



# Australian Parents Council

## 2019 Parent Sentiment Survey: Communication between home and school

### Executive Summary

The 2019 Parent sentiment survey was completed by 333 parents across all states and territories of Australia. Parents from all 3 education sectors participated; 46% were from government schools; 30% were from Independent schools and 23% were from systemic Catholic schools. 1 further respondent was home-schooled, and some were uncertain of the sector to which their school belonged. 70% of respondents had children in primary school and 40% had children in high school. (10% overlap indicating parents had children in both primary and high school)

The survey highlighted the following issues:-

- Parents want to be informed early on issues that arise with their children.
- Parents want more information on their child's social and emotion development and more meaningful information on their academic progress.
- Parents would find guidelines around engagement and involvement useful.
- Parents want to be involved in decisions about technology introduction and use.
- Parents believe they need more technical support in managing their child's devices.
- Parents would like time outside of school/work hours to contact teachers but do not want this to be a burden for teachers.

### COMMUNICATING WITH SCHOOLS

The survey found that all schools primarily use a newsletter to communicate with parents, however only 13% of parents wanted to be communicated with in this way. Parents said they would prefer to use parent portals, student diaries and social media.

School newsletter is the most prominent form of schools communicating with parents with 98% of respondents indicating that they received one from their school. However only 13% of respondents indicated that they would like to receive a newsletter. Parental preference for school communication was through a parent portal application with 40% indicating it would be an avenue they would like to access too. 40% of comments provided on this question were expressing negative feedback. 16 responses contained constructive feedback. For example:-

*"I would like to see a few changes: e.g. Newsletter: (i) acknowledge the achievements of children with a range of abilities and not just the high achievers, (ii) provide information that is parent friendly/centred - because it often has a slight negative (authoritarian undertone)."*

*"More web conferencing or 'facetime' like meetings where people can participate despite the distance."*

*"It would be great for all the info to be in one place instead of multiple places. Push notifications via text would be great and ability to sync calendars."*

*"Three-way (child, parent, teacher) interview is far more useful, provides insight and puts the onus on child also to be held accountable for learning"*

Parents are reporting that schools use a variety of communication methods with email and in person the most popular. Parents wish for communication via student diary (57%), parent portal (53%) and social media (53%).

That being said, there was evidence that parents believe that schools do not have enough time, space or passion to learn, implement and embed good communication strategies across new communication channels.

### COMMUNICATING WITH TEACHERS

Parents value having face to face conversations with their child’s teacher. However, many parents find school hours limiting to their interaction. But by enlarge parents expressed great concern for the burden on a teacher time.

*“If they can phone after hours when parent aren’t at work and can concentrate on the issue it might help everyone.”*

*“Not at all outside formal parent teacher meetings - often only once a year. There’s an open offer to come to the room after school at 3pm. That’s impossible for most working parents. Most of my children’s teachers have been unavailable later on (after 4pm) though a few have been. Direct communication with the classroom teacher is structurally discouraged and I have typically managed my children’s education without the benefit if that.”*

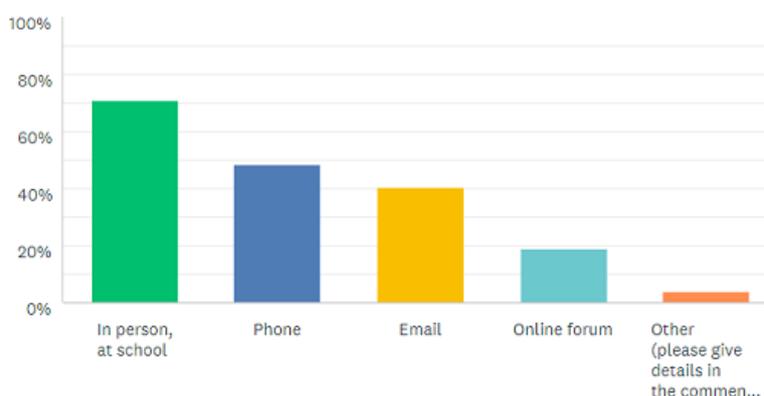
*“I don’t want to add to their workload unless it is necessary. Unless it’s to brief us on what we can contribute then I think it will just burn teachers out and that’s not good for my child. They are human and deserve space to focus on job, there too much on them as it is.”*

*“It could be a combination; it's more knowing that they would be available, should you need to consult.”*

**70% of parents wanted time available outside of school hours to talk to teachers.**

If yes, how would you like them to be available? You can choose multiple answers.

