

# Innovative parent engagement leadership practices across diverse school contexts

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## Abstract

Principals play a key role in parent-school engagement through their leadership style, communication, attitudes and expectations. Research on the mechanisms for how this occurs is sparse. Research on principal leadership for parent engagement in educationally-disadvantaged schools is rarer still. Such schools tend to have lower parent-school engagement levels which, in turn, further compounds their disadvantage. However, Queensland State School data about principal leadership obtained during one recent research project showed high levels of parent-school engagement for some educationally-disadvantaged schools. To investigate this apparent contradiction, follow-up design-based research during 2016 and 2017 that focused on the leadership of principals in five such schools was conducted. These schools were located in south-eastern, western and northern Queensland and each serviced disparate student and parent populations. This presentation presents early descriptive findings of the project. Data were gathered using quantitative (teacher and parent surveys) and qualitative (interviews and focus groups with teachers, parents and students) methods to explore what strategies and practices the different principals deployed to engage parents in each of their schools. Schwab's framework which comprises four interconnected dimensions: students, teachers, curriculum and milieu, where milieu include knowledge of schools, classrooms, parents and contexts, was used to analyse and conceptualise the findings. Using each of these dimensions as a basis for the presentation, examples of rich contemporary good practice of principal leadership for parent engagement are discussed. These examples highlight effective parent engagement practices evident within and across schools where enhanced student learning, professional practices, and stakeholder capacity for participating in and contributing to student learning occurred. At the same time, the challenges and complexities of principal leadership in these educationally-disadvantaged schools are examined. Finally, the presentation explores how the findings contribute to: a contemporary framework of principal leadership for parent-school engagement, inform the development of possible professional development packages for State and national use, and lay a foundation for future investigations.