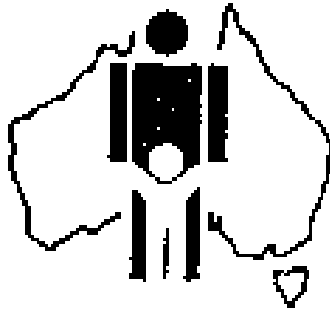


Review of Funding for Schooling

**Parental engagement with schools and schooling:
A framework for its inclusion as a key element of school funding**



BY

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Introduction

The Australian Parents Council (APC) is the national organisation representing the parents of students attending non-government schools. In this context the word “parent” includes carers and legal guardians.

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the consultation process on the Review of Funding for Schooling. APC’s submission of this supplementary paper is specific to our two following principles:

- Parents are the primary educators of their children
- Effective partnerships (between parents, families and schools) are central to the success of schooling

APC and the Australian Council of State School Organisations have for a number of years been leading the drive for greater recognition of the positive outcomes that derive from increasing parental engagement with schools and schooling.

Those benefits go far beyond improving student outcomes. Programs aimed at increasing parental engagement have wider and lasting benefits for parents, teachers and the community which feed directly into improvements in the life quality and economic wellbeing of individuals, the social capital of communities and the fortunes of the economy generally.

APC’s Position on Funding for Schooling

APC proposes that if the outcomes of the financial resourcing of schooling are to be maximised those resources need to be directed to the areas where they can have most impact. Too often when the funding of schooling is considered, the spotlight is focused solely upon the resourcing of teachers and classrooms.

However, what happens in schools determines about 40 per cent of students’ schooling outcomes. The other 60 per cent is determined by what students bring to school, i.e. their inherent personal characteristics and abilities and their parents’ interest in and aspirations for their schooling.

Research demonstrates that effective schools have high levels of parental and community engagement. This engagement is strongly related to improved student learning, attendance and behaviour and often serves to re-engage parents with their own education and skills development and workforce participation. It is a largely untapped focus for improving social capital and raising productivity levels.



APC seeks to encourage sustainable, effective partnerships between all members of the school community, including teachers, families and children and young people. In the words of the Family School Partnership Framework, these partnerships:

- view each partner as making equally valuable contributions, while respecting different contributions;
- respect student needs and preferences;
- actively help previously uninvolved families to become involved;
- create better programs, opportunities and learning for children and young people; and
- give families appropriate opportunities to contribute to school decision-making and governance.

Families who understand the education system and the difficulties schools face are a valuable source of support which schools cannot afford to underestimate. Schools that engage families in their children's learning are tapping in to a rich source of information and expertise and can help build communities.

APC therefore believes that programs aimed at engaging parents and families with their children's schools and schooling should be a key funding strategy in Australia.

Parental Engagement Strategies and Programs

Meaningful engagement between parents and the teachers and school leaders in whose hands they entrust their children to be schooled is a critical element of school reform.

Recent research into parent engagement programs in Australia also shows that such programs are not only effective in terms of student outcomes, but that the programs have wider and lasting benefits for parents, teachers and the community which feed directly into improvements in the life quality and economic wellbeing of individuals, the social capital of communities and the fortunes of the economy generally¹.

- In Australia a parental engagement strategy is supported by the COAG National Educational Plan, which identifies "*Boosting Parental Engagement*" in schooling as a key policy and reform direction (see Appendix 1).
- It is also supported by the 2008 Melbourne Declaration on Education Goals for Young Australians, which commits to developing stronger partnerships between parents/families/carers/communities and schools (see Appendix 2).
- The National *Family-School Partnership Framework*² also emphasises that schools need to recognise the primary role of the family in education and advocates for families and schools to work together in partnership.
- In overseas jurisdictions parental engagement is being embedded into educational policies and reforms. For example in 2009 the USA created a National Family, School and

¹ Australian Parents Council. (2009) *Parental Engagement: Social and Economic Effects*.

² Australian Government (2008). *Family-Schools Partnership Framework*. Commonwealth of Australia.
<http://www.familyschool.org.au/pdf/framework.pdf>



Community Engagement Working Group, to inform the development and implementation of federal policy related to family, school and community engagement.