Answered: 277 Skipped: 56



Of the 277 parents who answered yes, 70% would prefer this contact to be in person. Alternately, 48% selected phone contact as their preference. Working parents, in particular make, this request. The following comments were recorded:-

*“If schools want parents/carers to be more involved they need to accommodate or at least consider the parents who work full time, making it difficult to attend school events held during the day.”*

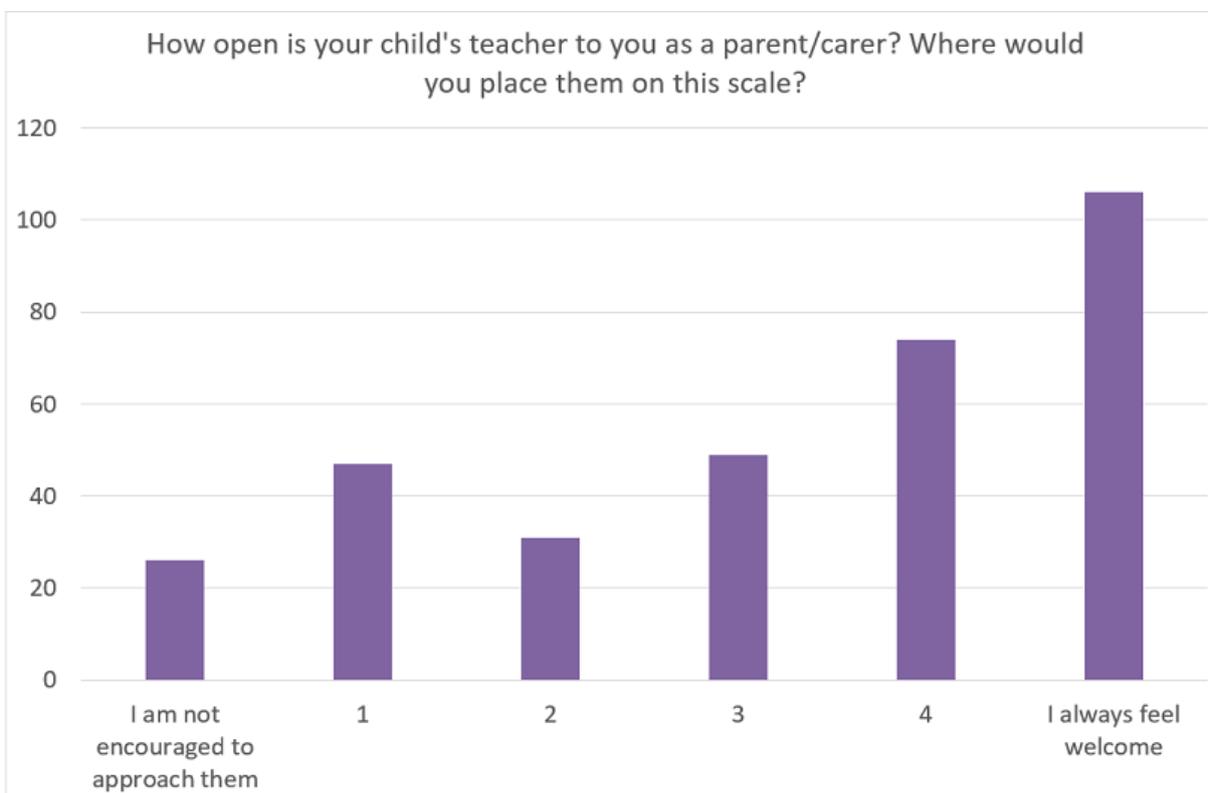
*“I would rather arrange a convenient time between the parties. They have lives out of school hours too”*

