School Learning Support Program

(November, 2010)

POSITIVELY ENGAGING PARENTS

CONTENTS

Foreword

The New South Wales Department of Education and Training supports the meaningful participation of parents or caregivers in the education of their child. Parents' knowledge and understanding of their child is integral to the work of the school learning support team. The process of identifying a student's support needs and monitoring these through a school learning support team structure is an important aspect of the *School Learning Support Program*. The program provides a new opportunity to strengthen the relationship between schools and families.

The role that parents play in the education of their child has the potential to strengthen the support provided by schools in improving the educational outcomes of students with additional learning needs. When the relationship between the school and family is trusting and collaborative there are benefits for all, but most importantly the student.

Research on improving educational outcomes for students supports the cooperation of those who have the greatest influence on them, namely parents and teachers. There is unequivocal evidence that parental involvement makes a significant difference to educational achievement. When schools and parents are able to work together in constructive and meaningful ways much can be achieved.

This resource, while having relevance for all parents, is designed for schools working with parents of students with additional learning needs. It should be acknowledged that some parents may already feel uncertain and disengaged from the school. Their journey so far, as a parent of a child with a disability or learning difficulty, may have been complicated and their investment in that journey will have impacted on them personally, emotionally and financially. Schools must be sensitive to issues and barriers that may prevent parent engagement and appreciate what parents bring to the partnership if they are to overcome these obstacles. School practice should be regularly reviewed to ensure that it encourages and invites participation and does not present further barriers to participation. Parents who are welcomed as genuine partners by staff will feel reassured and empowered.

Developing a strong partnership between parents and educators may be challenging and it should never be taken for granted that the partnership will automatically work productively. It is important that parents and teachers recognise the significant benefits of involving parents and the essential role that parents perform in their child's education. A particular focus of this resource is the emphasis on schools encouraging, developing and nurturing positive relationships with parents.

In his research, Sanders (2008) concluded that successful parent-teacher relationships are based on mutual respect, cultural sensitivity, a focus on strengths rather than deficits and attention to the needs of families as perceived by families rather than schools.

Training for all stakeholders may be necessary to attain the level of commitment and the positive attitude required to make the partnership work. In the development of this culture of collaboration and acceptance the principal's role as an instructional leader is significant.

Developing a climate in which all members of the school community are understood, valued and respected, and in which a genuine desire is fostered to achieve improved educational outcomes and greater success for students with additional learning needs, should be the aim of all stakeholders.

The cultural and linguistic diversity of New South Wales is reflected in its public schools. Students from language backgrounds other than English, both those born in Australia and overseas, comprise approximately one quarter of students enrolled in NSW government schools. These students speak over eighty different languages and bring with them a range of cultural and religious traditions (DET website 2010). Consideration should be given to this diversity to enable school teams to better engage with parents. The identification of discrete groups within the community and the development of an understanding of local issues that impact on these communities will enhance the capacity of schools to support individual students and their families.

Over 40,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students attend NSW public schools. In developing productive partnerships, schools must recognise and be responsive to Aboriginal families' cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds. School learning support teams should refer to the resource package *Turning Policy into Action,* dispatched to schools in 2009. The package provides advice, guidance and support to schools in working with with Aboriginal people and communities to implement both the Strategy and the *Aboriginal Education and Training Policy*.

In establishing and maintaining the positive and productive engagement of parents and the community, it is not what we say we do or will do, but what we actually do or don't do in practice that will influence the effectiveness of our engagement with parents and the community.

This resource explores the areas of communication, involvement and support where school teams can promote and encourage the engagement of parents as they work towards building a genuine culture of collaboration. The last section identifies existing resources and provides links to additional support.

N.B. throughout this resource for 'parents' read 'parents or carers'

Communicating with Parents

Parents' willingness and ability to positively engage in the education of their child can be impacted on by the communication strategies employed by a school. Good communication strategies have the power to inform and engage parents on matters related to the school. It can increase connectedness and confidence levels.

The table below identifies some areas that a school might consider when evaluating the effectiveness of their current practice in terms of communication. These tables may be used as the basis of an audit on parent engagement or the starting point for staff discussion.

> Parents and community members are the best people to judge whether or not communication strategies used by the school are successful. Schools seeking to improve their communication strategies should consult with parents and the school community.

	Considerations
Forming a Partnership with Parents	Are parents asked - "How do we communicate effectively with you?" – "What is your preference?" - email, person to person, phone, through a translator, etc? Is their response recorded then acted upon? Is the school moving into a new type of relationship with parents? Is this acknowledged and discussed with parents? Does the school apply creative solutions to enhance its capacity to engage all parents? This includes those parents who are disengaged from the school community, who do not speak English, have work commitments, live in isolated areas, have previously had negative experiences at school, etc. Does the school routinely review the number of parents that respond to communication from the school and use that data to inform future communication processes?
Physical Environment	Communication commences even before parents enter the school grounds. **Signage** – are buildings, especially the administration block, clearly labelled? **Acknowledgement of Aboriginal people and culture** – does the school fly the Aboriginal flag? Are there "welcome to the school" notices in the local Aboriginal language? **Parent waiting area** – are parents and visitors able to wait in a warm/cool/comfortable area that is safe for young children and has access to toilets? **Displays of student work and school activities** – do displays around the school promote the work of students, the school and include the work of students with disabilities? **Grounds** – are the grounds well maintained e.g. gardens, furniture, equipment and no litter?

