

Principal leadership strategies for parent and community engagement

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Dr Linda-Dianne Willis: l.willis@uq.edu.au

Dr Jenny Povey: j.povey@uq.edu.au

Dr Julie Hodges: j.hodges@psy.uq.edu.au

The University of Queensland

Research findings (Summary)

See PES website: <https://issr.uq.edu.au/parent-engagement-schools>

Schwab's (1973) framework provided four interconnected dimensions (students, teachers, curriculum and milieus – schools, classrooms, parents, communities, digital technologies) through which to examine how each Principal developed knowledge *of* and *for* parent-school-community engagement. This in turn informed the strategies and practices they adopted. At the heart of their parent-school-community engagement work was student learning and wellbeing.



The main findings as seen through each lens of Schwab's framework are summarised below:

- The Principals possessed detailed knowledge of **students** which they built by connecting personally with them and their families. The Principals' knowledge of students enabled parent-school-community engagement by building respectful

relationships; creating reciprocal connections between home and school learning; and aligning student needs and interests with opportunities that enhanced their learning and wellbeing.

- The Principals developed knowledge of **teachers** through conversations and working alongside them in ways that engendered open, supportive relationships. They recognised and developed each teacher’s strengths. The Principals led by example and drew on their own teaching experiences to articulate clear expectations for parent-teacher engagement. They encouraged teachers to see families through a contextual lens and to build on the strengths of diversity. They offered professional development opportunities to cultivate teachers’ skills for connecting with families.
- The Principals developed contemporary **curriculum** knowledge through personal and professional development opportunities. This knowledge allowed them to purposefully connect student learning and curriculum learning areas. They regularly shared curriculum news with the school community and P&C. They used specific strategies to overcome challenges to engagement (e.g., Liaison Officer to co-develop curriculum activities using teacher, parent, and community knowledge).
- The Principals developed knowledge of **schools** from working in different contexts throughout their careers. Each subscribed to the philosophy, “It takes a village to raise a child”. In cultivating a welcoming, inclusive school climate, they garnered knowledge about families and the community and showed genuine interest in each student’s learning and wellbeing. The Principals’ use of visibility (e.g., drop-offs/pick-ups) communicated to parents and students they were accessible and approachable.
- The Principals drew on their knowledge of **classrooms** from teaching and working in schools to enact and support practices that made parents feel welcomed, respected, and valued. Regular visits and contact with teachers heightened their awareness of what was happening in classrooms. The Principals used different strategies to enhance student learning and parent-school-community engagement opportunities that included employing teacher aides with particular knowledges and skills and supporting innovative classroom practices (e.g., co-teaching).

- The Principals developed knowledge of **parents** from their personal experiences and careers. They viewed parents as their child's first teacher, the keepers of intimate knowledge of their child, and important partners in their child's education. Principals valued being an initial point of contact (e.g., personally conducting enrolment interviews or conducting school tours), advocated face-to-face contact, extended personal invitations, and communicated regularly with parents. They built parents' capacities to participate in their child's learning by providing workshops, preparation for school entry, and certification courses.
- By participating in local activities, organisations, and events, the Principals developed knowledge of their **community's** families, languages, cultures, and histories, affording them understanding and respect for engaging with parents and community members. They demonstrated agility in connecting the work of external and internal stakeholders to advocate for opportunities and resources to benefit students.
- The Principals developed knowledge of **digital technologies** by using different platforms (e.g., school website, Facebook, electronic newsletters, Qschools app) to communicate with the school community. They also supported teachers to use technology (e.g., email, SMS, ClassDojo) to engage parents in student learning.

Relevant research

Povey, J., Campbell, A., Willis, L.-D., Haynes, M., Western, M., Bennett, S., Antrobus, E., & Pedde, C. (2016). Engaging parents in schools and building parent-school partnerships: The role of school and parent organisation. *International Journal of Educational Research*, (79) 128–141.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2016.08.009>

Willis, L.-D., Povey, J., Hodges, J., Carroll, A., Pedde, C., & Campbell, A. (2018). *What gives some Principals the edge on parent-school-community engagement? Principal leadership for engaging parents and community in disadvantaged schools: Four case studies*. Retrieved from:

<https://issr.uq.edu.au/files/5273/FINAL%20Case%20Studies%20Document.pdf>