The Federation Vision and Mission Statements for Parent Engagement

Values
Engagement with all families in Catholic Schools in Queensland is based on gospel values of respect, integrity, hope, equity, transparency, justice, love, community, human dignity and service.

Vision
All in Catholic Education welcome and recognize the value and right of families to engage with their child’s learning and will work in partnership to enhance the faith development and social and emotional wellbeing of students and increase opportunities for academic success for all students.

Mission
The Federation will work with Catholic School Authorities to build capacity of school staff and families and create tools to assist in building stronger partnerships in each school community that foster engagement and result in shared responsibilities for student learning and for student and school success.
Family School Partnership statement: animation

This Family School Partnership statement is a declaration of intention, a way of bringing to life the purpose behind why engage families and communities in children's education. It is designed to help school leaders understand the philosophy of family–school partnerships and to provoke conversations which deepen understandings around the key elements.

http://vimeo.com/80584793

In order for us to encourage and be successful Parent Engagement in Children’s learning needs all to work together for student centred practice.
What is parent engagement in student learning?

Parents play a significant role in supporting their children’s wellbeing and learning, guiding their children successfully through school processes, and advocating for their children and for the effectiveness of schools.

Parent engagement in schools is defined as parents and school staff working together to support and improve the learning, development, and wellbeing of children and adolescents.

Parent engagement in schools is a shared responsibility in which schools and other community agencies and organizations are committed to reaching out to engage parents in meaningful ways, and parents are committed to actively supporting their children’s and adolescents’ learning and development.

This relationship between schools and parents cuts across and reinforces children’s wellbeing and learning in the multiple settings—at home, in school, in out-of-school programs, and in the community.

For the purposes of this document, the word parent is used to refer to the adult primary caregiver(s) of a child’s basic needs (e.g., feeding, safety). This includes biological parents; other biological relatives such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, or siblings; and nonbiological parents such as adoptive, foster, or step parents. Parents guide the child’s upbringing, which includes the interaction processes between parent and child that contribute to the child’s emotional and social development.

Families regardless of their race/ethnicity, education background, gender, disability or socioeconomic status, are prepared to engage in partnerships with their child’s school and their Diocesan Offices or Religious Institute to improve learning for their children. They can engage in diverse roles such as:

- Supporters who engage with their children’s learning and development
- Encouragers of an achievement identity, a positive self image, and a ‘can do’ spirit in their children
- Monitors of their children’s time, behaviour, boundaries and resources.

Parent engagement also has significant benefits for families and their relationships in the home, the building of social capital in the community; positive effects on school culture; stimulating self growth among parents, and; enhanced professional rewards for principals and staff (Henderson and Berla: 1995; DEST: 2006 p14). Low SES families particular benefit from these activities but the advantages are there for all families.

The benefits are there for all families but particularly low SES families.

WHY IS PARENT ENGAGEMENT SO IMPORTANT?

Catholic Church documents, government documents and research clearly indicate the importance of the role of parents in their children’s learning, not only as the first educators of their children but importantly their key role as the ongoing educator and as an active participant in their children’s learning right through their schooling years and beyond.

Over fifty years of research links the various roles that families play in a child’s education – as supporters of learning, developers of their faith, encouragers of grit and determination, models of lifelong learning, and advocates of appropriate programs and placements for their child – with
indicators of student achievement including student grades, achievement test scores, lower drop-out rates, student’s sense of personal competence and efficacy for learning and student and families beliefs about the importance of education.

Recent research work by the Chicago Consortium on School Research has also shown that ‘parent and community ties’ can have a systemic and sustained effect on learning outcomes for children and on whole school improvement when combined with other essential supports such as strong school leadership, a high-quality staff, community engagement and partnerships, a student-centred learning climate, and effective instructional guidance for staff. In particular research shows that initiatives that take on a partnership orientation – in which student achievement and school improvement are seen as a shared responsibility, relationships of trust and respect are established between home and school, and families and school staff see each other as equal partners – create the conditions for family engagement to flourish (Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School partnerships USA 2013)

Catholic schools have a responsibility as part of their mission to engage and include parents in Catholic Schools and particularly in the faith development of families as part of their evangelizing mission.

Church documents are clear about this role.

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

父母 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 indispensible 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 Millenium, Librerie Editrice, Vaticana, Vatican City

More recently this Vatican document was released in 2013 and makes many references to family -

Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love (2013)

This document makes many references to families and their role in education

The school community is a place for encounter and promoting participation. It dialogues with the family, which is the primary community to which the students that attend school belong. The school must respect the family’s culture. It must listen carefully to the needs that it finds and the expectations that are directed towards it. In this way, the school can be considered a true experience of intercultural relationships, lived out rather than just spoken about.

