



Qld P&F Federation
STRONG VOICE FOR FAMILIES IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

***Seeking the support of the next Government of Queensland
to strengthen Parent Engagement in
Queensland Catholic School Communities***

Parent Engagement in Student Learning and Wellbeing in Queensland Catholic Schools

The Federation of Parents & Friends of Catholic Schools in Queensland (P&F) believes that building the capacity of schools to engage families in their children's education and well-being should be at the forefront of P&F activities. Research shows that parent engagement and well-being provides a platform to increase student success and school improvement.

Research in the area of parent engagement is growing and the evidence is irrefutable – parent engagement and the home have the most significant influence on the achievement of children and young people. The Federation understands the mutual responsibility all stakeholders have to ensure we build the best relationships between schools and families so that young people have the best chance for success.

In particular, research indicates that the first three years of life have the most impact on a child's brain development and future health and well-being. For optimum development, a child needs loving relationships and a stimulating environment in which to interact, play and learn.

These early years of parent engagement ensure that children are ready to learn when they reach the Preparatory year and provide vital foundations for successful learning during their school years.

The Federation seeks to play a pivotal role in this important endeavour by working in partnership with government, dioceses and Religious Institute Schools and families. We also wish to connect to families with young children before their children come to our Catholic Schools so that we can assist them with school readiness. The Federation sees this collaboration as a co-responsibility of government, Catholic schooling authorities and the Federation. We believe that existing strong relationships hold us in good stead to assist in improving our schools and assist families through better parent engagement with their children's education.

Background

The Catholic Church, Commonwealth Government and Queensland Government all recognise that parents are the first educators of their children and young people. They also agree that it is crucial for parents to engage with their children's learning and well-being.

World wide research supports this view and the Federation wishes to take a role in assisting schools and families to better engage with student's learning.

Government Support for Parent Engagement

The recently released ***Queensland Education Accord: Our 30-year vision for education in Queensland - A draft for consultation*** has listed Engaging Parents and Community as one of the key priorities.

When parents and schools work together to support the learning of the child, evidence shows that children have stronger learning outcomes, stay in school longer and enjoy school more. This engagement starts even before students set foot in the school grounds, with parents, early childhood education and care providers, principals, teachers and school communities. It also continues as children are leaving school to take up further education, training and employment opportunities.

The Federal Government has ***Engaging Parents in Education*** as one of their four priorities for **Students First (www.studentsfirst.gov.au)**. The website states – *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.*

What is Parent engagement in learning and well-being?

Parent engagement is simply the attitudes, values and behaviours that positively influence children's educational outcomes. In the schooling context, parent engagement is an intentional and collaborative

strategy to leverage the knowledge, capacities and social capital of families to improve learning and well-being outcomes for all children and young people.

Parents play a significant role in supporting their children's health and learning, guiding their children successfully through the early years and into school processes, and advocating for their children and for the effectiveness of schools.

Parent engagement in schools can also be defined as parents and school staff working together to support and improve the learning, development, and health 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 health and learning in the multiple settings - at home, in school, in out-of-school programs, and in the community.

All families, regardless of their race/ethnicity, education background, gender, disability or socioeconomic status, are prepared to engage in partnerships with school and their Diocesan Offices or Religious Institute to improve learning for their children.

When families are effectively engaged in their children's education and well-being, and in the improvement of schools, there are many roles they can play.

Families can be engaged as:

- Supporters of their children's learning
- Encouragers of an achievement identity, a positive self-image, and a "can do" spirit
- Monitors of their children's time, behaviour, boundaries and resources
- Models of lifelong learning and enthusiasm for education
- Advocates for improved learning opportunities for their children and at their schools
- Decision-makers/choosers of educational options for their child, the school, and community
- Collaborators with school staff and members of the community

To create the kinds of early years and 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).

We want to build a capacity in all families to better engage with their children's education and well-being, not only in school, but during the early years so children are school ready. We also wish to build the capacity in schools and early years settings to assist families to better engage and help their children to have success and to enhance school improvement strategies.

Key Issues:

Parent Engagement is one of the key priorities of the Queensland Government's *Education Accord* and one of the pillars of the Federal Government's *Students First* policy.

Most recently the Review of Australian Curriculum also strongly raises parent engagement as an area of particular focus.

