person's learning or wellbeing with staff.



Student Support Groups

The collaborative establishment of [Student Support Groups](#) and Individual Education Plans to ensure effective partnerships between schools, families, students and any relevant agencies. Student Support Groups work together to support the learning and wellbeing needs of students with diverse learning needs, and may also include the development of [Disability Inclusion Profiles](#).

9. See [Australian Education Research Organisation](#), 2021, for further examples

Anywhere anytime learning

Effective partnering in learning can happen anywhere, anytime not just on structured occasions. Processes by which families and schools can achieve the vision of anywhere, anytime learning and honour student learning outside of schooling include:

- The support that families provide to learners to pursue personal interests. It also includes the knowledge, skills, and encouragement that schools can offer families to do this well.

- The ways families and schools connect children to learning opportunities outside school, for example to libraries and museums.
- The efforts that families and schools make to sequence and sustain these connections over time.

Embedding effective engagement in your school

Effective engagement and partnering with families is enabled by:

- A shared vision for partnering and engagement that articulates the school community's aspirations, values and desired future achievements — this links directly to the school's culture and its school improvement agenda.
- Consistent practices across the school — a shared whole-school approach to family engagement supports the school's articulated vision for partnering and engagement.
- A safe environment for all, grounded in mutually respectful communication — people are able to speak openly, and diverse views are valued.¹⁰
- Open, responsive relationships between school staff and all members of the school community to work towards sustained school improvement.
- A commitment to ongoing open and two-way communication between the school and families, where feedback is both provided to and sought from families and teachers.

The following 3-step process can help embed family partnering in your school:

1. Reflect

- What practices do we currently have in place for partnering with families?
- Are there any gaps in terms of who we partner with, and how we partner with families?
- How effectively are we engaging with our Koorie families, families where English is an additional language, families of students with disability, and families of other priority cohorts?
- How do we gather ideas and learn from families?¹¹
- How do we let families know their perspectives are valued and they are being heard?
- To what extent is partnering with families currently reflected in our school policies?

2. Plan

- Given our reflection, what can we do to meaningfully improve engagement with families at the whole school level and individual family level?
- How do we ensure that building trusting, mutually respectful, and reciprocal relationships with families is built and strengthened?
- What strategies do we have and what supports can we access when communication with a family breaks down or communication is not mutually respectful?

3. Implement

- What will be our first steps?
- How will we co-construct learning opportunities with families — how will these be scaffolded over time?
- How will we monitor our family partnering practices and the impact of partnering on student learning and wellbeing outcomes?
- How is partnering embedded within our School Strategic Plan and/or Annual Implementation Plans?

10. See the department's [Family Engagement in Learning](#) resource for a one-page fact-sheet schools can provide to families to support safe and mutually respectful partnerships.

11. See [Culturally Responsive Pedagogy](#) for examples of how funds of knowledge can be applied in Australia.

Additional resources

Within the department

- [Student voice practical guide: Amplify — Empowering students through voice, agency and leadership](#)
- [Framework for Improving Student Outcomes \(FISO\) 2.0](#), Policy and Advisory Library
- [Using FISO 2.0 to plan school improvement](#)
- [School-wide positive behaviour support framework](#)
- [Respectful Behaviours within the School Community Policy](#)
- [Respectful Behaviours posters for parents, staff, and translated in over 30 languages](#) (under 'Safety at work posters')
- [Work-related violence in schools procedure: 4. Risk controls — parent/carer behaviours](#)
- [Marrung Aboriginal Educational Plan 2016–2026](#)
- [Dhelk Wukang Aboriginal Inclusion Plan 2022–2026](#)
- [Literacy and Numeracy Strategy Phase 2: Achieving Excellence and Equity in Literacy and Numeracy](#) (see: Engaging Families as Partners in Literacy and Numeracy section)
- [Get Parents Involved with Literacy](#) resources
- [Transition — Year 6 to 7](#)
- [School Council](#) — Overview, Policy and Advisory Library
- [Students with Disability](#), Policy and Advisory Library
- [Diverse Learners Hub](#)
- [Multicultural education programs and resources](#)

Other resources

- [Australian Professional Standards for Teachers](#) — Standards 3.7 and 7.3 relate to family engagement in learning.
- [Parents Victoria](#)
- [Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth \(ARACY\)](#)
- [Victorian Aboriginal Education Association \(VAEAI\)](#)
- [The Smith Family](#)
- [Berry Street Education Model](#)
- [Ardoch](#)
- [Foundation House](#)
- [An overview of mental health for family and friends](#) — HeadSpace
- [Inclusive education: supporting school communities to thrive](#) — Amaze
- [Inclusive school communities](#) — AllPlay Learn
- [Family Partnerships professional learning and supporting evidence](#) — Beyond Blue