

Engaging parents in their children's education: Bringing together research and practice to inform policy and improve children's outcomes

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CONTEXT: THE SMITH FAMILY



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Our vision

A better future for young
Australians in need

Our mission

Create opportunities for young Australians in
need by providing long-term support for their
participation in education

- Non-government organisation/charity, established 1922
- Ecological approach - seek to influence multiple dimensions impacting on children's outcomes - child, family, peers, institutions, community, society
- Support 112,000 children, young people, parents/carers pa
- 34,000 children and young people on a long-term *Learning for Life* educational scholarship, 5,000+ identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

PARENT ENGAGEMENT – WHAT IS IT?

- Parent engagement is simply the attitudes, values and behaviours that positively influence your children's education outcomes www.studentsfirst.gov.au
- Considered broadly, it consists of partnerships between families, schools and communities, raising parental awareness of the benefits of engaging in their children's education, and providing them with the skills to do so.
(ARACY, 2012)
- A shared responsibility of families, schools and communities and a continuous process that takes place from birth to young adulthood and crosses multiple learning settings, including the home and community.
(Harvard Family Research Project, 2014)

PARENT ENGAGEMENT – POLICY

- One of 4 key areas identified by the Australian government's '*Students-first*' approach as 'making a difference'
- Alongside teacher quality, school autonomy & strengthening the curriculum
- Less obvious activity relative to other areas – eg Review of Australian curriculum, Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group, funding for Direct Instruction, Teach for Australia, Independent Public Schools

PARENT ENGAGEMENT - RESEARCH

Students account for ‘about 50% of the variance of achievement’...‘teachers account for about 30% of the variance’, Professor John Hattie

Home:

- Can either nurture and support students' achievements or it can be harmful and destructive
- Positive expectations from the parents can be critical to the success of children

Source DEECD: synthesis of Professor Hattie's research , 2010 / Hattie, 2003

PARENT ENGAGEMENT - RESEARCH

Parental involvement in the form of 'at-home good parenting' has a significant positive effect on children's achievement and adjustment, even after all other factors shaping attainment have been taken out of the equation

(Desforges and Alberto, 2003)

The key to facilitating positive change in a child's academic attainment is the engagement of parents in learning outcomes in the home

(ARACY, 2012)

Parental involvement is more predictive of a child's academic success than family's socio-economic status

(UK Dept of Education & Skills)



PARENT ENGAGEMENT: SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS

- Schools commonly report great difficulties engaging parents and carers of disadvantaged students to support their children's education
- Quarter of primary school early career teachers and close to a third of secondary school early career teachers found their pre-service training not helpful not at all in equipping them to 'work effectively with parents/guardians'

The Productivity Commission, 2012

Is the ‘problem’ that low SES parents have low aspirations for their children and are unwilling to engage?



PARENT ENGAGEMENT & DISADVANTAGED FAMILIES

Parents of students from poorer backgrounds tend to have lower aspirations for their children.

(UK Dept. of Education and Skills, Michigan Dept. of Education)

Other research provides a different view

Poorer children and their families often have high aspirations and many want to go to uni or get professional, managerial and skilled jobs. The real difficulty for many is knowing *how* to fulfil their ambitions. It's not so much about changing aspirations, attitudes and behaviours as providing better information and access to support and advice. (Kintrea et al, 2011)



OUR RESEARCH WITH DISADVANTAGED PARENTS/CARERS



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Children's educational achievement is parents' major hope

I hope my kids do better or at least go as far as what I did.

I always told the children we want all of you to finish college because me and your mum we just only finished Year 8 that's it. And ...our life it's not full it's not rich.

I just want them to get the best education that they can and to get them to the career that they are happy to work in.

At the very least Year 12. You want them to have more options in life and it's too late once you get out of school.

With my son I would like him just to go to Year 12. He doesn't like school much so to get him to Year 12 would be a huge thing.

Naturally I hope that they can enter university.

LACK OF FINANCIAL RESOURCES IMPACT



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There is always the financial burdens and just making sure that they've got everything just like most of the other kids at school. You don't want them to look like they're missing out on anything.