*"I think teachers should be available to discuss significant issues about a pupil. I don't think they should have to be available to discuss every grievance parents have. A lot of parents seem to want to have unnecessary and unhelpful input"*

*"I don't want to add to their workload unless it is necessary. Unless it's to brief us on what we can contribute then I think it will just burn teachers out and that's not good for my child. They are human and deserve space to focus on job, there too much on them as it is."*

*"I don't care how - any communication is better than the current status quo (virtually none). I'm very happy to have comms go through a 3rd party first to ensure the teacher is not harassed."*

### 11. How open is/are your child's teacher/s to you as a parent/carer? Where would you place them on this scale?



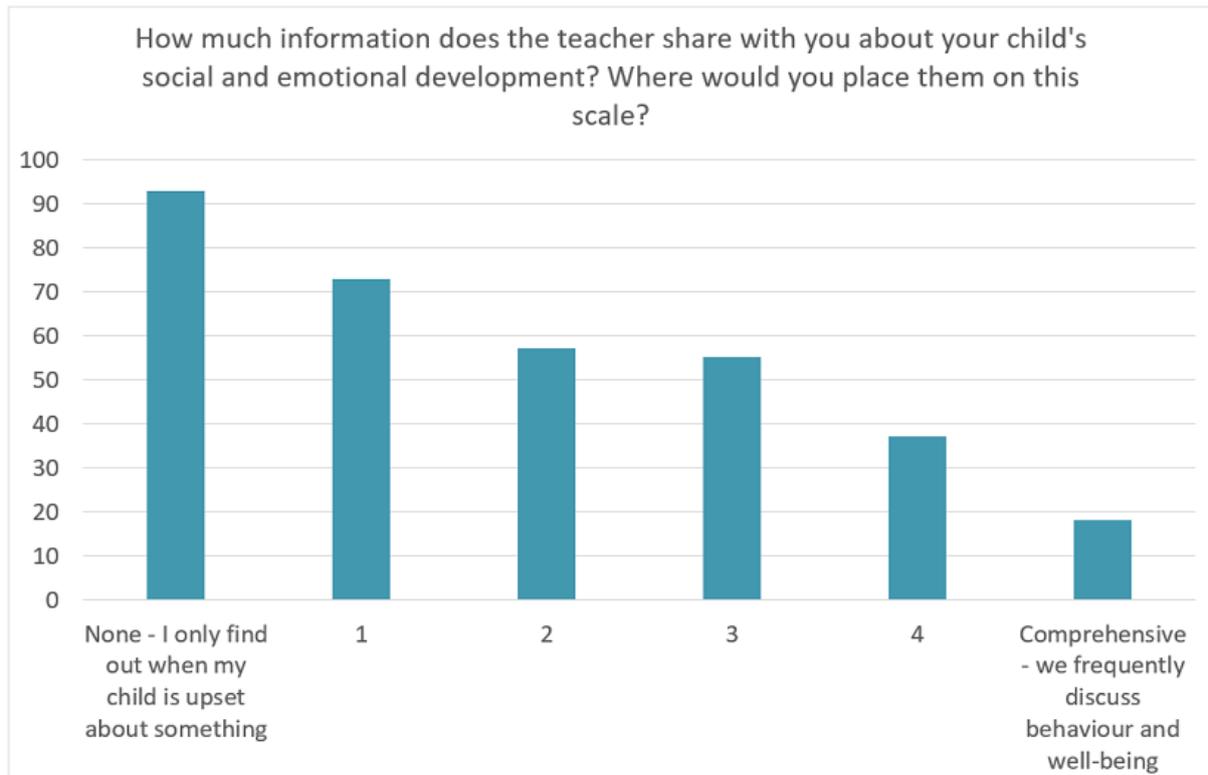
32% of parent respondents always feel welcomed by their child teacher, while only 7% feel they are discouraged from approaching their child teacher. Parents were less enthusiastic about parent teacher interview with 22% in the middle of believing they get what they need from the interview and the practice just being a box ticking exercise.

