

School - Parent - Community Engagement Framework



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Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



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Companion Tools

- Policy mandate and roles and responsibilities
- Tips for getting started
- Checklists for auditing and monitoring progress
- Calendar for parents of Grade R-6 learners
- Poster (not included with this document)
- Guidelines for parents (not included with this document)

Acronyms and Glossary

Learner Profile	A continuous record of a learner's personal information and progress from Grade R - Grade 12
LoLT	Language of learning and teaching
Parent	The term parent is used in a broad and inclusive way to mean any caregiver responsible for caring for, and supporting, a learner. This is supported by the South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996, amended in 2011, which defines a parent as (a) the biological or adoptive parent or legal guardian of a learner; (b) the person legally entitled to custody of a learner; or (c) the person who undertakes to fulfil the obligations of a person referred to in paragraphs (a) and (b) towards the learner's education at school
SBST	A management structure based on the SMT that works with teachers in the development and implementation of support packages for learners experiencing barriers to learning and development. Responsible for the implementation of the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) Policy in schools
SGB	School Governing Body
SMT	School Management Team

1. Introduction

Massive gains have been made in the area of education access since 1994, and pockets of excellence can be found scattered throughout the country. Yet, the general achievement of education outcomes remains poor, often below that of lower resourced countries. There are several reasons for this low level of achievement and government has identified improving the quality of education as a national priority. An area that has been identified as one which has the potential to impact education outcomes positively is that of parent and community involvement in children's education.

Currently the level of parent and community participation in education is low. Government is committed to redressing this: amongst other initiatives, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) has developed this framework to encourage and guide schools on engaging with parents and communities to work together to maximise learning outcomes and learner achievement.

The framework is part of a planned resource pack to support implementation in schools. The companion resources include tools such as practical *Guidelines for Parents*; tips for *getting started*, audit checklists and a poster to help schools interact effectively with parents and the broader school communities.

This document is structured as follows:

- Problem statement
- Causes of low parental involvement and challenges to participation
- The importance of parental involvement
- The framework
- The role of the school
- Tools and resources

2. Problem statement

International and local research confirms the critical role of parents in their children's education in order to maximise learning outcomes and despite an enabling policy environment that mandates democratic participation by parents and communities in school as partners both in their children's education and in school governance and management, effective participation remains low.

This framework looks at the causes of low involvement, the importance of involvement and presents a flexible framework that identifies the steps that schools need to take to encourage more active and meaningful engagement by parents and communities. It identifies six key areas of involvement, the benefits of these and suggests strategies for effecting change.

3. Causes of low parental involvement and challenges to participation

It is well known that most parents and communities do not participate meaningfully in their children's education. It is easy to attribute this to lack of interest and whilst this is doubtless true in some cases, most parents *are* committed to their children's success.

Research in South Africa suggests that it is most often not lack of interest that prevents parents from becoming involved but rather other factors that include:

- poverty and its effects
- single-parenthood
- low literacy levels
- language barriers
- job and time pressures
- the effects of the HIV&AIDS pandemic
- cultural and socio-economic isolation
- poor parenting skills
- insecurity by parents about their value (especially those with low education levels)
- lack of knowledge about the importance of their role
- uncertainty about the nature of their role
- lack of first-hand experience or understanding of the value and importance of education and the socio/economic upliftment possibilities that it can bring
- negative, arrogant, hostile and/or unwelcoming attitudes by the school and teachers toward them
- poor skills on the part of the school on how to communicate and collaborate effectively. (Lemmer, 2007. Maestry and Grobler, 2007. Msila, 2012. Sathiapama M et al, 2012)

Non-inclusive school practices and attitudes further erect barriers to participation by minority groups within schools. 'In many South African schools, assimilation remains the dominant model of integration, which means that the values, traditions and customs of the dominant group frame the social and cultural context of the school.' (Sathiapama M et al, p64) Lack of interest and/or knowledge in dealing with diversity means that 'minority' parents are marginalised and excluded. A commonly cited example is the sole use of one language, often English, in meetings and written communication to parents. In the same study, a parent is quoted as saying, *'Sometimes I tell my child to read for me, I can't read English nice. I don't know if he reads the truth or what.'* and *'The man who answered, he not understand what I'm saying. He say, speak English, speak English.'* (Sathiapama M et al, p68). When these parents don't attend meetings or submit reply slips, it is often interpreted as reflecting apathy or lack of interest. (Lemmer, 2007)

The above paints a picture of poor communication, exclusionary practices, lack of collaboration and commitment to building partnerships, lack of understanding of the heterogeneity of South African parent body, negative attitudes, and a failure of both schools and parents to view parents as equal partners.

Whilst the previous dispensation followed exclusionary practices in decision making, the South African Schools Act of 1996 legislated a more decentralised and democratic, participatory decision-making process, with school communities being empowered and expected to be more actively involved in running their schools. In a relatively new and evolving democracy, a common understanding and shared vision, mission and goals for schools, and active participation by stakeholders needs to be built and cannot be assumed to exist. The legislated power of SGBs and parents requires skills and an understanding of roles, absent in many schools' parent bodies. This can cause tension between school management teams and parent bodies.

