

How high expectations and engagement in primary school drive student learning

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation

Background

How high expectations and engagement in primary school drive student learning explores the role of student engagement and classroom practices for improving student learning. Specifically, it looks at the impact of engagement and effective teaching experienced in Years 5, 6 and 7 on academic performance in Year 7.

Key findings

- A culture of high expectations is as important for learning in primary school as it is in high school. Year 5 students who report having teachers with high expectations are over 6 months ahead in their learning by Year 7.
- Socioeconomic status has an impact on students' engagement at school. The proportion of students engaged in primary school is lower for students in the lowest socioeconomic quartile than for more advantaged students across measures of both classroom and social engagement at school.
- Other aspects of effective teaching also matter. When students understand the purpose of what they are learning and teachers deliver clear instruction and relevant content, student achievement improves.
- Having positive peer relationships and classroom behaviour during primary school are also important for learning.
- Students with a positive attitude towards homework during the final year of primary school have better numeracy outcomes in the first year of high school.

Practical implications

The publication is accompanied by professional learning reflection guides for principals and school executive staff to support school leaders in considering the implications of this research for practices in their schools. Two accompanying case studies, from Liverpool West and Warwick Farm public schools, provide additional resources to showcase how schools can effectively promote engagement and ensure high expectations of their students.

Further information

The How high expectations and engagement in primary school drive student learning publication, case studies and reflection guides can be downloaded from CESE's website at www.cese.nsw.gov.au/publications.

The NSW Department of Education Strategic Plan 2018-2022 includes the commitment to ensure that every student is known, valued and cared for in our schools. High expectations reflect an understanding of students' capacity, ensuring that they feel known at school and are challenged in their learning. Schools can use the department's Tell Them From Me surveys to capture students' perceptions of the expectations that they experience. This knowledge can then help build an accurate and timely picture that schools can use for practical improvements.