

Supporting student attendance: Exploring shared and differing perspectives of families and school staff

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1. Background

- Family-school partnerships are essential for supporting student attendance (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016).
- Partnerships revolve around goal-centred actions that are built on common goals and understanding, through shared values and beliefs (Griffiths et al., 2021).
- Shared understanding and goals enable families and schools to work together to coordinate support plan, initiatives or strategies, and resources to support students' schooling and learning, including their attendance (e.g., Epstein & Sheldon, 2016; Lenhoff & Pogodzinski, 2018).
- Aims:** To explore the perspectives of families and school staff on important factors to support student attendance, and to identify shared and differing views in fostering family-school partnerships.

2. Methods

Semi-structured interviews with 14 parents and 44 school staff (e.g., teachers, attendance officers, guidance counsellors, CEC's) in **5 low ICSEA* state high schools** in Queensland, Australia

Interview questions:
 "What makes young people want to come to school?";
 "Do you know of any ways in which families and communities have worked together with the school in improving student attendance? "

Interview data were analysed using **reflexive thematic analysis** (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Interviews were conducted **in-person, recorded, and manually transcribed** for analysis.

Quotes → Codes → Themes

*ICSEA = Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage

3. Results

What factors support high school students' attendance at school?

Connections, belonging, sense of safety

- Friendship with peers
- Relationships with school staff
- Openness with families for sharing experiences or challenges

Relevance and purpose

- Learning interests
- Career aspiration
- Living experiences and circumstances

Support

- Mental health support (i.e., anxiety, trauma, problematic screen use)
- Academic support
- Support for contextual barriers (e.g., transportation, uniform, meals)

Common areas of differing perspectives

- Perception of children's roles, either shaped by culture or circumstances (e.g., care-taking responsibilities)
- Awareness and understanding of school policies and available support
- Perceived family values and level of support toward education

4. Discussion

- The factors that both families and school staff indicated as important reflect common understanding, and may serve as shared goals when coordinating strategies to improve attendance.
- Identifying areas of differing perspectives may inform topics of family-school discussions when building partnerships, to align their views and develop shared expectations and goals.
- Future research should examine how families and school staff can address differences in perspectives and build shared understanding in supporting attendance.

5. References

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