Democratic decision-making vis-à-vis traditional power of school principals can also contribute to conflict within schools, with many principals struggling to 'relinquish power' and promote more democratic practices.

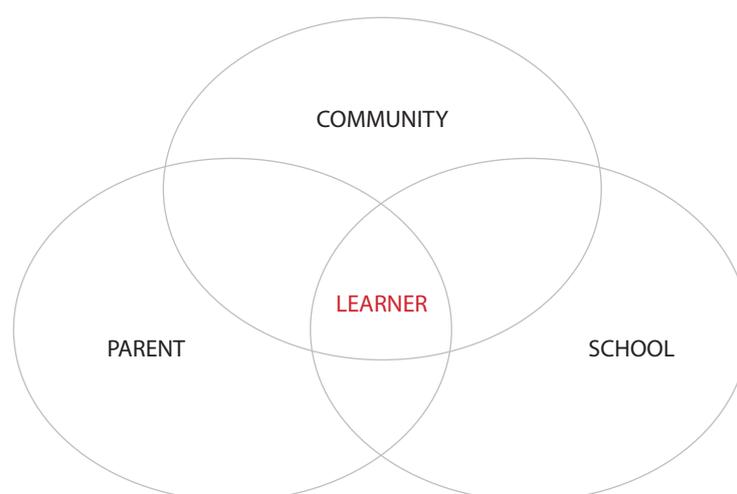
A further reason lies in the understanding of what parental involvement means. A narrow definition that includes only issues such as contributing to fundraising, returning reply slips, fixing buildings or attending annual parent- teacher meetings limits the opportunities and potential benefits for all role-players but most importantly, for improving learning outcomes. To optimally impact learning outcomes, participation needs to be understood more broadly

Finally, even where schools do understand parent and community involvement in a more comprehensive way, they struggle with effective implementation strategies.

Clear guidelines and strategies are needed to assist schools to navigate their way through the complex landscape and challenges to effective participation described above. This framework responds to this need.

4. Importance of parent - community involvement in schools

At the centre of the relationship between school, parent and community is the learner, with the goal of optimum achievement for *all* learners.



The relationship is important because no learner exists in a vacuum. Children's behaviour and performance is impacted by multiple spheres of influence, ranging from direct influences, such as a relationship with a caregiver and the home environment, to more indirect influences such as national law and policies. As influences may be positive or negative, every sphere of influence has the potential to increase risk and/or offer protection; to hinder and/or create an enabling environment for success. It is neither possible nor desirable to address the goal of children reaching their full potential outside of children's spheres of influence and environment – and in this case, the very direct influence of parents and caregivers and the home and community environments.

'Learning does not begin when children walk through the school doors nor does it end when they exit for the day. It takes place all the time and everywhere, throughout life. There is a pedagogic dimension to the links between schools and homes and localities. Children bring to school their family and community beliefs, practices, knowledge, expectations and behaviours. Similarly, when they return from school they bring back to their homes and communities new forms of knowledge, practices, behaviours, attitudes and skills. Children are engaged in a continuous, dynamic process of bridging the world of school and the world of home and community. They learn from both worlds, facilitated by teachers, family members, neighbors and others. Linking schools and communities is widely recognised as good pedagogic practice.'

Unicef 2009 Page 2

National and international research confirms the crucial role that parents and communities play in their children's success. The positive impact of effective school- parent- community engagement on learning outcomes is well documented, as are the benefits for all role-players, some of which are listed below.

Benefits of improved school-parent-community collaboration

<p>Learners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More positive attitudes toward school • Higher expectations of self • Higher achievement, better attendance, and more homework completed consistently • Higher matriculation rates and enrollment rates in tertiary education • Better quality schools 	<p>Parents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater knowledge of education programs and how schools work • Higher expectations of children • Knowledge of how to be more supportive of children • Greater confidence about ways to help children learn • More positive views of teachers • Greater empowerment
<p>Teachers and school management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater teaching effectiveness • Higher expectations of learners • Increased ability to understand family views and cultures • Greater appreciation of parent volunteers • Improved morale • Greater sense of community • (Adapted from Carter S, 2003, p15) 	<p>Communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater strength and education opportunities through collaboration with schools • Greater impact of services through a comprehensive, integrated approach • Increased access to services for families • Greater sense of community

That parents and communities have a critical and mutually beneficial role to play in partnership with the school in their children's education is not in question: the challenge lies in understanding what this means and realising it in practice. This framework and associated resources address this.

5. The framework

This framework addresses parent and community involvement in public schools

Aims

- To support schools to effectively communicate, engage with and empower parents and communities to work together so that the learning outcomes of their children are maximised
- To assist schools to strengthen learning through effective participation between parents and communities and principals, teachers and learners

It promotes school initiatives that support parents to create learning environments at home and be involved in their children's learning. It also addresses parent and community participation in schools and decision-making and school governance structures, such as SGBs.

Whilst the framework acknowledges the principle and importance of learner participation in all areas, it has not been foregrounded in this document, which specifically focuses on parent and community participation.

Target

This framework targets schools and the range of stakeholders involved in promoting and facilitating effective parent and community participation in schools.

