

Progressing Parental Engagement School Fact Sheet

Supporting parents to get engaged with the school community

This fact sheet aims to assist schools to support parents to get engaged with the school community by providing examples of ways to enhance parent-school communication and school community participation.

Parent-school communication – beyond the newsletter

Effective two-way communication among schools, families, and community members or groups about school programs and student progress are vital. They help to build a strong parental engagement culture within a school community.

There are numerous ways to communicate with parents, but importantly, there is no one-size-fits-all approach.

When it comes to reaching all parents, it is important to use multiple communication channels including face-to-face, email, letters/notices, SMS, web portals, mobile apps, phone calls, etc.

Some considerations

No matter which communication channel is being used, the following tips are important to consider when communicating with parents:

- Schedule a convenient way and time to communicate with parents
- Communicate the positive as well as the negative comments
- Be approachable and eager to build a relationship
- Keep parents informed of happenings in the classroom and school
- Respect the opinions of others, even where they are different.

Potential strategies:

- Develop the capacity of school staff to work with families and community members. Provide professional development for teachers to learn to effectively communicate with parents
- Be aware of and provide information about how to access information in other language forms
- Communicate frequently with parents and use a **variety** of tools such as newsletters, phone calls, electronic methods (e.g. email, blogs, website) to tell parents about projects, topics and activities that students are engaged in.
- Enhance communication with parents through effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communication about school programs and children's progress. Use a range of communication tools and channels, including newsletters, websites, emails, assemblies, parent/teacher interviews, P&C meetings, web conferencing, text messages and social media

- Appoint a community liaison person as a link between parents and the school, in order to build both teacher and parent capacity to communicate with one another. A person in this role has much to offer, teaching parents the language of schooling, including the nature of classrooms, how to speak with teachers and how to talk to their children about their schooling experiences.

Using ICT to communicate effectively – a special consideration

The rapid growth of online technologies has created many opportunities for schools to engage parents and the community. This includes online services and information on school websites, homework advice and materials that support learning, collaboration with guest experts, celebrating student achievements, conducting community consultation activities and promoting school activities through online social media.

It is important for schools to take care, however, choosing the right online tool for the job and using it safely and effectively.

In particular, schools need to maintain their duty of care to students, ensuring children and young people's safety online and preventing unauthorised access to student personal information.

CASE STUDY 1: **Schools Use Social Media to Better Connect with Parents and their School Community**

Many ACT schools are now using social media tools to keep parents and the wider school community up to date on their school's activities and achievements.

Facebook and Twitter have become useful communication tools.

They enable schools to provide parents, carers and families with a greater insight into a child's learning environment. Schools provide regular updates on items such as the various projects and activities students are working on, student achievements and advice on homework. Schools also use Facebook and Twitter to update general notices including school notes and updates from excursions.

While school newsletters remain the most common communication tool for parents, social media provides real-time updates for parents on their computer or smart phone.

One parent recently commented on Chapman Primary School's Facebook page:

“Hi, congratulations to everyone involved in the school's Facebook page. Great way for parents to keep in touch and on top of things. Reminders about notes due, excursions, camps etc are really helpful.”



<http://www.det.act.gov.au/parents-and-students-at-the-centre/chapman>

A school community that encourages belonging and engagement

Parents and families often lead complex lives today.

This makes it all the more important to provide a variety of ways, times and places for parents and families to participate in the school community. It also makes it important to acknowledge and value parent and community participation in student learning and in the school community.

This engagement sends a clear message to children about the value of education.

When it comes to building a school community that encourages belonging and engagement, Mapp (2003) highlights a 'joining process' that involves welcoming parents and families into the school, honouring their participation and engagement, and connecting with them through a focus on the children and their learning.

Some considerations for schools to reflect on include:

- How do parents and community members participate in school activities?
- How does the school community recognise and support volunteers?
- How can volunteers contribute to teaching and learning?
- Are parents notified about major events well in advance so they can plan ahead? How?
- Does the school celebrate significant cultural days?

Potential strategies:

- Promote parent engagement in school events and provide opportunities for families to observe student learning and celebrate student achievement
- Load events, meetings and assessment calendars on the school website at the start of each term, semester or year and update regularly
- Develop a database of parent and community skills, talents and availability to draw on when required
- Engage community members and business in designing learning experiences and extracurricular activities
- Invite parents and community members to become involved as guest teachers and speakers
- Regularly build parent engagement and/or involvement into staff meetings to strengthen commitment, knowledge and skills about parental engagement in the school culture.

CASE STUDY 2:

Muffins and Maths at Podcast Launch

Over coffee and muffins, parents and carers settled in to be briefed on one of the innovative learning resources being used at Fraser Primary School in Canberra's North.

Fraser Primary School has recently introduced a series of five Math Techniques podcasts as a learning resource. This easily accessible, convenient and creative education tool aims to help students improve their mathematics ability, and assist parents in understanding new techniques used to teach mathematics to their children.

The podcasts are located on the school's website and are therefore accessible wherever internet access is available.

Principal Sue Norton described the podcasts as being a way of enhancing parental understanding. "By showing what has changed, and how children may be working out math problems differently to how parents did when they were in school will hopefully make the link between home and school learning easier," she said.

"The podcasts are a fantastic tool for engaging parents with the school, it gives them a further resource to help them understand the techniques and ways their child is being taught and what best work with family lifestyles."

<http://www.det.act.gov.au/parents-and-students-at-the-centre/fraser>



Research and resources

There is a wide body of research available which supports the need for effective parental engagement strategies. Several Australian guides are provided here for reference.

Family – School Partnerships Framework – A guide for schools and families

http://www.familyschool.org.au/files/3013/8451/8364/Family-school_partnerships_framework.pdf

References

Mapp, Karen L. (2003) Having Their Say: Parents Describe Why and How They Are Engaged in Their Children's Learning. *School Community Journal*, v13 n1 p35-64 Spr-Sum

About this project

The ACT Education and Training Directorate partnered with the non-profit Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY), The Catholic Education Office of the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn, the Association of Independent Schools of the ACT, the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, the Catholic School Parents Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn and the Association of Parents and Friends of ACT Schools. Together, the alliance developed a shared understanding of parental engagement in the ACT, based on what the evidence shows has the biggest impact and the things that matter most to ACT families and schools. The international evidence has been reviewed and parents and teachers have been consulted on what is important to them.

Our Partners

The ACT Education and Training Directorate partnered with the non-profit Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY), The Catholic Education Office of the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn, the Association of Independent Schools of the ACT, the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, the Catholic School Parents Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn and the Association of Parents and Friends of ACT Schools. Together, the alliance developed a shared understanding of parental engagement in the ACT, based on what the evidence shows has the biggest impact and the things that matter most to ACT families and schools. The international evidence has been reviewed and parents and teachers have been consulted on what is important to them.

More resources will be available in 2015.

