

The aspects of parental engagement that appear to matter most

Family-led learning

- **High expectations and aspirations for children:** parents' aspirations and expectations for their children's achievement and participation in further education is consistently identified as the strongest and most influential aspect of parent engagement. It is theorised that parental expectations shape children's own beliefs about their potential, the value they place on education and their sense of academic competence (Eccles, 1989; Fan & Chen, 2001; Flouri, 2006; Flouri & Buchanan, 2004; Gutman & Akerman, 2008; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2005b; Singh et al., 1995)
- **Shared reading:** parent-child reading is one of the most strongly evidenced aspects of parental engagement. In the early years, it can have a substantial impact on emerging literacy skills and the supporting the development of specific skills, but it continues to be important throughout the primary years by helping build confidence and enjoyment of reading and learning (Jeynes, 2012; Nye, 2006; Van Voorhis et al., 2013).
- **Parent-child conversation:** family conversation is one of the simplest forms of parental engagement and there is emerging evidence suggesting it can have a strong influence on children's cognitive skills, the value they place on learning and their enjoyment of learning. The literature suggests that different themes of conversation and types of communication can be beneficial: conversations around *learning* (what children are learning, problem-solving around challenges, relationships with teachers, exploring areas of interest); conversations about *social issues* (politics, things in the news, culture and religion, science and nature, 'big ideas'); and *telling stories and family stories* (reminiscing about times the family spent together, stories about the child and the parents when they were young, about other family members, about the family's home country) (Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry, & Childs, 2004; Jeynes, 2005b; OECD, 2012; Powell & Peet, 2008; Reese, Leyva, Sparks, & Grolnick, 2010; Singh et al., 1995; Taumoepeau & Reese, 2013; Weizman & Snow, 2001).
- **Positive environment for homework:** the evidence around parent involvement in homework is very mixed, with some studies showing that it can have negative impacts on children's motivation, self-efficacy and academic achievement. More recent studies, however, have demonstrated that there are particular aspects of parental engagement that support children's learning and development and others that have a detrimental impact (which explains the mixed evidence). The types of parental engagement in homework that appear to lead to improved outcomes for children are:
 - Ensuring children have an appropriate space for homework;
 - Having rules around homework that are consistent with the expectations of the school (and invitations from the school that enable parents to ask questions, provide feedback and negotiate the parameters of homework);
 - Positive interactions between parents and children around homework (negative interactions having a detrimental impact on children's motivation, confidence and sense of self-efficacy); and
 - Supporting children's development as autonomous and independent learners, enabling them to take responsibility for homework completion and their learning (Bennett-Conroy, 2012; Dumont et al., 2014; Fantuzzo et al., 2004; Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008; Pomerantz et al., 2007).



- **Cognitively stimulating environment:** A cognitively stimulating environment incorporates a range of aspects, such as: having books and other learning resources at home; participating in cultural and community events; limiting screen time; visiting libraries, museums, art galleries; enabling learning around children's enthusiasms and interests; or talking about books, movies, documentaries and television programs (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Jeynes, 2005b; Reynolds & Gill, 1994).
- **Support for children's social and emotional wellbeing:** Social and emotional wellbeing is an important contributor to children's learning, reflecting the ecological model of child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In particular, child-teacher relationships is an important driver of academic outcomes (Hattie, 2008), while peer relationships have a significant influence on children's enjoyment of school. Parents also play an important role in children's behaviour at school (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Pomerantz et al., 2007).

Family-school partnership

- **Parent-teacher communication:** Positive and trusting parent-teacher relationships, and opportunities for regular communication, are the most important aspects of family-school partnership. The evidence suggests that communication around individual children's wellbeing and progress is important, along with class-wide communication about what children are learning and the provision of specific strategies (that are practical and achievable) parents can use to help support their children's learning. There is emerging evidence around the provision of training or workshops around specific aspects of learning (such as developing early literacy or demystifying the curriculum) and outreach to families who experience barriers to engagement (such as home visiting, partnerships with community agencies, or home-school liaison officers)(Saint-Laurent & Giasson, 2005; Van Voorhis et al., 2013).
- **Engagement in the school community:** School-based involvement, such as attending school events, volunteering or participation in governance, can have a strong impact on the culture and resources of the school. Yet these types of engagement have been consistently demonstrated to have a comparatively low impact on children's academic outcomes (Jeynes, 2005a), especially compared to the elements of family-led learning outlined above.

However, a sense of belonging to the school community and participation in school activities can indirectly impact children's academic outcomes by conveying to children the extent to which parents value and support their education. Engagement in the community can also help build parental social networks, facilitate the development of positive relationships with teachers and other school staff, enable parents to understand school norms and build their knowledge about the curriculum; these factors are particularly important for parents who did not have positive experiences of school themselves, come from different cultural backgrounds, and experience barriers to engaging in their children's learning (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2014; Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006; Pomerantz, Wang, & Ng, 2005; Ritter, Barnett, Denny, & Albin, 2009).

Parental engagement conceptual model

	What aspects of family engagement matter most for children's outcomes	Short term outcomes for the child	Longer term outcomes for the child
Family-led learning	High expectations	Belief in the importance of education Self-efficacy Academic competence/confidence Motivation and engagement in learning Persistence Skills for learning Social and emotional wellbeing	Academic achievement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • literacy • numeracy Mental health and wellbeing Mitigating the impacts of disadvantage on educational outcomes
	Shared reading		
	Parent/child conversation, especially around learning, social issues, family stories		
	Homework support that provides an appropriate environment, rules that are consistent with school expectations, that encourages autonomous learning and fosters positive parent-child interactions		
	Cognitively stimulating environment		
	Support for social and emotional wellbeing, peer relationships, teacher relationships		
Family-school partnership	Communication about children's wellbeing and progress		
	Communication about what children are learning and specific information about what families can do to help		
	Engagement in the school community and positive attitudes to school		

Definition of parental engagement

The proposed technical definition of parental engagement is grounded in the elements identified in the conceptual model. As noted, the purpose of the technical definition is to

- establish the parameters of parental engagement, based on current available evidence; and
- specify the core components that are central to measuring parental engagement.

It can also provide guidance for policy and practice and provide the basis for the development of a shared understanding of parental engagement between families, schools and administrators.