School Improvement Tool Elaborations

Student engagement and wellbeing

Contents

Introduction

What happens in schools can have a great and lasting impact on the future wellbeing and outcomes for young people. Schools therefore play an important role in supporting students' engagement and wellbeing. These *elaborations* are intended to support the work of schools by providing further specificity about the practices in each of the nine domains of the *School Improvement Tool* (previously *National School Improvement Tool*) that optimise student engagement and wellbeing and, in turn, impact on achievement.

Commissioned by the Queensland Department of Education, the elaborations provide an evidence-based framework to guide practice by teachers, school leaders and education systems in ensuring equitable outcomes for all students, particularly those most at-risk of disengagement, or for whom there are wellbeing concerns. The elaborations have been developed directly from the research evidence on student engagement and wellbeing by the Australian Council for Educational Research and refined in consultation with key stakeholders.

What is student engagement and wellbeing?

Student engagement and wellbeing are complex constructs. Although schools may sometimes focus on one particular aspect of engagement or wellbeing, addressing these constructs holistically is crucial to improving student outcomes.

Student engagement

Student engagement is more than just good classroom behaviour, attendance, or submitting assessment pieces on time. Research identifies that student engagement is multi-faceted, consisting of three domains:[1]

- Cognitive engagement – this includes motivation to learn and resilience and persistence to achieve;

- Emotional engagement – this includes the nature of a student's relationship with learning, and connectedness to others; and

- Behavioural engagement – this includes a student's level of participation in all areas of schooling, including academic, social and extracurricular activities.

Importantly, a student's level of engagement is not a 'fixed state', and will respond to external factors such as their relationships and classroom environments.

Student wellbeing

Broadly speaking, the concept of wellbeing covers a holistic range of psychological, physical, social, spiritual and cognitive dimensions. Student wellbeing has been defined as: "a sustainable state of positive mood and attitude, resilience, and satisfaction with self, relationships and experiences at school".[2]

How to use this tool

There is substantial research showing the interrelatedness between student engagement, wellbeing and achievement. The multi-dimensional nature of the definitions of these concepts highlights the vast possibilities and opportunities that schools have to promote student wellbeing and engagement.

While each school and cohort is unique, research has identified evidence-based practices that positively impact on student engagement and wellbeing. These practices apply across diverse settings, in different community contexts, and can respond to varying levels and complexity of student need. The research is clear that approaches to engagement and wellbeing must be integrated into the school learning environment, curriculum and pedagogy, policies and procedures and partnerships across the school.

The elaborations for student engagement and wellbeing provide an evidence-based framework for schools to review their current practices, identify new approaches, and refine existing responses to the engagement and wellbeing needs of their students. Schools can use these elaborations to optimise their support for student engagement and wellbeing in a targeted and coherent manner.

[1] Fredricks, J. A., Blumenfeld, P. C., & Paris, A. H. (2004). School engagement: Potential of the concept, state of the evidence. Review of Educational Research, 74(1), 59–109. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543074001059

[2] Noble, T., McGrath, H., Wyatt, T., Carbines, R., & Robb, L. (2008). Scoping study into approaches to student wellbeing: Final report. Australian Catholic University & Erebus International. https://www.dese.gov.au/student-resilience-and-wellbeing/resources/scoping-study-approaches-student-wellbeing-final-report. (p. 7).

An explicit improvement agenda

The school has collaboratively established and is driving a strong improvement agenda with an explicit focus on engagement and wellbeing for every student. There is a well-articulated aspiration and school-wide commitment to supporting every individual student's engagement, wellbeing and learning. Approaches to supporting student engagement and wellbeing are evidence-informed and are established in consultation with staff, students, families and the wider school community.

- The school leadership team has established an explicit focus on the continuous improvement of engagement, wellbeing and learning for every student, responding to students' cultural background, contexts and unique needs.

- The school's vision and mission statements clearly articulate high expectations and aspirations for engagement, wellbeing, and learning of every student, including those who experience barriers or are or at risk of disengaging. These expectations have been communicated to families, including hard-to-reach families, and the wider school community.

- School priorities and policies communicate that enhancing student engagement, wellbeing and learning are the mutual responsibility of every member of the school community.

- Staff, students, families, and the wider school community have been actively involved in the development of the school's improvement plan to support student engagement and wellbeing.

- Individual and aggregated engagement goals and targets, and wellbeing priorities are identified, and progress toward them is monitored and appropriately and regularly shared and discussed with staff, students, families and the wider school community.

