

# PARENT ENGAGEMENT



**Qld Parents & Friends**  
STRONG VOICE FOR FAMILIES IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

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What is it?

What makes a  
difference?

How do we do it?

**The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium (1997) states:**

*Parents have a particularly important part to play in the educating community, since it is to them that the primary and natural responsibility for their children's education belongs ....  
..... it is necessary to foster initiatives which encourage commitment, but which provide at the same time the right sort of concrete support which the family needs and which involve it in the Catholic school's educational project. The constant aim of the school therefore, should be contact and dialogue with the pupils' families.....in order to clarify with their indispensable collaboration that personalised approach which is needed for an education project to be efficacious'..*

Congregation for Catholic Education 1998 The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium, Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, Vatican City



## **When do we start?**

- When they are born
- When schooling begins build relationships

## **Why?**

- Ensure learning takes place everywhere
- Impact on student learning and wellbeing when relationship between home and school is strong
- Core work of the school
- Parents understand their role in their student's learning and actively participate.

# MOVE FROM PARENT INVOLVEMENT TO PARENT ENGAGEMENT

**BACKED BY RESEARCH OVER MANY YEARS**

**60% TO 80% INFLUENCE ON LEARNING IS THE HOME**

- Parent Engagement requires a new **culture** to be developed in schools.
- Not an initiative as sends the message that this is a short term
- Parent engagement must occur in all families in order for all students to have success at school.

***Initiatives die, Cultures live***



# What is the difference between Parent Involvement and Parent Engagement

**INVOLVEMENT** – builds social capital – volunteering  
Tuckshop, Fete, Working Bees, Fundraising etc.

**VERY IMPORTANT**

**ENGAGEMENT –**

- Recognise your role as the first educator
- Take on your role as the first educator
- Learning happens all the time
- Take opportunities for learning with your child
- Knowing what your child is doing at school
- Being interested and talking about their learning with them
- Open communication channels with school

# BENEFITS OF EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT WITH PARENTS

## STUDENTS –

### Increased

- Self esteem
- Engagement in learning
- Participation in more challenging subjects and activities

### Improved

- Literacy and numeracy outcomes
- Attendance
- Completion of homework
- Behaviours at home and school
- Connection to school and learning
- School completion rates

# FAMILIES

## Increased

- Understanding of their child's learning needs and progress
- Confidence in the school environment
- Investment in their child's education
- Feeling of support from school and other parents
- Satisfaction with the work of the school

## Improved

- Self esteem
- Capacity to help their child do better at school
- Involvement in their own education
- Connection to the School
- Links with Community resources and services

# SCHOOLS

## Increased

- Respect from staff for families' strengths and efforts
- Readiness of staff to involve all families in all aspects of the life of the school
- Understanding of the students' strengths, needs and goals
- Resources to support schools' learning programs
- Attendance of families at school activities
- Expectation of families and community to be involved in school programs and governance.

## Improved

- Connections with the community
- School image within the community
- Family and community satisfaction with the school

# PRINCIPLES WHICH UNDERPIN EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT IN STUDENT LEARNING

1. All families and schools want the best for their children
2. All children have the right to the opportunity to reach their full potential
3. Families are the first and continuing educators of their children
4. Effective schools provide a nurturing and supportive learning environment
5. Families and schools value quality teaching and respect teachers professional expertise

6. Families and schools value the diversity of families and use this as a resource for building partnerships and communities
7. Family-school partnerships are based on mutual responsibility, respect and trust
8. Leadership is critical to building, maintaining and renewing partnerships
9. Family-school partnerships improve student motivation and learning
10. Family-school partnerships strengthen the connections between schools and their communities
11. Partnerships can involve all organisations that support families and schools

# SEVEN DIMENSIONS OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- ❖ COMMUNICATING – formal and informal
- ❖ CONNECTING LEARNING AT HOME AND AT SCHOOL – assist families with working with children at home. Teachers setting tasks involving families
- ❖ BUILDING COMMUNITY AND IDENTITY – Is school welcoming? Is there a place for families? Awareness of cultural diversity. Openness
- ❖ RECOGNISING THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY – Mission and vision statements explicitly refer to working in partnership. Charter for parents.
- ❖ CONSULTATIVE DECISION-MAKING – Families contribute to development of school policies and programs, finance, curriculum etc. i.e. whole life of the school
- ❖ COLLABORATING BEYOND THE SCHOOL – partnerships with cultural groups and agencies, play-groups, universities. Community use of facilities
- ❖ PARTICIPATING – Training of parents and staff to facilitate programs, supporting families to assist in classrooms, school excursions and other activities. Activities where whole family (siblings, Grandparents) can participate.

# CONDITIONS FOR EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

FOR EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES TO BE DEVELOPED AND SUSTAINED – SUPPORTING STRUCTURES NEED TO BE IN PLACE

- Leadership commitment
- Respectful relationships
- Supportive and connected school culture
- A team, reflecting the diversity of stakeholders, responsible for planning, organising, implementing and evaluating activities.
- School Policies and procedures which explicitly state and clearly integrate the principles and dimensions of effective partnerships
- Resources (personnel and funds) allocated for the implementation of family and community engagement activities
- Support networks, to enable school communities to share ideas, issues and best practice
- Ongoing professional learning for all staff about cultural awareness and communicating with families from diverse backgrounds
- Skills building for families to build their capacity to support their children's learning at school and at home

**There are simple steps that parents can take at home as first and continuing steps on this journey –**

**Have high expectations for your children** – Let your children know that you think it is important that they do well in school. High, but realistic, parental expectations have the greatest impact on student achievement. When parents consistently express belief in their children's potential and tell them that they expect them to succeed academically, students do better.

