



2022-23

Annual Report.



QUEENSLAND INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS PARENTS NETWORK LTD
ABN 34 602 835 512

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2023

2022-23

Annual Report.

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Queensland Independent Schools Parents Network

The Queensland Independent Schools Parents Network (QIS Parents Network) is wholly owned by Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) and is governed by a Board of Directors.

The QIS Parents Network Executive Officer is supported by a Consultative Committee comprised of parents from small and large independent schools across Queensland.

The QIS Parents Network acknowledges and thanks the Queensland Government for its funding support and Independent Schools Queensland - the peak body representing the state's 230 independent schools – for its in-kind and Board secretariat support.

Annual general meeting

The 2023 Annual General Meeting will be held on 22 November in Brisbane.

Representing the families of more than 141,000 students from Prep to Year 12 enrolled in Queensland's 230 independent schools.



Discover

Who we are.

The Queensland Independent Schools Parents Network (QIS Parents Network) is the recognised representative body – and a strong voice – for the needs and interests of parents who choose an independent education for their children. We are consulted by governments, committees and other peak education groups on policy matters that affect families.

The QIS Parents Network is also a passionate advocate for positive and respectful learning partnerships between schools, parents and children (known as 'parent engagement'). Our website is a rich well of research and quality resources to help teachers and schools power up their parent engagement.

Building our reach in 2022-23.

In addition to continuing to share evidence-informed resources on parent engagement, education news and student wellbeing, QIS Parents Network has joined forces with Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) to elevate and enhance parent and community engagement in independent schools through regular events and projects.

Our key project across 2022 and 2023 has been **Engaging Parents in Curriculum (EPIC)**, a research project led by internationally recognised parent engagement experts Dr Linda Willis and Professor Beryl Exley of Griffith University. Three independent schools had their parent engagement practices analysed and nurtured by the research team throughout 2022. In 2023, EPIC has scaled up to support eight ISQ member schools to enhance their engagement with families. The evidence-based findings about best practice parent engagement from EPIC are made available to all ISQ-member school communities through webinars and resources (see pages 12 to 15 for more detail on EPIC).



IMAGES: (left) Board Chair Dr Lynne Doneley; (above) QIS Parents Network board members (L-R) Deni Fowler, Board Chair Dr Lynne Doneley, Mark Newham, Tammie Irons, Christopher Mountford



Report

Executive Officer.

'Parent voice' is increasingly being invited into Queensland independent schools' strategic planning.

Report

Board Chair.

I'm proud to endorse this report, which documents our past 12 months of advocacy on behalf of Queensland parents choosing an independent education for their children.

As independent school parents (and educators) know very well, independent schools in Queensland are as diverse as the communities they serve - and cater for an increasingly broad range of family budgets, philosophies and beliefs.

Our sector includes large faith-based and non-denominational boarding and day schools through to schools catering for specific family need including language disorders, autism diagnoses and trade training, to name just a few. We also have majority indigenous schools, distance education providers and schools delivering the Australian Curriculum through a specific philosophical or pedagogical lens. We have a growing number of special assistance schools helping families with complex psychological issues, including the very current dilemma of school refusal or 'school can't'.

That wide spectrum of family need means that QIS Parents Network's advocacy needs to be sincere and representative. We are fortunate to have a wonderfully diverse Consultative Committee, made up of parents from a broad range of independent schools supporting us in this work. I thank each of our Consultative Committee members for the thoughtfulness and dedication they bring to their role.

I would also like to pay tribute to my fellow QIS Parents Network board members for their strategic support of our work, and thank outgoing Board Chair Shari Armistead, who left the position in February 2023, for her contribution as QIS Parents Network Chair since 2018.

I extend the Board's thanks to Executive Officer Amanda Watt who has advanced the interests and concerns of parents of independent schools with outstanding professionalism and vision. Her networking and collegial relationships have been pivotal in advancing our strategic intents.

The QIS Parents Network team has much to achieve in terms of our advocacy and leadership in parent engagement for the betterment of families, schools and students everywhere. I look forward to the path ahead.

