



Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts



Parental Engagement Framework and Strategies

“OUR CHILDREN OUR FUTURE”



1.0 INTRODUCTION

The MOEHA emphasises that schools need to recognise the primary role of the parents in education and advocate for them to work in partnership. Of all the factors affecting a child's education, the home influence in terms of parental support and intervention, ranks amongst the highest. The emergent shift to a more 'child-centred' learning also supports the importance of parental engagement. Studies have shown that parental engagement has had an enduring and positive impact on many indicators of a child's achievement and in realizing his/her full potential.

This paper serves to highlight the importance of parental engagement and identifies important strategies which can be put in place to attain this in schools in Fiji.

1.1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1.1 It is evident that children nowadays are establishing patterns of behavior that is affecting their overall performance at school. These children are engaging in risky behavior for instance: failing to attend school regularly, late arrival to school and classes, truancy, disruptive behavior in class, bullying, consumption of alcohol/kava/tobacco/drugs, engaging in sexual activities, teenage pregnancies, showing disrespect to parents/teachers/elders and vandalism.

According to the 2015 NSAAC Report, a total of 300 Primary Schools and 100 Secondary Schools submitted their Evaluation Forms to NSAAC, and outlined below (**Table 1**) is a summary of the offences committed by the students. The statistics reveal that a total of 617 and 1179 offences were committed by the Secondary and Primary students, respectively.

Table 1. A summary of offences in Secondary and Primary Schools for 2015 (Source: NSAAC Report, 2015).

Types of Offences	Secondary Offences	Primary Offences	Total No. of Offences
Violence against Boys	138	489	627
Sex Related Offences	50	95	145
Violence against Girls	140	478	618
Teenage Pregnancy	118	1	119
Tobacco	101	12	113
Kava	12	70	82
Alcohol	22	29	51
Inhalants	17	3	20
Marijuana	19	1	20
Hard Drugs	0	1	1
Total number of Offences	617	1179	1796

- 1.1.2 Now more than ever, the schools and the Ministry of Education must work in tandem with the parents by establishing a strong and enduring partnership by enhancing protective factors in the lives of children which will help them avoid getting into risky behavior which will be detrimental to their educational progress, personal and mental health.
- 1.1.3 These protective factors must be inclusive of engaging parents in as many school activities as possible and must prompt better student behavior, higher academic achievements and improved social skills.

1.2 RATIONALE

- 1.2.1 Education in the current era demands parents to work together with other stakeholders in order to achieve desired outcomes from their children. As such, the MOEHA intends to identify and adopt effective strategies to attain parental engagement in schools in Fiji.
- 1.2.2 Pillar 4 of the MOEHA Reforms highlights Parental Engagement in Education as a key aspect of the education system.
- 1.2.3 Policy makers in the past have accepted and acknowledged that parental engagement is important for student learning but little had been done to identify strategies which can assist to improve this in schools.



2.0 PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

Parental engagement increases active participation, communication, and collaboration between parents, schools, and communities with the goal of ensuring student achievement and success in education. This is supported by evidence from research over the past few decades, which demonstrate that parental engagement significantly impacts on the academic outcomes and social and emotional wellbeing of a child. Therefore, parents need to provide a supportive and stimulating home environment for learning by emphasising the importance of education and fostering a love of learning.

2.1 Parent Vs Child

It is very important to spend time with your children. It is suggested that a parent spends about half an hour per day talking with their child. These are some important questions you can ask your child to involve yourselves in their lives and theirs in yours – it is about communicating with your child. Suggested topics of discussion are outlined below:



BEFORE SCHOOL
The parent must ensure the following:

- Greet your child. Ask if he/she slept well? How is the child feeling?
- Child has completed the morning chores.
- Provide adequate breakfast. Ask if he/she enjoyed the breakfast?
- Provide lunch parcel and water bottle.
- Check bus fare/ voucher/pocket money.
- The bag is checked.
- Child is neatly dressed.
- Personal hygiene considered - hair done, clean fingernails, handkerchief and proper footwear.
- Is there anything happening in the school today – sports day, swimming, etc.?
- Do you wish to share anything with me before you head off for school?

AFTER SCHOOL

The parent must ensure the following:

- Child has reached home safely and on time. If late, ask for a reason and verify.
- Provide refreshment for the child.
- Ask as to what was his/her day like today? Did your teacher come today? What did you do today? Did you talk to the teacher today? What did the teachers say? What was interesting/new/funny today?
- Who is your friend? Who were you sitting with today? Did you meet with anyone new? Did you play today? What do you like about your friends?
- Can I see your lunch box? Did you eat and enjoy your lunch today and with whom? What did your friend bring for lunch and did he/she share with you?
- Is there anything upsetting you? Did you face any problems? Did someone say anything which you did not like? Did anyone bully you? Did you bully anyone?
- Was the classroom clean? Did you do your duties well?
- Child has completed the afternoon chores.
- Can I see your homework? Can I help with your homework?
- All school work/homework is complete.
- Reading a story with child – questions on story to open up comprehension skills.