In schools, understood as educational communities, families have a most important place and role. Catholic schools appreciate their value, and promote their participation in the school, where they can assume various forms of co-responsibility. Even given that some families live in difficult circumstances and there are parents who do not follow the school’s recommendations, families are always considered an indispensable reference-point, as bearers of appreciable resources.
“Partnership between a Catholic school and the families of the students must continue and be strengthened: not simply to be able to deal with academic problems that may arise, but rather so that the educational goals of the school can be achieved.”[58]

68. Schools are challenged by the multicultural make-up of their classes. They must be able to rethink what is taught; the learning methods; their own internal organization, roles and relationships with families; and the social and cultural context where they are to be found. A curriculum that is open to the intercultural perspective presents the students with a study of civilizations that were previously unknown to them, or were remote from them, but which now are brought to their attention, as well as being brought much “closer” thanks to globalization and modern means of communication, crossing barriers of space and ideological defences. Teaching that aims to help students understand the reality in which they live cannot ignore the aspect of encounter. On the contrary, teaching has the duty to favour dialogue, as well as cultural and spiritual exchanges.

77. The time spent in formation must be used for reinforcing the idea of Catholic schools as being communities of fraternal relationships and places of research, dedicated to deepening and communicating truth in the various scholarly disciplines. Those who have leadership positions are duty-bound to guarantee that all personnel receive adequate preparation to serve effectively. Moreover, they must serve in coherence with the faith they profess, and be able to interpret society’s demands in the actual situation of its current configuration.[69] This also favours the school’s collaboration with parents in education,[70] respecting their responsibility as first and natural educators.[71]

Government documents are also clear about this role.

The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians endorsed by all Education Ministers explicitly recognises the role of parents as the first educators of their children

Parents, carers and families are the first and most important influence in a child’s life, instilling the attitudes and values that will support young people to participate in schooling and contribute to broader local and global communities.


Federal government priorities

An effective education system where students come first offers greater opportunities to raise self-worth and better support families and communities.

The Australian Government has a plan to put students first and improve their education outcomes and our schools. We want students to have a quality education with access to the best teachers and an up-to-date and relevant curriculum, and for the people who know them best – their parents, teachers, principals and community – to be able to make informed decisions that will affect their education.

Under the students-first approach, the Australian Government will work with the states and territories, teachers and parents to focus on four key areas that will make a difference:

- **Teacher quality**
- **Principal autonomy**
- **Engaging parents in education**
- **Strengthening the curriculum**
Engaging parents in education

We know that parents and carers are one of the most important influences on a child’s education. When you are engaged in your children’s education, your children are more likely to attend school and to perform better. Parent engagement is simply the attitudes, values and behaviours that positively influence your children’s education outcomes. We want to encourage you to support your children to get the most out of their schooling, from their first day onwards. The earlier you become engaged, the better it is for your children. (http://www.studentsfirst.gov.au/engaging-parents-education)

Anne Henderson, talks about Going Beyond the Bake Sale

Anne Henderson is Senior Fellow, Community Engagement Program, Anneberg Institute for School Reform. Anne’s specialty is the relationship between families and schools, and the impact of that relationship on students’ success in school and through life. Since 1981, she has steadily tracked the research on how engaging families can improve student achievement, particularly among students in diverse and low-income communities. She has also studied effective practice to involve families, not just with their own children but also in school improvement. In this short video Anne discusses, to improve student learning outcomes family involvement needs to go beyond the usual bake sales and into partnerships. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gN9WtMq4dzY#t=61

Parent Engagement is vital to student achiever most accurate predictor of a student’s achieve extent to which that student's family is able to

1. Create a home environment that encourages learning
2. Communicate high, yet reasonable, expectations for their children’s achievement and future careers
3. Become involved in their children’s education at school and in the community
These three seemingly simple steps require dedication and commitment from all students, parents, and school personnel. The resulting benefit of this investment in time and effort is well worth the future aspirations and success of every child. Please review the following list of Academic Benefits of Parent Engagement:

**BENEFITS OF PARENT ENGAGEMENT**

1. Students achieve more, regardless of socio-economic status, ethnic/racial background or the parents’ education level
2. Students have higher grades and test scores, better attendance, and complete homework more consistently
3. Students have higher graduation rates and greater enrolment rates in post-secondary education
4. Educators hold higher expectations of students whose parents collaborate with the teacher
5. Student achievement for disadvantaged children not only improves, but can also reach levels that are standard for middle-class children. In addition, the children who are farthest behind make the greatest gains.
6. Children from diverse cultural backgrounds perform better when parents and professionals collaborate to bridge the gap between the culture at home and at the school
7. Student behaviors such as alcohol use, violence, and antisocial behavior decrease as parent engagement increases
8. Students keep pace with academic performance if their parents participate in school events, develop a working relationship with educators, and keep up with what is happening with their child’s school
9. Junior and senior high school students whose parents remain involved make better transitions, maintain the quality of their work, and develop realistic plans for their future. Students whose parents are not involved, on the other hand, are more likely to drop out of school.