Lynne Doneley
BOARD CHAIR
QUEENSLAND INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS PARENTS NETWORK

More and more educators are also viewing their students' parents - quite rightly - as partners in their child's education and looking for opportunities to tap into each family's rich insights, knowledge and support.

What a joy it has been to witness, encourage, and celebrate the many innovative parent engagement initiatives underway at a range of independent schools over the 2022-23 year.

We are also delighted to be helping guide independent schools in this worthwhile work.

While schools and teachers have known from decades of research that engaging parents in children's learning is crucial, the overarching issue has long been how schools and teachers actually go about achieving effective parent engagement and what strategies are most effective when engaging busy parents.

Our longitudinal research project for the independent sector - Engaging Parents in Curriculum (known as EPIC for short) - which we have been funding since 2021 in partnership with Independent Schools Queensland and Griffith University's Dr Linda Willis and Professor Beryl Exley has been providing answers to those questions.

EPIC is advancing decades of research cementing the 'why' of engaging parents - and converting it to the 'how' for busy educators.

One of the most important findings is engaging parents in children's learning not only leads to positive learning and wellbeing outcomes for children - there can be equally pleasing wellbeing outcomes for the teachers who embrace the practice.

The findings also show that effective parent engagement doesn't have to be difficult or laborious.

As noted in the EPIC 2022 final report, often only small tweaks by teachers were quickly rewarded with noticeably enhanced: student learning and engagement, teaching effectiveness and teacher satisfaction, as well as collective wellbeing.

"The findings challenge the perceived barrier to parent engagement that most parents lose interest in their child's formal education as they get older," Dr Willis and Professor Exley wrote in the EPIC 2022 report, titled *Pedagogies, practices and processes for engaging parents and communities in children's learning and wellbeing*.

"On the contrary, this research showed that parents of children of all ages were often waiting in the wings, they just needed to be invited into their child's learning in a way that worked for them."

We thank Independent Schools Queensland and Dr Willis and Professor Exley for partnering with us on this important work, which is leading to tangible change for the teaching profession, students and families.

We also acknowledge and thank the Queensland Government for their ongoing funding support.

Amanda Watt
EXECUTIVE OFFICER
QUEENSLAND INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS
PARENTS NETWORK

IMAGE: QIS Parents Network Executive Officer Amanda Watt



Targeted Advocacy.

QIS Parents Network continues to represent the views of independent school families on a range of taskforces, committees and reviews.

During the 2022-23 year, we had a seat at the table at a range of information and advocacy opportunities, including:

- The Non-State Schools Accreditation Framework review
- Senate Committee inquiry into The Rising Trend of School Refusal and Other Matters
- Education Ministers meeting stakeholder de-brief sessions
- Parent body stakeholder meetings with Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority
- Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority's Artificial Intelligence Working Group
- Regular stakeholder meetings with the Queensland College of Teachers' Director and Board Chair
- Independent Schools Queensland's Affiliated Reference Group, featuring the heads of independent school systems
- World Teachers' Day stakeholder committee
- Healthy Food in Queensland Schools Alliance (coordinated by the Queensland Association of School Tuckshops)
- Outside Schools Hours Care ministerial working group
- Isolated Children's Parents' Association Queensland State Conference.

IMAGE: (L-R) QIS Parents Network Executive Officer Amanda Watt, ICPSA Queensland's Anneli Day and Kate Bradshaw, ISQ Chief Executive Officer Christopher Mountford

“ Working collaboratively for the benefit of all children. ”

School Refusal Senate Inquiry appearance

School refusal or 'school can't' is a live issue in the Queensland independent school sector and an area of growing concern for parents and educators. After speaking to a number of principals and families across the independent sector about their experiences, in December 2022 QIS Parents Network made a written submission to the Senate's Education and Employment Committee inquiry into the Rising Trend of School Refusal and Other Matters. On the back of that submission, QIS Parents Network was called to appear as a witness at the Brisbane sittings of the inquiry on 20 April 2023.

