



# **WHAT WE'VE LEARNT FROM COVID-19**

Engaging parents in the  
learning process



**CATHY QUINN**

# Introduction

Social distancing measures during COVID-19 put enormous pressure on teachers, parents and students to adapt to a new online learning environment, with greater dependency on parents to facilitate learning at home.

Although there have been many concerns and frustrations, the upside is that it has shone a light on how we can better develop relationships between home and schools to improve student learning outcomes.

Research over more than five decades has consistently shown that children have better academic, social, and emotional outcomes when their parents are engaged in their learning, especially in the home.

However, parent engagement is often only perceived as necessary when something goes wrong - whether that's COVID-19, or when a child is in trouble at school or fails a test.

This eBook explores how the learning lockdown has influenced parent engagement and what we can take away from this experience as we head back into the classroom.

In writing this eBook, I hope we can establish a new 'normal' where parents and teachers communicate, collaborate and share a mutual respect for each other's contribution.

Best regards,

*Cathy*

# Education during COVID-19

A Ministerial Briefing Paper revealed that schools have adopted one of four approaches to learning from home, which is dependent on the school's access to resources and the needs of the local community (ACER, 22 April, 2020, p.13).

## **These four approaches include:**

### **1 Online Learning**

Online learning requires a learning management system and allows for collaboration between students and teachers, including social connections.

### **2 Remote Teaching**

Remote teaching is a direct replacement for face-to-face teaching and requires video technology or similar for teachers to interact with students in real-time.

### **3 Hybrid Teaching**

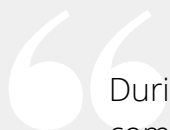
The hybrid model employs a combination of remote teaching and paper-based materials. This model capitalises on the school's existing learning resources and uses technology to maintain the student-teacher connection.

### **4 Paper-based Teaching**

Paper-based teaching is where the school delivers printed materials to the student's home. This model caters for those who don't have access to a suitable device or internet connection, but it requires a high level of self-regulation and parental support.

The Ministerial Briefing Paper also stated that 'many vulnerable children will have neither the family resources nor environment to use the provided resources usefully for learning.' (ACER, 22 April 2020, p.14). However, my research shows that some positive outcomes emerged from remote learning during COVID-19.

Since COVID-19, some schools have reported a significant improvement in parent engagement as parents became 'crucial partners' in their child's education.



During the last few weeks, a genuine learning community has evolved as teachers endeavoured to support parents in assisting with their child's learning.

I've seen a significant paradigm shift regarding how teachers teach and how they now view parents as partners in educating children.

Dr Michael Stewart

Principal at Our Lady of the Rosary School, Sunshine Coast

While children were learning from home, teachers needed to find new ways of connecting with students and families while also taking into consideration the circumstances and resources of the families in their community.

As teachers proactively sought to engage with parents about their child's learning, open lines of communication were established and parents became more engaged. Some teachers also reported that they were communicating more openly and with more transparency than ever before.

# What's next?

Research by the Centre of Family Engagement shows that teacher outreach affects if and how parents engage with their child's learning.

During COVID-19, we witnessed first-hand how some of these home-school partnerships lead to improved student outcomes and have positive benefits for schools and teachers as well.

Moving forward, we need to continue to proactively engage parents in the learning process - both early and often. By doing so, we can improve our parent-teacher relationships and more importantly, improve our children's learning, development and overall wellbeing.

Subsequently, this also brings significant benefits to teachers and schools through improved family and community satisfaction and improved student outcomes.

For teachers, the below steps will show you how to incorporate the six key components of parent engagement into your lesson planning.

For parents, the below strategies outlines the importance of doing what you did, sometimes instinctively, when you were asked to oversee your child's learning during the lockdown.



# Parent Engagement Strategies

## that fit into lesson planning

The six key components of parent engagement are outline for teachers in the grey sections, and for parents in the blue sections.

### Number One

#### Social-Emotional Wellbeing Authoritative Parenting

Supporting social-emotional and physical wellbeing is a key area to parent engagement according to Australian research Alliance for children and youth (ARACY) *Parent engagement: A Review linking policy and programs* (April 2016).

While learning at home during COVID-19, parents were asked to tune in to their child's wellbeing. Schools sent home resources and guidance to support parents as they strived to monitor their child's stress levels and online safety, and establish routines.

But why should this fantastic initiative be confined to the current learning situation? I'd like to see teachers and parents continue this exchange of information as students make it back to school.

By continuing to share this information on a regular basis with parents, they can continue to be engaged in the children's social and emotional learning as they have done so well throughout COVID-19.

According to research, this type of parenting, known as authoritative parenting, is one of the six most important things that a parent can do at home for the child.



## Number Two

### Communicate the value of education Develop a love of learning with your child

The second of the six key components of parent engagement in their child's learning in the home was highlighted by schools during learning at home during COVID-19.

Schools asked parents to monitor their child's work habits and to help the child develop a routine that suited the family circumstances and the child's ability to be self-motivated.

Although it depended on the mode of learning adopted by the individual school, for some families that meant breaking the learning into smaller chunks and having physical activity in between, for others, it meant focusing for extended periods of time until the work was completed.

Parents were able to adjust the schedule to suit their child's individual needs while getting the message across to the students that learning was important. In doing so, parents instinctively put emphasis on the value of learning and hence the second key component of parental engagement in the home.

Teachers can continue to get the message across to parents about how important it is to develop in their child a love of learning and the importance of learning to their life success.

Teachers can share information with parents about the behaviours of successful learners and how these can be developed in each child.



## Number Three

Personalise learning

Pass on high aspirations but realistic expectations

The third key component of effective parent engagement in the children's learning is holding and passing on to the child high aspirations based on realistic expectations.