Its primary audience is:

- School management teams, school governing bodies and teachers
- Education officials at district level, where officials are working in direct support of schools

A secondary audience is:

- Education officials at provincial and national level

Guidelines

This framework brings together the school, home and community in a relationship serving the best interests of the learner. It is based on the following guidelines, intended to guide planned action.

- It operates within the South African legal framework and policy mandate
- It is school-based and school-driven
- It defines the family and community broadly and flexibly
- It understands South African parents as diverse and heterogenous
- It identifies six focus areas of engagement: communicating; parenting; learning at home; volunteering; decision-making; and partnering with the community.
- It allows for a continuum of involvement: from very active school-based activities (such as face to face parent- teacher interaction or assisting in the classroom) to supportive, simpler home-based activities (such as talking to a child about their school day or checking their homework)
- Plans for parent-community engagement should form part of a school's annual development / improvement plans
- Identified actions should be linked to specific improvement objectives (for example, a parent workshop on the importance of arriving at school on time can be linked to the improvement objective of reducing late coming)
- It requires assessment of needs and then continuous training of all role-players in identified competencies. This should be reflected on staff and other development plans
- It understands partnering to mean widespread, ongoing and sustained participation by all role-players as equal partners
- It approaches the institutionalisation of parent-community participation in schools as a process, at first possibly only involving a few parents, classes or community groups. However as the impact of improved communication, effective learning partnerships and community collaboration on learning become clearer, it is critical that work continues to ensure changed practice for the whole school community so that effective parent and community engagement becomes the norm.

Principles

This framework is based on the following principles. These principles should guide and inform all strategies, interventions, activities and tools for promoting parent and community engagement.

- **Participation by equal partners.** Learning takes place at home, community and at school. Parents and communities are essential and equal partners in their children's education. Education demands collaboration between partners - involving learner, parent and teacher - all of whom need to work constructively together in the best interests of the learner. Widespread and sustained participation is critical to a school's effective parent and community engagement strategy, because it ensures that schools are reflective of the communities that they serve and it enables collaboration to become the institutionalised practice of the school community.
- **Evidence-based and build on existing successful initiatives.** Successful initiatives should be identified, built on and their reach extended. This will mitigate against 'reinventing the wheel' and also ensure that best practice initiatives are identified to be taken to scale.
- **Flexible and respect for diversity.** Communities are not homogenous and one size cannot fit all. Whilst the framework defines effective involvement and identifies action areas and strategies, it aims to be flexible enough to facilitate effective involvement across all sectors of South Africa's diverse society.
- **Contextually appropriate.** A thorough understanding of different communities will ensure that initiatives and strategies resonate with their target audiences. This means employing strategies that are contextually and culturally appropriate to the unique situation in each school.

Key areas of parent and community involvement

The guidelines and principles described above form the foundation upon which school-parent-community initiatives are planned and implemented.

The following six areas¹ provide a comprehensive, inclusive and flexible approach to organising and designing context-driven interventions to meet specific needs.

The six types of involvement	
Communicating	Using appropriate strategies to facilitate genuine communication
Parenting	Helping families to establish home environments to support children as learners
Learning at home	Helping families to assist their children with homework and to recognise other learning-at-home opportunities
Decision making	Including parents, learners, and community members in the school decision-making process
Volunteering	Recruiting for, and organising, the school's volunteer programme
Partnering with the community	Identifying and integrating resources and services from the community

Whilst these intervention areas are relevant to all public schools, they can only be effective if tailored to local context and need. Their form and content is therefore likely to look different in different schools. As needs change, the interventions too will change to meet these needs.

Each intervention is discussed in more detail in the following section.

¹Although this has been informed by research into other frameworks and successful intervention strategies, the organising principle is Epstein's framework of six major types of involvement. For each of the six, Epstein defines the area, identifies sample practices, challenges and benefits for different role players. Elements are drawn on here and the listed benefits have been incorporated in this framework as part of the checklist/ indicators of success for each area.

6. The role of the school

Each school bears the responsibility for facilitating effective parent-community engagement. This is discussed below under the following headings:

- Understanding South African parents and communities
- Creating an enabling environment
- Working in the six key intervention areas:
 - Communicating
 - Parenting
 - Learning at home
 - Decision-making
 - Volunteering
 - Partnering with the community

6.1 Understanding South African parents and communities

South African parents and communities are heterogeneous: socially, politically, linguistically, culturally and economically. Diverse urban and rural contexts; geographical locations; family structures; caregiver age, ranging from teen parents and child-headed households to older siblings and grandparents; education levels; health and wellness status; mental and physical abilities; socio-economic status; and religious and cultural beliefs, practices and value systems are all part of the mix. School communities reflect this diversity, both within and between schools.

Clearly one size will not fit all, and for schools to effectively address parental and community engagement, it needs to take diversity into account

In this framework, the term **parent** is used in a broad and inclusive way to mean any caregiver responsible for caring for, and supporting, a learner. This is referenced to the South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996, amended in 2011, which defines a parent as:

- (a) the biological or adoptive parent or legal guardian of a learner;
- (b) the person legally entitled to custody of a learner; or
- (c) the person who undertakes to fulfil the obligations of a person referred to in paragraphs (a) and (b) towards the learner's education at school

The first step then is for each school to fully understand its parent body.