The Federation has developed a Parent Engagement Framework (Appendix 1) and Growth and Renewal cycle (Appendix 2) and now believes it is time to take this to all Catholic schools and work with them on best practice in parent engagement.

Development of materials to enhance the framework includes -

- Build knowledge and skills across the state about parent engagement and what it means in every home and every classroom so that all children can have success.
- Prepare materials for in-service
- In-service Principals and staff and parents
- Prepare professional development materials and have them accredited through College of teachers for PD credits for teachers
- Work with diocesan P & F councils and diocesan education offices
- Work with local schools as requested
- Research to keep Federation up to date with latest trends
- Work with QELi to further develop Parent Engagement knowledge in Leadership courses

The Federation, if funding can be achieved, plans to have a comprehensive approach to the program based mainly on research from Harvard Family Research Project, John Hopkins University Centre on School, Family and Community Partnerships as well as local research by Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) and the Family School and Community Partnerships Bureau.

Intended Programme

Develop materials for in-service of various groups of stakeholders

1. Diocesan leadership and Catholic Religious Australia Qld Leadership (CRAqld)
2. School Principals and leadership teams
3. School staff (relating to AITSL standards)
4. Parents
5. Prospective parents

Engage a researcher to map program and provide action research information on project.

Develop further our resource bank on parent engagement including:

1. Action framework
2. Model policy documents
3. Model Action Teams for Partnership
4. Theory of change models
5. Growth and renewal cycle for parent engagement
6. Survey models
7. Dialogue models
8. Best practice examples for schools and systems (including ATSI families, families of SWD, culturally diverse families, rural and remote, primary, secondary etc.)
9. Parenting
10. Research articles
11. Evaluation
12. Recommended books and videos on parent engagement
13. Strategies to improve parent engagement
14. Faith education development for engaging families
15. Developing relationships with play groups and kindergartens

These resources will be updated on a regular basis in order to have most recent information/resources available.

Work with Diocesan Directors and Religious Institute principals to:

Year 1

Step 1

1. Provide a plan and outline of our intended program to leadership
2. Expressions of interest (EOI) for pilot schools
3. Develop an agreed plan for each diocese (including RI schools)
4. Set up program plan working with schools

Step 2

1. Make contact and visit pilot schools
2. Preliminary workshop for Principal and Leadership team
3. Work with Principal and Leadership Team to develop appropriate program for their setting
4. Assist with setting up Action Team, surveys etc.
5. Deliver initial PD to staff and parents
6. Follow up with pilot schools

Step 3

1. Review programme and make appropriate changes
2. Seek Expressions of interest for more schools to join pilot programme
3. Further follow up and assistance with pilot schools

We will also -

- Work with Queensland College of Teachers to develop activities for Parent Engagement Professional Development Activities for Teachers
- Work with QELI to include appropriate materials in their courses for development of school leaders and other programs
- Work with ACU on further development of parent engagement information/strategies into Pre-service teacher education.

Year 2

Step 1

1. Contact schools from EOI list.
2. Work with Yr 1 pilot schools to evaluate previous work
3. Work with Yr 1 pilot schools to add further components to their program
4. Work with researcher re any learnings from initial year of project.

Step 2

1. Make contact and visit Yr 2 pilot schools new to project
2. Preliminary workshop for Principal and Leadership team
3. Work with Principal and Leadership Team to develop appropriate program for their setting
4. Assist with setting up Action Team, surveys etc.
5. Deliver initial PD to staff and parents
6. Follow up visits with Yr 1 pilot schools

Step 3

1. Review programme and make appropriate changes
2. Seek expressions of interest for more schools to join pilot programme
3. Further follow up and assistance with pilot schools

During year 2 we will continue work with QCT, QELi, ACU and Researcher.

At the end of year 2 we will also provide some initial findings from researcher.

Years 3 and 4 will continue to add more schools to the programme and continue to build research, resources and website.

During the program we will also do the following:

- Keep parent engagement research information up to date and included in materials.
- Add resources as they are located and also good practice examples from pilot schools
- Meet regularly with researcher
- Keep Government, QCEC, diocesan offices and RI authorities up to date with progress through regular reports
- Secretariat staff to engage in Professional Development activities

The request we have for funding would allow the Federation to work with pilot Schools and to provide:

- all necessary materials
- in-service/professional development
- action research reports
- information on latest trends and
- opportunities for schools to build greater parent engagement for school improvement and better educational success for all students.

