

PARENT ENGAGEMENT IN LEARNING STRATEGY



A partnership between parents,
educators and children and young people.



Government of South Australia
Department for Education

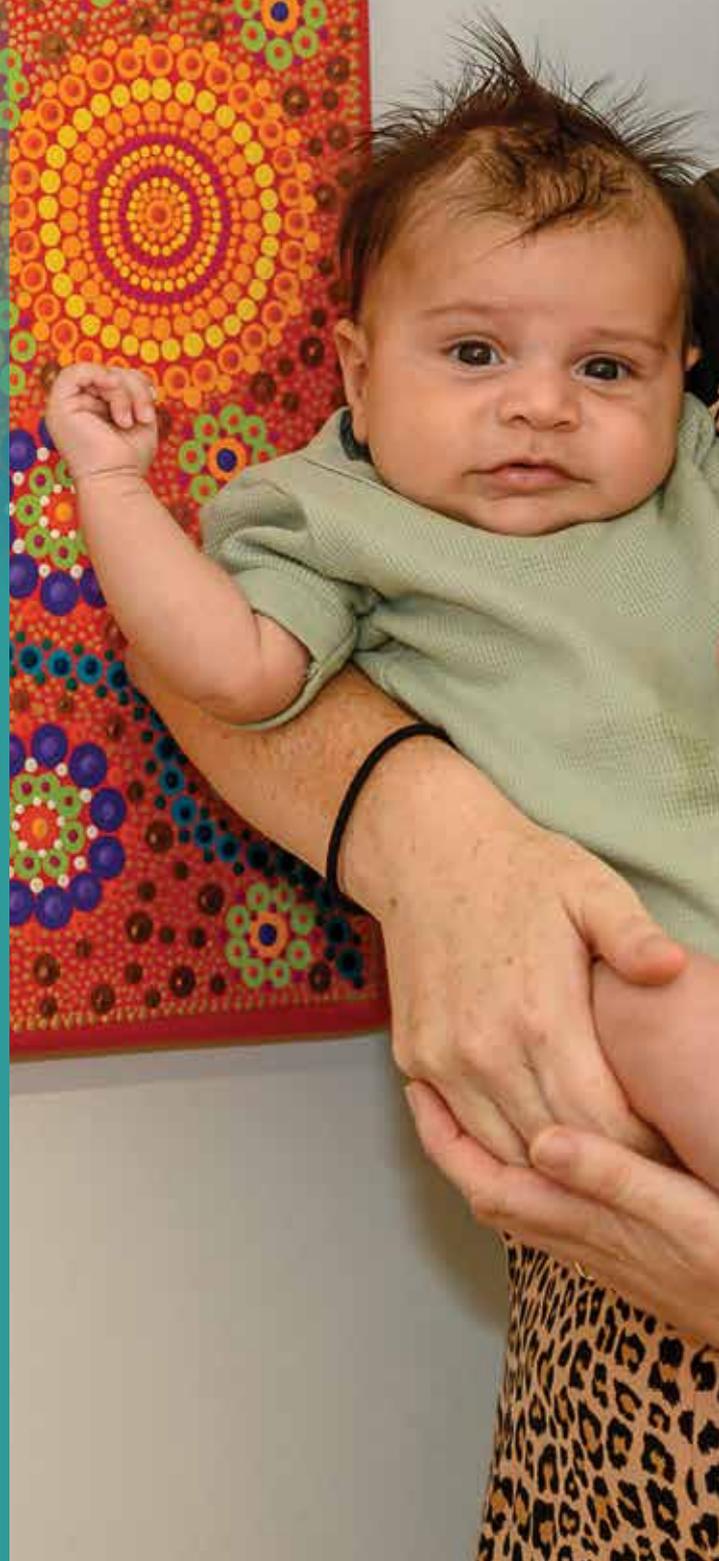


ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The development of this strategy took place on the traditional lands of the Kurna people, and we respect their spiritual relationship with their country.

We value the role Aboriginal parents, carers and families play as teachers, supporting their children's knowledge of and connection to language, culture and lore.

Through this strategy, we will continue to build learning partnerships between schools and preschools, parents, families and communities, working together with mutual respect and understanding to support all children and young people to succeed.





