

**SCHOOL POLICY:** PARENTS/CARERS AS PARTNERS IN SCHOOLING  
**PUBLISHED:** September 2001  
**IDENTIFIER:** PCP200109  
**CONTACT:** Community Partnerships and School Improvement Section

## 1 PURPOSE

The purposes of this policy are to:

- promote parent/carer participation in a diversity of roles to support children's education
- provide a framework for effective partnerships with parents/carers at system level and in schools
- affirm parents/carers participation as a highly desirable component of the ACT government school system, and
- acknowledge parents/carers as first educators of their children and their right to participate in their children's schooling.

## 2. APPLICATION

- 2.1 This policy applies to all members of the ACT Department of Education and Training and all preschools and schools. It also includes some general principles which parents/carers are encouraged to adopt in working with and in schools in support of students' learning.

## 3. DEFINITIONS

- *Parent/Carer(s)*: people with parental responsibility and guardians.
- *Children*: preschool, primary school, high school and college students.
- *Parent/Carer participation*: engagement with their child's schooling in a broad sense (refer to scope for further details).
- *Partnership*: a mutually respectful and responsive relationship in which goals are shared and the assumption of goodwill exists. It also implies participation in decision-making or an ability to influence decisions.
- *School community*: includes parents/carers, students, administrative and teaching staff in preschools, primary schools, high schools and colleges.
- *Two-way communication*: regular, meaningful dialogue initiated by both parents/carers and staff.
- *System*: the Department of Education and Training including Central Office and schools.

#### 4. CONTEXT

Parent/Carer participation:

- enhances social and educational outcomes for children, and communication between classrooms and homes
- allows schools to benefit from socio-cultural and linguistic diversity that children and parents bring to schools
- enhances understanding of parents/carers and the public of school activities
- provides schools with a broader resource base from which to draw in providing learning opportunities and services to children and families
- increases participation in decision-making in the community, and
- enhances community spirit and cohesion.

#### 5. SCOPE

The scope of parent/carer involvement enables the planning of more inclusive strategies to enhance parent/carer participation. It acknowledges the rights of parents/carers to have their opinions respected and considered, including the need for sensitivity to the rights and roles of adults with different caring responsibilities. The scope covers:

- *Parenting Responsibilities*: the basic parenting responsibilities that support children and which are central to a child's successful participation in schooling.
- *Learning at Home*: participation and support in general developmental learning through childhood and adolescence and in school work at home.
- *Communication*: formal and informal communication between home and school about school programs, activities and student progress. Communication is a two way process and is one of the most basic elements of supporting home-school partnerships.
- *Volunteering*: the traditional, visible and highly valued form of parent/carer participation in schools. It includes helping in classrooms and other areas of the school, fund raising and support services such as canteen and after school care. It may also include the support and involvement of parents/carers in P&C Associations.
- *Decision Making*: the involvement of parents/carers in decision-making at various levels on school boards and committees and at the system level.
- *Community*: Parents/Carers support students and schools through active roles in community organisations. Examples are sporting organisations, service clubs, after school care and integrated support services for families.

## 6. PRINCIPLES

- 6.1 All parents have knowledge, skills and resources that support their children's learning in school and parents have a strong complementary role to play in their children's learning and behaviour.
- 6.2 Parent/Carer participation is very important to student achievement and school success. Effective partnerships between schools and families foster student learning and contribute to the general climate and development of schools. Comprehensive parent/carer participation is valued and encouraged at all levels of the system.
- 6.3 The system aims to acknowledge, encourage and extend parent/carer participation by:
- creating an environment in which the participation of all parents/carers in schools and student learning is welcomed, where teachers and parents treat each other with mutual respect and where differing views and opinions are considered and discussed with a view to finding solutions;
  - involving parents/carers in decision-making at the school and system levels, by consulting with parent/carer representatives on education policy, school development issues, including parent/carer representation on committees and advisory groups;
  - encouraging parent/carer participation as volunteers to support schools and classroom activities; (**Note:** *parental assistance is additional to paid, trained teacher assistants and not in place of them*).
  - promoting relevant, accurate and timely communication between schools and families about student progress, all aspects of school programs and policies with respect for the diversity and differing needs of families;
  - developing system and school programs and strategies that encourage and assist parents/carers to actively participate in their children's education both at school and at home;
  - connecting children and families with community and support services;
  - supporting programs and activities designed to develop parenting skills; and
  - providing information about the benefits of parent participation and enhancing the skills of teachers and parents in developing effective home-school partnerships.

## 7. RESPONSIBILITIES

### 7.1 Responsibilities of the Department

- provide a system framework for the development of effective home-school partnerships and encouragement of parent participation in schools and students' learning;
- facilitate access to information for schools and parents about the benefits of parent participation and programs to support parent participation;

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#### Parents/Carers as Partners in Schooling

- provide opportunities for teachers and parents to enhance their skills in developing effective home-school partnerships; and
- consult with the representatives of parents on system policies and initiatives and include representatives on review committees and working groups at the system level.