Point of contact	**1st point of contact** – are there set procedures for phone calls or person to person contact? Do all staff in the front office have a clear understanding of these procedures? Do staff follow these procedures in establishing and maintaining positive parent and community relations? **Who's who** - are there pamphlets, displays in waiting areas or pages on the website that clearly identify key personnel in the school and their role as it relates to students? **Booking appointments** – are parents able to book appointments and interpreters through the front office? Are Aboriginal parents/caregivers asked if they would like the Aboriginal Education Officer or another support person such as a local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group member to be contacted? **Business cards** – do key contacts within the school have business cards that can be given to parents to assist them in organising follow-up meetings? **Parent communication** – does the school immediately acknowledge parent communication, even if the action taken by the school is going to take a little longer?
Formal Meeting Procedures	Do you consider the following when conducting a formal meeting with parents? • Staff take into consideration cultural sensitivities and protocols when dealing with members of the school community. • All staff understand and are fully informed about the local Aboriginal community and related protocols and practices. • Meetings are held at a mutually convenient time to accommodate parent commitments. • Parents are provided with information about the purpose of the meeting, who will be present and are given advance copies of documents that will be discussed. • Parents that lack confidence or have difficulty communicating in meetings are encouraged to invite a support person. • Consideration is given to the need for flexibility in the timing and structure of meetings. Interpreters are made available and, if necessary, organised before the meeting. • Understanding and accepting any cultural objections that might arise and if necessary making accommodations for them. • Accommodations are made for young children who may be present e.g. provision of toys or a safe, supervised area for them to play. • Key personnel are present and all participants have been fully briefed on what is required of them prior to and during the meeting. This might include outside agencies. • Introductions and farewells are extended, with parents being informed about the role of participants not previously involved. • The meeting area is private. • The furniture used during the meeting is appropriate - consideration is given to the size of the chairs (no small chairs) and the positioning of chairs and tables (some arrangements may be intimidating to parents). • The meeting is free from interruptions – phone calls, students, staff, etc. • The meeting commences on time. • Parents are given access to relevant documents well before meetings. • A record of the meeting is made and distributed to all participants. Key discussion points and areas for action are included in the notes distributed.

Formal Written Communication	Have the following strategies been considered in the school's formal written communication? • An assessment has been made of the communication needs of the audience (language and literacy levels). • The language is jargon free, clear and succinct. • Materials produced acknowledge a range of both literacy levels and linguistic/cultural backgrounds. • Bullet points are used to aid clarity when communicating a number of ideas. • The format is predictable. Headings are used to summarise the content of the text. • The information is available in other languages where necessary. • There is an invitation to meet and discuss the information if further clarification is required. • A key contact (name of person and phone number) is clearly identified in the text and that contact is aware of the content of the letter. • Strategies are developed and implemented for parents that experience difficulties with literacy. This can include meetings and information provided electronically.
Informal Contact	What opportunities are available for parents to meet with staff informally? These might include activities such as: • Meet and greet barbeques • Drop-in time • Parent and staff morning or afternoon teas • Parent workshops led by staff • Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) meeting. The AECG is a community based non-government organisation. The school could refer parents to their local AECG by providing information such as the local president's name and contact details. • Local sporting events • School Carnivals, concerts and theme days etc. • Education Week activities • Special weeks and days such as NAIDOC Week, Reconciliation Week, Multicultural Week, Refugee Awareness Week, National Tree Planting Day and Clean Up Australia Day • Community cultural festivals.
Communication Sent Home	When communication is sent home does the school consider the following? • Communication is sent via a reliable route. Conversations are had with parents about the best approach when communication routes appear unsuccessful. • Copies of materials distributed at school are sent home for students who are absent. • Archives of previous communications are available for parents if necessary. • Material is made available for a parent who lives apart from the child. • Copies of distributed materials are made available on the school website or school notice board if appropriate. • Communication is colour coded to alert parents e.g. all parent notices are always printed on a particular colour. • The school produces reader friendly materials that are concise, preferably on a single page and well designed. • The school offers multi-lingual or multicultural materials and resources – websites, print production, multimedia and translators. • Strategies are developed and implemented for parents who experience difficulties with literacy. This can include meetings and information provided electronically. • The use of text messages as reminders or requests.

Website	The school website will increasingly become the first point of contact for parents and the broader school community. Schools should capitalise on the immediacy of this method of communication and its ability to be dynamic and interactive. Parents can access information on the site at a pace that suits them. Does the school have a website and to what extent does the school website do the following? • Promote key messages to parents and carers about the school and its aims. • Provide a school calendar with key events such as assessment periods, Parents and Citizens' meeting times, parent-teacher interviews. • Promote home based materials and websites. Due to work commitments many parents would prefer to access material from home rather than attend workshops. • Provide interactive workshops using programs such as Moodle and chat rooms for parents. • Provide products and resources that the parent may work through on their own or with their child. • Have an area for parents on the site with specific information about how they are able to support their child. • Provide information about the school for non-reading parents. • Link parents to existing resources and publications. Remember you don't have to reinvent the wheel. • Link parents with other organisations that have the capacity to provide support. • Inform parents about special programs that operate within the school, e.g. *The School Learning Support Program*.
Complaints Procedure	• Does the school have a complaints procedure? • Is it clear? • Does it have formal and informal steps? • Are steps in the procedure timed? • Is it agreed upon? • Is the complaints procedure available as a process chart or diagram?