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What we mean when we say parent:

we recognise the diversity of families and the range of care arrangements that may exist for children. When we say 'parent', we are referring to adults who are the primary carers of children and young people. This includes biological parents, legal guardians, relative carers, kinship carers, foster carers, residential carers and others.

Minister and Chief Executive foreword

The Department for Education (the department) is committed to partnering with parents to support children and young people to thrive. Parents play a crucial role in the fabric of our schools, preschools and children’s centres. Our educators and staff interact with parents every day, working together to support children and young people as they learn, develop and grow.

The value of partnerships between educators, parents, carers and other community members is emphasised in the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) agreement. All have a role to play in nurturing the love of learning needed for success in school life. The Mparntwe agreement also recognises the importance of strengthening existing partnerships to foster learning progress and create opportunities for young Australians within and beyond the classroom.

As a department we have set high expectations for every child and student’s growth and achievement. Our strategic plan recognises that the best education is one in which parents and carers understand the value of a good education and are active in their child’s learning. We are committed to taking a greater lead in fostering that vital partnership between parents, educators and students.

We know that parent engagement in children’s learning makes a real difference to education outcomes. Parents are the most important influence in the lives of children and young people – we aim to ensure, through both universal and tailored approaches, that parents and communities are empowered to support children to become confident and successful learners.

The South Australian Government has developed a parent engagement framework and fact sheets to support the development of relationships between parents and educators. Building on this work, this strategy seeks to place learning at the heart of those relationships and outlines our plan for investment, advice and supports to achieve this outcome.

The strategy builds on other departmental initiatives and reforms that support parents and parent engagement in learning, including the Aboriginal Education Strategy, Early Learning Strategy, Vocational education and training (VET) for school students policy, and the Education Management System (EMS).



Hon John Gardner MP
Minister for Education

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Gardner'.



Rick Persse
*Chief Executive,
Department for Education*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rick Persse'.

Our parents

Parents of children and young people in South Australia come from diverse cultural and economic backgrounds, live in metropolitan and regional areas, and have different levels of education and life experience. One thing that almost all parents have in common is that they believe education at school is important for their child's future (2021 parent survey).



The **distribution of parents** in our system reflects the distribution of our students, with the **majority being in metropolitan areas and in primary school.**

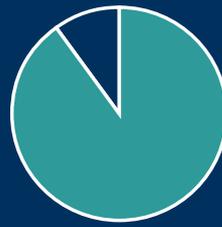


78% of families speak English as their main language at home. The diversity in non-English speaking families is great, with **241 different languages spoken in homes** and close to **6% of families indicating a need for a translator.**

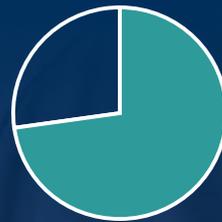




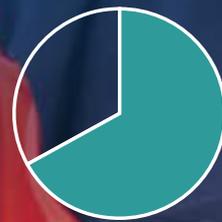
Results from the department's 2021 parent survey demonstrate the good connections that parents make with their children and schools.



Almost **90%** of parents report talking often to their children about school



73% report that their children have good habits in reading and learning at home.



A majority of parents (**67%**) have useful discussions with their child's school about learning and understand the standard of work that is expected.



Around **one quarter** of parents would welcome more help from the school with their child's learning.



Parents as partners in their child's learning

Parents are a child's first educator and the home is a child's first classroom. Parents play a critical and ongoing role in nurturing and supporting their child's learning at home, at school and in the community. They influence their child's wellbeing and success in school and life by shaping their values, attitudes and approaches to learning.

The best possible learning and life outcomes are achieved when parents, educators and children and young people work together in partnership. These partnerships help educators understand the strengths and needs of their students, and help parents understand how they can best support learning at home.

Lessons from COVID-19

COVID-19 tested the ability of parents, schools and preschools to adapt quickly to the way learning is delivered and supported, and they responded brilliantly. This unique situation highlighted the need for parents, educators and children and young people to work together in different ways to ensure continued access to quality education despite the many challenges faced by the community. More than ever, the need for parents to engage in their children's learning, especially in the home environment, was critical.

