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Media Release

Students and schools succeed when parents and teachers support each other: new report

A landmark longitudinal study into parent engagement in education has confirmed student learning and wellbeing is maximised when parents and teachers respect each other as partners in a child's education.

The Engaging Parents in Curriculum (EPIC) research project (2021-2023) has also found that while parents are time poor, parents of children at all ages still crave opportunities to value-add to their child's education.

Griffith University's Dr Linda Willis, who led the EPIC project together with Professor Beryl Exley, said the research had shown that while teachers often initially "scaffolded" parents in ways to value-add to classroom learning, effective parent engagement initiatives hadn't been laborious - for parents or teachers.

"To put it simply, parent engagement is about bringing parents closer to what their child is learning," Dr Willis said.

"What we've found through EPIC is when schools and teachers offer parents short, sharp and optional ways to contribute to that learning, it can lead to greater buy-in from parents – and rich learning and wellbeing outcomes for students, which would not otherwise have occurred," Dr Willis said.

The 2021-2023 EPIC research project is a collaboration between Queensland Independent Schools Parents Network (QIS Parents Network), Griffith University and Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ).

Dr Willis said more than 60 years of research has shown that effective parent engagement leads to enhanced outcomes for students: children to do better academically, socially and their attitude to learning at school, and classroom behaviour also improves.

"What we know from the schools and teachers who've taken part in EPIC is that when they engage parents effectively – with each party viewing the other as partners in a child's education - there are demonstrable wellbeing benefits for all involved," she said.

“And it goes without saying that students feel supported and affirmed when they have two important figures in their life – their teacher and their parent – invested and interested in what they’re learning.”

Benefits for schools

Fairholme College principal Dr Linda Evans, who has been participating in EPIC for the past three years, said alignment between home, school and student was a strategic priority for their school and school events were now structured to “capture the parent voice more strongly”.

“Anything we can do as a school to invite parents in as participants, rather than as consumers, can strengthen the learning opportunities for them and therefore for their child,” Dr Evans said.

“Previously at events or information evenings we would have stood in front of parents and said, ‘this is our approach for these very good reasons and here’s the data that supports it, but we would have failed to ask parents who are their child’s expert what it’s like for them at home and what’s important to them. We would have failed to include a parent voice and thus missed an opportunity to extend learning conversations beyond the school gates, and into the home.

“It’s a small tweak but gee it’s important.”

Parents ‘elevated’ to partners

QIS Parents Network Executive Officer Amanda Watt said it was affirming to see parents elevated to “partners” in their child’s education.

“Parents have much to contribute and they want to contribute,” Ms Watt said.

“This research has confirmed engagement needs to be done with empathy – both from educators to parents and vice-versa,” Ms Watt said.

“We have financially supported the EPIC research project since 2021 because we have seen first-hand how parent engagement transforms teacher, parent and student wellbeing.

“Trust, open communication and respect between home and school also means when rocky times happen, there’s a solid relationship from which to springboard.”

Success looks different for every school community

Ms Watt said eight Queensland independent schools took part in EPIC in 2023 and their detailed case studies in the final report which are replete with the voices of school leaders and teachers

confirmed while school contexts and approaches were very different, they had significant things in common:

- An understanding of the distinct difference between 'involving' parents and 'engaging' parents
- Respect for parents as a child's first educator
- Buy-in and support from school leader/s
- A core group of enthusiastic change-makers in the school (comprising school leaders, teachers and parents) meeting regularly to improve existing practices, trial innovative strategies and evaluate progress.

Parents critical for school performance

ISQ CEO Christopher Mountford said parents were key stakeholders in schools and the EPIC research confirmed they were also critical partners when it came to maximising students' learning and wellbeing and accelerating school performance.

"Research projects of this magnitude are only successful due to the vision and willingness of school leaders and teachers to take part and I thank the many participating ISQ member schools for their commitment and energy.

"Thank you also to Dr Linda Willis, Professor Beryl Exley and QIS Parents Network for partnering with us on this valuable and significant longitudinal research project, which will benefit families and schools for years to come."

ENDS

[Read the EPIC final report.](#)

[View the EPIC resources \(video series + Snapshots of findings\)](#)

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