("Collaborating for Success" Parent Engagement Toolkit Michigan Dep of Education)
In a Catholic School we are also connected to Church. Catholic Identity and faith development are the cornerstones of a Catholic School. All the players in a child’s education need to be linked and working together with our children at the centre of all we do so that all our students can have success.

**What does Catholic Identity mean?**

In his book, *Practice Makes Catholic*, Joe Paprocki identifies five key characteristics that define what it means to be Catholic. I encourage you to consider what these characteristics look like for the staff, families and students in your school.

1. **A sense of sacramentality**—Today’s families may not have holy water fonts in each room or pray the rosary as a family. They may not know what a novena is. They may be clueless to the rhythm of the *liturgical year*. They will have palms, be familiar with ashes, and may use an Advent wreath. This year I invited families to learn about the Epiphany blessing of the home and provided chalk, a prayer, and instructions. How can you share the depth and meaning of ritual and symbol with families in non-threatening ways?

2. **A commitment to community**—Young families understand and crave community. They belong to school communities, athletic teams, and neighbourhood groups. They may not feel connected to the Catholic community. Is your parish or school a welcoming place? Do you know one another by name? Do you know what parents do for a living, or what gifts and talents they have? Look for ways to include families in parish events and for families to interact and support one another.

3. **Respect for human life**—How we treat one another and how we think about the value of each person should reflect Gospel values. Being Catholic means being people for others. But are we always? Where in parish, school, or family life does this characteristic break down?

4. **Reverence for Scripture and Tradition**—Yes, there really is a core of Catholic knowledge and belief, and we must continue to hold up the bar. Catholics need to learn and remember the teachings of the faith.

5. **An attitude of faith and hope**—In spite of life’s challenges, a Catholic turns away from despair and seeks comfort in the faith and the community. Knowing one another and being there to encourage and support each other in difficult times reminds us that we do not journey alone. In what ways do parents and students receive our support through life’s difficulties?


There really is something special about being Catholic, and our task is to act and live in a way that communicates these characteristics effectively to all students and their families, in ways that makes sense for them.
WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The Family School Partnerships Framework describes the Principles and key dimensions of effective engagement.

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.
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


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 Parish, 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
The seven dimensions are not designed as stand alone focus areas. Research shows that effective schools use an integrated, multi-dimensional approach to strengthen engagement with families and their community. The Strengthening Family and community engagement resource builds on effective practice for each of these dimensions.

For effective family and community engagement practices to be developed and sustained these supporting structures need to be in place.

1. Leadership commitment to family and community engagement in student learning
2. Respectful relationships with families and communities
3. A supportive and connected school culture
4. A team, reflecting the diversity of the school’s stakeholders, responsible for planning, organising, implementing and evaluation family and community engagement activities
5. School policies and procedures which explicitly state and clearly integrate the principles and dimensions of effective partnership.
6. Resources (personnel and funds) allocated for the implementation of family and community engagement activities
7. Support networks, to enable school communities to share ideas, issues and best practice
8. Ongoing professional learning for school leaders, teachers and families about cultural awareness and communicating with families from diverse communities.
9. Skills building for families to build their capacity to support their children’s learning at home and at school
To create the kinds of school-family partnerships that raise student achievement, improve local communities, and increase public support, we need to understand the difference between family involvement and family engagement. One of the dictionary definitions of involve is "to enfold or envelope," whereas one of the meanings of engage is "to come together and interlock." Thus, involvement implies doing to; in contrast, engagement implies doing with.

A school striving for family involvement often leads with its mouth—identifying projects, needs, and goals and then telling parents how they can contribute. A school striving for parent engagement, on the other hand, tends to lead with its ears—listening to what parents think, dream, and worry about. The goal of family engagement is not to serve clients but to gain partners.

It's not that family involvement is bad. Almost all the research says that any kind of increased parent interest and support of students can help. But almost all the research also says that family engagement can produce even better results—for students, for families, for schools, and for their communities (Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009).

Effective family engagement requires the school to develop a relationship-building process focused on listening. Parents and staff can be recruited as listeners/researchers. This listening process can take many forms mentioned in the action framework and can provide valuable insights about homes and families and assist families to improve their skills.

**CASE STUDY - LISTENING**
During one school's listening time with an immigrant family, a father told how impressed he was with the online literacy program the school was using to help his son. He added that he wished he could afford to have a computer and internet connection at home so that he and the rest of the family could also use the program to learn English.

The listener suggested that if the father knew other parents who had a similar interest in getting access to the literacy program, he might want to bring them together in a meeting with school staff members to explore ways to address this need. The father did so, and out of that process, the parents and the school developed a family literacy project that provided computers and home Internet access to immigrant families, who used the school's website to increase their English skills.