*"Meetings in person are in the form of parent/teacher interviews (held during school hours), and which feel somewhat tokenistic, focuses on data, and doesn't reassure you that they actually know your child (especially if the child is quiet/shy). It is difficult to get teachers to ring you back as I sometimes have to call the school several times before the teacher will call back. I know they're busy but it comes across as disrespectful and of low importance to them. Basically teachers are focused on the children but in order for the child to really thrive, they need to embrace the parents/family because the child is part of that family system."*

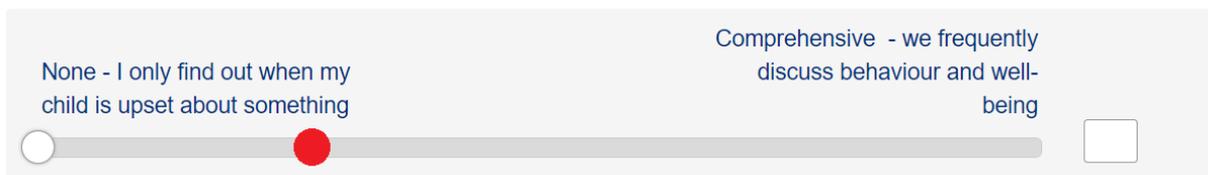
*"would like to see more parent teacher interviews, at least one every term"*

## SHARING OF INFORMATION WITH PARENTS

Parents are saying that they only get information about their child's social and emotional development when an issue arises. Whilst parents receive information about academic progress, they feel the information provided on what they are learning in the classroom is not meaningful.



10. How much information does/do the teacher/s share with you about your child's social and emotional development? Where would you place them on this scale?



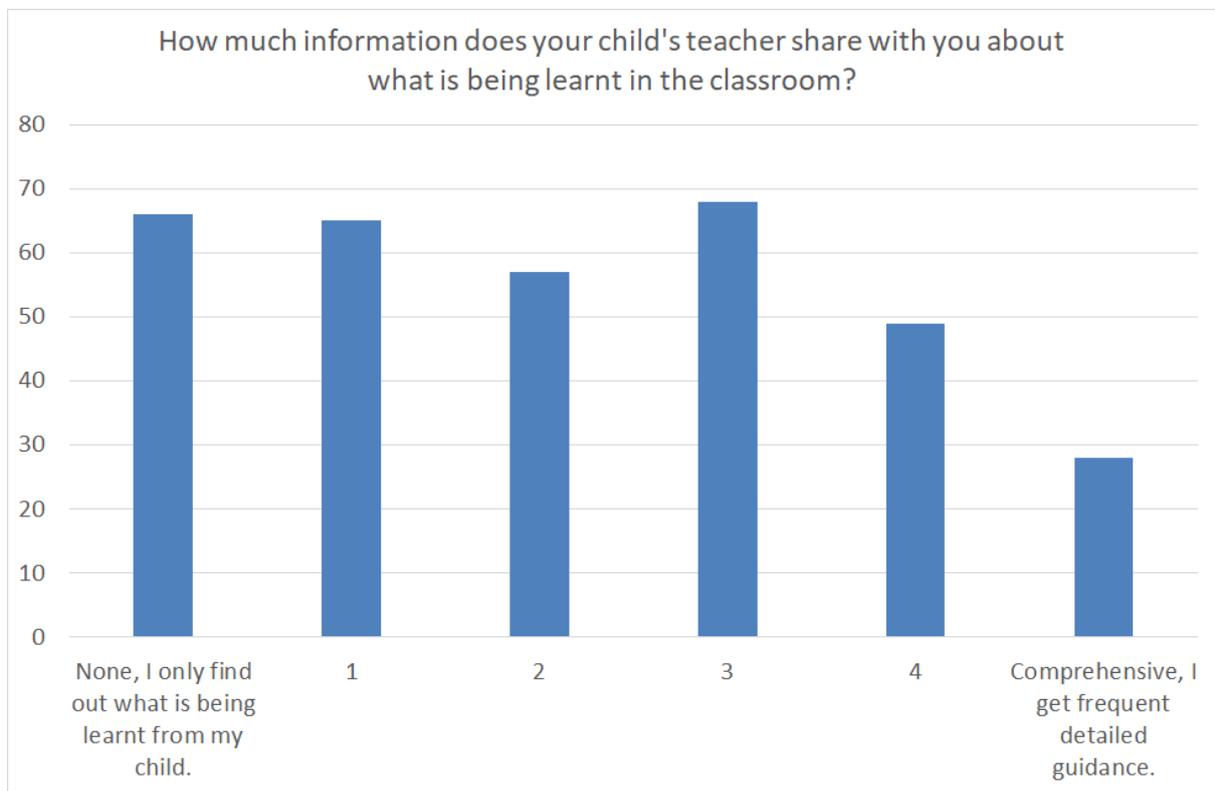
What would you like to discuss with your child's teacher...