2.2 Parent Vs School Head

Most parents/guardians come to the school when they receive a call to go the school. This needs to change. Parents/guardians and the school need to have more regular communication in order to strengthen the relationship between the parents, school and the teachers. This will ensure children are more involved or engaged in school activities. The following are suggested ideas for opening up dialogue between parents/guardians and the school:



SCHOOL HEADS TO ASK PARENTS:

- Is your child comfortable studying in our school? Does he face any concern/difficulties/issues while at school? How can I assist in addressing these things?
- Does your child have any medical problems/special needs which the school should be aware of?
- Does your child communicate on school experiences at home? What could be the challenges, if any?
- Are you able to provide adequate meals and resources to your child at home or are there financial challenges?
- Where do you work or what do you do? Does your professional work directly or indirectly affect the required quality time that you need to give to your child?
- Do you and your child have access to MOE website/school website?
- Are you aware of and make an effort to attend to PTIs, PTAs, pocket meetings, outreach programs and AGMs? What challenges do you face in this regard? How are you able to contribute to these meetings?
- Do you have a particular area of expertise which the school can use in motivating/inspiring our children?
- Are you aware of school policies/code of conduct/ethics/programmes/timetable/extra classes/Saturday classes? How can I assist you in understanding these?

PARENTS TO ASK SCHOOL HEADS:

- What range of subject combinations are available for my child? Is there availability of advice on career paths/academic counseling?
- Does the school have adequate resources to facilitate a proper learning experience for my child?
- What type of stationery is adequate for my child for his subject combination? Can I have the textbook list that indicates what my child should have? Do I have to buy any of these textbooks or are these provided free by the school? How can my child best take care of these books?
- What are the general expectations of my child? How can I assist in meeting these expectations?
- What are the general expectations of me as the parent of the child?
- Does your school provide any facilities in school for parents (waiting area, suggestion box, rest rooms)?
- Does the school have emergency plans/OHS programmes? Where are these for our information?
- What are the school's procedures in counseling, disciplinary policies, and feedback on disciplinary issues?
- What are the Government's initiatives in education (school zoning, free milk, free textbooks, bus vouchers, scholarships, fees, loans)?
- Is my child actively involved in school activities (if any)? How can I assist in his/her active participation? How do I get the information on school activities?
- Does the school provide opportunities in life skills training – swimming, Girl Guides, Water Safety, Scouts, cadets and other club and cultural activities? How do I get feedback on these activities and how can I assist my child's involvement in these?



2.3 Parent/Guardian Vs Teacher

Teachers spend a good amount of time with children. They are sometimes referred to as a child's "second parent/guardian". In order for teachers to engage in effective learning outcomes, they need to have adequate information about the child's well-being. This warrants effective communication between the parent/guardian and the teacher, and the following are some suggested points for discussion:

TEACHER TO ASK PARENTS/GUARDIANS:

- What is the expected arrival time at home/departure time from home?
- Who accompanies your child to the school/bus stop?
- How is discipline/ positive parenting instilled in your children?
- How much time do you spend with your children with respect to their school work?
- What other activities do your children engage in at home – sports, religion, chores, others?
- Does your child own electronic gadgets? How much time is spent on media/technology? How do you monitor on the usage of these by your child? How do you monitor your child's use of social media?
- Does your child have ample time, space, and facilities at home for study?
- Do you sit with your child when they study?
- Does your child have time to play outside with other children and for how long?
- What is the situation like at home? Any concerns? Are you aware of your child's academic/extracurricular progress in school?
- Is the career aspiration your or the child's dream? Do you need specific guidance/information to make appropriate career decisions for your child?

- Is there a homework or study timetable/plan? Do you monitor it? How often do you check/monitor your child's progress in his/her studies? What challenges do you face in this regard and how can we assist?
- Do you have the school timetable/ school calendar/ term planner, school contact? Do you receive, read and sign the school newsletters?
- Your child's other siblings – what are they doing? Other members of family and their occupation?
- Is there awareness at home on NCDs, suicide, STIs, drugs and other issues? Are you aware of public awareness on such activities and do you encourage your child to participate in these?



