

Policy

Statement

6

PARENTS AND SCHOOLS

FOREWORD

As parents we naturally want the very best for our children.

What exactly is "the best" of course differs greatly from one parent to the next but basically we all want our children to be successful and happy - and to feel secure in all aspects of their lives.

During their school years, the home and school occupy the greatest part of their time - and carry the greatest influence on their development into adulthood. Obviously, the more harmony there is between home and school, the greater will be the chances of achievement and fulfilment.

The contribution which parents have traditionally made in schools is highly valued. However, students (first and foremost), parents, teachers and the school communities generally stand to reap major benefits from even stronger ties.

This policy puts an onus on schools to reach out to their parents to encourage involvement or participation in decision-making affecting the education of their children while observing the rights of parents to choose the type and level of their commitment.

Whatever your effort, it will not be wasted. The "best" possible outcomes from your child's education are very much enhanced by a strong partnership between parents, teachers and students.

This policy was developed by the Parents and Students in Schools Committee. Its original publication, in 1989, was a significant event, reflecting the Education Department's determination to improve the partnership between school and home.

Many schools have already made major steps towards implementing the policy. It has been reprinted in the standard Education Department policy format to coincide with the publication of other support materials designed to facilitate parent participation in our schools.

Ken Boston
Director General of Education

Greg Crafter
Minister of Education

INTRODUCTION

This policy is about parents and schools.

It uses the term "parent" to refer to people who have responsibility for the care of children attending school.

Students learn best when school programs offer some understanding of their background.

Therefore a strong partnership between parents and school becomes all the more important when the complex and rapidly changing nature of our society is considered.

To help students' personal, social and academic performance is just one of many good reasons why the Education Department wants parent participation in schools.

The Education Department also encourages participation because:

- parents have a unique knowledge and understanding of their own children, being their first and most influential educators
- parents have the right, through their responsibility to and for their children, to be informed about their children's learning and to participate in reaching decisions which affect them
- parents have talents, interests, energies and skills which enrich the life and program of the school.

Our school communities - in consultation with the broadest possible range of views and opinions - need to discuss and plan an education which will ensure excellence and best prepare students for an active role in future society.

Parents together with professional educators, business and community leaders must be a part of the process in clarifying future directions of education and shaping the changes that are needed.

Together they must make some important decisions now to ensure a successful future for today's students - tomorrow's citizens.

INVOLVEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

Involvement refers to the contribution which parents make to the life and business of a school without necessarily being part of the decision-making process. Many parents are already involved in their child's school in a variety of ways.

Their involvement may range from presenting elective courses to working in the canteen or listening to children reading. Parents can also be involved by being consulted on particular issues by decision-makers.

Participation refers to parents sharing in the making of decisions about school aims, policies and programs with staff and students. It may be through membership of the school council, sub-committees on finance, curriculum or assessment and reporting, or in preparing submissions on issues of special interest.

The Education Department is committed both to increasing parents' involvement and to ensuring that parents can participate in school decision-making if they wish to do so. The nature and level of each parent's involvement and participation remains a matter of individual choice.

Involvement and participation are equally valuable and parents should have the opportunity to choose how they are involved or participate from a wide range of options agreed upon by the school community.

POLICY STATEMENT

Each school will develop, in collaboration with staff, parents and students, a clearly stated policy which:

- promotes and develops the role of parents in the school
- enables parents to participate in school decision-making.

The policy should enable parents to participate in a variety of ways, for example, as members of the school council, sub-committees of the school council, parent clubs and other groups established for specific purposes.

The policy should ensure that parents are informed of the welfare and educational progress of their child and have information about the operation of the school, its curriculum, financial position and expectations in relation to student behaviour.

The overall aim of the policy is to help school communities take greater control over their own affairs and educational direction.

However, as the first step, staff and parents at each school need to develop a parent participation policy which outlines the extent and level of involvement or participation suitable for their school community.

Once the policy is adopted, its implementation should become embodied within the school's future development plan.

In the process, each school must observe the following guidelines:

- A policy and a plan consistent with this policy are to be developed.
- Structures, courses of action and a time-line for achieving steps in the plan are to be outlined.
- Parents are to participate in the development of the plan.

- The plan must be developed within the framework of the Education Act and Regulations, and the South Australian Education Department Administrative Instructions and Guidelines.
- The plan must not conflict with the specific professional responsibilities for which principals and teachers are accountable. (For example, while parents should participate in the development of a school discipline policy, it is the responsibility of the principal and teachers to manage student behaviour on a day-to-day basis.)

RESPONSIBILITIES

All of us - from the Director-General of Education to each and every parent, school principal, teacher and school councillor - has a role to play in implementing the policy on parent participation.

The responsibilities of the directors

The Director-General of Education is responsible for the implementation of the policy on parent participation. In determining future development of parent involvement and participation throughout the school system, advice will be sought from the Primary and Secondary Boards of Education.

Directors of Education will provide a central support point for all schools in their areas. They will:

- consult with parent representatives to develop a suitable program to implement the policy within their areas
- initiate special programs to ensure parents have the skills and knowledge to take part effectively in school affairs
- support and/or fund appropriate efforts to develop school-based policies and programs
- monitor and evaluate efforts both to encourage parents to take an interest in school affairs and to help them take part effectively in decision-making.

The responsibilities of principals

Principals have an especially important role. Their task is to:

- consult with parents to organise a school-based policy and plan to promote parent involvement and participation. The policy should detail aims, how they will be achieved, timelines, key people and resources
- foster the interest, knowledge and skills of parents who have not previously been involved
- ensure that information is made available to parents, establishing new channels where necessary

- identify staff and/or others within the school community to be responsible for increasing parent involvement and participation
- monitor and evaluate parent participation practices
- make possible staff development programs on parent participation.

The responsibilities of teachers

Teachers will continue to work with parents to:

- help parents feel welcome in the classroom, for example, through activities including class parents' meetings
- build good relationships with parents and students
- ensure that parents have all relevant information about their children's education
- seek the views of all parents on matters relating to their children's education
- promote the idea of their parents' participation among students
- create a welcoming environment for all members of the school community.

The responsibilities of parents

Parents have a responsibility to:

- cooperate with school staff, other parents and students in the interest of their child's education
- show an active interest in their child's schooling
- express their opinion in relation to school matters
- support the implementation of school policies
- assist the school in establishing a set of shared values and expectations.