Executive Officer Amanda Watt appeared before the Senators to speak of the economic and psychological impact on parents and carers dealing with school refusal, and invited Arethusa College Executive Principal Lisa Coles to accompany her. Ms Coles is an experienced educator and was able to share how she supports students and families dealing with school refusal at her well-regarded Special Assistance School.

QIS Parents Network's written submission also included a summary of the evidence-based findings from our parent engagement research project Engaging Parents in Curriculum (EPIC), as part of our evidence that more focus on parent engagement in initial teacher education training and ongoing teacher professional development was worthy of the Committee's consideration.

IMAGE: QIS Parents Network Executive Officer Amanda Watt, Arethusa College Executive Principal Lisa Coles at the Senate Committee Inquiry

Review of the Non-State Schools Accreditation Framework

QIS Parents Network valued the opportunity to contribute to the Review of the Queensland Non-State Schools Accreditation Framework in May, 2023.

In addition to providing a written submission, QIS Parents Network was asked to facilitate a panel of independent school parents for a direct audience with the Review team, led by independent reviewer Cheryl Vardon. The 10 parents articulately and passionately explained why they chose an independent education for their child and why they value their school being able to deliver the Australian Curriculum through its unique philosophical/pedagogical lens. They also spoke of concerns about school resources being taken away from teaching to answer unnecessarily onerous reviews.

The parent panel represented a diverse range of independent schools: Hillcrest Christian College, Fairholme College, St Andrews Lutheran College, Samford Valley Steiner School, Islamic College of Brisbane, Sinai College, Pacific Lutheran College, Josiah College, Angelorum College and Charlotte Mason College.





IMAGES: (1) Amanda Watt, Radiant Life College Principal Nathanael Edwards, ISQ's Education Services Advisor Natalie Horrobin at the Griffith University Creating Futures Summit, 13 June 2023; (2) Amanda Watt leads a panel discussion on parent engagement at ISQ's Research in Schools Showcase with Sue Kloeden, Shannon Brischke and Natalie Horrobin; (3) Meeting with P&Cs Queensland's Karl Brien (left) and CEO Scott Wiseman (right); (4) Griffith University's Dr Linda Willis and Amanda Watt presenting EPIC's findings and resources at the Australian Council of State School Organisations' national conference in Canberra, November 2022; (5) With TeachX finalists Jacqueline Child (St Aiden's Anglican Girls' School) and Shantelle Janek (Somerville House) at the 2022 Awards ceremony; (6) Amanda Watt talks about evidence-based parent engagement to school leaders at ISQ's Distance Education forum, October 2022; (7) ISQ Board Members Chris Mountford, Glenn Denniston, Shari Armistead and Mark Newham and Executive Officer Amanda Watt with Education Minister Grace Grace MP at the ISQ Parliamentary Reception, November 2022; (8) The Engaging Parents in Curriculum first Masterclass underway, March 2023; (9) Amanda with newly elected ICPA Qld President Wendy Henning at the ICPA Qld State Conference, June 2023; (10) A parent engagement professional learning session for independent school teachers, 2022; (11) Amanda with ICPA Qld members and Tambo delegates Pip Fearnon and Kimberley Rains at the ICPA Qld 2023 State Conference, June 2023



Community Representation.

QIS Parents Network is pleased to represent independent school families at a number of stakeholder events every year.

In 2022-23 those attendances have included:

- Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority's QCE Achievement Awards
- ISQ State Forum 2023, speaking as part of the Changes and Challenges panel
- ICPA Qld State Conference
- P&Cs Qld State Conference
- Queensland College of Teachers TeachX award ceremony
- Independent School's Queensland Research in Schools Showcase, leading a panel discussion on parent engagement
- Independent Schools Queensland's Parliamentary Reception.

