



Transition to school: encouraging parent engagement from the start

A positive start to school and parent engagement – why it matters

Starting school is a big milestone. It can be an exciting and joyful time, but it may also involve some anxiety, both for children and for parents.

A positive start to school has been shown to have lifelong impacts. Children who start well are more likely to feel relaxed, be motivated to learn and achieve more. Starting school is a critical time for developing strong parent-school relationships and parent engagement in learning. Parent engagement has been proven to have significant impacts on the academic, health and social outcomes for children. Research shows that when parents are engaged with school and learning, children behave better and achieve more at school, teachers have higher morale, and schools have better community reputations.

First contact with parents around enrolment and transition to school is where these foundations can be laid.

Smooth transition processes

The transition to school process starts well before school enrolment and extends beyond the first days or weeks. Smooth transitions come from activities that help children build a sense of belonging at school. Families and schools play critical roles in this. The important ingredients for a positive start are:

- Relationships and making connections with families and across the school community
- Continuity and managing change from the child's previous environment to the new one, leveraging all the learning that has already been experienced by that child
- Being positive and having high expectations – everyone looking forward to a positive experience, having a shared understanding of the child's strengths, and believing they can meet any challenges.

What schools can do to support transition and to encourage parent engagement

Schools can enable the success of each child by having transition strategies which engage parents and children, and which support teachers to understand the families. Your transition program can alleviate anxiety and offer a child the best possible start to school by involving everyone, building communications networks, and celebrating and incorporating previous learning experiences. Things schools and teachers can do:

- Provide an open, welcoming environment and encourage positive interactions between children, families and educators.
- Connect with children – share expectations and experiences of school, have children engage with peers, have buddy programs
- Communicate with care services, learn about the child's journey, strengths and needs
- Welcome families, invite families to visit the school, meet parents to discuss the transition
- Seek – and listen to – advice from parents
- Recognise the significance of starting school for parents and provide spaces for parents to meet
- Help parents to understand how they can support their child's learning at school.

MORE INFORMATION AND IDEAS

A summary of the most effective strategies and illustrated examples from schools and parents: <https://docs.education.gov.au/documents/continuity-learning-resource-support-effective-transition-school-and-school-age-care>

An example of a community transition project: <http://www.transitiontoschool.com.au/index.html>

Resources to help schools review and improve their current transition strategies: <https://det.qld.gov.au/earlychildhood/about-us/transition-to-school/information-schools-ec-services/strengthening-practices>