- The school has identified, implemented and monitors evidence-informed, age and contextually appropriate, whole school strategies for improving student engagement and wellbeing. These are distinguished by high expectations for school attendance, retention, curriculum choices, learning outcomes and post-school transitions.

Analysis and discussion of data

The school has plans and procedures in place to monitor student engagement and wellbeing outcomes alongside academic gain. All staff are expected to continuously improve their capabilities to collect and analyse data to inform school practices to optimally support students. Data from multiple sources are used to identify early warning signs of disengagement or reduced wellbeing, inform targeted actions, and provide insights into the effectiveness of these actions to promote student engagement and wellbeing at an individual, cohort and whole of school level.

- The school has clearly articulated plans for the collection and use of data to identify and inform targeted action for students at-risk of disengagement and/or for whom there are wellbeing concerns.

- The school's data plan is aligned with systemic and school priorities and includes multiple explicit measures for student engagement and wellbeing, recognising that engagement and wellbeing are multi-faceted and not able to be holistically measured through a single data source.

- School staff monitor student engagement, wellbeing and academic achievement over time at an individual student, cohort and school level to identify areas of focus and to inform short, medium and long term resourcing.

- School-wide discussions are scheduled and embedded in practice for in-depth discussion of engagement and wellbeing data to develop detailed, holistic understandings about individual students, cohorts and the whole school to inform support, interventions and programs and monitor the effectiveness of these initiatives.

- School-wide data conversations reflect deep, informed knowledge and practice in student engagement and wellbeing and include discussion of the most at-risk students.

- Professional learning is provided to build staff capability in the collection and analysis of data specific to student engagement and wellbeing as well as academic achievement.

- School staff participate in professional learning focussed on developing a shared language and understanding about aspects and indicators of engagement and wellbeing.

- The school has found ways to collect information from and communicate about student engagement and wellbeing with hard-to-reach students and families.

- Data are stored and disseminated according to legal and ethical requirements in a way that is attentive to student dignity. Confidentiality is maintained when data are shared and used.

A culture that promotes learning

The school has established school-wide high expectations for all students' success. There is a strong sense of community and mutual responsibility for student learning, engagement and wellbeing amongst staff, students, families and community members. The school's learning environment is supportive of student academic and non-academic needs, inclusive, safe, culturally responsive, and respectful.

- School staff promote and maintain high expectations for all students, including those who are at risk of disengaging or for whom there are wellbeing concerns, and are united in their belief that collectively they can support students to meet these expectations.

- There is a whole school, inclusive and proactive approach to identifying and addressing concerns about student engagement and wellbeing in a timely and respectful manner.

- The school has found ways to communicate with and engage students and families, including those hardest to engage, that foster aspiration, motivation and engagement in learning and encourage a collective approach to supporting wellbeing.

- Staff discussions about student learning incorporate deep knowledge of their physical, cognitive, wellbeing and family needs to design and engage students in positive and culturally appropriate learning experiences

- Teachers know their students well and draw on their strengths as starting points for learning and supporting their engagement and wellbeing.

- The school's physical learning environment and resources promote inclusion of all students to optimally support their engagement and wellbeing.

- The school promotes and maintains an environment where students feel emotionally, physically and culturally safe and comfortable to take risks and be challenged to continuously improve.

- School leaders and staff model positive and productive engagement with students and families, demonstrate care and compassion towards each individual in the school community and promote them to feel included, respected, safe, valued and encouraged by others.

- Strong, mutually respectful, trusting and supportive relationships are in evidence for every student, family, staff member and community members, regardless of their circumstances.

- The school has found ways to celebrate student success and involves families and members of the community in these celebrations.

Targeted use of school resources

The school has strategically allocated and coordinated its resources in an equitable way to support optimal student engagement, wellbeing and academic achievement. It has school-wide policies, practices and programs in place to identify and address specific priorities. Flexible structures and processes enable the school to respond appropriately to individual student and whole-school needs and allocation of resources are regularly evaluated.

- The school has found ways to differentiate and target its resources to optimally support the engagement, wellbeing and academic progress of all students.

- The school allocates its physical and human resources to ensure adequate collaborative development of the school's improvement plan and associated strategies with students, teachers, families and community stakeholders.

- The school has clear and transparent decision-making processes for allocating resources which are understood across the school and align with the school's vision of high expectations and aspirations for student engagement, wellbeing and learning.

- There is clarity across the whole school team on roles and responsibilities to achieve student engagement and wellbeing, and how team members and community partners work together to achieve student outcomes.