One of the positives to come out of this challenging time is a greater appreciation of the valuable roles parents, leaders and teachers play in ensuring the best learning outcomes for children and young people. Parents gained a greater understanding of the complexities of education and the critical role our educators play in the day to day needs of their children as they learn in a structured environment. Teachers and leaders recognised more clearly the positive impact parent engagement can have on a child's learning. It's important that this mutual respect and appreciation be maintained so that relationships between parents, educators and children and young people can grow stronger and evolve into authentic learning partnerships.





Benefits of parent engagement in learning

Parent engagement expands the ways a child can successfully learn and has a positive impact on learning at school as well as at home.

When parents engage in their child's learning this can have a positive effect on their child's education including better engagement with learning at school, increased attendance, and improved behaviour and academic achievement.

For educators, supporting parent engagement in learning is an investment in accelerating children and young people's achievement. When parents engage in their child's learning it can help support the role of educators, for example by reinforcing learning concepts at home.

The impact of effective parent engagement in learning extends beyond the school and has been shown to result in stronger career aspirations and higher levels of participation in post-secondary training and education.

What we heard

Consultation with a diverse range of parents, students, leaders and teachers produced rich insights about how parent engagement in learning can be fostered and supported. We heard some consistent messages which have shaped this strategy.

We heard that **parents** want timely, consistent and targeted communication about what their children are learning, how they are progressing academically and what they can do to help. They asked for flexible and supportive engagement that is culturally safe and appropriate for diverse school communities.

Students told us they value their parent's contribution to their learning. They want support from their parents to motivate them in their studies and to support good study habits and develop their career aspirations over time.

Leaders and teachers are looking for practical guidance on how they can support parent engagement in learning appropriate to their local context, acknowledging the reality of a busy schedule. They highlighted the importance of positive engagement in the early years of children's education to build parent confidence in engaging in learning and identified opportunities to improve engagement at transition points.

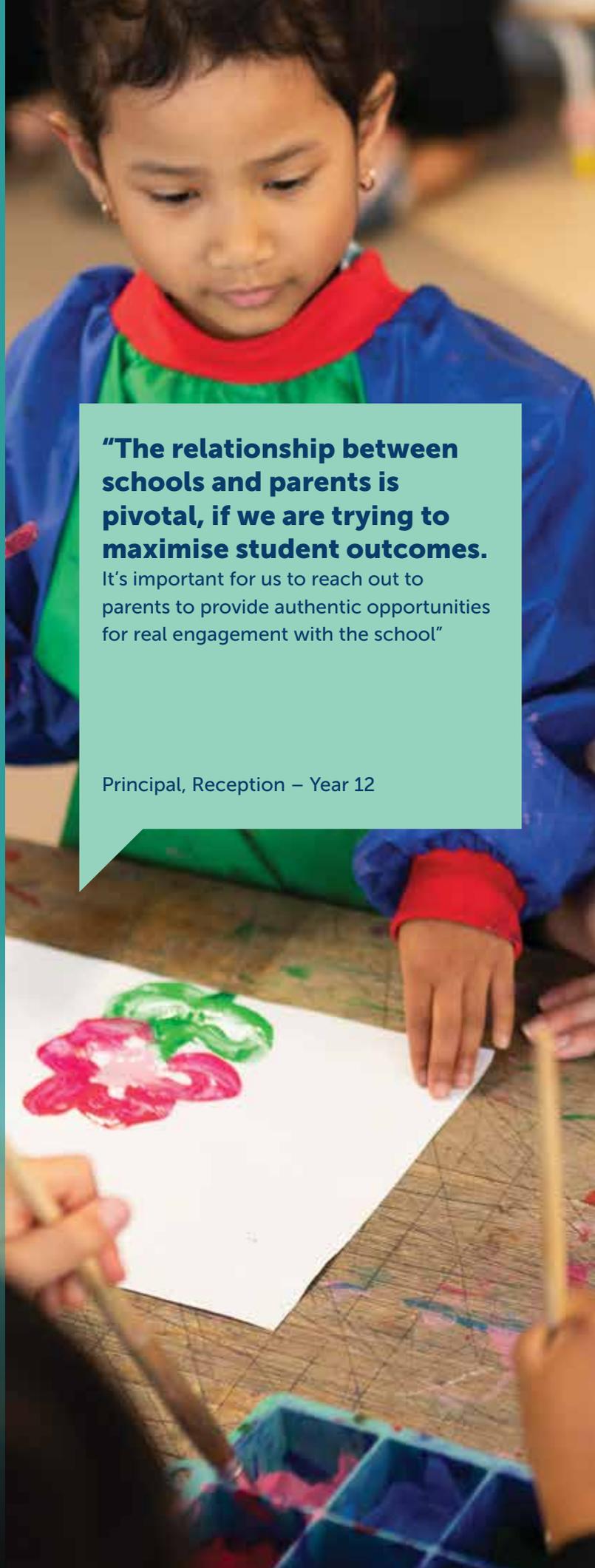
"I think [parent engagement in learning] is very important, **if a parent wasn't involved, a child might not get as much experience or might not learn as much**"