Conclusion

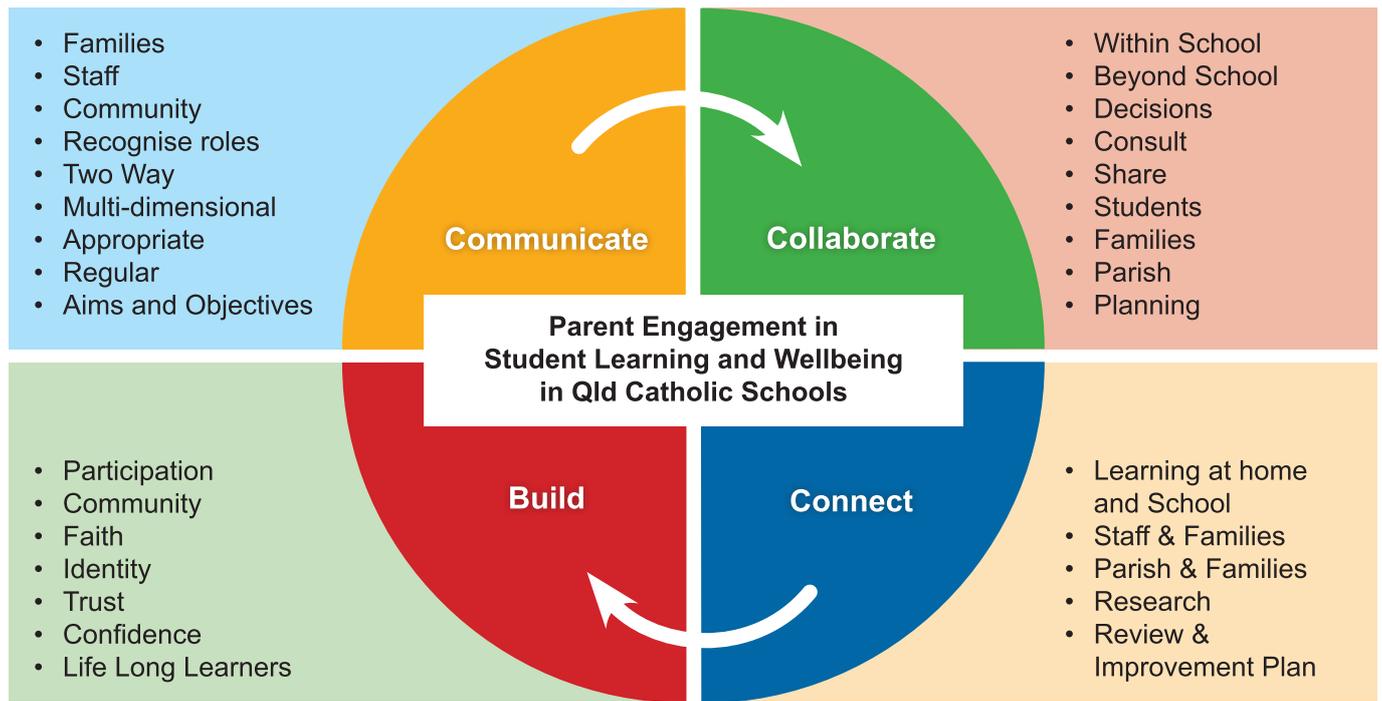
It is clear that a culture of parent engagement is vital to the success of learning and teaching in our schools, and to the development of our young people.

In order to do this Catholic Education Staff at all levels need to be aware of exactly what parent engagement is and how they can work with families to improve their children and young people's educational experience. This is not an initiative this is a culture for lifelong learning to enable all students to have success. Steven M. Constantino writes in his book, *101 ways to Create Real Family Engagement* a chapter called *Culture Eats Change for Lunch*, that research shows that initiatives die but cultures survive and we believe this is what we need – a culture of family and community engagement not only in school but during the early years also.

The Federation is therefore seeking consideration from the Queensland government of \$250,000 over the term of the government to further develop our resources and allow us to work with schools to provide professional development in the area of parent engagement to all stakeholders. This funding would provide localised professional development, development of appropriate materials, further web materials and to work with a university to map changes and effects on student learning and well-being and school improvement.

We want to partner with all education authorities in this important endeavour.

Appendix 1



Appendix 2

Parent Engagement Growth and Renewal Cycle