*"Relationships with other students"*

*"home issues"*

*"I have no issue with the way academic are communicated however don't really have a good idea of how well they Interact and general mood"*

*"Ways we can support and build on learning at home"*



9. How much information does/do your child's teacher/s share with you about what is being learnt in class? Where would you place them on this scale?



What would you like to discuss with your child's teacher....

*"I like the student goals but received no feedback on my child's performance."*

*"The real picture e.g. of where my child's reading is at and is this going to set them up for success?"*

*"general academic performance and any ways that I can assist at home"*

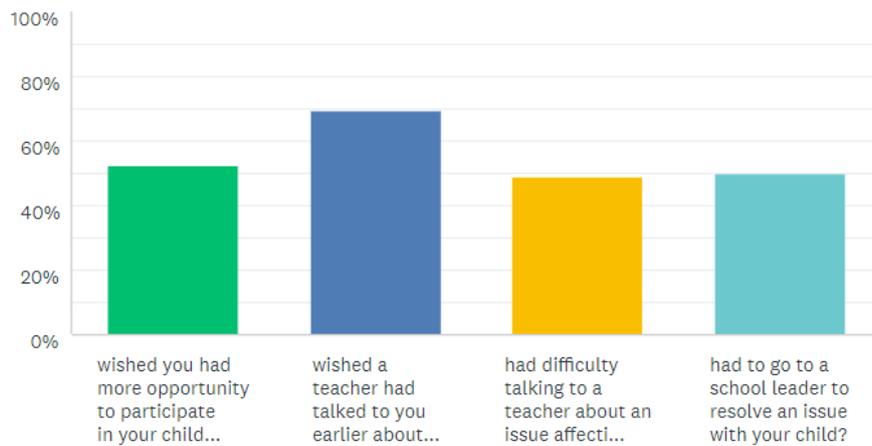
*"I would like it more if I was told how my child is doing. Where they may have difficulty in their learning so I can help them and where their strengths are. Not only at report time when too late to help them catch up"*

Consolidating from last year's survey, parents continue to prioritise discussing their child's wellbeing with their teacher.

**70% of parents wished their child teacher had have spoken to them sooner about an issue.**

Have you ever...

Answered: 300 Skipped: 33



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ wished you had more opportunity to participate in your child's education?	52.67% 158
▼ wished a teacher had talked to you earlier about a problem your child was having?	69.67% 209
▼ had difficulty talking to a teacher about an issue affecting your child?	49.00% 147
▼ had to go to a school leader to resolve an issue with your child?	50.00% 150
<b>Total Respondents: 300</b>	

Parents want to be informed and a part of the conversation about the solutions for their child issues. However, drilling down further, the data shows that 50% of parents felt they needed to escalate an issue and 49% of parents had difficulties discussing issues with their child's teacher.

For the most part, the comments section of this question was positive with 44% of comments being coded positive.