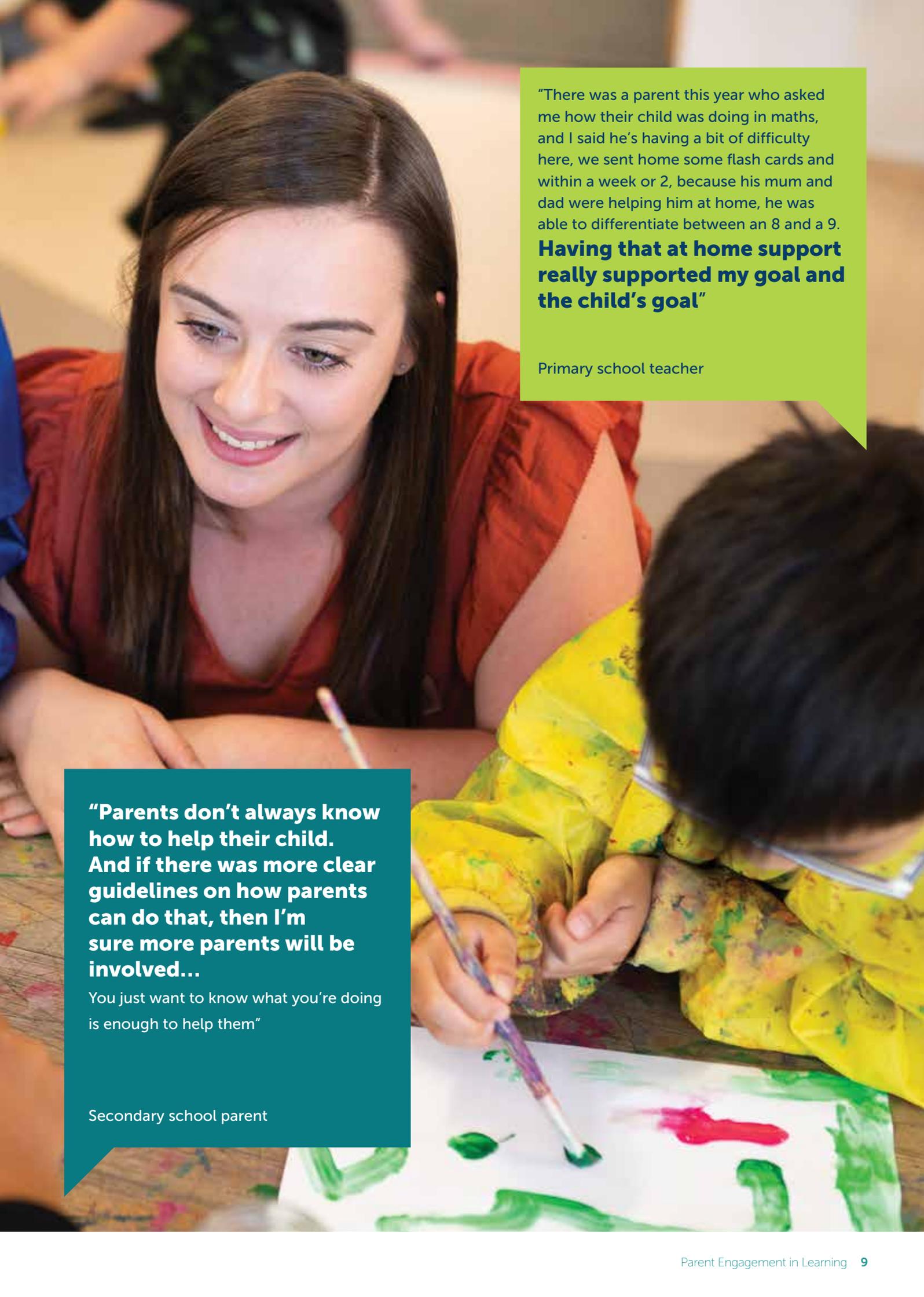
Secondary school student

"The relationship between schools and parents is pivotal, if we are trying to maximise student outcomes.