The table below looks at more specific procedures that a school might consider when communicating with parents of students with additional learning needs. The points raised are designed to support schools as they reflect on their current practice and would be useful discussion points for school learning support teams.

	Considerations
How are parents made aware of the needs of their child?	When the school identifies that a student has additional learning needs: • When the school first identifies that a student has additional needs how are parents involved/informed? • Are parents provided with evidence to support them in understanding the nature and level of their child's difficulties and strengths? • Are parents spoken to personally? • Does the school acknowledge with parents the student's strengths as well as areas of additional need? When the parent raises a concern with the school in relation to the learning needs of their child: • Are parents' concerns treated with respect? • Is a written record kept of parents' concerns in relation to their child? • What communication strategies are in place to ensure that key

	personnel are aware of the parents' concerns? • Does the school draw on that parental knowledge and expertise? In collaboration with the school principal, the Aboriginal Education Officer or regional support staff such as the Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer provides a key conduit between the family of Aboriginal students and the school.
How are parents made aware of the provisions made for their child?	• Are parents made aware of the nature of the provisions and the reason those particular provisions are being made? • Do parents understand the frequency with which the provisions are being made available to their child? • Do parents understand the resources and equipment that are being used to support their child? • Do parents get an opportunity to meet with any additional adults who will be working with their child? • Are parents provided with relevant documentation about possible funding/avenues to support their child? • Are parents provided with information on a regular basis in order that they can support their child's learning at home?
How are parents kept up to date with the level and nature of support that their child receives as he/she progresses through school?	Does the school have procedures in place to inform parents of the following? • Staff changes • Prolonged staff absences • A change of class • A change in school learning support officer • Available funding • Changes in provisions that are being made available to their child • Changes of routine that may impact on a child with a disability

Involving Parents

Over time, with good leadership, schools can become places where parents are genuinely involved in decision making concerning their child's education and where parents and teachers acknowledge each other as partners in the growth and development of the child.

Educational research over the past thirty years, exploring the issues related to the engagement of parents as partners in education, has established unequivocally a direct correlation between parental involvement and increased student achievement. Even after all factors such as social class, socio-economic status, ethnicity, family structure and parents' educational attainment have been factored out, parental involvement still remains a significant predictor of student achievement and adjustment.

In 2002 Professor Tony Vinson emphasised the importance of school community partnerships in the *Vinson Inquiry into the Provision of Public Education* citing extensive research evidence supporting home, school and community partnerships.

As schools aim for productive parent-school partnerships it may necessitate a cultural shift in the school community as the traditional roles of parents and schools in the education of children with a disability or learning difficulty are challenged. The leadership of the principal will be paramount as the school community forms new ideas, new attitudes and acknowledges and appreciates the role of parents as first and continuing educators of children. Issues of control and power may emerge as parents and staff adjust to an increased level of parental involvement. The principal will have a key role in ensuring that these issues become positive catalysts for change rather than barriers to success.

The process of change is time hungry and will require patience and persistence from all. A celebration of gains at regular points along the way, no matter how small, will maintain an impetus to continue.

While the majority of parents desire to be more involved in their child's learning, there are many obstacles preventing them from doing so. Lack of money and time are two major inhibitors. The pressure on households to have all available adults contributing to family income places demands on parents to be active participants in the workforce. Add to this children with busy afterschool commitments and there is a small amount of time left for parents to be involved in school in a meaningful way. Psychological barriers may also operate for parents and inhibit participation and involvement. Some parents confidently treat teachers as equals and are comfortable using the language of education while others come to the partnership with little confidence and self assurance. In the case of some Aboriginal parents and family members, their own educational experience may have been negative and this can impact on how they engage with and participate in their child's schooling.

A recent study of Australian high school students by Mansour and Martin (2009), investigating home and parental factors that predict achievement motivation, suggests that if parents do not actively engage with the school itself there are benefits for students if schools promote and encourage ways for parents to become involved at home. This research explores home resources, in and out of home parental assistance, parenting style and parental involvement in the school. Home resources and parenting style are identified in the study as the most significant home and parental factors associated with key aspects of achievement motivation and engagement. The findings of this study may provide guidance to schools in working with those parents who are unable to be actively engaged with the school but desire to be more involved in their child's education.

Parents can support their child and the work of the school by working with their child to develop a positive self-esteem and self-belief. By assisting their child to have a positive attitude towards staff and the work of the school, and by helping them to develop organisational strategies to support learning, parents can positively impact on their child's learning.

In some situations, while the intention of activities or programs implemented by the school may have been to break down existing inequalities such as those related to socio-economic status, past government policy and practices, and gender or ethnicity, parental involvement may strengthen rather than erode existing power divisions between schools, teachers and parents. This can occur when initiatives presuppose that schools, students and parents share equal status and confidence. An increased level of success will come from acknowledging and addressing this where necessary.

While the barriers may initially seem insurmountable, research identifies that many schools benefit as a result of their persistence and resolve to involve parents.

