

# Parent and Community Engagement Framework

Working together to maximise student learning



## Purpose

Parents\* and the broader community play a vital role in supporting successful learning outcomes for our children. This framework is about schools engaging with parents and communities to work together to maximise student learning outcomes.

The research tells us that the most meaningful partnerships are those where schools, parents, students and the community work together to focus on student learning. Parent and community engagement that is effectively focused on student learning can deliver powerful outcomes.

This Parent and Community Engagement Framework identifies what schools can do to strengthen learning outcomes for students – through effective partnerships between principals, teachers, students, parents and the community. It sends a call to action to our schools to focus on parent and community engagement as a key part of supporting student learning.

Many of our schools have already developed effective strategies to engage with parents and community, however with the overwhelming evidence that parent engagement has a positive effect on student achievement, all state schools are encouraged to strengthen their approaches in this area.

Queensland has a diverse range of communities and it is important to acknowledge that each school has its own contexts to which they respond. A range of contexts apply including remote locations, high proportions of working parents, high proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, recent disasters and other community events. For this reason, it is essential that schools individualise their engagement strategies to suit their particular needs and those of their parents and communities.

This framework uses current best practice to provide a model to support all partners in their quest to boost parent and community engagement.

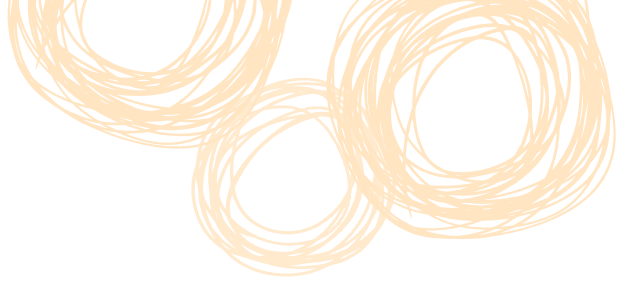
## Introduction

The education of our students is a shared responsibility, benefiting all students, our society and economy as a whole. Therefore, parents and broader communities have a reciprocal responsibility to engage with schools.

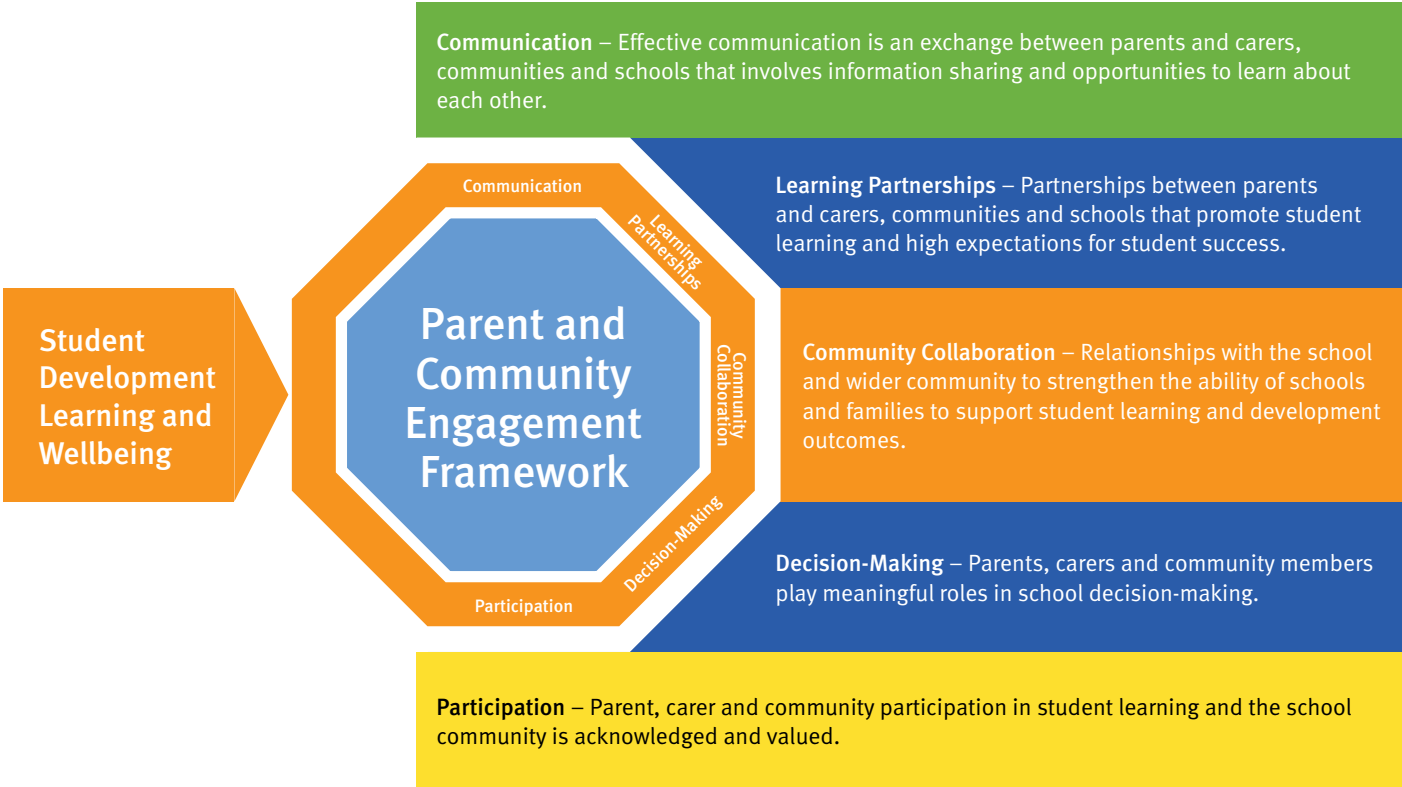
Schools are better able to support student achievement by developing strong engagement with and between:

- students
- teachers
- parents and carers
- support staff
- community, industry and business groups.

\* Throughout the document, where the term 'parent' is used to refer to parents, carers and families.



The quality of these relationships will determine the quality of the learning. This framework outlines five key elements of parent and community engagement to make a positive difference in our students' education.



## Communication

Effective communication between schools, parents, the community and students forms the foundation in developing and maintaining partnerships. Schools also have a responsibility to help parents understand the language of learning.

### Some considerations:

- Is student progress communicated to parents in a positive and meaningful way? How?
- Is it clear what teachers and parents need to discuss? How?
- Is there a shared language of learning between teachers and parents to explore the learning development, challenges and successes of the students?
- How can schools work with parents and the community to establish a shared set of expectations about schooling?
- How do working parents or parents with language barriers communicate with the school?
- How does the school communicate with industry and business partners?

### Potential strategies:

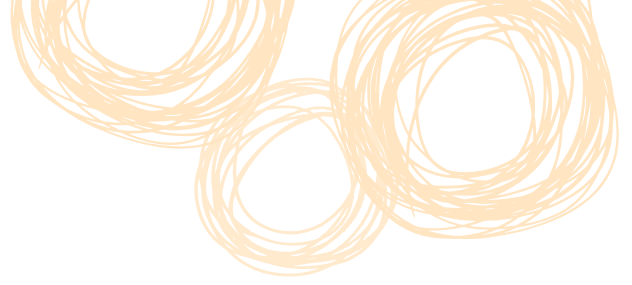
- Use home-school liaison personnel to teach parents the language of schooling, including the nature of today's classrooms, how to speak with teachers and how to talk to their children about their schooling experiences
- Use a range of communication tools and channels, including newsletters, websites, e-mails, assemblies, parent/teacher interviews, P&C meetings, web conferencing and text messages
- Develop a school transition calendar outlining key points in the school year where engagement of parents and the community is vital and the specific activities to be used to engage them
- Be aware of and communicate how to access information in other languages and forms
- Provide professional development for teachers to effectively communicate with parents
- Share consistent and ongoing messages of high expectations for all students and their learning.

## Learning partnerships

Learning is not limited to the classroom. The beliefs, expectations and experience of parents is a powerful determinant in student's achievement. Understanding the school, home and community contribution to student learning helps cultivate a holistic learning environment.

### Some considerations:

- How can schools support parents to be positively involved with their child's learning, at home and at school?



- How can teachers and parents work together to help children learn?
- How does the school find out what would help parents?
- How can the school leverage community, industry and business knowledge and skills?
- Are there opportunities to develop partnerships with parents or the community that could deliver more innovative models of partnership development, education and training?
- How do teachers seek to understand and learn about students, including their home and community contributions, their culture and what contributions it makes?