*"I have on a couple of occasions needed to discuss an issue with my child and on each occasion I felt I was listened to and that the issues were promptly resolved."*

*"No, have found all issues have been managed well. That comes down in no small part to us as parents communicating clearly & respectfully."*

*"Had bullying issues ignored for 3 terms until there was physical evidence when he was in Kindy. No problems since thankfully and have been very well looked after. We have had a wonderful experience at the school this year (yr3). I just wish schools actually listened to parents in the first instance instead of being dismissive and then waiting until a problem was huge rather than 'nipped in the bud'."*

The comment section of this question gained the most amount of comments directed at school leadership with 20% of comments being directed at school leadership.

*"My children's teachers are excellent - very open and approachable. The issue with parent communication lies with the principal and deputy principal. They play lip-service to genuine parental engagement. They treat the P & C as merely a cash cow from which to draw money to purchase resources with no or minimal parent consultation into the process used to decide on spending priorities or the selection of the preferred services. For example, after fighting for years against parent requests for on-site out of school care, the principal finally succumbed when faced with a survey conducted by the P & C that showed over 100 families at the school wanted and would use the service. The principal then tried to obfuscate further by putting it back on*

*to parents to do the running around to find out the process for establishing such a service. When the parents did that, she then sought to stymie it by taking full control of the process - unilaterally requesting proposals from certain providers of her choice with no clear, consistent or transparent process or specifications; refused to allow parent representatives to be part of the assessment panel; failed to consider cost as a factor that warranted consideration in the assessment of the preferred provider (despite it being a service that will be fully funded by parents, not the school); refused to rule out service providers subject to enforcement actions; refused to take into consideration the National Quality Standards ratings when comparing providers' submissions; and has indicated that she is as interested in getting a service that gives kick-backs to the school as one that provides a quality service to children/parents. This is just one symptomatic example of how the principal runs the school. It is truly stuck in the 1950s."*

*"Principals are difficult to get open honest conversation from. There should be no hidden agendas. Principals should see parents/families and students as clients. Parents should be encouraged to question and challenge schools such that schools must use up to date best practice and parents can help a school evolve"*

*"I have had to resort to complaining to the department directly due to lack of accountability in rural and remote school."*

*"Not all teachers and school leaders are the same, they all need to improve in different areas and work to improve"*

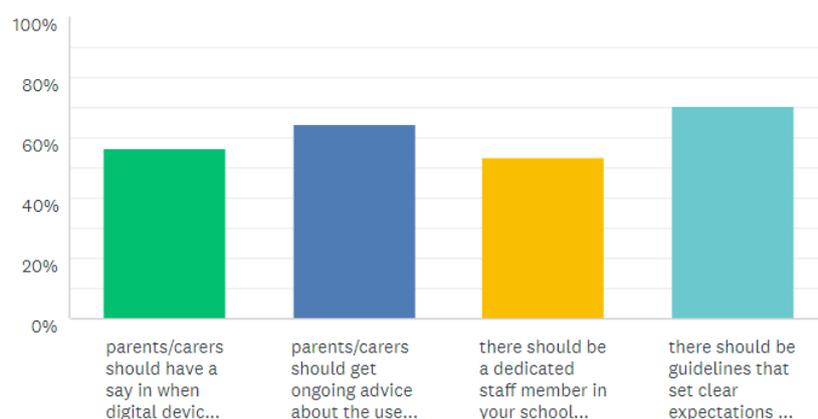
At this point it is important to note that this year's survey had a significant reduction in responses. It is possible that due to the subject nature of the survey those who felt very strongly either negatively or positively responded. And that those who had previously participated and chose not to this time did so as they had no strong opinion about the survey.

### COMPUTER USE IN SCHOOLS

57% of parents wanted to have a say about when technology was introduced in schools. Further to that 64% of parents felt the school needed to provide ongoing support to parents regarding digital devices.

Do you think....