Although the focus of this resource is involving parents, it should be emphasised that when appropriate, the inclusion of students in discussions between parents and teachers may encourage further commitment to learning such as the development of Personalised Learning Plans, which is a consultative process involving the student, teacher and parents. This involvement needs to be thoughtfully discussed between teachers and parents. Student involvement at the high school level, particularly the upper secondary level, may be an effective strategy in encouraging students to take more responsibility for their learning.

> Parents and community members are the best people to judge whether or not strategies used by the school to support parent involvement are successful. Schools seeking to assess their involvement with parents should consult with parents and the school community and should look towards continued improvement at all times.

The following table identifies areas that schools might consider when working to positively engage parents.

|	Considerations
Supporting Structures	Involving parents and community in the work of the school requires planning and commitment. Structures within the school may enhance or inhibit parental involvement. • Is leadership within the school visible and available? (e.g. greeting students and parents in the morning/afternoon, attending community functions, being present at school functions) • Are parents able to access key personnel within the school and are the key personnel equipped to provide accurate information? • Does the school plan for parental involvement and does parental involvement feature as an item in the School Plan? • Does the School Plan identify activities and programs that will take place throughout the year and are actions allocated to specific people/teams? • Is there a budget allocation for parent-school partnership activities within the school? • Do parent-run programs and activities have an opportunity to meet regularly with a member of the school leadership team? • Does the school make formal recognition of parents and their contribution?
Connecting Learning at Home and at School	When parents are able to support the learning that takes place at school there are clear benefits for students. Parents should be encouraged by the school to provide home environments that support children as learners. • Does the school have clear and succinct information about how parents can support children at home? • Where appropriate, does the school explore possibilities for parent involvement in the classroom? • Are there opportunities for parents to discuss student progress between home and school at times other than the formal parent-teacher meetings? • Are parents/families involved each year in setting student goals? • Are parents/families involved where appropriate, with the student in career planning? • Are parents encouraged to support and encourage their child rather than direct and control? • Are parents informed about the links between learning activities at home and learning at school? • Are parents made aware of the skills and knowledge students will require in particular subjects each year? • Are informal workshops available for parents which demonstrate concepts related to their child's learning, such as in literacy and numeracy? • Does the school provide information in alternative formats to enable parents to support their child at home?

Building Bridges across Cultural and Language Divides	It is important for schools to understand the cultural and linguistic characteristics of their school community. Programs and practices that have achieved success in one school community may not be best suited to another. One size does not fit all. • Does the school provide cultural awareness training for school staff and parents? • Does the school provide opportunity for staff to engage in cultural immersion programs? • Does the school demonstrate a commitment to supporting staff to build their competency in understanding local Aboriginal culture and community? • Research suggests that the most effective form of communication is personal contact. Does the school encourage and support this form of communication? (phone and face to face) • Do parents and staff have easy access to translators when required? • Does the school work with Aboriginal Education Officers, Community Elders, Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers and Aboriginal Student Liaison Officers to make connections with the parents of Aboriginal students? • Do Aboriginal parents have active roles in the school? • Does the school have a community liaison officer? • What strategies does the school have in place to actively assist previously uninvolved parents to become involved in their child's learning? • Is communication with the home genuinely two-way and culturally affirming? • Is the school represented at community events when they are invited? • Does the school support community events and functions? • Does the school have a model based on parent to parent support where necessary? • Do all staff demonstrate a willingness to engage all parents?
Building Community and Identity	When schools are an integral part of their community all people in the partnership benefit. • How well does the school know the local community? (e.g. local Aboriginal language groups, ethnic groups, local history, Aboriginal Elders, Aboriginal community organisations, etc.) Does the school promote an understanding of this in the wider school community? • Is the school utilised by other community organisations? (e.g. adult learning, Aboriginal service providers, Saturday school, health and welfare services, afterschool care, sport training, Red Cross, a venue for local council run programs, church, etc) • Does the school participate in community celebrations, (e.g. NAIDOC Week, Reconciliation Week, Sorry Day, multicultural festivals, garden competitions, ANZAC Day, Iftar celebrations, Clean Up Australia Day, etc) and does that participation involve parents? • Does the school community work collaboratively on projects which cement their partnership and reflect the school community's cultural and social characteristics? (e.g. community gardens, peace/Reconciliation walkways, murals, etc.) • Do the parents have a place in the school that they can call their own? (e.g. a community meeting room or community resource room, etc.) Is it inviting? • Does the school participate in meetings that are co-sponsored by local community groups? • Does the school take an active role in developing relationships with non-government organisations that support students and families?

