Family engagement for learning

Brief methodology

Australian Education Research Organisation

Creating the family engagement practice guides

About the guides

The Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) has released underline practice guides for practitioners synthesising the research evidence on promoting and supporting family engagement[1] for children's early learning and development and students' learning outcomes.

For practitioners to be confident with using recommendations from research evidence, they need to know the research evidence was both created and synthesised using high-quality research methods. This 2-page explainer describes the process we followed to synthesise the available research evidence on family engagement. A more detailed description is also available.

What process did we use to create the guides?

To create the practice guides, we used a rapid review process.

A rapid review uses a specific, step-by-step process for searching the available research literature. The steps are illustrated opposite:

Planning

Setting a **specific question** that needs answering

Deciding **what types of studies** will answer this question (that is, which types of studies should be included and which should be excluded)

Deciding **where and how to look** for these studies (for example. which databases, using which words/search terms)

Collecting

Running the searches (running the search terms in the databases)

Screening studies identified through the searches (going through each study to check if it should be included or excluded)

Assessing the quality of included studies

Gathering information from the included studies

Reporting

Synthesising the findings from the included studies so they are clear and accessible

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[1] For this review, "family engagement" is defined as the process of staff at early childhood services or schools working together with family members to support their child's early learning and development or student learning outcomes.

We used a rapid review because it:

✓ makes the findings more **rigorous** (for example, we don't just include studies that are easy to find, well-known or politically popular)

✓ makes it easier to **update** the practice guides (we know exactly where we've searched before, so we can run the same search in future to capture any new research evidence)

✓ helps us to **focus** on the question we're investigating (there is a vast amount of literature on family engagement, which answers all sorts of questions and includes both high-quality and lower-quality studies)

✓ aligns education search strategies with search strategies used in **other evidence-based fields** such as health

✓ is more timely than a **systematic review** (another type of review method), meaning that findings are more current.

What types of studies did we include, and how did we find them?

In 2017, the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) in the UK searched the research evidence to answer a very similar question on family engagement. Their search was extensive and their findings were published in 2019. We built on their work by using the same search terms and the same databases (where possible).[2]

We included studies that met the criteria in the table below.

Our initial search located 2,254 papers. After removing duplicates, we screened 1,737 papers to see if they met the criteria for included studies. We supplemented our included studies with meta-analyses and systematic reviews from the EEF search. Ultimately, 24 papers were used to inform the practice guides.

A full list of criteria is also available.

We **included** studies that:	We **excluded** studies that:
• are meta-analyses or systematic reviews (papers which themselves summarise lots of other studies), or rigorous primary studies that show whether an approach causes a change in outcomes • report on activities, practices or processes delivered by early childhood education and care (ECEC) services/schools for promoting and supporting family engagement • involve families with children aged 3-16 years • are designed in a way that allows us to know if the practices have been effective • measure effects on children's early learning and development/students' learning outcomes • are published in peer-reviewed academic journals.	• report on working with communities more broadly • report on family or educator perspectives on family engagement • report only on factors that can help or hinder family engagement • are focused on health (including mental health) outcomes • are specific to particular populations (such as students with disability) • are set in developing countries.

What else did we do?

To ensure that findings from the review were presented in a useful way, we formed a small project advisory group. The group consisted of accomplished practitioners (from ECEC, primary school and secondary school) nominated by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) and the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). We also sought insights and feedback from ACECQA, AITSL, the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY), parent associations and various state and territory jurisdictions.

Our practice guides are designed to be clear, concise, relevant to a range of ECEC and school contexts, and relevant to practitioners with different roles. As such, they are designed to be a starting point. We hope you find them useful in your work with families, and welcome any feedback.

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2 We used Education Research Complete, ERIC, PsycINFO, the Australian Education Index and Scopus.