6.2 Creating an enabling environment

In order to operationalise the framework, certain elements need to be in place in schools. These contribute to the enabling environment within which strategies can be implemented. They require ongoing attention and are discussed below.

6.2.1 Legal and policy mandate

Laws and policies define commitments, guide budgets, identify role-players, allocate authorities and responsibilities and provide clear procedures for taking action. An enabling policy environment does exist and the barriers to effective parent and community engagement lie more in the area of implementation challenges rather than gaps in policy. A summary of the legal and policy mandate is summarised in the companion tool: **Policy mandate and roles and responsibilities**.

Each school should develop a policy on school-parent-community engagement. This should include a commitment to the engagement, to developing a shared understanding of stakeholder roles and responsibilities, and a shared vision for the school.

6.2.2 Empowered and effective governance, management and support structures

Operationalisation of legislated school, district, provincial and national structures is essential for successful implementation as these are the organisational structures through which work will be coordinated and completed. In particular, empowered, effective and committed school-level School Management Teams (SMT), School Based Support Teams (SBST), School Governing Bodies (SGB) and teachers need to be working toward common goals. The district, through the district-based management team, plays an important support role to schools. Whilst all these structures share responsibility for establishing and maintaining well-defined partnerships within education and with other stakeholders, the leadership role of the school principal as a key agent in ensuring effective engagement with parents and communities cannot be over emphasised.

Roles and responsibilities

Mandated roles of these school-level structures and individuals with regard to parents and community are included as part of the tools: **Policy mandate and roles and responsibilities**

The district's role is to support schools. This includes training, mentoring, designing programmes, developing policy, budgeting as well as mobilising and coordinating district resources to achieve goals. *Although the school-parent-community engagement function is cross cutting, responsibility for its overall coordination should be located with the school's SGB and needs to be driven by the school, and supported by the district.*

6.2.3 Capacity development

Any effective parent and community involvement programme needs to be initiated and driven by the school. Even when it becomes institutionalised as part of the school culture and practice, it will require ongoing relationship building and maintenance.

However, many school management teams do not see this as their function; schools are often perceived by parents to be unwelcoming places; some teachers have negative attitudes towards parental involvement and have little knowledge about how to accommodate diversity. A critical element therefore is capacity development.

All role-players should be trained in this framework to understand its objectives and to identify strategies for improving their engagement with parents and communities as key partners. They will also need to be trained in the required skills and competencies. Current skills and competencies should be audited annually against the checklists provided at the end of this framework, and development plans drafted accordingly.

Schools and school-based personnel will need to engage in ongoing skills development programmes so that they are able to fulfil their roles effectively. These should all be reflected in schools' annual staff development plans.

6.2.4 Programme planning

Consultative school and district-level planning is essential for any successful initiative. Planning a parent and community engagement strategy is no different. It needs to be reflected in both district and school-level planning.

It also needs to be acknowledged that this is neither a once-off nor an overnight task. As it involves changing attitudes, building relationships, gaining buy-in, developing a shared vision, ensuring operational structures as well as developing skills, growing an actively involved school community is a process. It will be built over time and requires ongoing commitment and effort.

Plans should take this into account and be organised according to long-, medium- and short-term plans with prioritised action areas for immediate attention. These should be reflected in annual school development and improvement plans. The first steps should be to:

- Conduct an audit of existing involvement against the checklist at the end of this framework and a plan to address issues that emerge
- Conduct a survey to get to know your parent community

A plan for getting started is suggested in one of the Tools: **Tips for getting started**

6.2.5 Monitoring, evaluation and reporting

To track impact and monitor efficacy, all initiatives should be monitored, evaluated and reported on, using existing processes and reporting tools. The checklists in the tools that accompany this framework can be used as a baseline and thereafter to monitor progress. This documented evidence will also help to identify successful and best practice initiatives that can be tried in other schools.

6.2.6 Enabling environment: Indicators of success

- A school policy on parent-community engagement
- An annual audit of current participation
- A survey of the parent community
- An audit of staff skills level and competencies
- A short, medium and long term engagement plan to address findings
- Evidence that the plan is being implemented
- Minutes of SGB parent-community engagement planning meetings
- School management support for teachers' capability to work with parents as learning partners
- The school has documented evidence of varied strategies for working with parents - to identify and execute the roles they can play in learning partnerships and to inform them about their roles
- Teachers and school management can explain the rationale for parent and community engagement

- Teachers acknowledge parents as the first teachers of their children and as partners in their education
- Teachers produce records of varied approaches to engagement

6.3 Working in the six key areas

The six areas are communicating, parenting, learning at home, decision-making, volunteering and partnering with the community. Each is discussed in turn.

6.3.1 Communicating: using appropriate strategies to facilitate genuine communication

This intervention area refers to *all* communication between partners to effectively connect school-home-community. It is addressed first because it cuts across all intervention areas.

It requires an equal exchange between learners, parents, communities and schools that involves information sharing and opportunities to learn about each other. This is essential for developing and maintaining relationships and partnerships and a shared vision and goals for the school.