The school ask us to take children to excursion...we don't have enough money to let them go and so we just say sorry.

Every time I get the money it is gone to pay the bills, buy some food, petrol for the car.

FAMILIES MAY BE DEALING WITH A RANGE OF ISSUES



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- Parental ill-health
 - Child with a learning difficulty, autism or ill health
 - Household unemployment
 - Language difficulties
 - Foster children, large families
 - Financial pressures in many areas not just re education
- Lack of formal & informal support networks & access to services
 - Lack of knowledge of Australian educational & employment services/systems ➡ Confusion about career paths
 - Poor parental history with schools and education

MAKING A DIFFERENCE RESEARCH

- Young people connected own wellbeing with that of their families.
- Wanted to feel parents listened to & respected by their schools.
- Families found it easier to have faith in investing in children's education (financially & emotionally) when schools communicated respect for them.
- Respectful engagements with families added to YP's engagement with learning; damaging when interactions perceived as disrespectful.
- Many YP felt their parents had no power as advocates, were not listened to, skills & knowledge weren't validated by school system.
- YP often looking for small acts rather than large initiatives/gestures re school and family partnerships.
- Communicating respect for families & their values seen as key platforms for young people's engagement in learning.

'INVISIBLE' INDIGENOUS PARENTS RESEARCH, NT



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- Dissonance between what parents expect level of engagement should be and what policy community assumes about the importance of engagement
- Parents' visible engagement with school \neq importance they place on education
- Parents who were most visible not necessarily engaging re academic advancement or schooling success but over concerns re bullying, truancy or social trauma
- Least visible parents were not necessarily marginalised from school but believed school was addressing education of their children, educators could be depended on to get the job done, making forthright 'engagement' unnecessary.
- Refocus engagement efforts on helping parents invest in the cognitive and emotional development of their children toward academic achievement.

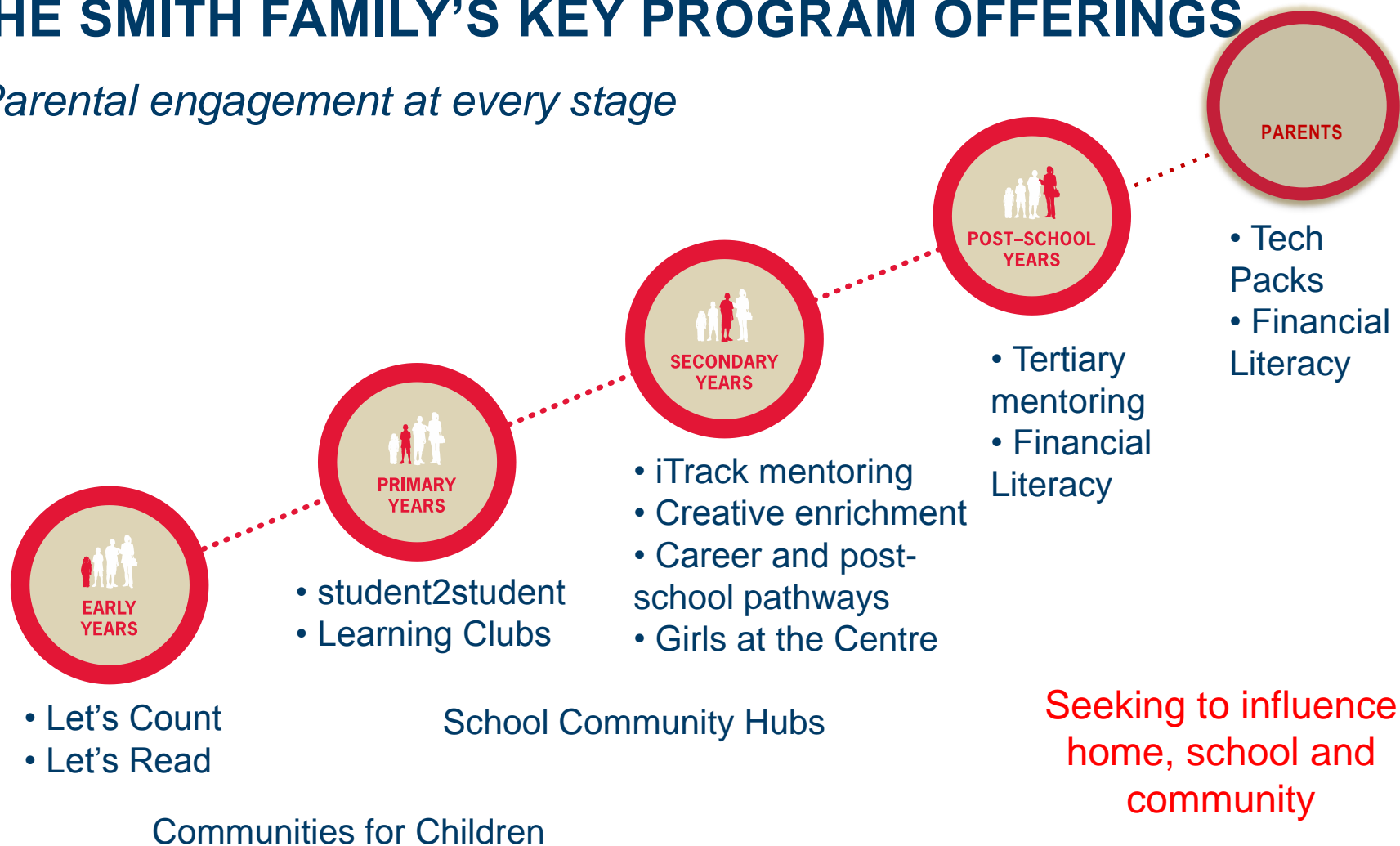
Richard Chenhall et al (2011) *Parent-school engagement: Exploring the concept of 'invisible' Indigenous parents in three north Australian school communities*