- Another example can be found in Ontario, Canada where in 2010 the Minister of Education introduced the first comprehensive parent engagement policy in schools.³
- Parental engagement is evident in some worthwhile individual programs and projects throughout Australia but APC proposes that Australia should aspire to the systematic and sustainable integration of parental engagement into all aspects of the reform agenda.

APC strongly advocates for a focus on parental engagement strategies for all students in any future funding model for Australian schooling.

Indigenous Parent Factor – A Successful Parental Engagement Program

Achievement gaps for minority and low-income students persist and there is growing evidence to show that parental engagement plays an instrumental part in eliminating them. The OECD has developed ten practical steps that governments can take to enhance equity in education⁴ and one of these is to strengthen the links between school and home to help disadvantaged parents help their children to learn (see Appendix 3).

APC conducts the highly successful *Indigenous Parent Factor: Successful learning in the early years at home and school* (IPF) program. Through the IPF program APC reaches out to Indigenous parents with the aim to positively influence home learning and consequently improve Indigenous children's chances of a successful start in the early years of schooling.

The program is based on key principles, including: parents are the first and continuing educators of their children; the first few years of a child's development are crucial in setting the foundation for life-long learning; and all young Indigenous people have the capacity to learn.

The program was designed in collaboration with Indigenous communities, elders and educators to foster the partnership between home and school in support of Indigenous children's successful learning and literacy development, successful entry into school learning and participation in school life. Indigenous elders and educators continue to be closely involved in monitoring, evaluating and shaping the program which is delivered by indigenous men and women.

The program was the subject of a major independent evaluation in 2007⁵ which found it was effective, appropriate and efficient:

- ✓ It was judged to be *effective* in that it contributed to increases in parent knowledge of, and participation in pre-school and school education and improved linkages with the school and other community services;
- ✓ It was *appropriate* as it had been designed in substantial consultation with Indigenous people, used a workshop format which was culturally appropriate, and materials suited to Indigenous people. It was noted that the materials received the highest praise from all Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons interviewed because they took into account

³ Ministry of Education (2010). *Parents in Partnership. A Parent Engagement Policy for Ontario Schools*. Ontario, Canada.

⁴ OECD. (2008). *Ten Steps to Equity in Education*. OECD Policy Brief. January 2008.

⁵ Denis Muller & Associates. (2007). *Successful Learning in the Early Years of Schooling: The Indigenous Parent Factor. Evaluation Report*.



Indigenous methods of learning, used suitable (jargon-free) language and allowed for flexibility in delivery; and

- ✓ It was *efficient* as it had over-performed on its delivery targets, had brought together participants from multiple locations and costs were low.

APC believes the IPF program provides an excellent example of how parents in disadvantaged communities can be engaged with schools and their children's schooling. APC is currently finalising the development of similar programs for parents in low socio-economic communities, parents of newly arrived families and the parents of students with disabilities.

APC strongly believes that the allocation of funding for parental engagement strategies and programs such as the IPF program should be an integral element of any school funding model.

Parents Australia – Parents partnering with government and business

APC is actively engaged in seeking funding sources outside of government to provide additional support for parental engagement programs and strategies. In this regard it has recently set up Parents Australia Incorporated, an Association which is endorsed as a Deductible Gift Recipient.

Parents Australia has the objective of developing and delivering, in partnership with schools and government and community organisations, programs for parents from disadvantaged communities (for example, parents in low SES communities, parents of newly arrived families and parents of students with disabilities) to build their interest, confidence and capacity to engage in and support the learning experiences, general development and wellbeing of their children at home and school.

Through its capacity to attract philanthropic support Parents Australia is well placed to effectively combine the resources of government and business to build Australia's social capital through improving student outcomes and increasing the confidence of parents of students in disadvantaged communities to re-engage with their own education and the workforce.

However, it will be necessary for government to take a lead encouraging business to engage with supporting the work of Parents Australia primarily because the programs developed by the Australian Parents Council and Parents Australia can provide linkages across school sectors, age groups, across all levels of government and their departments and with businesses and the broader community.

School Parent Liaison Officers – A Sustainable Approach to Parental Engagement

There is good recent evidence in Australia that the employment of paid parent liaison officers by schools is one of the most effective strategies in strengthening and sustaining parental engagement.