- The school prioritises allocation of physical and human resources to ensure adequate communication, relationship-building and a sense of community amongst its members.

- The school has embedded evidence-informed, age and contextually appropriate, proactive strategies to promote student engagement and wellbeing across the school.

- The school has allocated physical and human resources to adequately monitor student engagement and wellbeing to inform interventions and programs and report to key stakeholders.

- Resources are prioritised to identify and respond to students most at risk of disengagement or reduced wellbeing through evidence-informed interventions.

- Arrangements are in place, including flexible curriculum delivery options and access to expertise external to the school, to enable staff to address the learning and wellbeing needs of individual students.

- Resources are used to access expertise to implement an integrated, case management approach and establish multidisciplinary teams based on identified student needs.

- Resource allocations and investment decisions are evaluated to ensure they positively contribute to the intended outcomes for achieving student engagement, wellbeing and academic success to inform immediate, medium and long-term resourcing decisions.

- The school resources professional learning opportunities for individuals and the whole school focussed on evidence-informed strategies for student engagement and wellbeing alongside academic achievement.

- The physical environment and resources for learning promote engagement and wellbeing across the school.

An expert teaching team

The school has strategies and procedures in place to continuously develop and improve teacher and school leader capacity to support student engagement, wellbeing and learning. Structures and processes foster the teaching team's collective efficacy and optimise opportunities to learn from one another's practice through formal and informal collaborations and professional learning.

- Teachers and school leaders have a strong collective efficacy; a shared belief that, collectively, they can improve engagement, wellbeing and learning for every student, particularly those facing the most challenges.

- School leaders ensure that structures and processes are in place which foster and sustain collective efficacy towards improving engagement and wellbeing outcomes for all students.

- The leadership team has strategies in place to assist all staff to continuously develop and share understanding of the multifaceted nature of student engagement and wellbeing and its importance for learning.

- Strong internal systems and processes exist to support student engagement and wellbeing, including professional development and opportunities for staff to collaborate and share effective practice.

- Multi-disciplinary teams work to identify students at-risk of disengagement and reduced wellbeing, put in place targeted support for identified students, and monitor progress and outcomes in a planned and structured way.

- Staff in the school have expertise to support students who face specific barriers to their engagement or for whom there are wellbeing concerns.

- Formalised structures are in place for teachers to receive induction, mentoring, coaching and feedback on the effectiveness of their practice in supporting student engagement and wellbeing.

- School leaders ensure that opportunities are created for regular, planned, school-wide conversations focused on sharing evidence-informed practices and building capability to improve student engagement and wellbeing.

- Whole school and individual professional learning plans align with the school's commitment and goals for engagement and wellbeing.

- Teachers and school leaders collaborate with key community stakeholders or experts outside of the school to build and sustain their own capacities and optimally support student engagement and wellbeing in culturally-appropriate ways.

Systematic curriculum delivery

The school has developed a coherent plan for implementing curriculum in collaboration with students, teachers, families and community members. The planned curriculum is inclusive and reflects high aspirations, whilst being flexible to ensure responsiveness to student needs and interest. All students are provided opportunities to develop a broad range of disciplinary and cross-disciplinary knowledge and skills, including social and emotional skills. Strategies and mechanisms are in place for monitoring and reporting on student engagement and wellbeing across school years.

- The school curriculum plan promotes deep understanding, cross disciplinary connection, authentic and relevant learning and academic challenge for all students.

- Students, teachers, families, and community members have contributed to the collaboratively-developed curriculum plan, which reflects high aspirations for all students, recognises diversity, and includes culturally responsive content, materials and authentic learning experiences responsive to the school's context.

- The school's curriculum plan has been communicated to and shared with students and families in a way that is accessible to enable informed participation in schooling.

- The planned curriculum allows sufficient time for acquiring foundational knowledge and skills whilst maintaining flexibility to incorporate exploration of student interests.

- The curriculum is designed to be flexible and responsive to student needs to promote their agency and autonomy and build on strengths, existing knowledge and identified starting points for learning.

- The curriculum provides opportunities for all students to develop deep learning and disciplinary knowledge, creative and critical thinking and the use of new technologies.

- Proactive strategies to optimise engagement and wellbeing are embedded in the curriculum.

- Teachers clarify short- and long-term learning intentions and success criteria for individual students and encourage self-direction.

- Every student has access to the full breadth of curriculum offerings available within the school, including co-curricular offerings.

- Curriculum is used as a tool to build students' sense of self as learners and their aspirations for achievement and future possibilities.