In order to have an impact on **learner outcomes**, each communication exchange needs to be tied to a specific goal and focused on learning. For example, communications linked to the objective of **learner achievement** could include:

- Schools seek advice from parents about their children's needs and aspirations and make joint decisions for solutions to these
- Schools discuss expectations with both learners and parents, including school policies, codes of conduct and homework policy, and are open to making changes to these where it is suitable/appropriate to do (based on the learner/parent input)
- Parents and teachers discuss learners' progress, needs, challenges and successes

Communications linked to the objective of fostering **ownership** of the school by parents and community could include:

- Schools ask for, and value, parents' opinions on specific matters affecting them and the school. Once asked for, schools need to act on opinions and concerns to show genuine commitment to the partnership
- Community members and groups share their knowledge and perspectives and together, action these

In order for communication to be an **inclusive exchange**, appropriate communication channels need to be selected. As previously discussed, parents and communities are not homogenous and this means that different channels should be used to reach different audiences. This requires that schools know their parent and community base in order to know how best to reach them.

- Varied **types** of communication are used to ensure participation by *all* parents (taking into account cultural background, literacy levels, home language, education levels) For example:
 - Varied and non-traditional, innovative communication channels should be explored, such as: clubs; church meetings; traditional leadership; taxis; clinics; through integrated service delivery days; using SMS/other electronic applications and services for reminders about meetings, events or homework tasks; by learners visiting home to home to encourage parents to attend important meetings
 - Interpreters are used in meetings

- Written communication is produced in more than one language
- Face-to-face meetings are acknowledged and promoted as one of the most effective communication vehicles
- Varied **opportunities** for communication are employed to allow for participation by *all* parents (taking into account working conditions and hours, cultural practices, living arrangements and distance from schools) For example:
 - Meeting venues suitable to the task are made available (for example, a private room for a teacher- parent conference; a hall for big meetings; a room for workshops)
 - Meetings are held at venues, times and in languages that suit parents
 - Refreshments are provided
 - Meetings include a fun and social/educational element that include families wherever possible and appropriate
 - Transport and child-care is supplied, if possible, to ensure these do not form barriers to caregiver attendance and participation. If budget is a problem, approaches to local taxi associations to donate rides for elderly caregivers and small children can be made (See **Partnering with the community** below).

Strategies for action

- Capacity development:
 - Identify and provide training for school staff members, parents and community on how to appropriately and effectively use various forms of media (including cell phone technology, online and social media)
 - Provide ongoing training to teachers and school management on effective communication (including with diverse groups) that stresses the importance and benefits of strong family – community involvement. This is planned and documented on staff development plans.
- Communication opportunities:
 - Identify, plan and implement. Consider working parents and those who live far away from the school
 - Ensure that the method is appropriate to the topic issue, for example, a parent-teacher conference to discuss learning barriers will need a carefully worded letter or phone call, and a private room for the meeting
 - Schedule regular events to share important information
 - Make a designated space available at school for parent education/support/discussion groups
 - Include the topic 'improving communication' as a standing agenda item in staff, SGB and SMT meetings
- Communication channels:
 - Identify the channel most appropriate to the topic/issue, for example, a mass SMS could serve as a reminder for an event but would not be a good channel to discuss a complex issue such as discipline in the home
 - Profile your parent community (*all* parents)
 - Identify the type of communication most suitable to ensure widespread participation and maximum involvement. Consider minority groups within a school, parents with literacy barriers, parents speaking a language different to the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT), parents without easy access to email and internet services, community partners, including not-for-profit organisations, industry and business. A variety of types of communication might need to be used to reach all audiences

Benefits and indicators of success

For learners

- Awareness of own progress and of actions needed to maintain or improve grades
- Understanding of school policies on behavior, attendance, and other areas of learner conduct
- Informed decisions about life, subject and career choices
- Awareness of own role in partnerships, serving as courier and communicator
- Feel supported

For parents

- View the school as a welcoming place
- Understanding the channels for communication and related protocol and etiquette
- Formal opportunity to discuss child's progress at least once a year
- Understanding school programmes and policies
- Monitoring and awareness of child's progress
- Responding effectively to child's problems
- Interactions with teachers and ease of communication with school and teachers

For teachers and school management

- Parent ideas taken seriously and acted on
- Increased use of varied communication strategies
- Awareness of own ability to communicate clearly
- Appreciation of the relationship with parents and seeking their opinion about their children
- Appreciation for and use of parent network for communications
- Increased ability to elicit and understand family views on children's progress

6.3.2 Parenting: helping families to establish home environments to support children as learners

This area is about helping families to establish home environments to support children as learners. It includes assisting parents to acquire parenting skills, for example:

- Understanding children's development phases and corresponding parent roles and children's needs as they move from one phase to the next (for example, specific issues such as parenting small children compared to teens, changed homework requirements, changed levels of responsibility for own learning, changed bedtime, sleep and nutritional requirements)
- The importance of fathers' involvement
- Positive discipline and setting boundaries

- Routines and structure
- Building children's self esteem
- Communicating with children to build strong relationships
- Dealing with difficult subjects such as sex, pregnancy, STIs (including HIV), substance use
- Addressing issues around health, nutrition, accessing social services

Refer to the **Tool: Guidelines for parents** for more ideas on topics that need to be covered

Strategies for action

- Ask parents what they want to know, and what they want included, before designing a programme so that it is needs-based and has their buy-in. This will ensure better attendance at events
- Design and implement an annual programme of parent workshops/meetings/events
- Ensure that parents are aware of, and understand, the **Tool: Guidelines for parents** on how to support children at school.