Promoting parental engagement



THE SMITH FAMILY'S KEY PROGRAM OFFERINGS

Parental engagement at every stage



Parental engagement>
Community engagement.....>

1. LEARNING FOR LIFE

My family
and The Smith Family
Learning for Life partnership agreement



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Shared
agreement
between
parent & TSF
re education of
child

As a Learning for Life partner we agree to:

- Encourage regular school attendance and talk to *Learning for Life* staff about irregular school attendance.
- Provide student profiles, copies of end-of-year school reports and other documents when requested
- Participate in appropriate LfL programs where possible

As your partner in LfL, The Smith Family will:

- Provide opportunities for your family to participate in LfL programs
- Make scholarship payments for eligible students
- Invite your family to appropriate LfL activities and events.
- Allocate a LfL staff member wherever possible.

2. LET'S COUNT – EARLY NUMERACY



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- Helps educators in early childhood settings to work in partnership with parents to promote positive mathematical experiences for young children aged 3 to 5.
- Fosters opportunities for children to engage with the maths they encounter in their everyday lives.
- *It's been a positive thing for building relationships with parents because they've felt that we're acknowledging them as their child's educator. (Educator)*
- *I think it's fabulous, that's exactly how I think kids should learn, particularly when it can start at home from such a young age. I think sometimes you don't realise as a parent that you're actually doing maths, it's great that programs are trying to educate parents too (Parent)*



3. GIRLS AT THE CENTRE – ALICE SPRINGS, NT



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- Holistic program for girls in the 'middle years' of school
- High proportion of girls of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background
- Girl coaches, Girls Room, weekly after school activities, breakfast with a mentor, Families and Schools Together, experiential mentoring trips
- Evaluation by Assoc Prof Tess Lea & Catherine Driscoll showed:
 - School attendance for girls participating > their school peers
 - Development of life skills & goals facilitating stronger educational outcomes
 - 'Extraordinary achievement' engaging families

Something I'm very impressed by is the degree to which The Smith Family brings families into the school and helps the school make sense to the families and families make sense to the school, so it's a little bit of a broker between families and the school (Senior school staff)