IMAGES: Independent Schools Queensland 2023 State Forum June 2023 Changes and Challenges panel (L-R) Facilitator Loretta Ryan, QIS Parents Network Executive Officer Amanda Watt, Principal Clayfield College Dr Andrew Cousins, Deputy Principal The Lakes College Mathew Stein, EdStart CEO Jack Stevens; Consultative Committee Teams meeting



Consultative Committee

To ensure our advocacy efforts are representative, QIS Parents Network is supported by a Consultative Committee of parents from a range of independent schools.

The Committee has provided invaluable input on a number of topical issues including mobile phones in schools, artificial intelligence, vaping and school refusal.

Thank you to each Committee member for the thoughtfulness and dedication they bring to their volunteer role.



Parent Stakeholder Collaboration.

The four peak parent bodies in Queensland have long enjoyed a warm and collaborative relationship and have a shared vision to improve outcomes for all children, regardless of the school they attend.

In 2023, the Joint Parent Council Queensland resumed regular meetings once a term to discuss matters of common interest.

The Joint Parent Council Queensland is made up of representatives from: QIS Parents Network, Catholic School Parents Queensland, P&Cs Queensland and Isolated Children's Parents' Association Qld Inc (ICPA Qld).

Spreading the good news

In April 2023, QIS Parents Network was a guest at two cross-sector parent engagement events hosted by Catholic School Parents Queensland, featuring guest speaker Professor Janet Goodall, a parent engagement expert from the University of Swansea.

The EPIC research team, represented by Griffith University's Dr Linda Willis, Professor Beryl Exley and Fairholme College's Dr Linda Evans were also invited to give a presentation on our parent engagement work with Queensland independent schools to a room of education stakeholders.



IMAGES: (clockwise from top) Members of the EPIC research team with Professor Janet Goodall (third from right) and Catholic School Parents Queensland Executive Director Carmel Nash (centre); Representatives from QIS Parents Network, ICPA Qld and Catholic School Parents Queensland at the ICPA Qld State Conference in Julia Creek, June 2023; The Joint Parents Council Qld meeting, May 2023.



“ Sharing our resources with families and educators everywhere. ”

Relevant

Information Sharing.

QIS Parents Network keeps its audience of families, educators and stakeholders updated with original, informative content which is posted on our website and shared via social media and monthly e-newsletters. Stories focus on education news and student wellbeing topics.

Public-facing exposure of QIS Parents Network and our parent engagement research project EPIC has also included:

- Presenting EPIC’s findings and resources at the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACCSO) national conference in Canberra, November 2022
- An article in *P&Cs Qld Parent Talk* magazine, Issue 2, 2023
- A story in *The Australian* on 14 June, 2023
- Stories about EPIC in the *Australian Literacy Educators’ Association* magazine

- A webinar on parent engagement hosted by ACCSO on 28 March 2023
- A story on Steiner Education Australia website about EPIC
- Presenting to parents and staff at Ormiston College’s Strategic Planning Summit on *What Parents Want and Why Parents Matter* in May 2023.



IMAGES: Top (L-R) Ormiston College parents and staff following the Strategic Planning Summit breakout session led by QIS Parents Network and ISQ; QIS Parents Network’s Facebook page

IMAGES: (L-R) Ormiston College’s Strategic Planning Summit flyer, The Australian article on 14 June, 2023, EPIC presentation hosted by ACCSO, Story on EPIC featured in P&Cs Qld Parent Talk magazine, Issue 2, 2023



Effective Parent Engagement.

QIS Parents Network has long championed the benefits of families and educators working in partnership.

The 'how to' of engaging parents in their child's learning and wellbeing – a concept known as parent engagement – is a step closer thanks to world-leading findings from our research project with independent schools.

Engaging Parents in Curriculum (EPIC) – an established collaboration between Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ), Griffith University and QIS Parents Network – is innovative research which sees parent engagement experts Dr Linda Willis and Professor Beryl Exley working alongside independent school teachers and leaders as they hone their parent engagement practices.

EPIC's latest findings were contained in a report released in November 2022 titled *Pedagogies, practices, and processes for engaging parents and communities in children's learning and wellbeing*.