As part of the development of the National Family-School Partnerships Framework, a national project was conducted which saw the Australian Government provide grants of \$10,000 each to 61 schools to trial a family-school partnership project of their choosing. A key finding of that project was: "If there was a single most critical use for the money, it was the employment of a parent liaison officer. This was invariably part-time, but in the nature



of these things the time given by the person tended to stretch well beyond the time paid for. In that sense, the schools got very good value for money.”⁶

The Smarter Schools National Partnerships Key Reform Project: Parental Engagement in Schooling in Low SES Communities, which is currently in development and is due for release in late 2011, provides further support for these findings.

Some schooling jurisdictions have already started to move in this direction, but this patchy and there would appear to be considerable ‘reinventing of the wheel’. The development of the National Family School Partnership Framework showed that there is a diverse range of understandings and misunderstandings in schools throughout Australia in respect of parental engagement.

School budgets do not generally allow for initiatives of this kind. APC has therefore argued in previous submissions to the current Review that, “A pool of funds should be established and made available to school communities for projects and programs to engage parents in active participation in their children’s schooling in accordance with the National Framework for Family-School Partnerships.”⁷

However, this issue must be about more than simply giving schools government money to employ parent liaison officers. To ensure the integrity of the parent liaison program and of parent partnership programs chosen by schools, the rollout should be guided by the Australian Parents Council and the Australian Council of State School Organisations through our networks of affiliated organisations.

We understand that the employment of paid parent liaison officers in all schools or seed funding for parent partnership programs would be a significant cost in the first instance. This could be alleviated by using a transition process whereby schools are funded in clusters in the first instance.

Family-School & Community Partnerships Bureau – A Key Driver of the Parental Engagement Agenda

APC and the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) established the Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau (Bureau) in 2008 with funding from the Australian Government for the purpose of increasing parental engagement and community involvement in schools. It conducts research, shares best practice, and provides practical support and advice to parents, principals, teachers and others about how to build and sustain partnerships. The Bureau has the capacity to make a significant contribution to education reform and improvement as a key driver of the parental engagement agenda and by embedding that agenda into the Australian schooling environment.

Completed and current projects of the Bureau include:

Project Name	Project Description
A book chapter for an ACER publication	A book chapter for the ACER publication “Developing a Networked School

⁶ Saulwick Muller Social Research. (2006). Family-School Partnerships Project. Prepared for the Department of Education, Science & Training; the Australian Council of State School Organisations; and the Australian Parents Council.

⁷ Australian Parents Council. (2011). Response to the Emerging Issues Paper. Submission on the 2010 Emerging Issues Paper to the Australian Government’s Review of Funding for Schooling.



Project Name	Project Description
	Community” was released in 2010
Effective partnerships in practice: A qualitative research project on Family, School and Community Partnerships	This study looked at parental engagement and best practice in building family-school and community partnerships by revisiting a number of the 61 schools across Australia that had participated in an action research project carried out in 2005 on behalf of APC and ACSSO.
What parents say about teachers, schools and family-school partnerships: a report on the outcomes of parent focus groups conducted early in 2009	A total of around 100 parents of school aged children participated in focus groups to glean insights into how parents viewed the quality of the education their children were receiving and to get a sense of the language and concepts that parents used when talking about such things.
Parental Engagement in Children’s Education	A paper to describe parental engagement - what it looks like, the benefits, challenges and possible future directions.
Parental Survey – Parent Interactions with Secondary Schools	A telephone survey examined the experiences of parents as their children have made the transition to secondary school and explored how parents of students in early secondary years of schooling can best be supported to engage with their children’s secondary schools. The survey will inform the future development of parent resources.
Parents in Indigenous Education	The project will identify, analyse and document the elements of innovative and effective partnerships between schools and indigenous families and their communities.
Professional Development Module for Teachers and Educational Leaders on Engaging with Parents	In November 2008 the Faculty of Education at Monash University reported to DEEWR on the National Mapping of Teacher Professional Learning Project. The Monash Study found that 82% of teachers surveyed indicated they needed professional development in the area of parent and community involvement. This project aims to develop a professional development resource that can assist schools and schooling authorities to meet that need.
Transitions from Primary to Secondary School	The project will see the development of a set of resources for parents to assist them and their children through the transition from primary to secondary school. The resource/s will be published on the Bureau website along with links to appropriate resources that have been developed by Australian and International organisations.
Website and E-Newsletter	The Bureau’s website is its shop-front and