Use the information in the **Guidelines** document to help plan your workshop topics

- Follow the guidelines in the above section: **Communicating** to ensure you use the vehicles most appropriate to the audience and topic. For example, invite a health worker from the local clinic to speak to parents about contentious issues such as contraception

Benefits and indicators of success

For learners

- Awareness of family supervision; respect for parents
- Positive personal qualities, habits, beliefs, and values, as taught by family
- Balance between time spent on chores, on other activities, and on homework
- Good or improved attendance
- Awareness of the importance of school and education

For Parents

- Awareness of the optimum home environment they can provide (within their circumstances) to foster children's growth, learning and development
- Understanding of and confidence about parenting, child and adolescent development, and changes in home conditions for learning as children proceed through school
- Awareness of own and others' challenges as parents of school aged children
- Feeling of support from school and other parents

For Teachers

- Understanding families' background, cultures, concerns, goals, needs, and views of their children
- Respect for families' strengths and efforts
- Understanding of learner diversity
- Awareness of own skills to share information on child development

Example

In order to cater for learning needs of parents with low levels of literacy, a series of workshops were conducted to build parenting skills using dialoguing and interactive activities where, as a group, parents 'built' a picture containing three core messages per workshop. Each workshop included take-home material and homework tasks that encouraged parent-learner communication.

6.3.3 Learning at home: helping families to assist their children with homework and other learning-at-home opportunities

This area is about working with parents to identify ways in which they can help their children's learning at home, for example:

- Reinforce the important role they play, whatever their personal education levels
- Give advice about setting up spaces and routines for homework
- Show parents how to take a supportive interest in their children's homework even if they themselves are not literate (for example, listening, praising, guiding and discussing -- not 'teaching')
- Encourage them to ask about their children's progress
- Encourage parents to learn *from* their children; the child teaches the parent what has been taught at school, so parent and child learn together collaboratively
- Provide extra resources and activities that parents can use to enrich learning in areas of interest or need, including during holidays
- Include practical activities in homework that involve parents, especially in literacy and mathematics
- Show parents how to recognise 'learning moments' at home. Conduct a workshop with reminder take-home material. (For example, cooking soup for supper: vocabulary around the ingredients; Maths around the amount of ingredients needed per person/sharing ingredients between x number of people, size of pot, amount of water, science around how different items cook and produce soup; life skills around hygiene)
- Help parents to understand the 'language of learning', i.e. the language used to communicate expectations to learners and help them meet these expectations. Without this understanding, it is difficult for parents to work with schools to discuss their children's needs and aspirations, and harder for them to talk to their children at home about learning

Refer to the **Tool: Guidelines for parents** for more ideas on topics that need to be covered

Strategies for action

- Ask parents about their education needs – what do they want to know?
- Reinforce learning from workshops/meetings with practical and appropriate take-home material, such as an interactive calendar, follow up SMSs

- Ensure that parents are aware of, and understand, the **Tool: Guidelines for parents** on how to support children at school. Use the information in the **Guidelines** document to help plan your workshop topics
- Get local business to sponsor T-Shirts or buttons for parents to wear, with slogans such as: 'I am my child's first teacher'
- Follow the guidelines in the above section: **Communicating**. For example: Host family activity days focusing on Literacy/ Maths/Science or Life Skills on Saturday morning, at schools/venues convenient to school communities

Benefits and indicators of success

For learners

- Gains in skills, abilities, and test scores linked to homework and class work
- Homework completion
- Positive attitude toward schoolwork
- Views of parents are closer to that of teacher (views from home are similar to views of the school)
- Self-concept of ability as learner

For parents

- Know how to support, encourage, and help learner at home each year
- Know school's expectations about behaviour, class work and homework
- Understand the instructional programme each year and of what child is learning in each subject: the curriculum, assessments, achievements, reporting
- Appreciation of teaching skills
- Awareness of child as a learner
- Know the value of their own role in their children's education
- Know the school's expectations for behaviour, attendance, homework and achievement

For teachers and school management

- Better design of homework assignments
- Respect for family time
- Recognition of equal helpfulness of single-parent, dual-income, and less formally educated families in motivating and reinforcing learner learning
- Satisfaction with family involvement and support

Example

An interactive calendar was developed for parents of learners in Grades R-6. Supplied with a box of crayons, the calendar includes a monthly fun, age-appropriate and curriculum-compliant activity for learners to complete as well as tips for parents that address some of the above issues. This innovative product has a use-value for parents beyond the information it supplies about education as well as providing opportunities for learning experiences at home. The calendar also aims to overcome potential language barriers by being produced in isiZulu/English and Sesotho/English.