- The curriculum is used as a tool to develop students' social and emotional skills and foster wellbeing through embedding personal and social capability across relevant learning areas.

- A range of strategies and mechanisms are in place to comprehensively monitor and report on student engagement, wellbeing and learning progress across school years.

Differentiated teaching and learning

Differentiation is applied by all teachers to ensure every student has access to high quality learning experiences and the full breadth of curriculum. Learning activities are designed to provide appropriate challenge and opportunities for all students to experience success. Learning goals and success criteria are articulated and used by teachers and students to monitor and drive progress. Tailored interventions for students requiring additional support are monitored for effectiveness and impact.

- All teachers draw positively on the full range of information they have about individual students in planning for teaching and learning.

- Teachers consult students and families to identify individual learning strengths, interests and aspirations to inform differentiated teaching and learning.

- Teachers work to ensure that learning activities provide challenge and a sense of accomplishment for every student according to their starting points for learning.

- The learning environment and classroom organisation are tailored to meet students' individual needs.

- Data on the achievements, progress, specific needs and areas of interest of individual students are used in all classrooms to continuously personalise teaching and learning activities to individuals.

- The school has tailored interventions in place for students requiring additional support and these are monitored for effectiveness and impact.

- Clear learning goals and success criteria which reflect challenge and opportunities for success are jointly articulated by the teacher and students.

- Classroom assessment processes support students to reflect deeply on their learning and provide opportunities for self and peer review.

- Students are active participants in their learning and can clearly articulate their learning goals and monitor their progress towards them.

- The school has implemented practical and effective ways to assist families to support student engagement, wellbeing and learning.

Effective pedagogical practices

Recognising the critical importance of effective teaching on a broad range of educational outcomes, the school has developed a comprehensive and inclusive evidence-informed pedagogical framework. Teachers draw on a range of pedagogical practices – including student-led and collaborative learning activities and mutual feedback interactions – to foster student engagement and wellbeing by building on students' strengths and catering for diverse needs and interests.

- The school's pedagogical framework articulates evidence-informed teaching practices that promote student engagement and wellbeing, including differentiated, student-led and collaborative practices.

- The school's pedagogical framework is attentive to the diverse cultures, backgrounds, experiences and needs of students and families.

- Pedagogical practices reflect high expectations for every student, every day, evidenced in culturally-appropriate learning experiences that take account of every students' individuality.

- Pedagogical practices reflect a commitment to deep, authentic and relevant learning to encourage curiosity, creativity and collaboration for every student.

- Teachers draw on a range of pedagogical practices to promote and maintain student engagement and wellbeing, including practices that activate students and encourage them to take control of their learning.

- Learning is characterised by substantive conversation and builds on students' strengths and contributions.

- Collaborative pedagogical approaches are used to promote positive and respectful peer relationships and student engagement.

- Teachers and students engage in mutual feedback interactions to improve learning, acknowledge achievement and ensure pedagogical practices are engaging and effective.

- Teachers guide students in facilitating productive engagement with feedback and assist them in regulating their emotional, behavioural and cognitive responses to feedback.

- Technology is intentionally used for pedagogical purposes to enhance student engagement and wellbeing.

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School-community partnerships

The school has built partnerships with individuals, groups, organisations, businesses or other institutions within the wider community to enhance student engagement and wellbeing. Procedures are in place to ensure effective communications with community partners and to monitor, evaluate and adjust partnerships, programs and initiatives to ensure they are contributing toward meeting student engagement, wellbeing and learning goals. School-community partnerships are purposeful and authentic and inform the school's strategic planning in order to meet student needs.

- The school has built partnerships with families, community organisations or stakeholders and a range of organisations with specialised expertise and services to optimally support student engagement and wellbeing.

- Partnerships are authentic and reflect the school's integrated approach to strengthening engagement and wellbeing of all students.

- There is shared understanding and evidenced commitment between the school and partners about the purpose of the partnership to address barriers to student engagement, wellbeing and learning.

- Goals and targets for student engagement, learning, and priorities for supporting student wellbeing have been collaboratively developed with community partners and are regularly monitored.

- The school organises regular activities or gatherings that are accessible to and inclusive of all members and foster a sense of community.

- The school has established partnerships with other schools to ensure a sustained focus on promoting strong student engagement and wellbeing as well as student school transitions.

- Community partnerships, programs and initiatives are monitored, evaluated and adjusted to ensure they achieve their intended impact.

- School-community partnerships inform school policy and direction setting in response to identified student engagement and wellbeing needs.