## 7.2 Responsibilities of Principals

The responsibilities of principals are to ensure that parents/carers are to:

- establish a school environment that welcomes and encourages all parents to raise questions, participate in school activities and volunteer their services in a variety of ways;
- ensure that parents are treated as collaborators in children's learning;
- ensure that parent views are sought in developing policies and addressing school wide issues and that parents and their representatives are involved in decision making processes about school policies, programs and finances;
- ensure a school wide approach to communication with parents about school policies, programs, activities and reporting on students that is frequent, clear and two way; and
- report on parent participation in school board annual reports.

## 7.3 Responsibilities of Teachers

The responsibilities of teachers in parent/carer participation are to:

- acknowledge that all parents have positive strengths that contribute to their children's learning;
- respect diversity of family backgrounds and cultures and their contribution to children's learning;
- encourage parent involvement in their children's learning and provide advice to support that environment; and
- provide clear and timely information to parents about the achievements and progress of their children and provide regular opportunities for two way dialogue about progress.

## 7.4 Responsibility of Parents/Carers

- Parents/Carers need to comply with all relevant policies, procedures and guidelines, and the principals' directives that pertain to visitors when they enter a school.
- Parents/Carers who have issue with decisions taken by class teachers or principals should attempt to resolve these at the school level in the first instance. Should resolution be unachievable, the issue(s) should be

resolved according to the department's procedures for resolving complaints.

- Parents/Carers who, in the course of their participation, become a party to confidential information must agree not to divulge the information to any other person.

# **IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES OF PARENT/CARERS AS PARTNERS IN SCHOOLING POLICY**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Parents/Carers as Partners in Schooling Policy provides a broad framework from which preschools and schools can promote parent/carer participation. In addition are Implementation Guidelines and a Checklist for schools to offer some guidance in the implementation of the policy. This document is not intended to be prescriptive. Its aim is to provide schools with suggestions and ideas for the implementation of the policy.

## **PROCESSES**

Schools need to have processes that ensure parent/carer participation practices are constantly promoted and developed throughout the school. Some of these are:

- Creating a profile, through research and by collecting information, of the families that make up the school community
- Discussing and recording the school's commitment to family involvement
- Developing a three-year plan for parent/carer participation
- Ensuring parent/carer participation is highlighted in the School Development Plan
- Having a specific school policy on parents/carers involvement
- Identifying who in the school will be responsible for different aspects of parent/carer participation
- Creating an inventory of current practice of parent/carer involvement in the school
- Conducting regular surveys of parents/carers (minimum once per year) to assess their satisfaction with, and ideas on, parent/carer involvement
- Supporting teachers to attend professional development on parent/carer participation
- Running discussion groups within the school on current issues/experiences in parent/carer participation
- Running training sessions for parents on ways of involving parents in the school
- Holding an End-of-Year Celebration and Planning Workshop to recognise the progress made and to plan ahead to improve partnerships in the next school year
- Seeking grants for strategic projects/new initiatives in parent/carer participation

## **SPECIFIC ROLES FOR PARENTS/CARERS AND RELEVANT ACTIVITIES**

The headings of this section relate to the scope section of the Parents/Carers as Partners in Schooling policy.

### **PARENTING**

These activities increase families' understanding of their children as students and also increase schools' understanding of families.

- Summits or Information Nights on key parenting topics
- Workshops, videotapes, online messages on parenting and child development at each age and grade level
- Family support programs to assist families with health, nutrition, and parenting
- Home Visiting programs or neighbourhood meetings to help families understand schools and to help schools understand families.

### **COMMUNICATING**

These activities include school-to-home and home-to-school communication about school and classroom programs and students' progress:

- Develop a communication policy for the school
- Develop a complaints/grievances policy so that parents have clear guidelines to address these issues in the school
- Clear information to parents/carers about choosing schools and selecting courses, programs and activities within schools
- Clear information on all school policies, programs, reforms, assessments, appeals and transitions.
- Information Packs for parents/carers that include school telephone numbers, important meeting dates, school policies
- Parent noticeboard in the school
- Focus groups for parents to discuss issues related to the school
- Use of interpreters/written translation for non-English speaking background families
- Three way interviews between teachers, parents and students about student progress
- School/classroom newsletters with parent/carer "reaction" sheets
- Phone calls and other communication by teachers to parents

- Implementation of “online” packages whereby parents can access curriculum/program material about their child’s classes and individual information about their child’s progress
- Similar events held at different times to accommodate differing family commitments
- Parent Room in the school
- Provide opportunities for students to become key participants in communicating within their families about their learning eg. learning journeys
- Portfolios of student work sent home regularly for parent review and comments
- Annual survey of families on students’ needs and families’ reactions to school programs
- Family Fun and Learning Nights that help families understand school programs
- Parents and students invited to become members of school committees to review curriculum or school policies.