6.3.4 Decision making: including parents, learners and community members in the school decision-making process

This area is about including parents in school decisions and developing parent leadership. Schools need to include parents as participants in decision-making in school, governance and advocacy activities through SGBs but also more broadly, through other activities and committees. This will ensure parent buy-in and encourage their 'ownership' of the school.

Parent representation on committees, but particularly on the SGB, needs to be inclusive and reflective of the diversity of each school's parenting body.

Examples of issues to be considered:

- Understanding by the school community of SGB functions, practical skills required, and the SGB's role in building a top quality school. Training might be required in many areas
- Governance issues such as school vision, school uniform, fees policy, school code of conduct, school performance (parents need to hold schools to account), types of services offered at the school (for example, clubs and extra mural activities)

Publically recognise and regularly thank the SGB members and those involved in other committees. This will help to motivate and keep them involved and also encourage other parents to get involved. It is also important that parents know who their SGB is.

Strategies for action

- Survey parents to identify skills and areas of interest
- Survey skills and competencies of current SGB members to determine gaps
- Ensure SGB membership is inclusive and reflective of the diversity of the parent body
- Ask for volunteers but also approach parents individually
- Offer skills training, for example, leadership, finances. Be creative about sourcing training. Are there any members of the broader community who can offer workshops?
- Follow the guidelines in the above section: **Communicating**
- Acknowledge publically the help of SGB members so that they know their work is valued

Benefits and indicators of success

For learners

- Awareness of representation of families in school decisions
- Understanding that learner rights are protected
- Specific benefits linked to policies enacted by parent organisations and experienced by learners

For parents

- Input into policies that affect child's education
- Feeling of ownership of school
- Awareness of parents' voices in school decisions

- Shared experiences and connections with other families
- Awareness of school, district, and state policies
- Hold schools to account for performance

For teachers and school management

- Awareness of parent perspectives as a factor in policy development and decisions
- View of equal status of family representatives on committees and in leadership roles

6.3.5 Volunteering: recruiting for, and organising, the school's volunteer programme

This area is about recruiting for, and organising the school's volunteer programme. It is about encouraging participation in school-based activities.

Getting volunteers is not an easy task as parents often don't have time but it is an excellent way of including parents in the school, and making them feel valued and at home. It also encourages parents' ownership of the school.

Example activities:

- Identify skills, besides educational, that parents can use to contribute to the school, for example, helping to keep the school clean, painting the school, repairing broken furniture/doors
- Have a 'repair the school day'; a 'clean the school day'; and an 'anti-waste resource-making day' where teachers and parents are shown how to make Literacy, Maths, Science and Life Skills resources for use in the classrooms, for example, large plastic cold drink bottles can be made into pigeonholes for the teacher to store items or for the children to store items
- Have a book-making day where parents collaborate with the teachers to make story books for the children. Parents write stories, cut and paste or draw images. Those parents who cannot write tell the teacher exactly what to write for them on each page
- Have holiday or after-care game days where parents and children play, for example, board games such as snakes and ladders or cards
- Plant trees in and around the school to beautify the school area and teach that planting a tree symbolises hope and an investment in the future because even though benefits will not be immediate, future generations will benefit from the tree in terms of shade and beauty.
- Help in the classroom as story-teller or teacher assistant: handing out work, collecting work, making sure that each child has understood the instruction, helping restless children to focus and settle down
- Run an aftercare programme, tutoring programme, homework or holiday club
- Run the school tuck shop or be responsible for second-hand uniform sales or catering at events

Publicly recognise and regularly thank volunteers. This will help to motivate and keep them involved and also encourage other parents to get involved.

Safety Check

Children's interests and safety is paramount and it is the school's responsibility to ensure that learners are safe whilst at school It is important that all volunteers are screened and know and agree to school rules and policies before working in the school.

Strategies for action

- Appoint a coordinator to manage the volunteer programme It could be an SGB member
- Train teachers in working with volunteers and to see the benefits
- Include 'volunteering' as a standing item in staff, SGB and SMT meetings
- Find out what parents can offer (survey their interests and skills) and compare these to needs in the school. Think about broader school improvement issues, but also specifically about the school's needs regarding teaching and learning. Think about how the volunteers can contribute to this
- Ask for volunteers, but also approach parents individually
- Sign parents up for specific tasks, including 'fundraising' by collecting cans, newspaper, glass bottles for recycling to bring in funds for the school
- Provide opportunities for skills training if necessary, for example an ETDPSETA teacher assistant qualification
- Include learners in the programme if possible
- Follow the guidelines in the above section: **Communicating** to ensure that all interested parents are given the opportunity to participate
- Publically acknowledge the volunteers' help so that they know their contribution is valued

Benefits and indicators of success

For learners

- Increased skill in communicating with adults
- Increased learning of skills that receive tutoring or targeted attention from volunteers
- Awareness of the many skills, talents, occupations, and contributions of parent and other volunteers

For parents

- Understanding teacher's job, increased comfort in school, and carry-over of school activities at home
- Self-confidence about ability to work in school and with children; to take steps to improve own education
- Awareness that families are welcome and valued at school
- Gains in specific skills of volunteer work

For teachers and school management

- Readiness to involve families in new ways
- Awareness of parents' talents and interests in school and children
- Greater individual attention to learners, with help from volunteers

Example

Unemployed volunteer youth were recruited to work within communities. The youth, who were either semi-literate or matriculants, communicated face-to-face with parents explaining the school's policies, requirements and duties. They also carried out family maths and family literacy activities at the schools and assisted the teachers/children where applicable. They acted as a liaison between parents and school, assisted the parents to help their children's school work and, after being trained to do so, shared important information about nutrition, health, sleep needs.