The findings have also been distilled into a suite of professional development videos and snapshot documents which are available to all ISQ member schools to support them to effectively engage parents.

EPIC lead researcher Dr Linda Willis of Griffith University, says the project's findings offer schools and families new ways of thinking and new practices.

The findings advance decades of research cementing the 'why' of engaging parents in their child's learning – and converting it to the 'how'.

"Teachers have always known that parents have a rich well of knowledge and our EPIC findings not only show this but also illustrate how educators from early, middle and senior years can tap into that knowledge," Dr Willis says.

"This research gives teachers something we know they are seeking – 'how to' guidance for effectively engaging parents in their child's learning and wellbeing.

"We know unequivocally after two years of embedding ourselves in Queensland independent schools for this research – and in State and Catholic sectors since 2008 – that engaging parents not only works, it can be reasonably easy and also enriching for teachers' practice and wellbeing.

"When engaging parents happens well it means teachers and parents are working as partners for their child's education."



IMAGES: EPIC Masterclass participants at the first in-person event held at the ISQ's Professional Learning Centre

EPIC 2023

EPIC is now in its third year and has scaled up from three schools in 2022 to eight schools in 2023, with 50+ participants, including parent representatives from every school team.

EPIC 2023's goal is to help teams of people at each school (school leaders, year level leaders, teachers and parents) work together to build sustainable practices of parent engagement while they work on a self-identified parent engagement 'project' or 'goal'.

EPIC 2023 got off to a strong start on 10 March with the first in-person Masterclass at ISQ's Professional Learning Centre. Schools are continuing to be supported with their parent engagement projects via regular Teams check-in sessions.

The power of parent engagement

The suite of videos QIS Parents Network and ISQ produced in 2022 featuring educators speaking about the shifts in their pedagogy as a result of their parent engagement strategies – and the big wins for teachers and families – have proven to be very useful in 2023 to promote QIS Parents Network, EPIC and parent engagement to a range of education stakeholders.

Plans are underway to expand this video series in 2023, showcasing our newest participants.





“Chris has been very clever in his communication and from a parent’s perspective, that’s really helped build a connection between myself as the parent and Chris as a teacher. Melissa Croker”

SAMFORD VALLEY STEINER SCHOOL

One school’s journey.

Samford Valley Steiner School teachers Chris Jack and Melissa Croker have been on a unique journey due to their participation in the Engaging Parents in Curriculum (EPIC) research project.

As well as being Mr Jack’s teaching colleague, Mrs Croker is a parent of a child in Mr Jack’s Class 3 and the pair attended the same EPIC professional development sessions throughout 2022.

It gifted Mrs Croker the unique perspective of not only changing her own pedagogy to better engage parents in her class, but also allowed her to watch Mr Jack fold shared learnings into his planning and communication.

“It’s been really nice as a parent to be included on the journey that is taking place with EPIC and seeing how the little changes Chris has made in the program have impacted parents and also children,” Mrs Croker said.

“Chris has been very clever in his communication and from a parent’s perspective, that’s really helped build a connection between myself as the parent and Chris as a teacher.

“He hasn’t just told us what the children are doing in the classroom; he’s giving us a holistic picture of ‘this is how it looks in the classroom and this is why they’re doing this’ in terms of the philosophy.

“I feel that’s helped (my child) to build their confidence (in conversation with us), not just at the



dinner table but also in the car and with his brother and sister as well.

“(My child) is more engaged and his skill set to communicate what is happening in his life has been given a positive twist. This year I’ve seen him really grow as a child.”

For Mr Jack, the biggest change to his practice as a result of EPIC has been his consciousness around parent communication.

“The parent and teacher work together for the benefit of the children,” Mr Jack said.

“I think one of the important things as a teacher is to reflect on your practice and that applies equally to parent engagement. Try something - if it works, celebrate. If it doesn’t work, go back to the drawing board and try something different.

