

# Promising approaches audit tool

## Secondary school leaders

This tool can be used to examine your school's 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 – secondary school leaders](#), to help plan the implementation of your school's approaches for engaging with families to support student learning.

It is suggested schools undertake this exercise each year, to contribute to the development of school improvement, strategic or annual improvement planning. Schools may even wish to complete this tool more frequently for tracking purposes, such as checking progress in specific promising approach areas.

## Using this tool

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

- **Establishing** – our school is in the early days of doing this
- **Extending** – our school is part of the way to doing this
- **Enhancing** – our school has accomplished a great deal of this and is building on its success to date.

### Example:

1 Recognising and supporting family engagement in learning at home	Establishing	Extending	Enhancing
At this school we encourage families to:			
a) talk with their child about school and what they are learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

School leaders can use this exercise 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 educators, 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 **3** approaches for engaging with families can have a measurable positive effect on student learning outcomes.

<b>1</b> Recognising and supporting family engagement in learning at home	Establishing	Extending	Enhancing
<b>At this school we encourage families to:</b>			
a) talk with their child about school and what they are learning			
b) convey to their child their family’s expectations around learning			
c) harness resources available in the local community that link to the school curriculum (for example, local cultural sites and outdoor environments).			
<b>At this school there is a process for introducing families to homework; and the role of families in supporting homework is explicitly discussed (see ‘not promising’ approaches on page 4).</b>			

<b>2</b> Supporting two-way, positive communication and providing light touch updates about learning	Establishing	Extending	Enhancing
<b>At this school we support two-way, positive communication, by:</b>			
a) actively encouraging communication from school staff to families			
b) actively encouraging communication from families to staff			
c) drawing on the knowledge and expertise of families about students’ learning needs and achievements			
d) ensuring supports are in place to help all families and staff communicate with each other (for example, translation services)			
e) ensuring school communications cater to differing levels of adult literacy			
f) consulting with 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
<p>At this school we use light touch updates (such as, texts, emails or phone calls) to share important information with families, for example:</p>			
g) upcoming tests or assignments			
h) assignment results			
i) missing assignments or homework			
j) short summaries of a lesson to prompt conversation at home.			
<p><b>At this school:</b></p>			
k) we consider how light touch updates should be personalised, positive, concise, and focused on learning, and can enable families to respond if desired			
l) we consider how light touch updates can be maintained without increasing teacher workload.			

3 Collaboratively planning and problem-solving with families	Establishing	Extending	Enhancing
<p>At this school there is a culture of listening and responding to families, evidenced by:</p>			
a) staff having clear expectations for communicating with families			
b) staff knowing families' preferred method/s for receiving information			
c) families know what to expect from their communications with the school, such as, how long it typically takes staff to answer an email or phone message.			

3 Collaboratively planning and problem-solving with families (continued)	Establishing	Extending	Enhancing
At this school we promote collaborative planning approaches, by:			
d) ensuring there are systems in place for encouraging two-way communication between a teacher/s and the student’s family wherever possible			
e) having an easy/accessible system in place for families to raise with school staff issues or challenges about their child’s learning			
f) having systems in place to allow for collaborative problem-solving with families (for example, ensuring a family-centric model is used when decisions are being made that will impact a student)			
g) inviting and working together with families and students to identify students’ individual goals			
h) inviting and working together with families and students to identify strategies to achieve students’ individual goals			
i) having systems that help teachers of students within the same family to share information from that family where appropriate			
j) having systems in place to communicate student goals and successful problem-solving strategies between 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 secondary school students’ learning outcomes. Schools should **reduce** or avoid:

- relying on inviting families to activities on the school grounds
- relying on one-way communication from families
- encouraging families to monitor, assist with, or check homework.

Instead, secondary schools 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 secondary school practice guide](#).