It's important for us to reach out to parents to provide authentic opportunities for real engagement with the school"

Principal, Reception – Year 12





“There was a parent this year who asked me how their child was doing in maths, and I said he’s having a bit of difficulty here, we sent home some flash cards and within a week or 2, because his mum and dad were helping him at home, he was able to differentiate between an 8 and a 9.
Having that at home support really supported my goal and the child’s goal”

Primary school teacher

“Parents don’t always know how to help their child. And if there was more clear guidelines on how parents can do that, then I’m sure more parents will be involved...”

You just want to know what you’re doing is enough to help them”

Secondary school parent



What we know about parent engagement in learning

Parent engagement in learning in high-performing education systems is characterised by 4 key features which we will embody through this strategy:

- 1** Leadership at all levels of the education system
- 2** 3-way partnerships between parents, children and educators
- 3** Tailored approaches to parent engagement in learning
- 4** Continual improvement in parent engagement in learning



1

Leadership at all levels of the education system

Leadership at all levels of the education system is needed for parent engagement in learning approaches to be effective. Leaders' commitment to parent engagement in learning sends a clear signal about its value, shapes culture, and assists in priority setting. We all have a role to play in ensuring effective parent engagement in learning including through leadership from central office, leadership within schools, preschools and children's centres, and through parents supporting learning within the home and community.

2

3-way partnerships between parents, children and educators

The benefits of parent engagement in learning are most effective when parents, educators, children and young people work together in partnership. With a shared focus on learning, 3-way partnerships help position students to engage and excel.



The role of children and young people

Children and young people can play a role in encouraging parents to engage in their learning by expressing their interests and learning needs.

Actions children and young people can take to support parent engagement in learning include:

- starting conversations with their parents about what they're learning at school
- exploring how their learning connects to their family, community and life outside of school
- talking with their parents and teachers about career goals and aspirations.

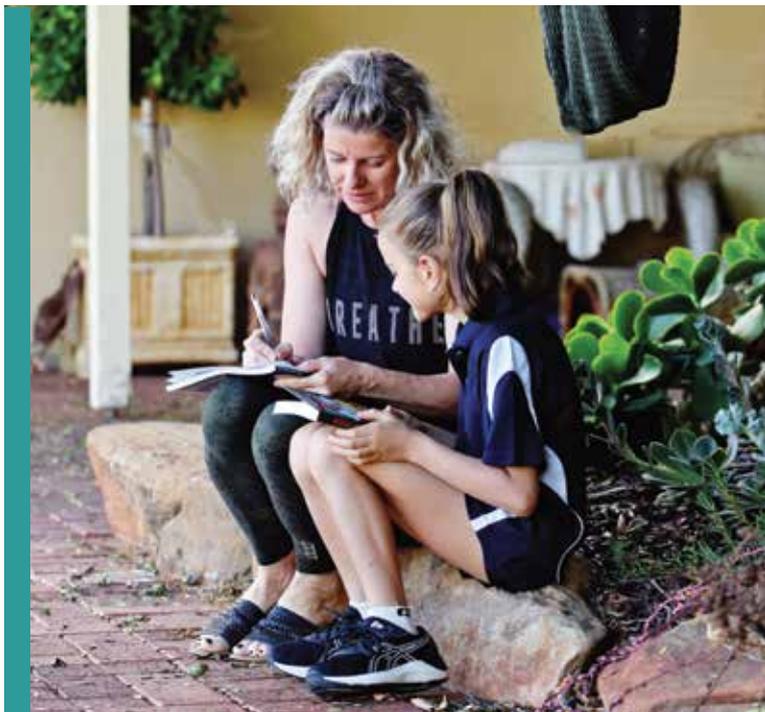


The role of parents

Parent engagement in learning involves parents taking an interest in and shaping family practices to encourage learning at home, at school, and in the community. It doesn't have to take up much time and it doesn't mean taking on the role of a teacher.