Formal Meetings	Refer to section 2 *Communicating with Parents* – *Formal meeting procedures* (p.p. 4 and 5) for more considerations around formal meetings. • Does the school unpack performance data for parents and provide explanations of state-wide testing in relation to their child? • Are parents given access to information, advice and support during assessment and any related decision making process about specialist education provision? • Is consideration given to the venue for parent-teacher meetings? A formal structure and venue can be very intimidating for some parents. • Are staff made aware of the kinds of considerations that should be given to different Aboriginal and ethnic groups when conducting meetings? (The resource *Working with Aboriginal People - A Practice Resource* provides practical advice on this topic. (see page 20 for details) • Are parents provided with clear outlines of the outcome of meetings about their child's learning? • Are parents involved in the appraisal process and the planning and review of programs?
Consultative Decision Making	As one of the key stakeholders, it is vital that parents have an opportunity to be involved in decision making that impacts on their child's education. • Do parents have appropriate opportunities to contribute to decision making related to their child? • Are students invited to participate, where appropriate, in decision making groups? • Has the school signed a local partnership agreement with the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group? • Does the school seek out and include representation from all racial, ethnic, socio-economic and other groups represented in the school population when involved in consultative decision making? • Does the school encourage parents to participate in formal parent organisations and groups such as Parents and Citizens' Association, school councils and merit selection panels? • Are parents provided with training and support when they are representing the parent body?
Harnessing the Interests of Parents	Creating a climate within the school that is welcoming and supportive is an important step in breaking down the barriers that may exist for some parents. Principals should also recognise that contributions and involvement from parents are complex and perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of school leadership and management. It will not necessarily be consistent in and across schools and in relation to individuals. The key here is perseverance on the part of the school. • Are there opportunities for parents to attend the school for informal activities? • Does the school involve the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group and the Aboriginal community in the engagement of parents? • Do parents have a say in the activities that are held for parents and the time that they are held? • How does the school research parents' views? • How does the school tap into and utilise the interests and skills of parents? • How appropriate is the venue – relaxed, non-threatening? • How are activities for parents advertised e.g. are parents approached personally, through a range of media? • Are the meeting times rotated e.g. morning to afternoon to capture different audiences? • What arrangements are made for young children while parents are attending workshops or meetings? • Does the school have an easily accessible parent area?

Harnessing the Interests of Parents (continued)	• Does the school widely publicise activities that involve parents in partnership with the school? • Does the school listen to and respond to complaints and criticisms? • As a way of breaking down the teacher/non-teacher barrier, are there opportunities for staff and parents to meet in activities that are not directly education related? • Are parents provided with guidance about ways in which they can be involved in the school or in their child's learning? • How does the school make parents aware that their contribution is valued? • Does the school manage the expectations of parents?

Developing Parents Understandings	Schools are in an ideal position to develop the knowledge and skills of parents in relation to the education of their child. Parents are more likely to be advocates when they have an understanding of what the school is trying to achieve.
	• Are parents personally invited when the training workshops are relevant to them and their child?
	• Are parents provided with opportunities to learn about particular issues related to students with special education needs?
	• Does the school provide workshops, discussions, meetings, demonstrations, etc, for parents around the following areas?
	   ➢ Literacy, numeracy, science and technology
	   ➢ Home and classroom work
	   ➢ Building resilience and confidence in young people
	   ➢ Transition and career planning
	• Is the information in workshops delivered in a dynamic, interactive and culturally appropriate and sensitive way?
	• Does the school provide access for parents to activities run by outside organisations?
	• Does the school support parents in accessing training and qualifications?
	• Does the school seek advice from parents on what they need to know? Does the school act on that advice?
	• Does the school access professionals from the community to speak with parents or provide parents with training?
	• Does the school involve students in showcasing school events?
	• Does the school use audio, visual and digital media to communicate with parents?

Beyond the School	There are many resources and organisations in each community that are available to support families, and in particular, families with children with additional learning needs. Connecting families with these organisations can have a positive flow-on to the school environment. Some schools have developed a symbiotic relationship with organisations in their community. • Are parents made aware of resources available in the community that can support them in their role as parents of a child with a disability or learning difficulty? • Does the school collaborate with community organisations to assist them in providing support for families with students with additional learning needs? (e.g. higher education facilities, after-school care providers, local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, foundations, community services, Red Cross, Police Citizens Youth Club, private providers, organisations that can support their children's learning, etc) • Does the school encourage past students to participate in school programs?

Roles and Responsibilities are Clear	When stakeholders understand the parameters of the partnership it reduces misunderstandings and prevents the formation of new barriers. • Are school staff made aware of their roles and responsibilities in regard to parental involvement? (cultural sensitivity, protocols, privacy, etc) • To what extent does the school promote key messages to parents about their roles and responsibilities? • Does the school articulate expectations of parents at the point of enrolment and are these expectations reinforced at parent–teacher interviews? • Is there a clear understanding of the areas of policy and decision making that are open to parental involvement? • Is there clarity of purpose around parent-school partnerships? Do all stakeholders understand why the school is pursuing the involvement of parents and the community in school life?
Transition Points	Transition points are critical times in parent-school partnerships. Transition points provide schools with opportunities for new beginnings. • Are parents actively involved in preparation for enrolment, transfer or transition? • Does the school recognise and utilise parental knowledge and expertise? How is this conveyed to staff? • Do parents have an opportunity to meet staff prior to their child's enrolment? • Does the school seek information from the student's previous institution that will assist the student? • Is there a procedure to ensure that information about a student's learning needs and support is effectively shared at transition points?
Acknowledgement of Staff, Parent and Student Input	Parental involvement takes time and commitment. Maintaining the motivation of all stakeholders will be an ongoing task. • Is the concept of family-school partnership promoted throughout the school community as having benefits for staff, students, parents and the school community as a whole? • When appropriate, are students encouraged to provide input to their education needs and learning methods? Is their input acknowledged? • How do parents know that their input and support can make a difference? (e.g. through newsletters, discussions, class meetings, articles published on the school website, etc) • How does the school convey to parents that their input to their child's education is valued and welcomed by the school? • Are examples of shared views, actions and goals disseminated to the whole school community? (e.g. in newsletters, on the web, at formal assemblies, etc.) • Does the school celebrate success with its community? • Does the school celebrate Aboriginal student success and acknowledge partnerships with Aboriginal communities and organisations?
Homework	Homework has the potential to strengthen or destroy relationships in the partnership. For families with a child with a disability or a learning difficulty it can be an extremely difficult time. Schools should give careful consideration to the homework and assessment demands that it places on students. • How does the school ensure that students with disabilities and additional learning needs receive the appropriate amount and level of homework? • Do students have all the information that they require to complete homework with or without their parent's assistance? • Is there across-school coordination in regard to homework and assessment tasks? (applies particularly to secondary schools) • Is the type and level of homework set relevant to the outcomes identified for the students?