Project Name	Project Description
	the e-Newsletter is its primary communications vehicle to reach out to parents, teachers, school leaders and the broad range of schooling stakeholders.
Promotion of the National Family-School Partnerships Framework	To undertake meetings with Ministers for Education and key education jurisdiction leaders; to provide Bureau representation at education forums and conferences; and to promote greater awareness, recognition and acceptance of the National Family-Schools Partnership Framework and the work of the Bureau.
Growing the Body of Knowledge of Parental Engagement Research Outcomes	To develop and publish short, contextualized synopses of relevant and relatively recent quality research contributions (past 10 years) and easy access details for the complete papers.
Partnership Practitioners' Symposium	A day long symposium will be held to showcase excellence and innovation in partnership practice with the target audience to include parents, school leaders and other schooling stakeholders

The Bureau is now 38 months into its inaugural 48 months funding period. APC believes the work of the Bureau and its future development is critical for the purposes of achieving systematic, integrated and sustainable approaches to parental engagement with their children's schools and schooling in Australia.

Parental Engagement and Teacher Training and Professional Development

In the 21st century parental engagement modules need to be offered in universities to fully prepare teachers to deal with the reality of communicating and working with parents and parent groups to raise student achievement. Teachers need to develop skills and practices in parental engagement and these skills are more likely to be imparted when parental engagement and the underpinning research is embedded in a system of training and professional learning. A recent research paper⁸ details a number of ways that this might be achieved and which are relevant to the Australian context:

- Support the development of standards for teacher knowledge and skills in parental engagement so that higher education institutions, schools and other stakeholders can adequately prepare teachers in this area.

APC and the Australian Council of State School Organisations, which represents the parents of students attending government schools, are jointly conducting a pilot study to trial the use of aspects of the National Professional Standards for Teachers. Titled *Parental Engagement: enriched teaching for effective learning*, the study is focused on the two standards which define the knowledge and skills necessary across teaching

⁸ Caspe, M., Lopez, M.E., Chu, A. & Weiss, H.B. (2011). *Teaching the Teachers: Preparing Educators to Engage Families for Student Achievement*. Issue Brief. May. National PTA & Harvard Family Research Project.



careers for the engagement of parents and carers in the educative process (Standard 3.7) and engagement with parents and carers (Standard 7.3).

The primary aim of the study is to identify the common practices of teachers and school leaders at each career stage that lead to effective parental engagement to support student learning.

- Ensure that the curriculum directly addresses the skills and knowledge that teachers need to possess for parental engagement in practice.

In APC's recent submission to the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority's General Capabilities Consultation we argued that there is a need for schools to be encouraged and enabled to engage with parents and to work in partnership with families to build and develop the general capabilities in children and young people. In particular, materials and other supports should be developed that will build the capacity of parents to understand and engage with what schools are doing in implementing the general capabilities within the Australian Curriculum.

- Support collaborations between training institutions, schools, parents and other stakeholders to ensure that policies and procedures are in place to provide prospective teachers with field placements that enable them to learn about exemplary parental engagement practices. Support the placement of infrastructure to conduct research and share best practice and strategies for parental engagement with curriculum developers and current and future teachers.
- Ensure that pre-service education around parental engagement is available for teachers as well as continuing education and professional development for practising teachers about the impact of parental engagement on student success. Workplace practicums should provide pre-service teachers with opportunities and experiences of working collaboratively with parents.
- Ensure that evaluation of data on parental engagement is documented so that information is available about how teachers can best partner with parents, where teachers need support in the area of parental engagement, and to help with any redesign of training and professional development for teachers in relation to parental engagement.
- Ensure that teachers are aware of the benefits of creating a vehicle for partnership with the parent body aimed at engendering their support and understanding of schools and schooling

Australian teachers support the provision of professional development and training in parental engagement as evidenced by a report commissioned by DEEWR in 2008. This report mapped the policies and practices of teacher professional learning in Australia and provided guidelines for quality professional learning into the future. In the report, *National Mapping of Teacher Professional Learning Project* by the Monash University Faculty of Education, teachers identified parent and community involvement as their main area of need for professional development (82% of surveyed teachers). This item had such a large proportion of responses that it outweighed the next identified area of need by almost 60%.