Answered: 323 Skipped: 10



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ parents/carers should have a say in when digital devices (tablets, computers etc) are introduced in class?	56.66% 183
▼ parents/carers should get ongoing advice about the use of digital devices in school?	64.40% 208
▼ there should be a dedicated staff member in your school focused on working with parents?	53.25% 172
▼ there should be guidelines that set clear expectations of how parents, teachers and schools should work together as partners in education, for example a parent charter?	70.59% 228
<b>Total Respondents: 323</b>	

*“Absolutely all of these. We don't allow our children to have devices and I had to be very firm with the AP about it. I work with parents and almost 100% would say they have felt compelled by the school to provide a device for the child even when it's against their own judgment. The year advisors have no time to talk to parents and there should be an expectation that the school and the parents are a team. I'm reasonably confident that a lot of the aggression/anger from parents towards teachers/principals is from sheer frustration at the system and being shut out, particularly in high school.”*

*“It would be better if parents were more involved in decisions like the iPad program. Schools feel the need to jump in and get into a program because they feel it might be beneficial but then it's hard to back out of it when data comes out later to indicate that early use of iPads are not beneficial. The school has already made a business decision and it needs to stick with it.”*

*“My children started at an independent primary school where BYOD was required. It was used for 30% of the day and the school prided itself on being a digital teaching school for other schools. The children are now at a Catholic school where they do not need their own device. The school supplies them ONLY when they cannot use pen and paper, and it is a set subject of technology, not iPads being used for English and Maths. etc. I don't think primary schools need digital devices at all.”*

*“Agree strongly with the digital support...our kids are always steps ahead of us and parents need support in this area.”*

*“I find my school don't teach much about computers or anything digital as they don't know much themselves. Even basics about what a spreadsheet is for and how to use it would help them in high school.”*

#### **GUIDELINES WOULD BE USEFUL TO FACILITATE BETTER PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT/COMMUNICATION**

70% of respondents felt that guidelines either in the form of a parent charter, written guidelines or a dedicated staff member would be useful. 53% of respondents felt that a dedicated staff member to facilitate parental engagement would be useful.

Some concerns raised by respondent in relation to a parent charter were that gaining a consensus of the parent community would be difficult to achieve and a further facilitating a power imbalance between school leadership and parents. Any potential guidelines would need to be discussed and agreed upon as a community.

*“I think the parent charter is a great idea - as a parent, you want to feel involved and that your involvement is welcomed... but I can also see that some parents would make it very hard for teachers to do their job and would oversubscribe to the involvement (emailing every day and expecting an immediate response is NOT reasonable!), so having something that outlines expectations of all parties is good idea.”*

*“Charter should be created with parent input.”*

*“parent charter: must include behaviour acceptable for the parents to display, I've had more problems with other parents' actions at school than I've had with teachers”*

*“I believe the needs of students are very individual and I would be disappointed if a fixed parent charter affected how parents, teachers and schools worked together to support individual student's needs”*

*“I think teachers should be given more time off class (for other teachers to teach specialty areas) so that they have more time to connect with families. Teachers already do so much. If we keep pushing them to do more they will break. And teaching already has a very high attrition rate.”*

*“Wonderful work has been done and schools could embrace the ideas outlined in the 'Family-School Partnerships Framework' and the 'Continuity of Learning' because at the moment it doesn't feel like much of a so-called partnership!”*

*“We are a LIFT school in TaS Learning in families together so have dedicated program with teacher assigned”*

*“Having a dedicated staff member is unlikely to be useful as they can't possibly have sufficient information about every child in the school. It would be much more useful to have systems that allow parents to see the feedback that students are being given and records of their behaviour and wellbeing so that parents to get in touch if needed.”*

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Parents feel welcomed in school by their child teacher. However, for the most part parents do not feel they get meaningful information about their child's social and emotional progress as well as academic progress. This suggests the current methods of school reporting and parent teacher interviews are not the most effective forms of communication for parents to gain a clear understanding of their child's development. There appears to be a conflict in availability for parents who work and teachers work hours. Many parents would like times available after hours to contact their child teacher but are fearful this would be too much of an imposition on teachers. Parents want to be informed early about issues that develop for their child and they wish to be a part of the decision-making process for big issues such as the introduction of technology into their child's school life. Finally, parents are supportive of guidelines being introduced to steer interactions between school and home.