Homework (continued)	• Does the school confirm that the parents are able to support their child's homework? • Does the school run an after-hours homework centre or an in-school tutorial support learning centre?
Resources	Having access to resources will support parents who have heavy demands on their time and may not be able to participate in school based activities. • Does the school have resources for parents to borrow to enable them to support their child at home? • Do parents know what resources are available and the process for borrowing? • Do parents understand how to make best use of the available resources? • Does the school website have links to informative sites for parents? • Is the school able to provide parents with access to computers and the Internet? • Are parents able to gain access to translation services through the school?
Policy Development and Decision Making	Parents have a right to be involved in decision making that will have an impact on their child. Supporting parents as they participate in that process is a key element of parent-school partnerships. • Are parents provided with opportunities to work with teachers when the educational decision-making process is related to their child? • Are parents given the opportunity to be involved in policy development and decision making? • Does the school provide training for parent leaders – Parents and Citizens' Association, panel representatives for merit selection and curriculum evaluations, local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group members, workshop leaders, etc? • What process does the school have in place to ensure that the values and opinions of parents are considered when developing relevant policies and procedures?
Evaluation, Innovation Leading to Improvement	School communities can change over time and require regular reassessment to ensure that the school is reaching all stakeholders. This should not be an onerous task but it is an important one. • Does the school regularly review practice on building, maintaining and renewing parental participation and consider how it can be improved? • Does the school regularly assess the communication needs and preferences of parents? • How well does the school understand its community?
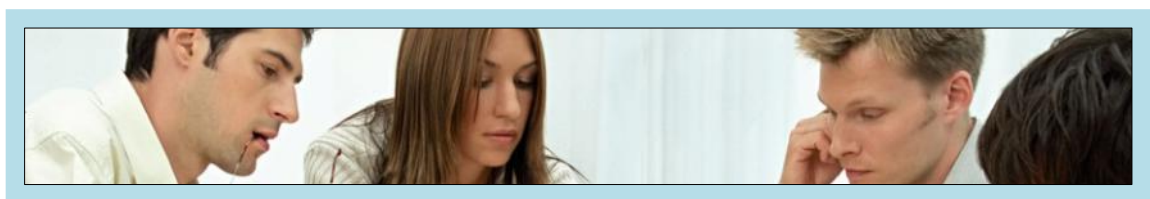
Supporting Parents

Research has demonstrated the benefits of schools and parents working together to support students with their learning. It also recognises that parents of students with additional learning needs may require resources to allow them to support the specific needs of their child.

Schools are in an ideal position to connect parents with community organisations to strengthen the support base that is available to them. A key element of positively engaging parents is the construction and maintenance of culturally supportive networks and programs that help parents become more informed sources of guidance and support for their child. Schools should resist working at cross purposes with outside organisations by building positive links that avoid duplication.

Making use of the resources at a local level has the potential to support the school as it develops genuinely productive partnerships with parents. All school staff should be aware of the community organisations in their area and refer parents to them when relevant. Information relating to local organisations should be displayed in the school and made readily available to families. Information days involving local organisations, parents and school personnel are a good way to share information and build connections between the school community and the broader community.

Investigate the links and resources listed in Section 5 as a starting point for discussions that explore the possibilities of providing support for parents.

Parents and community members are the best people to judge whether or not strategies used by the school to support parents are successful. Schools seeking to assess the support that they provide to parents should consult with parents and the school community.

	Considerations
Supporting Structures	Schools can provide assistance to families when their child is moving from one educational setting to another. Schools might assist by: • Providing a link to key contacts in the new setting • Advising parents on questions to ask and things to look for when seeking an alternative setting • Organising a meeting for parents at the new setting with key contacts so that information can be exchanged • Accompanying the parents on their first visit to the new setting • Organising a representative from a community organisation to act as an advocate/support person where necessary. How does the school link parents and families to outside organisations e.g. council services, health services, voluntary organisations? This may be accomplished through: • Newsletters or flyers

