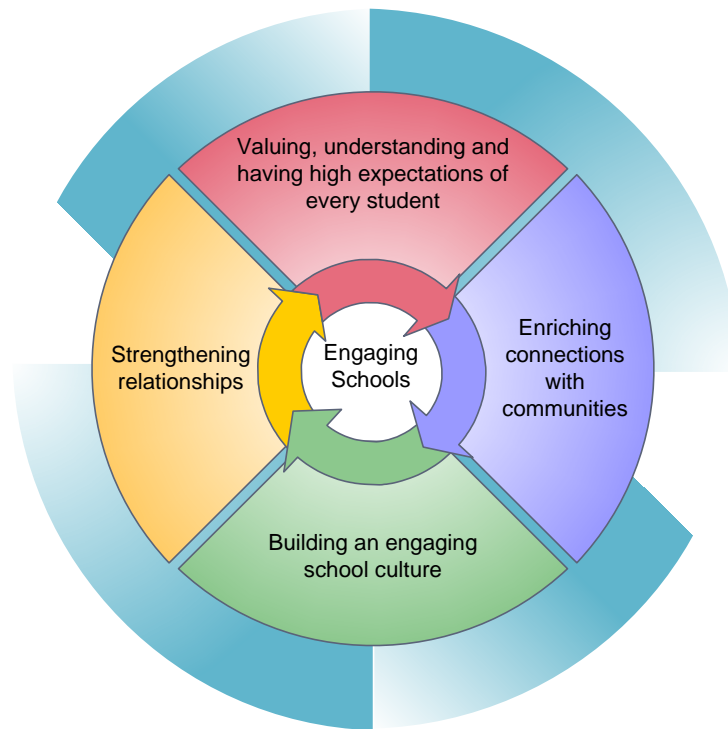# Engaging Schools Framework

Underpinning Principles

Principles which underpin good practice of engaging schools, and an engaging school system are considered below. Engaging schools:

Ensure every student belongs to their school

Engaging schools take responsibility for achieving good outcomes for every student. The ACT Government and community recognise that every student has a right to receive the best possible education, inclusive of their ability, behaviour, background, or the challenges which they face. Engaging schools take responsibility for every student by building relationships with them, understanding them, providing them with a safe environment and the opportunity to learn, and by connecting them to the community.

Engage everybody

Engaging schools are not only engaging for their students, but also for teachers, families, non-teaching staff and the local community. Engaging schools recognise the roles played by those in the broader school community, and act as a hub which enables every part of the school community to play its role in engaging and educating students.

Focus on success

The desire to achieve is a powerful driving force in education. Engaging schools have high expectations about what can be achieved, both in terms of learning and wellbeing outcomes for students, and what the school itself can do to continually develop its practice.

Respond to context

Engaging schools are conscious of the context in which they operate. They are able to make use of their relationships with educators, parents, government and the broader community to design contextually appropriate and integrated student engagement strategies.

Engaging schools understand how to draw upon their networks and connections to support engagement, and their communities value the opportunity to contribute to and enjoy their local school in turn.

For more information: EngagingSchools@act.gov.au

Areas of good practice

The areas of good practice outlined in the Engaging Schools Discussion Paper are outlined below.

Strengthening Relationships

Research shows that the quality of supportive relationships a student forms with adults within their learning environment is a key determinant of student's willingness and ability to engage with their school, and their learning.

Schools that engage all of their students through strong teaching and learning relationships demonstrate good practice within four interrelated areas. These engaging schools:

- Systematically cultivate good relationships between students and teachers, and clearly state and reinforce their expectations of these relationships
- Create forums and opportunities for student voice to shape the school environment, decision making, and teaching and learning practices
- Support student self-determination in learning through the collaborative development of classroom, assessment and feedback processes, which respond to students' abilities and interests
- Dedicate time and resources to these priorities.

Valuing, understanding and having high expectations of every student

Valuing, understanding and having high expectations of every student means that schools treat students as individual learners, and build their approach around empowering individual learners to learn. An engaging school encourages students to have high expectations for themselves and shows it has high expectations for all its students.

Schools that engage all of their students by valuing, understanding and having high expectations of every student demonstrate good practice within five interrelated areas. Engaging schools:

- Provide quality learning programs that offer a rich and varied curriculum for all students, showing that the school wants to connect with all students, regardless of their background or circumstances
- Make explicit their high expectations of all students, that school work is valuable, and that the student's strengths and interests are worthwhile
- Consistently apply the principles of good pedagogy, and are creative about how to deliver ambitious learning outcomes for students with different interests and abilities

- Respond creatively to design and develop flexible learning and educational program options for students whose needs are not met in traditional classroom settings
- Understand students in a holistic way, incorporating an understanding of their learning and wellbeing as being influenced by factors both within and external to the school.

Enriching connections with communities

Enriching connections with communities means that schools see themselves as part of a broader community, and purposefully create opportunities for community members to reach into the school, as well as for the school to reach out to community members.

Schools that engage all of their students by enriching their relationships with communities demonstrate good practice within three interrelated areas. Engaging schools:

- Develop a two way relationship, where the school reaches out to communities, and community members reach into the school
- Break down barriers for families to help them to engage with the school, and participate in and shape their children's education
- Recognise their school as an integral part of their broader community, and present a welcoming face to the community.

Building an engaging school culture

A whole of school approach to innovation and engagement aligns the school's values, systems, culture and actions to generate and sustain the good practices which create an engaging school.

Schools that create a sense of belonging or identification with the school by students and staff demonstrate good practice in all aspects of 'building an engaging school culture'. Particularly, good practice within five interrelated areas is identified in the literature and through consultations in the ACT. Specifically, engaging schools:

- Develop a clear vision and values that underpin everything that the school does
- Effectively coordinate learning and wellbeing elements of education for individual students
- Creatively use and improve the school's physical and learning environment
- Have consistent approaches to behaviour support that focuses on creating a safe, supportive and inclusive school environment.
- Focus on what is possible, and proactively take risks in order to achieve results