PARENTS/GUARDIANS TO ASK TEACHER(S):

- What is the overall school/class and child's academic target? What are the strategies in place to achieve those targets? How do you monitor my child's performance and provide necessary feedback to my child and to me for further assistance?
- How is my child performing in her studies and extra-curricular activities? How about his/her behaviour, attitude and class participation? Do you give my child a chance to participate in the class? Does he/she ask questions? What is her level of confidence? Do you encourage my child to excel in what he/she does?
- Do you check that homework is completed? How often do you sight the exercise/ text books? What extra role/assistance can I provide to have it up to expectation?
- Who are his/her friends? Can I know more about them?
- How is the punctuality/attendance of my child?
- Do you notice any strange behaviour in my child? If any, then what action have you taken? Can I assist in addressing this?
- Does he/she actively participate in art and craft/ music?
- Does he/she actively participate in extracurricular/ club activities?
- Are Saturday classes or extra classes timetabled? Is my consent needed for these and how are these different from normal classes?
- Does my child require remedial classes? Do you have a remedial plan?

- Do you maintain a communication /register/ minute book to check on attendance/punctuality?
- Have you initiated a parent and teacher meeting for your class only?
- How do you deal with disciplinary issues in the class/school? Is there a disciplinary policy in the school?



2.4 Community Vs Child

Every school serves its community and is part and parcel of it. As such, schools have enormous responsibilities towards the well-being of the community. Therefore, the schools and the community need to provide platforms for communication with the child. The following are a few suggested topics for discussion:

COMMUNITY TO ASK CHILDREN:

- Does your behaviour conform to your custom/society/values, etc.?
- How are you willing to contribute to the well-being of your community? Do you feel the need to be more involved in community work? How can we help you do that?
- Do you know the expectations of the community?
- Do you have any problems or personal issues? What can we do to help you overcome these problems/issues?



CHILDREN TO ASK COMMUNITY:

- What is the community doing to help me to contribute to the progress/prosperity of the society?
- Are there any community provisions for completion of school work – libraries, computer/internet facilities, power supply, water, etc.? What can I do to assist efficient use of these?
- How does community involve with school planning, development, operations, etc.?
- What are the upcoming events in the community and what is the involvement of the children in those events?
- How are child protection issues in the community being addressed?
- How are school activities incorporated into community programmes and vice versa? How do these benefit the children?



3.0 PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

The School Heads must embrace the concept of Parental Engagement and work in collaboration with the parents to achieve the aspirations of the child. The following are suggested strategies that can facilitate this:

- 3.1 **Parents have a pivotal role in the appointment of the school board executives** assigned to be the parental representatives to consult and manage with the School Heads the school management operations. The School Board liaises with the School Heads on financial matters and the procurement of teaching/learning resources. It assists the School Heads to formulate the strategic and annual plans and to also draw up the school development and improvement programs regarding infrastructure and resources. The Board is tasked with conducting committee meetings, the Annual General Meeting and submitting the audited financial reports to the Ministry of Education. It also takes ownership and makes functional the vision, mission and the guiding principle statements of the schools.
- 3.2 Parents assist in establishing an effective and functional **Parent Teacher Association** – a standard constitution that clearly establishes objectives which must not interfere with the academic, administrative and management policies and operations of the school. The motive for establishment must be to assist with the activities of the school and the school board. Moreover, the objective must extend to encouraging and strengthening goodwill and understanding between the parents and the teachers.
- 3.3 **Parent Teacher Interview** – planned report day activity with attendance, absence and truancy records highlighted; exercise and text books shown; examination answer scripts shown, disciplinary cases discussed and parental issues and concerns are noted and referred to the Administrators.
- 3.4 **Parents are invited to participate in major events** – Prefects' Induction; Annual Prize Giving ceremony; Cultural events; celebrating National & International days; Department weeks; sports activities and school in house Careers Expo (standard operating procedures for these events).



- 3.5 **Parent Teacher Association partners with the school Administrators to produce a school handbook** that incorporates the vision/mission/guiding principles of the school, a code of conduct/ethics, disciplinary policy, history, achievements, enrolment forms and a host of other pertinent information. This is to ascertain that students and parents are well informed about the school organization and the standard operating procedures to make functional the school and the MOEHA policies, reforms and initiatives.
- 3.6 **A parent section provided in the school annual magazine** and school newsletters/web pages containing contributions from the parents on encouragement, motivation, personal educational experiences and inspirational thoughts.
- 3.7 **Parents establish formal mechanisms for communication** with school Administrators so that proper procedures are followed which strengthens respect for personnel and school operations.
- 3.8 **Parents attend Orientation Day** to discuss with the school Administrative Team and teachers as to how the school and the MOEHA expectations could be achieved; discuss issues on varying subject combinations and career opportunities; factoring parent teacher meeting into the school calendar and discuss issues on school development and improvement programs. The parents can visit and check on the school facilities to make suggestions on ways to improve facilities.
- 3.9 **Parents take suggestions on home conditions that support learning.** Emphasis on a safe and secure home environment, limiting visitors, reading and writing as family activities, assisting with homework, provision for a study place, asking about school in general, checking exercise and text books, preparing a home study time table, quality family time together, discussing career options, making school requisitions available, always talking positively, cherishing and nurturing values and principles in life, keeping a check when engaged in out of school activities, faith/love/trust in relationships, sharing and discussing conflicting situations, positive reinforcements are in order when children misbehave and just taking a passionate interest in their children's learning and school.