According to the ARACY paper, Parent engagement– A review linking policy and programs (2016), this strategy has proven to be the most influential aspect of parent engagement.

"Parent's expectations shape children's own beliefs about their potential, sense of academic competence, the value they place on learning, and aspirations to complete school and continue into further education." ARACY (2016, p. 12) Parent engagements– A review linking policy and programs.



I think remote learning has highlighted that parents have a greater understanding of the abilities and strengths of their children. If this information is sort by teachers and schools on a regular basis like it was during COVID-19, all students will benefit.

During this time, teachers had to rely heavily on feedback from parents and students as to how they were coping with tasks. If we could harness these two-way conversations using newfound skills and technology so that this could occur regularly, this would result in the personalisation of learning to the individual needs of each student.

Teachers have enlisted the help of parents during this first part of 2020, so let's continue this highly effective practice as we move back into the classroom.

## Number Four

### Homework

#### Lead learning in the home

The fourth component of effective parent engagement is traditionally known as homework, but COVID-19 has taught us that parents play a much larger role in their child's learning then may have been previously recognised by the school.

Children are only in front of the teacher for a short time in 24 hours. A lot of learning takes place in the home by parents, grandparents, siblings and peers.

We've recently seen that parents can be very creative and adaptive in using everyday household tasks, chores and equipment to teach the content required. Many teachers also became very creative and used multiple digital technologies to demonstrate the lesson - for both the students and the parents.

Homework could become a short video demonstrating a particular higher-order thinking skill for older children or a literacy skill for younger children, which the parent and child watch together and have a short number of questions to discuss.



According to Clinton, Hattie, and Dixon (2007) and Hattie (2009), sharing the language of learning between home and school allows parents to have greater in-depth conversations with their children and hence greater in-depth learning.

"Family conversations can have a strong influence on children's cognitive skills, the value they place on learning and enjoyment of learning. This includes conversations around the school and learning directly, but also family discussions about news, political and social issues, books, TV and movies, and family storytelling." ARACY (2016, p. 12) *Parent engagements- A review linking policy and programs*.

## Number Five

Get parents involved early

### Take an active stance

According to Goodall (2013), another key component of parent engagement is to start early when the child is young and remain engaged right through to high school. High school can actually be one of the more important times that parents really do need to connect with their child's learning, especially their social and emotional wellbeing.

The problem is that this time of adolescence is spent balancing the need for independence and the need for family support. It is also time when the curriculum is probably not something that parents can be of assistance with - take chemistry, for example.

Again, teachers can play a great role in sharing the language of higher-order thinking with parents so that they can discuss with the child what the task is asking them to do. Parents can scaffold the task for the child because of their unique understanding of the child's strengths and weaknesses.

Teachers can do so much as they have done during this unprecedented time of the coronavirus to engage the parent in their children's age-appropriate learning activity.

## Number Six

Give effective feedback

### Build a home-school relationship

The home learning environment was crucial during the lockdown and remains critical to a child's education as we return to the classrooms. Dialogue between parents and school is crucial to the child's success. I am sure you have found that schooling during this time was relationship-based and required quality two-way communication and meaningful dialogue between home and school.

Schools that successfully engaged parents in learning during this time tended to communicate with them openly, clearly and frequently and offered a wide range of reciprocal communication opportunities for parents and school staff.

“What would have taken the next five years to achieve in terms of digital pedagogy using digital learning management systems has been compressed into four weeks.

It just goes to show that if the purpose and urgency are there, people will rise to the occasion.

Regional Director of schools during COVID-19

These six strategies form my conceptual model of effective parental engagement and take on a different shape in different schools. It's based on the work of Janet Goodall (2013), a parent engagement expert in the UK, and the continued work of ARACY in Australia.

Let's take the learnings we've gained during this time and explore the newfound value of parental engagement in their children's education.

Let's be adventurous and see it not as an add-on, but rather a value-add, and align parental engagement in the children's learning to a new school strategic direction and which can only enhance the framework for teaching and learning and the outcomes for students.

## Want more?

For more detail on parent engagement strategies head to [cathyquinn.com](http://cathyquinn.com).

Cathy has programs with the latest research, resources and information on effective parent engagement.

Each of her programs are specifically tailored for parents, teachers or school leadership.

**SIX EFFECTIVE SIMPLE PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES**

- Strategy 1: Authoritative Parenting
- Strategy 2: Know the value of education
- Strategy 3: Set boundaries and expectations
- Strategy 4: Family led learning in the home
- Strategy 5: Take an active interest
- Strategy 6: Family school communication

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(Based on Goodall, 2013; Fox & Olson, 2014)

## About Cathy...

Cathy Quinn specialises in professional development for Principals, Teachers and Parents in the area of parental engagement in their child's learning.



A dedicated teacher with a decade of experience as a school principal, Cathy moved out of the principal role and devoted her time to bringing up her three children through their critical teenage years.

During this time, Cathy became aware of developments regarding "Parental Engagement in Schools" and began studying and researching the latest academic findings.

Cathy Quinn has devoted the past ten years to refining strategies for parental engagement and developing a comprehensive program with particular emphasis on meeting the Australian Professional Standard for Principals and Teachers.

Now a full-time educational consultant and completing a PhD in this area, Cathy's credentials include a DIP Teach, BEd, BA and a Masters of Educational Administration.

Please feel free to email [cathy@cathyquinn.com](mailto:cathy@cathyquinn.com) if you would like a free bookmark as a reference for teachers and parents or visit my websites for free posters and fridge reminders of each of the six strategies for parents.

# References

Australian Research Alliance for children and youth (ARACY). (2016). Parent engagement: A Review linking policy and programs, available at <https://www.aracy.org.au/>

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Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible Learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. New York: Routledge.