Family engagement for learning

Planning tool

Australian Education Research Organisation

Promising approaches audit tool
Primary classroom teachers

This tool can be used to examine your own approaches for engaging with families to support student learning. It is designed around the 'promising approaches'; the approaches for engaging with families that research evidence shows can have a measurable positive effect on student learning outcomes.

This tool can be paired with AERO's Family engagement implementation checklist – primary classroom teachers, to help plan the implementation of your approaches for engaging with families to support student learning.

It is suggested teachers undertake this exercise at least annually, and even more frequently for tracking purposes, such as when checking progress in specific promising approach areas. This exercise may assist practitioners working to develop in their roles and evolve their professional standards, such as the AITSL Australian Professional Standards for Teachers relating to family engagement in learning: 3.7 (Engage parents/carers in the educative process) and 7.3 (Engage with the parents/carers).

Using this tool

Tick one of three boxes for each promising approach, to help determine where your teaching practice is positioned:

- **Establishing** – I am in the early days of doing this
- **Extending** – I am part of the way to doing this
- **Enhancing** – I have accomplished a great deal of this and am building on my success to date.

Example:

1 Recognising and supporting family engagement in learning at home	Establishing	Extending	Enhancing
In my practice as a classroom teacher, I:			
a) actively seek to understand how my students' families already support their children's learning	☐	✓	☐

Teachers can use this exercise in teams or individually to consider which promising approach areas require the most attention.

Remember, engaging with families to support students' learning is never finished – each new year brings a new cohort of families, students and even teachers, into a school community; additionally, students' learning needs change as they age, and family engagement for learning will need to adapt to these changes.

This tool was created by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) for the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO).

Promising approaches

Research evidence shows these **4** approaches for engaging with families can have a measurable positive effect on student learning outcomes.

1 Recognising and supporting family engagement in learning at home	Establishing	Extending	Enhancing
In my practice as a classroom teacher, I:			
a) actively seek to understand how my students' families already support their children's learning			
b) encourage my students' families to talk with their child about school and what they are learning			
c) have explicit discussions with my students' families about having high expectations for learning			
d) encourage my students' families to harness resources available in the local community that link to the school curriculum (for example, local cultural sites and outdoor environments)			
e) have a process for introducing families to homework; and I explicitly discuss the role of families in supporting homework as per the 'not promising' approaches.			

2 Supporting two-way, positive communication and providing light touch updates about learning	Establishing	Extending	Enhancing
In my practice as a classroom teacher, I support two-way, positive communication, by:			
a) actively encouraging communication with and from my students' families			
b) drawing on the knowledge and expertise of families about students' learning needs and achievements			
c) drawing on available supports in place to help me communicate with my students' families (for example, translation services)			
d) ensuring my communications cater to differing levels of adult literacy			
e) consulting with my students' families about their preferred frequency, method/s, and time of day for communications.			

2 Supporting two-way, positive communication and providing light touch updates about learning (continued)	Establishing	Extending	Enhancing
In my practice as a classroom teacher, I use school systems for light touch updates (such as, texts, emails or phone calls) to share important information with families, for example (if applicable):			
f) upcoming tests or assignments			
g) assignment results			
h) missing assignments or homework			
i) short summaries of a lesson to prompt conversation at home.			
In my practice as a classroom teacher, I:			
j) consider how light touch updates should be personalised, positive, concise, and focused on learning, and can enable families to respond if desired.			

3 Promoting a literacy-rich environment at home	Establishing	Extending	Enhancing
In my practice as a classroom teacher, I promote literacy-rich home environments, by:			
a) promoting shared reading between my students' families and their children, over the long-term			
b) sharing relevant forms of shared reading with my students			
c) ensuring families have a clear understanding of how specific aspects of reading develop over time			
d) ensuring families are made aware of the school's literacy program (including how it may differ from families' own schooling), while recognising that family members have differing levels of literacy.			

4 Collaboratively planning and problem-solving with families	Establishing	Extending	Enhancing
In my practice as a classroom teacher, I support a culture of listening and responding to families, by:			
a) practising the school's expectations for communicating with families			
b) finding out and using each family's preferred method/s for receiving information			
c) ensuring my students' families know what to expect from their communications with me; for example, how long it typically takes me to answer an email or phone message.			
In my practice as a classroom teacher, I promote collaborative planning approaches, by:			
d) having systems in place for encouraging two-way communication between myself and my students' families			
e) inviting and working together with families and their children to identify individual goals			
f) inviting and working together with students' families and their children to identify strategies to achieve students' individual goals			
g) having a system in place to communicate students' goals and successful problem-solving strategies with other school staff as students transition from one year to the next.			

'Not promising' approaches

Research evidence shows that the following approaches are **risky**. They may have no effect or, in some cases, even have a negative effect on primary school students' learning outcomes. Primary school teachers should **reduce** or avoid:

- relying on inviting families to activities on the school grounds
- relying on one-way communication from families
- expecting families to use specialised reading strategies in the home
- encouraging families to monitor, assist with, or check homework.

Instead, primary school teachers should aim to strengthen their efforts in the promising approach areas.

More details about 'promising' and 'not promising' approaches can be found in AERO's Engaging with families to support student learning in primary school practice guide.