6.3.6 Partnering with the community: identifying and integrating resources and services from the community

Schools do not exist in isolation; they are a key part of their community. This gives them the opportunity to work together with other community members, to promote a shared vision and community ownership of the schools, and to form strategic partnerships with families and community organisations, for the benefit of all.

Collaborative relationships with the school and wider community will strengthen the ability of schools and families to support learning and development outcomes. This type of collaboration encourages learners to come to school ready and able to learn.

Partnering with the community is also an effective way of optimising the use of resources within the school's immediate surroundings. It adds to the school's base of expert knowledge, networks, financial support and physical resources.

For example:

- Invite the local chief, area councilor or community celebrity to come to the school for an event to affirm the importance of the school, and to pledge assistance
- Start an alumni society of past learners who can mobilise resources for the benefit of the school
- Ask local taxi associations to provide transport to elderly caregivers and small children to allow them to attend important school events
- Promote 'ownership' of the school by inviting the community into the school:
 - Source community help to offer co-curricular activities to learners such as photography, art, dancing, drama and music
 - Source community volunteers for help in other ways: in the classroom, library, garden, homework assistance, maintenance, road safety near the school
 - Get to know local business and identify ways that they can contribute
 - Identify what the community can do to support the school in areas such as substance abuse education, anti-bullying, teenage pregnancy and the development of social skills
 - Celebrate events that matter to parents and the community such as significant cultural days
 - Offer family workshops
- Encourage service to the community by learners and the schools (for example, recycling, activities to help older people, community clean-up)

Activities such as these will also grow the reputation of the school.

Strategies for action

- Find out what the community, including local employers, expect from the school. How can they contribute to, and benefit from, improved learning?
- Conduct an exercise to identify resources and key characteristics and strengths of the community and individuals within it according to areas of need, for example, financial management training for SGB members, retired teachers for tutoring, NGOs, etc.
- Find out the needs of the community and where learners and the school can participate in community development projects
- Track down past learners who can mobilise resources (including skills) for the school
- Develop a map and directory of resources for use by teachers, parents and learners
- Follow the guidelines in the above section: **Communicating**
- Acknowledge and thank volunteers regularly and publically

Benefits and indicators of success

For learners

- Increased skills and talents through enriched curricular and extracurricular experiences
- Awareness of careers and of options for future education and work
- Specific benefits linked to programmes, services, resources, and opportunities that connect learners with community

For parents

- Knowledge and use of local resources by family and child to increase skills and talents or to acquire needed services
- Interactions with other families in community activities
- Awareness of school's role in the community and of community's contributions to the school

For teachers and school management

- Awareness of community resources to enrich curriculum and instruction

Openness to and skill in using mentors, business partners, community volunteers, and others to assist learners and augment teaching practices.

- Knowledgeable, helpful referrals of children and families to needed services, for example, medical/health, social/economic, etc.

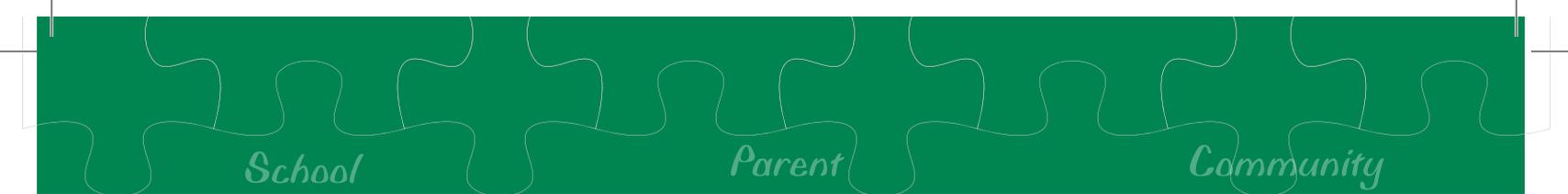
7. Tools and resources

Several tools already exist to accompany this framework. The resource pack includes the following:

- This Framework
- Tools
- **Checklists** to monitor progress in implementing this framework
- **Tips for getting started** on a school-parent-community engagement strategy
- **Guidelines for parents** on how to support children at school (a critical tool for understanding parents' role)
- **A poster** promoting the school-parent-community partnership
- **An interactive calendar** for parents of learners in Grades R-6 as an example of an innovative approach to reaching targeted audiences

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The National Education Collaboration Trust

Telephone: +27 12 752-6200 **E-mail:** info@nect.org.za

Physical Address: Ground Floor, Block D, Lakefield Office Park, 272 West Avenue, Centurion, 0163

Postal Address: PO Box 11150, Die Hoewes, 0163

© Department of Basic Education

Telephone: 012 357 3000 **Fax:** 012 323 0601

Physical Address: 222 Struben Street Private Bag X895, Pretoria, 0001



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