A current project of the Bureau is the development of a professional development resource for teachers and educational leaders on engaging with parents. It is hoped that the development of this resource will inform the future development of a pre-service teacher-training model that can be incorporated into university teacher training programs. A trial module for beginning teachers and one for experienced teachers was piloted successfully in



March 2011 in the ACT and the Bureau is now exploring options to enable the modules to be made available more widely.

Summary

APC is passionate about supporting, encouraging and promoting parental engagement in Australia. We believe that the meaningful engagement of parents with their children's schools and schooling is a critical element of school reform that needs to be integrated more deeply into the current school reform and funding agenda as well as into other broader wellbeing reforms in Australia.

If the funding of schooling is to maximise schooling outcomes for all students it must provide and enable systematic, integrated and sustained approaches to parental engagement, particularly in schools serving students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

We propose that the review panel consider the value that would be derived from a strategic approach in the Australian school funding regime to ensure:

- The allocation of funding for parental engagement strategies and programs such as the *Indigenous Parents Factor: Successful learning in the early years at home and school* is a key strategy for improving schooling outcomes and building social capital.
- The provision of government funding to support the capacity of Parents Australia to bring together the resources of government, business, philanthropic organisations and individuals to drive the building of social capital and improve Australia's productivity agenda through engaging parents with their children's schools and schooling with all the known associated benefits.
- Ongoing funding to enable the continuance of the work of the Family-School & Community Partnerships Bureau which would include growing, monitoring, evaluating and disseminating research based evidence and data on parental engagement programs and initiatives and working more directly with stakeholders.
- The establishment of an annual pool of funds is made available to school communities on application, through parent organisations, for projects and programs to engage parents in active participation in their children's schools and schooling in accordance with the National Framework for Family School Partnerships.



APPENDIX 1

COAG National Education Agreement

Policy Directions

- Improving teacher and school leader quality
- High standards and expectations
- Greater accountability and better directed resources
- Modern, world-class teaching and learning environments, including ICT
- Integrated strategies for low SES school communities
- **Boosting parental engagement**



APPENDIX 2

Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians

Goal 1: Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence

Goal 2: All young Australians become:

- Successful learners
- Confident and creative individuals
- Active and informed citizens

A Commitment to Action:

- **Developing stronger partnerships**
- Supporting quality teaching and school leadership
- Strengthening early childhood education
- Enhancing middle years development
- Supporting senior years of schooling and youth transitions
- Promoting world-class curriculum and assessment
- Improving educational outcomes for Indigenous youth and disadvantaged young Australians, especially those from low socioeconomic backgrounds
- Strengthening accountability and transparency

Developing Stronger Partnerships

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.

Partnerships between students, parents, carers and families, the broader community, business, schools and other education and training providers bring mutual benefits and achievement. Partnerships engender support for the development and wellbeing of young people and their families and can provide opportunities for young Australians to connect with their communities, participate in civic life and develop a sense of responsible citizenship.

In particular, the development of partnership between schools and Indigenous communities, based on cross-cultural respect, is the main way of achieving highly effective schooling for Indigenous students.

Australian governments commit to working with all school sectors to ensure that schools engage young Australians, parents, carers, families, other education and training providers, business and broader community to support students' progress through schooling, and to provide them with rich learning, personal development and citizenship opportunities.



OECD: Ten Steps to Equity in Education

The OECD has recommended ten steps which would reduce school failure and dropout rates, make society fairer and avoid the large social costs of marginalised adults with few basic skills.

Design

1. Limit early tracking and streaming and postpone academic selection.
2. Manage school choice so as to contain the risks to equity.
3. In upper secondary education, provide attractive alternatives, remove dead ends and prevent dropout.
4. Offer second chances to gain from education.

Practices

5. Identify and provide systematic help to those who fall behind at school and reduce year repetition.
6. **Strengthen the links between school and home to help disadvantaged parents help their children to learn.**
7. **Respond to diversity and provide for the successful inclusion of migrants and minorities within mainstream education.**

Resourcing

8. **Provide strong education for all, giving priority to early childhood provision and basic schooling.**
9. **Direct resources to the students with the greatest needs.**
10. **Set concrete targets for more equity, particularly related to low school attainment and dropouts.**