**Potential strategies:**

- Build relationships with local early years services
- Include practical literacy and numeracy activities that involve parents in homework
- Provide parent/teacher workshops targeting areas of need or interest such as student resilience, literacy and numeracy
- Embed the practice of involving parents in goal setting and career planning discussions with their children
- Connect culture and learning by partnering with Elders in educational experiences
- Develop local strategies to support transitions between early childhood education and care, primary school and secondary school, higher education and the workforce.

## Community collaboration

Schools do not exist in isolation – they are often the central hub of their community. Schools should leverage their position in the community to work together with other community members, for the benefit of all.

**Some considerations:**

- What are the key characteristics and strengths of the community?
- What can the community do to support the school in areas such as drug education, anti-bullying, civic responsibility and the development of social skills?
- What does the community, including local employers, expect from the school? How can they help student learning?
- Are there genuine partnerships established between the school and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and individuals?

**Potential strategies:**

- Generate and maintain contact with relevant health professionals in the area to support referrals
- Develop a school alumni group and other marketing materials such as school banners and fence signs
- Open school facilities for community use, including adult learning, community meetings and community interest groups
- Build networks to establish a community integrated student support/health/early childhood services hub, including Child and Family Centres.

## Decision-making

Providing opportunities for relevant consultation ensure decisions reflect local needs – whether for an individual student or the school as a whole. Greater community ownership and trust of school directions and decisions can be developed through open and authentic consultation.

### Some considerations:

- Is consultation genuine, encouraging open and honest dialogues?
- Does the school offer training and support to build parent leadership capacity, empowering parents to participate effectively in consultation?
- Does the school arrange for the community to be consulted on formal/informal decision-making, reviews and new school policies (for example, assessment, reporting and curriculum changes)? How?
- Has the school considered how it will consult with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consultative groups?

### Potential strategies:

- Consult flexibly to reach a cross-section of students, parents and community members, not just the most confident
- Ensure information regarding consultation opportunities is widely circulated in a variety of forms
- Offer training or skill development opportunities to parents and teachers
- Develop strategies to help teachers balance any time and workload issues that may result from their involvement with consultative decision-making
- Encourage active participation in the school council and/or the P&C and encourage student participation in decision-making processes.

## Participation

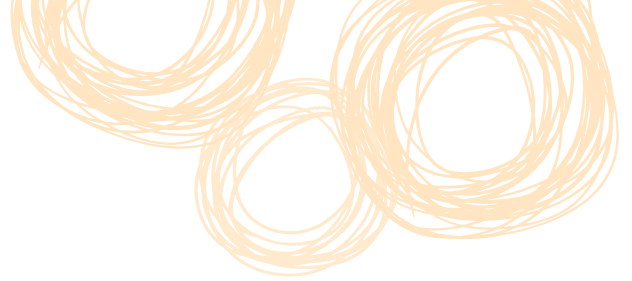
In a society where parents lead complex lives, opportunities to participate in a variety of ways, times and places is key to improvement. Parent and community participation in student learning and the school community should be acknowledged and valued. This involvement sends a clear signal to students about the value of education.

### Some considerations:

- 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:

- Load events, meetings and assessment calendars on the school website at the start of each term, semester or year



- 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.

## Research and resources

There is a wide body of research available which supports the need for effective parent and community engagement strategies.

A range of practical tips, tools, guides and checks for both schools and parents are available on the Parent and Community Engagement Framework website.

## Markers of strong parent and community engagement

- Parents are encouraged to take a genuine and close interest in the work of the school, are acknowledged as the first teachers of their children, and engage as partners in their children's learning
- Communication with parents provides information about where students are up to in their learning, what progress they have made over time and what they might do to support their children's further learning
- Respectful and caring relationships are reflected in the ways in which staff, students and parents interact and in the language they use in both formal and informal settings
- Schools have regular and ongoing ways of finding out what parents need to engage with their child's learning
- Parents can list the school's key expectations for behaviour, attendance, homework
- The principal and the teachers use many styles of communication appropriate for parents' cultural backgrounds, availability, working conditions etc
- The principal and teachers regularly connect with the parent/s of every child in the school
- There are mechanisms to build relationships with relevant members of the community.

## Continual improvement

The *Teaching and Learning Audit Dimension 3 – a culture that promotes learning* provides a mechanism for schools to review their parent and community engagement.

The School Opinion Survey also provides schools with valuable data to reflect upon the effectiveness of their parent and community engagement.

School and Community Partnerships is one of the central elements for inclusion in the Annual Implementation Plan and School Plan.