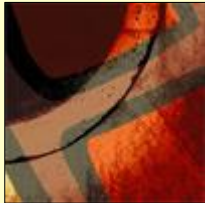|	
Supporting Structures (continued)	- Pamphlets on display in the parent/community room or school foyer - Links provided on the school website - Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers - Transition personnel or members of the school learning support team linking families where appropriate - Having organisations present at parent meetings - Having representatives of organisations run courses for parents at the school. Schools can provide assistance to parents to allow them to access information more readily. Schools might assist by: - Having interpreter services available through the school for written and verbal communication - Providing information in a range of formats e.g. video, multimedia, Braille, community languages, etc - Supporting the community with parent literacy classes - Utilising the Aboriginal Education Officer. The school provides an ideal environment for the establishment of formal or informal networks. Schools might assist by: - Establishing regular opportunities for parents to meet on an informal basis and issuing personal invitations for parents to attend - Providing opportunities for parents to meet for non-educational reasons e.g. cooking classes, sewing classes, parent excursions to places of interest, etc - Having a dedicated space or room for Aboriginal staff, Aboriginal community members and parents - Organising support group meetings for parents of students with additional learning needs - Calling on outside organisations to run short courses for areas of need. This might include courses in parenting, literacy, managing finances, etc. Specialist staff or community members can provide parents with a non-threatening link to the school. The following examples may support parents as they become more familiar with the school. - Aboriginal Education Officer - Aboriginal Elders - Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer - Aboriginal Student Liaison Officer - Community Liaison Officer - Transition Officer - Department of Community Services Officers - Police Liaison Officers - School Learning Support Teacher - English as a Second Language Teacher - Centrelink Officers

Useful Links and Resources

Resources within the Department of Education and Training	
	The following resources can be found on the NSW Department of Education and Training's website. NSW Public Schools - Going to a Public School - Ten Tips for Parents of Children Starting Kindergarten http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/gotoschool/primary/tentips.php NSW Public Schools - Going to a Public School - Parents: Ten Tips to help prepare Students for High School http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/gotoschool/highschool/tipsforparents.php NSW Public Schools – Supporting Students – Summary: Role of parents http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/studentsupport/studenthealth/individualstud/roleofparents/index.php NSW Public Schools – Supporting Students – Consulting with parents. http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/studentsupport/studenthealth/individualstud/consultparent/index.php Resources for download found on NSW Department of Education and Training's website. *Who's Going to Teach my Child? – A guide for parents of children with special needs* http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/schoolsweb/studentsupport/programs/lrngdificulties/whoteach.pdf
Partnership Agreement 	The partnership agreement between the NSW Department of Education and Training and the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. (NSW AECG), *The Partnership Agreement 2010-2020: Maintaining a collaborative partnership into the future* has been renewed. The renewed agreement is built on the principles of "respect, commitment, collaboration and accountability" and outlines a shared goal where Aboriginal learners "have access to an education and training system that values their cultural heritage and identity". The commitment statement may be found through the following site: *http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/news/announcements/yr2010/mar/partnerships.php* The *Partnership Agreement* underpins the ongoing relationship between the Department and the NSW AECG as its peak advisory body. This is further supported through policy and strategy. *The NSW Aboriginal Education and Training Policy* https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/students/access_equity/aborig_edu/PD20080385.shtml

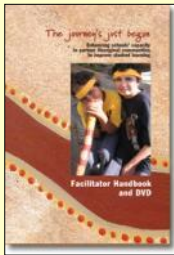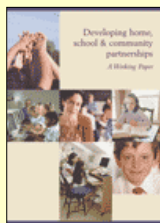|	
	The NSW Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy 2009-2012 https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/strat_direction/aetstrat0912.pdf *Aboriginal Education and Training Policy – Turning Policy into Action – Resources for the Planning Group* This kit was distributed to schools in 2009 and includes a range of resources that will support schools as they engage with Aboriginal communities. Two documents from the kit that will be particularly useful are found at: http://ab-ed.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/go/partnerships *Working with Aboriginal Communities (Revised Edition 2008) – A Guide to Community Consultation and Protocols* http://northcoast.det.nsw.edu.au/targetedPrograms/AborigEdu/Documents/working-with-aboriginal-communities.pdf and *The journey's just begun – Enhancing schools' capacity to partner Aboriginal communities to improve student learning – Facilitator Handbook and DVD.* You can download and view the entire video and Facilitator Handbook. *Welcome to Country & Acknowledgement of Country* http://www.aecg.nsw.edu.au/resources.php NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. http://www.aecg.nsw.edu.au/
	The following links are just a few of the resources that can be found on the NSW Department of Education and Training's intranet. Partnerships with parents – By Phil Lambert https://detwww.det.nsw.edu.au/schooladmin/sbs/yr2006/oct/parents.htm Partners in Learning - 19 April 2010 https://detwww.det.nsw.edu.au/news/sbs/aboriginaledu/yr2010/partnerslearn.htm Parents as Partners in Learning https://detwww.det.nsw.edu.au/schooladmin/sbs/yr2007/jun/partners.htm
	Priority Schools Funding Program - The following resources plus many others are downloadable or are available for order from resources page on the PSP website. http://www.lowsesschools.nsw.edu.au/section/166-resources.aspx

	Developing home, school & community partnerships. A working paper - NSW Department of Education and Training http://www.lowsesschools.nsw.edu.au/wcb-content/uploads/psp/file/HomeSchoolCommunityPartnership.pdf and Home, School Community Partnerships – Support Sheet http://www.lowsesschools.nsw.edu.au/resources/support_sheet_3.pdf