- 3.10 **Parents partner with NGOs** to organize workshops on parenting skills, nutrition, study techniques, resolving disciplinary issues, maintaining a conducive home environment for study, manners and respect and career opportunities.
- 3.11 **Parents participate in regular community visitation** conducted by the school Administrative Team and the teachers to relay information on upcoming events, discuss the school code of conduct and ethics, express concern on parental neglect leading to poor academic performance and escalating disciplinary issues, interpreting school and MOEHA policies/ reforms and initiatives, soliciting assistance on forthcoming school activities, prompt discussion on how parents could contribute in achieving the school and MOEHA expectations, discussion on steps that parents could take to assist the school in improving student attendance and punctuality and discussing issues expressed by parents.



- 3.12 **Parents clearly understand school policies/reforms/initiatives** so that these are effectively implemented and monitored. When the parents are consulted on the development/ implementation/ monitoring phases of the policies/reforms/initiatives, it is definite that the parents will take ownership and will expect the same from their children.
- 3.13 **A parents' suggestion or comment box** is used for parents to communicate anonymously on issues/recommendations/clarification/questions.
- 3.14 **Parents receive information on how to improve study skills/learning** in various academic subjects and other extracurricular activities through community outreach programs.
- 3.15 **Parents are engaged in school planning/leadership** on committees/volunteer opportunities as majority of the schools are constrained when schools require expert assistance on school planning/projects and parents with leadership characteristics to be in school sub-committees to move the school forward in terms of infrastructural development and provision for state of the art teaching and learning resources.

- 3.16 **Create a parent resource/information center** in the foyer or other designated area in the school that will accommodate books, magazines, flyers and posters on parenting skills, motivation, study guides, research on behavior and impact on academic achievement. Parents could also contribute to this center by contributing items from their store of things which they wish to share with other parents.
- 3.17 **Parents are invited to present talks and demonstrations** on their specialized knowledge and skills to inspire, motivate and encourage the children to never give up irrespective of how challenging the circumstances might be to still move ahead in life and contribute to the economic wellbeing of the country.
- 3.18 **Maintain regular communication** – through fortnightly/monthly newsletters, class newsletters on school activities and in general academic performance of the students. The parents must always be considered as very important partners and as such, must be engaged purposefully by ensuring they are kept well informed on school activities, development and improvement programs, academic performance in terms of achievements and setbacks and extra curricula participation.
- 3.19 **Parents assist with school excursions in the overall planning stages**, to assist with costs incurred, be part of the travelling group, assist with supervision of students, help prepare and distribute meals, contribute in decision making at crucial times and see to the overall safety of the students at all times.
- 3.20 **Parents assist students to prepare for national sporting events**. Formulate and assist with training programs. Identify outstanding sporting personalities and mentors for guidance, inspiration/motivation to excel in their categories of competition. The parents are there when they are needed the most to subdue their jittery nerves. Provide words of wisdom/prayer.



- 3.21 **Parents assist with setting up entrepreneurial schemes** to generate revenue for the school. Assist students and teachers to plan projects, get the projects underway, provide and put in place monitoring and evaluating mechanisms and conduct a SWOT analysis to basically provide hands on and real life experiences and challenges.
- 3.22 **Parents to participate in Annual General Meetings** by scrutinising thoroughly everything said and presented by the School Heads and the school Board Executives. The performance of the Executives must be assessed thus, either voted in or out. Participation in Annual General meetings means having a say in the appointment of the executives who are knowledgeable regarding school operations, financially literate, approachable, have the ability to formulate development and improvement programs, are faithful and trustworthy, have time, take ownership of the school and are passionate in establishing a culture of excellence in all facets of school operations.
- 3.23 **Parents to be aware of the financial status of the school** through the audited financial reports and have the confidence to voice concerns on financial transactions that were in breach of the financial act/regulations/procedures.
- 3.24 **Parents work in partnership with the school to put in place appropriate measures to protect children from all forms of abuse, neglect and exploitation.** Help with the development, implementation and monitoring of the school child protection policy.

4.0 CONCLUSION

It will be evident that when schools take functional strategic steps to facilitate parental engagement, children will be empowered to become responsible learners.

The MOEHA's mandate on quality education for all citizens requires nothing less than strong school and parental efforts which when combined with the other factors will produce excellent learning outcomes.