“My advice to other teachers regarding parent engagement is to communicate regularly with parents, get to know them as best you can and engage them in the learning of their children.”

Results equally effective in high school

In Samford Valley Steiner School’s high school, EPIC teacher participant Andy Currey - a teacher of Class 7 to 12 – is also on a new path of parent engagement thanks to the knowledge gained from EPIC in 2022.

“What EPIC gave to me was some cold, hard data and advice on how to improve the communications and appreciate the actual tangible benefits of interactivity with parents,” Mr Currey said.

“It didn’t require much more work, it’s just been changing the way I worked to bring parents in.”

His parent engagement strategies have had a marked improvement on some students. Intellectually it also just makes sense to Mr Currey.

“If students can hold a conversation about a topic knowledgeably and the more they practise those conversations, the more likely they are to be able to understand and engage from different angles. If they practise those conversations at home they’re getting twice as much exposure than just in a 90-minute lesson.”

IMAGES: Samford Valley Steiner School teachers Chris Jack and Melissa Croker participating in the EPIC research project; ISQ’s Web and Multimedia Officer Jeff Lience on location filming the EPIC suite of videos; EPIC Snapshots (page 14)

Engaging Parents What We Know

EPIC Research Snapshots

Decades of research have consistently shown the value and importance of engaging parents* in student learning and wellbeing.

- Recognised benefits for students**
 - Enhanced wellbeing and higher academic outcomes
 - Increased confidence, motivation and engagement in learning
 - More positive attitudes about school and improved behaviour
 - Improved school attendance, continued enrolment, and higher rates of graduation
 - Increased likelihood of participation in higher education
- Momentum for parent engagement continues to grow**
 - Governments – nationally and internationally – recognise the imperative of engaging parents.
 - Parent engagement is a focus in three Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.
- Engagement and involvement are different**
 - Parents keeping time at the sports carnival or fundraising for the fete are worthwhile school involvement activities as they may prove the first step toward engagement, but engaging parents is more effective.
 - Parent engagement is an active process designed to bring parents and their child’s learning and wellbeing closer together.
- Positive, respectful relationships are crucial**
 - Effective parent engagement is possible when schools and families work in partnership and respect each other’s unique contributions.
 - A good relationship between school and home also means that when challenging situations arise – around a child’s learning or wellbeing – conversations, and the outcomes for all involved, are more likely to be productive.
- Parents appreciate personal, two-way approaches**
 - Parent engagement is enhanced when schools and teachers use easy, direct, personal forms of contact and communication which offer parents ways of staying connected.
 - Some approaches may not genuinely engage parents in their child’s learning so their effectiveness should be regularly reviewed and changed or adjusted accordingly.
- Keep it simple**
 - Engaging parents in their child’s learning and wellbeing does not need to be overwhelming. With every opportunity, ask:
 - How can I bring parents closer to what their child is learning in the classroom/school?
 - How might parents contribute in easy, effective ways?

These initial snapshots of ideas for schools come from the research project, *Engaging parents in student learning and wellbeing: Using inquiry curriculum and online technologies during COVID-19* (EPIC, 2021) conducted by Linda-Dianne Willis, Beryl Esley, and Narelle Daffurn from Griffith University in collaboration with ISQ and QIS Parents Network.

*We describe parents generally to include carers and families and broadly to include communities with the responsibility and care for a student’s learning and wellbeing.

REFERENCE
Willis, L.-D., Esley, B. (2020). *Engaging parents in their child’s learning and wellbeing – Change, continuity and COVID-19*. Our Schools – Our Future Issues Paper. Published by Independent Schools Queensland. Retrieved from <https://www.isq.qld.edu.au/publications-resources/posts/engaging-parents-in-their-child-s-learning-and-wellbeing/>

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Engaging Parents Ideas for Teachers