Actions parents can take to support their child's learning include:

- starting conversations with their child about their learning
- creating a supportive, positive and stimulating learning environment in the home
- helping steer their child's subject and career choices as they move through school.



The role of educators

Educators at schools, preschools and children's centres play an important role in supporting parents to engage in their child's learning. The willingness of educators to include parents and the opportunities they offer can have a big influence on the level of engagement parents have in their child's learning.

Actions educators can take to support parent engagement in learning include:

- creating an environment that is welcoming for all parents that facilitates opportunities for 3-way learning conversations between parents, teachers and children and young people
- empowering parents to support their child's learning by providing them with information and resources
- providing parents with timely updates on their child's progress, including successes, learning concerns and ways for parents to help or stretch their child's learning.



3

Tailored approaches to parent engagement in learning

Parent engagement in learning is not a one size fits all approach. Every family has their own strengths, needs and challenges that require careful consideration to ensure that advice and support given to parents is both appropriate and effective.

It is crucial that every school, preschool and children's centre monitor and adapt approaches to building relationships and partnering with parents to support children's learning. It is leaders and teachers who know their parent community best and can address their needs most effectively.

Engagement across the learning continuum

Parent engagement in learning approaches need to change as children grow older and gain increasing independence, but the role of parents across their child's learning journey is always critical.

In the early years parents lead learning with their children. This may include play, talking and singing, reading both at home and at a playgroup. When children commence primary school, parents can support their child's learning through encouraging and reinforcing learning at home, nurturing interests, supporting literacy and numeracy, and helping their children to create routines. In upper primary and secondary school, parents can help by encouraging and recognising effort and achievement, assisting with organisational skills, discussing school and careers, imparting problem solving skills, and showing interest in learning.

4

Continual improvement in parent engagement in learning

The research is clear that monitoring and evaluation of parent engagement in learning activities at all levels of the system best supports continuous improvement. In particular, including parent engagement in learning in school planning will support a whole-school commitment to working with parents and students and create a focus on improvement.

Our aspiration

Our aspiration is for a world-class public education system that actively partners with parents to improve children and young people's learning and achievement in every class, in every school, preschool and children's centre.

We know this will take time as we work to build on our existing foundations to achieve our aspiration.

All parents have different experiences and needs. We're focused on how we can work with parents to make sure they have what they need to support their child's learning.

Similarly, educators in our public education system work all over South Australia in metropolitan, country and remote locations, at schools, preschools and children's centres, to deliver quality education to a diverse group of children and young people. Support for educators will be tailored to these different contexts, providing the knowledge, tools and resources they need for effective learning partnerships with parents.



How we will achieve our aspiration

Our department has built strong foundations to support parent engagement in learning. We will invest more time and effort to build on those foundations to create a focus on learning partnerships with parents, and bring parents closer to learning information so they can play a critical role in their children's growth.



Foundations (what we've done)

Developed learning resources for parents including the Our Learning SA website, parent fact sheets and videos

Designed a parent engagement framework to guide educators to support parent engagement in learning

Established targeted playgroups for families with particular needs

Implemented Parent Initiatives in Education grants to encourage parent engagement in preschools and schools

Developed and implemented an annual parent survey

Developed a vocational education and training (VET) for school students policy to support career pathways.



Current focus (what we'll do next)

Invest in playgroups to increase access and quality to support parents to engage in their child's early learning and development

Undertake activity to promote parent engagement in children's learning as a key contributor to improving learning outcomes

Provide parents with the information and resources they need to engage in their child's learning as and when they need it

Provide educators with resources to help them build and maintain learning partnerships with parents, children and young people

Develop a new portal, providing an easy to use, one stop shop for teaching and learning advice to educators, parents and students

Support students to have age-appropriate access to devices and home internet connectivity for learning when they need it.