Other Resources	
	Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of NSW The Federation is committed to a free public education system which is inclusive of all, irrespective of culture, gender, academic ability and socio-economic status. Parents as partners in the education process, have a right and a responsibility to play an active role in the education of their children. http://www.pandc.org.au/
	Working With Aboriginal People and Communities – A Practice Resource NSW Department of Community Services. http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/DOCSWR/_assets/main/documents/WORKING_WITH_ABORIGINAL.PDF or https://detwww.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/intranet/lists/directoratesaz/humanresources/winanggaay/valuedstaff/culture/docs.pdf NSW Government – Human Services – Community Services website is a useful site for parents and would be an excellent link on a school website. The homepage http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/welcome_to_docs_website.html Parenting http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/parents_carers_and_families/parenting.html
	Shoulder to Shoulder – Information for Aboriginal families who have a child or young person with a disability This booklet was developed as an initiative of the NSW Government's *Stronger Together: A new direction for disability services in NSW 2006-2016.* It can be accessed via the following links: http://www.dadhc.nsw.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/23D7D09F-80D9-43E8-9141-2C0FEA1825D6/3774/DADHC_Shoulder_Getting_Facts.pdf http://www.dadhc.nsw.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/23D7D09F-80D9-43E8-9141-2C0FEA1825D6/3775/DADHC_Shoulder_Not_Alone.pdf http://www.dadhc.nsw.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/23D7D09F-80D9-43E8-9141-2C0FEA1825D6/3776/DADHC_Shoulder_Who_Can_Help.pdf

 	Human Services Aging, Disability and Home Care Making the move – Information for families of children with a disability making the move from primary to secondary school. http://www.dadhc.nsw.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/23D7D09F-80D9-43E8-9141-2C0FEA1825D6/5327/MakingtheMove.pdf Stepping Out - Information for families of young people with a disability moving from secondary school to adult life. http://www.dadhc.nsw.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/23D7D09F-80D9-43E8-9141-2C0FEA1825D6/5327/MakingtheMove.pdf
	What Works. The Works Program website, funded by the Commonwealth, helps schools plan and take action to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal students. The website provides material to support the 3-step process of building awareness, forming partnerships and working systematically. Information about effective community engagement and forming meaningful partnerships with Aboriginal communities can be found on this website through the following link: http://whatworks.edu.au/dbAction.do?cmd=displaySitePage1&subcmd=select&id=353
	The *Family-School & Community Partnerships Bureau* has been set up to help Australian schools, families and communities build sustainable, collaborative, productive relationships. *The Family-School & Community Partnerships Bureau* is an organisation dedicated to greater parental engagement and community involvement in schools. It conducts research, disseminates best practice and provides practical support and advice to parents, principals, teachers and others about how to build and sustain partnerships. http://www.familyschool.org.au/ While the website itself is an extremely relevant resource, schools will find the following documents from the site applicable: *Family – School Partnerships – Framework – A guide for school and families.* http://www.familyschool.org.au/pdf/framework.pdf and *Family- School Partnerships Project – A Qualitative and Quantitative Study* http://www.familyschool.org.au/pdf/muller.pdf
	Parent and Community Engagement Program (PaCE) The PaCE Program is a community driven program which focuses on the development and implementation of creative and innovative approaches to improve the educational outcomes of Indigenous school students through enhancing Indigenous parental engagement with schools and education providers. http://www.deewr.gov.au/Indigenous/Schooling/Programs/Pages/ParentalandCommunityEngagementProgram.aspx

Community Organisations	**Autism Advisory and Support Service** www.aass.org.au Autism Advisory Support Service (AASS) was established in 2007 by a group of parents to empower children with Autism and their families through knowledge and support and to positively impact and influence their children's social and emotional development. They set out to form a service for families of children with Autism, run by parents of children with Autism. **Family Advocacy** www.family-advocacy.com Family Advocacy is an independent, disability advocacy organisation which works across New South Wales, Australia. The organisation works with families in which there is a child or an adult with developmental disabilities. **Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia (inc)** www.icpa.com.au **ICPA** (Aust) is a voluntary national parent body dedicated to ensuring that all geographically isolated students have equality, with their non-isolated peers, of access to an appropriate education. **Learning Links** www.learninglinks.org.au Learning Links is an Australian charity and not for profit organisation formed to help children who have learning disabilities, difficulties and developmental delays, and their families. The service brings together early childhood professionals, teachers, psychologists, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, social workers, family counsellors and a developmental paediatrician to work towards each individual child's goals and to help each family. **NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc.** http://www.aecg.nsw.edu.au/ The NSW AECG Inc. is an Aboriginal community-based organisation made up of volunteer members who are involved in Local and Regional AECGs throughout NSW. The NSW AECG Inc. is recognised as the principal source of advice on behalf of Aboriginal communities on issues relating to education and training. **SPELD NSW** (Specific Learning Difficulties Association) www.speldnsw.org.au SPELD NSW is a public benevolent institution whose mission is to provide advice and services to children and adults with specific learning difficulties and those who teach, work with and care for them. **The Parenting Research Centre** www.parentingrc.org.au The PRC engages in a range of activities to help parents raise children well. Its focus is generating new knowledge of how parenting practices affect children, and how best to engage and support parents

in this rewarding but often challenging task.

The Parenting Research Centre is responsible for the Raising Children Network, a fully interactive website providing parents with evidence-based information to make parenting a little easier. www.raisingchildren.net.au

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