## **VOLUNTEERING**

These activities involve families giving their time and talents to support schools, teachers and students by:

- Direct classroom activities
- Assisting with school excursions
- Involvement with the P&C Association
- Fundraising
- Training for volunteers
- Annual survey to identify interests, talents and availability of volunteers
- Class parents, telephone tree, or other structures to provide all families with required information.

## **LEARNING AT HOME**

These activities provide information and ideas to families about the academic work students do in class, how to help with homework and other curriculum-related activities and decisions. Teachers can assist parents/carers to support their children in a range of ways with learning at home by:

- Providing assistance to parents/carers on how to support the experiences, interests and skills children develop in the home context
- Encouraging some ‘interactive homework’ ie homework that involves students in two-way activities and interaction with families and/or community members.



- Ensuring homework is not always based on family involvement for those students who do not have assistance at home
- Promoting shared reading programs between parents and students
- Supporting parents by providing them with information about how they can develop a learning culture within the home
- Helping parents and carers recognise that the home environment and the broader community provide children with many and varied learning experiences
- Sharing information on how to assist students with skills they need to learn
- Calendars with daily/weekly activities for parents and students to do at home or in the community
- Preparing a school brochure for parents on how to develop a learning environment at home

### **DECISION-MAKING**

These activities enable families to participate in decisions about school programs by:

- School Board membership
- School development process
- P&C involvement
- Distributing draft policies/issues papers to parents for feedback
- Forming a parent / teacher group through an existing or new structure to consider a range of school issues
- Networks to link all families with parent representatives
- Including student representatives alongside parents in decision-making

### **COLLABORATING WITH THE COMMUNITY**

These activities facilitate cooperation and collaboration among schools, families and community groups, organisations, agencies and individuals. This is a two-way process whereby community resources assist schools. Educators, families, parents/carers and students help their communities by:

- Operating Community services sessionally or permanently from the school
- Inviting community services/government agencies to talk about their service to groups of parents/carers
- Ensuring staff have up-to-date lists of community agencies for families
- Displaying examples of individual students and classes' work and discussing these with parents/carers

- Providing information for students and families on community health, cultural events , recreational activities, social support and other programs/services in newsletters, noticeboards etc
- Having “one-stop” family services through partnerships of school, counselling, health, recreation, job training and other agencies
- Encouraging ex-students and their parents/carers to participate in school programs
- Seeking opportunities for Cluster School-Family-Community Partnership activities
- Promoting mentoring programs using community members
- Looking for opportunities for students to work supportively within the community (eg with aged persons)
- Involving students in neighbourhood projects
- Providing opportunities for the community to use school space and/or facilities

## **CONCLUSION**

The Community Partnerships and School Improvement Section of DET has a range of resources/ideas to assist schools in the implementation of this policy. In addition, they can assist in supporting particular ideas or projects schools may have. They can be contacted on 6205 9370. Teachers, parents/carers and members of the community can share initiatives with the Section who will circulate ideas amongst ACT school communities.

## **RESOURCES**

1. *School, Family, and Community Partnerships. Your Handbook for Action* by Joyce L. Epstein, Lucretia Coates, Karen Clark Salinas, Mavis G. Sanders, Beth S. Simon (Corwin Press 1997)
2. ACT Department of Education and Training – Contours of Learning; A guide for children’s learning in the early years.
3. Department of Education Tasmania: Parent Participation Project

<http://www.education.tas.gov.au/ooe/ppp/>

The ACT Department of Education and Training acknowledges the work of Associate Professor Dr Patricia Thomson of the University of South Australia who was the adviser for the Tasmanian project.

**YEAR:**

<b>CHECKLIST FOR SCHOOLS ON PARENT/CARER INVOLVEMENT</b>	
	<b>Comments</b>
• Does the school have a specific policy on parent/carer involvement?	
• Has the school done a survey of parents/carers on issues relating to parental involvement?	
• Who in the school is responsible for coordinating parental involvement?	
• What mechanisms are in place for teachers to report on their parent/carer involvement activities?	
• Has the school developed a plan for parent/carer participation activities?	
• If so, how is this plan reviewed regularly?	
• Have any submissions for funding of parent/carer participation projects been made?	
• Have teachers attended professional development on parent participation?	
• Have information sessions been held for parents/carers on key topics?	
• How has information about community services been distributed to families?	
• Is information accessible to parents/carers from diverse linguistic backgrounds?	
• What activities have been put in place to specifically target "hard-to-reach" families?	
• What activities occur to celebrate parent/carer involvement?	