Research tells us that the most successful schools engage students, parents, carers and the community as partners in supporting student learning. Many schools have already developed strategies to engage with parents and community. However with the overwhelming evidence that parent engagement has a positive effect on student achievement, all schools and their communities should make efforts to strengthen their engagement - with and between students, teachers, parents and carers, support staff, community, industry and business groups.
How do we get started in improving parent engagement in our school?

Any successful improvement in parent engagement must involve both school leadership, staff and parent leaders.

Before anything can begin all staff must agree to support this movement and understand what parent engagement in learning is. Staff meetings and pupil free days offer wonderful opportunities to increase their knowledge and to assist them in moving forward and working with parents to engagement them in a meaningful way. When staff realise that parent engagement can make a difference in many ways in their classrooms, including better engagement not only by parents but also students and their learning but also in behaviour and general well being, they will commit to this improvement. Staff need to be taken on the journey to better parent engagement. When they better understand the research that indicates the home as the greatest determiner of success then they will be eager to make this change. Parent engagement in children’s learning added to their quality teaching, which is the greatest determinant of success in school, will all come together to improve overall school improvement.

All parents also need to understand what you are trying to achieve and how they can make a difference to their child’s achievement through being conscious of and acting on these simple activities at home. Beyond school councils Engaging parents to help their children succeed at school A toolkit for principals, teachers and parents about doing what matters most offers a very simple place to start for all (Principals, teachers and parents).

(Further information - Beyond school councils: Engaging parents to help their children succeed at school. A toolkit for principals, teachers and parents about what matters most. www.peopleforeducation.ca)

Key things parents can do

- Have high expectations for your children
- Talk about school at home
- Help your children develop a positive attitude toward learning and good work habits
- Reading together

We add one more

- Bring children to school ready to learn – plenty of sleep and well fed

The toolkit then offers tips that teachers and principals can use to support parents efforts in each area. The toolkit is based on research from across the world and explains why school practices make a difference – it is not about parents ‘teaching’ their children the curriculum but rather about quality interaction as parents influencing attitudes, personal competence, persistence and organisation.

How do you get this message to all families and help them to enact these activities?

There is no simple answer to this question. Parents are not an homogenous group and so the makeup of your school community will be the determinant. There needs to be a range of opportunities provided that welcome and encourage parents to participate – you may need to provide significant outreach to some parents. (Some suggestions are offered in the action framework).

If you can make a start on everybody working on these simple things then you are well on the way.
Steps to strengthen engagement

The steps described in the following pages align with a typical school planning cycle and as such the school community (staff, families, students and community members) should be involved in all the steps. When the school community is included it is more likely that all groups within the school community will take ownership and be more committed to action. Within each school community there will be key people and organisations who can assist families and community members engage in the processes.

The Reviewing current practice proforma and School Assessment Tool (Reflection Matrix) can be found in the Resources section on our website www.pandf.org.au

The following Theory of change diagram provides direction to lead us in in our work.
School-Family Partnership: The Theory of Change Underlying our Work

**Vision/Goals**

- **Vision**
  Parent-teacher partnerships to improve student achievement

- **Goals**
  - Enhance school staff capacity
  - Enhance parents’ knowledge and skills
  - Link school-family partnership plan to goals of school improvement plan (SIP)

**Govt/School Strategies**

- **State Supports**
  - **Technical assistance**
    - Regional institutes
    - Site visits
  - **Tools**:
    - Sample plan
    - Rubric
    - *Beyond the Bakesale*

**School Actions**

- **School response**
  - **Create action team**
  - **Develop process for writing new partnership plan**
  - **Co-write new plan**

- **Focus on improving critical student skills**
  - Collaborate with parents

**Changes in Attitudes and Practice**

- **Communications more frequent, focused on learning**
  - Parent-teacher interactions
  - Two-way home-school information exchanges
  - Parent-teacher conferences focused on student learning

- **Teacher capacity**
  - Professional development
  - Cultural competence

- **Instruction**
  - Tailored to students’ needs
  - Homework has family component

- **Parent capacity**
  - Knowledge and skills to support academics
  - Confidence to help student

**Outcomes for Students, Parents and School**

- **Student outcomes**
  - Improved attendance and behavior
  - Greater homework completion
  - Less remedial and catch-up work needed
  - Increased student motivation and proficiency

- **Parent outcomes**
  - More parent engagement
  - Greater participation in adult education
  - Increased family learning

- **School outcomes**
  - More positive school climate
  - Greater trust among staff and families
  - Increased satisfaction and loyalty of stakeholders
None of this is easy but can be made easier through commitment, perseverance and resilience – all the things we teach our children – but if we work together to understand parents and their needs then we will achieve what we set out to do.