EPIC Research Snapshots

Building Knowledge
What is parent* engagement?
Engaging parents is an active process designed to bring parents and their child’s learning and wellbeing closer together.
What can I do to encourage parent engagement?
1. Articulate clearly and early to parents what engaging in their child’s learning and wellbeing means. (see *Engaging Parents: What We Know* snapshot for more information)
2. Share from research the benefits of parent engagement for children’s school and life success. (see *Engaging Parents: What We Know* snapshot for more information)
3. Establish regular times and spaces to dialogue cooperatively with colleagues about engaging parents in the curriculum
4. Network with parents to find out more about them, what they know and can do, and use this knowledge as inspiration for inquiry projects
5. Lead by example, sharing your personal stories so parents come to appreciate the power of personal connections in their child’s learning
6. Build knowledge about curriculum inquiry projects and their associated pedagogies so there is a genuine opportunity for student agency and parent engagement.

Inquiring with Parents
What does that mean?
Recognise the power and value of inquiry curriculum approaches for not only engaging students in their learning, but also engaging parents in their child’s learning.
How do I do that?
1. Understand the potential of each phase of an inquiry process (planning, teaching, reflecting) for new and different opportunities to engage parents, which may require new pedagogies and practices

Connecting and Communicating
Is there an ideal way to connect with parents?
Consider ways to engage parents that are short in duration, sharp in focus, offered regularly, always optional, and personal to them and their child’s learning.
What are some suggestions?
1. Communicate with parents and families in ways they use and value, e.g., a vlog created by students for parents
2. Let parents know what their child is learning at the beginning of each week and close the loop by letting them know at the end of the week about their child’s learning successes and next steps
3. Create virtual spaces for engaging parents in classroom topics and phases of inquiry curriculum at times that suit them
4. Harness the power of student agency for engaging parents, e.g., have students create a video about their learning, and email it to parents
5. Respond quickly and directly to requests from parents for clarity and/or explanation about aspects of their child’s learning and wellbeing.

These initial snapshots of ideas for schools come from the research project, *Engaging parents in student learning and wellbeing: Using inquiry curriculum and online technologies during COVID-19* (EPIC, 2021) conducted by Linda-Dianne Willis, Beryl Esley, and Narelle Daffurn from Griffith University in collaboration with ISQ and QIS Parents Network.

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Engaging Parents Ideas for School Leaders

EPIC Research Snapshots

Building Knowledge
Be clear about what parent* engagement means
Engaging parents is an active process designed to bring parents and their child’s learning and wellbeing closer together.
How can I embed knowledge of parent engagement in my school?
1. Co-develop with your students, parents, teachers and community a philosophical and pedagogical statement for guiding ways to engage all groups
2. Model how that statement works in practice in your school at every opportunity, e.g., on assembly
3. Make the statement friendly for students, parents and teachers so it can be easily understood and applied by everyone in the school community
4. Importantly, recognise the uniqueness of your context and setting, and consider how this uniqueness affects opportunities and possibilities for engaging parents.

Connecting and Communicating
How can I embed knowledge of parent engagement in my school?
1. Make the distinction between engaging parents and involving parents clear in what is said and written at your school
2. Ensure school leaders are not only visible and accessible to parents (e.g., in the playground, at the school gate), but also that parents perceive this access as always available and safe
3. Establish clear, regular lines of communication to parents based on your context and setting, e.g., taking account of cultural and social diversity
4. Ensure communication to parents includes feedback loops to encourage dialogic conversations to parents and from parents
5. Focus on relationship-building with parents, e.g., set up a parent community group to listen to parents’ wants and needs for their children
6. Share the outcomes of these discussions with the school community through newsletters and social media to encourage student and parent ownership of initiatives

Leading the Way
Why is it important that school leaders are proactive and model how to engage parents?
School leaders play a key role in engaging parents as they set the tone and establish a culture of parent engagement at all levels of the school.
How do I start?
1. Create leadership roles with a specific focus on engaging parents
2. Identify parent engagement champions from among parents, teachers and community members to support these leaders
3. Build teachers’ professional learning for engaging parents through opportunities to learn with and alongside parents
4. Identify barriers to engaging parents at your school and develop plans to address or minimise these
5. Capitalise on knowledge and insights of engaging parents from learning at home during the COVID-19

These initial snapshots of ideas for schools come from the research project, *Engaging parents in student learning and wellbeing: Using inquiry curriculum and online technologies during COVID-19* (EPIC, 2021) conducted by Linda-Dianne Willis, Beryl Esley, and Narelle Daffurn from Griffith University in collaboration with ISQ and QIS Parents Network.