**Talk about School** – Talk with your children about what's happening at school – activities, programs and what they are learning. Surprisingly, this has a greater impact on academic achievement than monitoring homework, being at home after school for your kids, or limiting the time they are allowed to watch TV or go out during the week.

**Help your children develop a positive attitude toward learning and good work habits** – Research shows that the greatest influence you can have on your children’s chances for success in school lie in how you influence their attitudes, their sense of personal competence, and their work habits, including persistence, seeking help and planning.

**Read together** – Reading is one of the foundations of all education, and you can make a big difference by reading and talking about books and stories with your children. Reading with children is the best way to turn them on to reading. This doesn’t mean that you should be forcing them to sound out words – instead of focussing on teaching your children the mechanics of reading, teach them to love reading. Make reading fun and enjoyable.

## HOW DO WE CHANGE PARENTS' AND STAFF THINKING ABOUT ENGAGEMENT

Everyone must first understand what it is we are talking about -

Parent engagement is developing **relationships** with the primary caregivers of students to empower them as active partners in their child's **learning**.

**Leadership** and **reflection** are critical to being strategic with activities. There is always somewhere to start, and always somewhere to improve.

**No single strategy** fits all school contexts – but questions and ideas will help you adapt widely published strategies to your needs.

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Broadening understandings of learning beyond the school, to include **‘learning at home’**. include **‘the language of schooling/learning’** as this has been identified as a possible barrier for families to engage in learning both at school and at home.

**Cultural considerations** - Indigenous, migrant and refugee families - Work on improving communication strategies’ with these families.

Create opportunities to strengthen connectedness and engaging families in schooling and their child’s learning through events which will involve them in the school e.g. International food events, Cooking classes, Cultural dance events etc.

Start with a conversation with parents and ask questions that build relationships. Collectively as a school try to reach every parent and staff member to enhance the relationships and their understandings.

# STEPS TO STRENGTHEN ENGAGEMENT

The whole school community should be involved in all steps. When all are included there is more likely that all groups will take ownership and be more committed to action.

## Step 1

Analyse current practice –

- What do you need to know? e.g. Backgrounds, languages, stories, protocols/culture, needs, is there a sense of community for all, what works already
- What data collection methods do you use to capture all views? e.g. online, paper, interviews, P & F, Car Park chats, Surveys, Focus groups etc.
- Who do you collect from?
- How much is enough?

There are a number of survey/audit tools available which each school can adapt to their needs.

## **Step 2**

### **Determine Priorities for Action**

- What have we learned from the information collected
- What are the most important items
- What can we do immediately
- What do we need to plan for long term
- Research strategies, case studies and resources used by others and adapt if necessary
- Develop a plan
- Set targets

## **Step 3**

### **Implement the planned actions**

- Plan is agreed by all
- Embed these in the school plan
- Set up groups to implement particular actions – includes staff and parents etc
- Set up regular reports/meetings to ensure plan is being implemented
- Review if actions aren't successful

## **Step 4**

### **Evaluate progress**

- Analyse current situation through data collection – various methods
- Review plan
- Develop new plan which builds on current work and sets new directions and targets

**This change in culture won't happen over night but if there is commitment from all stakeholders at the school then it will work to enhance the chances of success for all students.**

# HOW CAN WE WORK WITH THE SCHOOL TO ENGAGE ALL PARENTS?

Make sure it is a welcoming place –

- Not all parents feel comfortable at school – work with school to make sure signs are welcoming
- How are relationships formed and nurtured?
- Hold some meetings/information nights outside the school to try to involve those parents who are uncomfortable – reach out
- All parents have to sign in – provide parent engagement tips on the front desk where the sign in book is
- Why does the sign in book call parents ‘visitors’ – are we visitors in our own child’s school
- Provide parenting information nights to assist parents with their parenting
- When do you hold a Welcome BBQ?
- How is information provided to parents?
- Classroom liaison parents
- Are P & F meetings welcoming and inclusive

**PARENTS ARE NOT AN HOMOGENOUS GROUP –  
DIFFERENT SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE AND ABILITY**



# WHAT ABOUT P & F – WHAT CAN YOU DO?

**Review what you do? –**

What is your purpose?

Is student learning and success for every child a focus?

Do you make a difference to the school?

Would they notice if you didn't exist?

Are you part of the decision making process at your school?

Do all parents and staff feel welcome at meetings ?

Are you seen solely as a fund raising body?

Do you discuss engaging all families at the school?



Do you work with your school to provide opportunities for parents to engage in their child's learning?

Do you provide parent education opportunities?

When you meet is there always general business to discuss?

Do all families realise they are members of P & F?

Is every family provided with an opportunity to put items on the agenda? Do they know they can do this?

Do you consider the school strategic renewal plan in your deliberations?

How do you contribute to ensuring this plan is achieved?

**I am sure you can think of more  
questions to add to this list**



# Thanks for listening

Please contact me if you want to take this further and want some help to do so

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