Future priorities (our horizon)

Support improved and more regular feedback to parents on their child's learning in real time using our new Education Management System

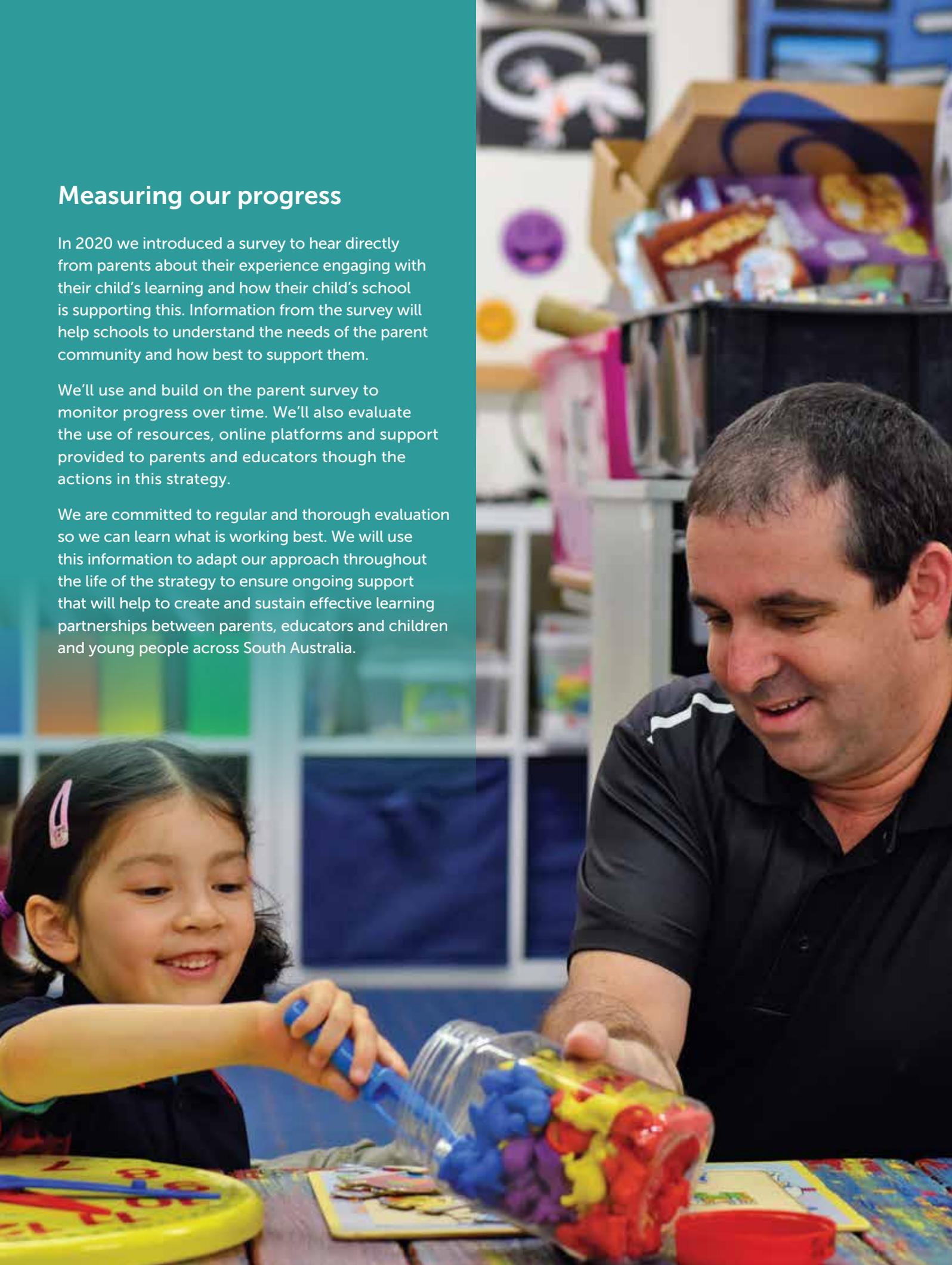
Support parent engagement in learning through site level improvement planning.

Measuring our progress

In 2020 we introduced a survey to hear directly from parents about their experience engaging with their child's learning and how their child's school is supporting this. Information from the survey will help schools to understand the needs of the parent community and how best to support them.

We'll use and build on the parent survey to monitor progress over time. We'll also evaluate the use of resources, online platforms and support provided to parents and educators through the actions in this strategy.

We are committed to regular and thorough evaluation so we can learn what is working best. We will use this information to adapt our approach throughout the life of the strategy to ensure ongoing support that will help to create and sustain effective learning partnerships between parents, educators and children and young people across South Australia.



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