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SSOOPP Framework Developing Effective Practices for Engaging Parents

EPIC Research Snapshots

SSOOPP (pronounced SOUP) is a mnemonic teachers can use to develop and filter their practices when engaging parents. It stands for **short, sharp, often, optional, with a purpose, and personalised to parents and their child.**

Some useful questions to develop and interrogate your pedagogical practices when planning for engaging parents.	Examples from research – middle and senior secondary years and early years.	
S SHORT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will the activity take you long to prepare and/or organise? Will the activity be onerous for parents and/or students? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have older students email their parents directly to ask questions relevant to the curriculum such as: <i>How are forces used in your everyday home or work context?</i> Ask younger students and their parents to respond to personal/high-interest questions or find photos together: <i>Where and when was I born? What is your special place?</i>
S SHARP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will the invitation to engage parents value-add to what you are already teaching in the classroom? Have you included specific details about what the topic/activity is and the process involved? Have you included examples to illustrate what you mean? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have older students video one another in pairs talking about their learning (e.g., a book study). Let students email the video to their parents, with the invitation to: <i>Ask me about my video at home.</i> Develop a survey for parents to interview younger students about some aspect of learning (e.g., redesigning classroom spaces).
O OPTIONAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you let parents know why, when, and how you will communicate with them about their child’s learning and wellbeing (e.g., email, newsletter, class website, text message, homework, diary)? Do you communicate with parents at the beginning of each week and also let them know how learning and teaching went at the end of the week? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For all students, let parents know specific topics and areas of focus each phase or week of inquiry. ‘Close the loop’ with students by regularly inviting them to share what they talked about at home. ‘Close the loop’ with parents by letting them know what happened in the classroom when students listened and learnt together. Share with the class what each parent contributes through discussions, or using physical (e.g., library) or online spaces accessible to all students and parents.
O OPTIONALITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are opportunities to participate framed as invitations? Do you use friendly language? Do you remind parents (and students) they don’t need to accept every invitation to engage in their child’s learning? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For all students, invite parents to contribute in different ways (e.g., photos, emails, letters, videos, PowerPoints, stories, songs, poems, objects, games, social media posts, classroom visits, demonstrations, presentations).
P PURPOSE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you make the connections to students’ curriculum learning and wellbeing clear? Do opportunities encourage parents’ curiosity, interest, enjoyment? Will opportunities invite meaningful, relevant, parent-student discussions? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help parents navigate conversations with their child by providing them with conversation starters. For older students, email suggestions to parents after lesson/lesson sequences. For younger students, put suggestions on their student wristbands before they leave for home.
P PERSONALISED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do invitations call on parents’ knowledge of the world, topic, experience, and/or their child? Are opportunities to engage personalised to parents as well as their child? Are there opportunities for intergenerational conversations? Are engagement opportunities inclusive of different families (e.g., single parent, blended families, LGBTQIA+ parents)? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have older students ask their parents to share a story, comment, opinion about a theme in a current book study (e.g., <i>Can you share an anecdote about a first meeting? Why was it memorable? What happened next?</i>) Have younger students talk to parents/grandparents about life in the past (e.g., <i>What has changed/stayed the same? Can we find pictures together of our talk?</i>)

REFERENCE
Willis, L.-D., & Esley, B. (2022). *Pedagogies, practices, and processes for engaging parents and communities in children’s learning and wellbeing*. EPIC 2022 Final Report. Our Schools—Our Future. Report to Independent Schools Queensland and Queensland Independent Schools Parents Network. School of Education and Professional Studies, Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia.

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