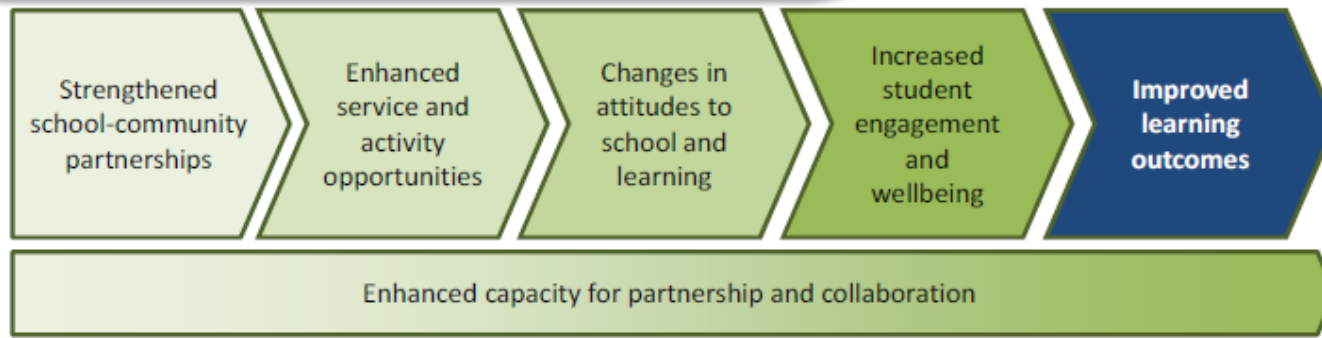
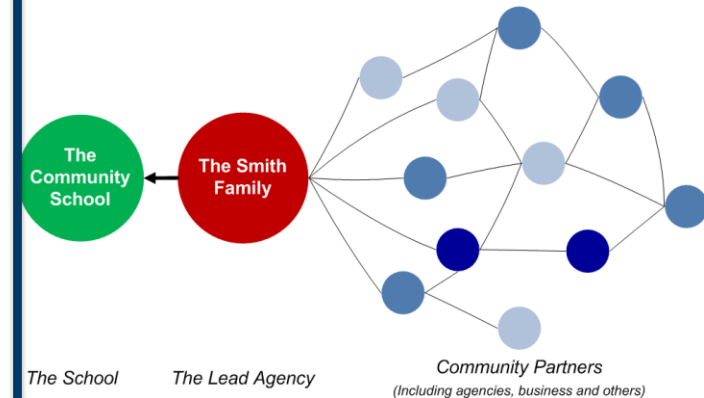
4. TECH PACKS – DIGITAL INCLUSION

- Digital literacy is pre-requisite for C21st educational engagement
- Only 68% of children in most disadvantaged communities accessed internet at home over a yr
- *Tech Packs* provides refurbished computers and internet access
- Parents/carers receive skills training with accredited trainer and technical support.
- 70% of parents reported skills & confidence in using internet increased
- Strengthens home learning environment, supports parents' skill development and ability to engage with key part of their child's education



5. SCHOOL COMMUNITY HUBS

- Schools alone can't improve student outcomes, esp in low SES areas
- Hubs are effective way of harnessing diverse resources & expertise & facilitating cross sectoral collaboration involving education, community, business, govs, philanthropy
- Platform for targeted & coordinated activities & services that  student & family engagement &  student learning
- Strong focus on parental engagement
- NGOs as facilitator bringing resources & networks, parental engagement expertise, social capital focus, facilitation skills



SOME OBSERVATIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS



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- Parental engagement not just about the parent - shared responsibility of families, schools, communities
- Requires level of reciprocity underpinned by respectful relationships
- Multiple contexts – home, school, community
- Looks different at different ages/stages – birth to young adulthood
- Small steps/initiatives can have deep impact
- Embed parental engagement in policy and program approach rather than a stand alone activity

SOME OBSERVATIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS



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- Check and test our assumptions re parents' aspirations and engagement, esp those from disadvantaged backgrounds
- Need for PE to be purposeful & think through desired outcomes ➡ enhance education and wellbeing outcomes of children & young people
- Communicating respect for families & their values is important platform for young people's engagement in learning
- NGOs can help facilitate enhanced parental engagement in a range of ways, within family, school and wider community
- Need to explore further what policy levers exist for State/Territory and Commonwealth jurisdictions to enhance parental engagement, including in context of Independent Public Schools