



# PARENT LEADERSHIP IN THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL OF THE 21ST CENTURY

*A discussion paper endorsed by  
the State Committee*

*The Federation of Parents and Friends  
Associations of Catholic Schools in Queensland*

**The Federation of  
Parents & Friends  
Associations of Catholic  
Schools Qld**

**GPO Box 2410  
Brisbane Qld 4001**

**Ph 3224 3242  
Fax 3210 0136**

**Email [info@pandf.org.au](mailto:info@pandf.org.au)  
Web [www.pandf.org.au](http://www.pandf.org.au)**

*September 2006*

*The climate and role of the educating community is constituted by the interaction and collaboration of its various components: students, parents, principals, teachers and non teaching staff.*

*Parents have a particularly important role to play in the educating community since it is to them that primary and natural responsibility for their children's education belongs. It is necessary to foster initiatives ...which provide the right sort of concrete support which the family needs and which involves it in the Catholic school's educational project.*

The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium, 1998.

## **THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

Catholic Education is in a period of momentous change requiring systems and schools to evaluate their practices in the light of serious challenges to the role and conduct of education within contemporary society. In a world in which our youth face an uncertain future, the Catholic school needs to centre its existence on those Christian values and traditions which give hope for a more just and peaceful society.

In his 2005 Ann D Clark Lecture, 'Creating Tomorrow's Catholic School', noted educationalist Barry Dwyer suggests that Church documents 'liken schools to homes, families and places where people meet to share ideas and strengthen values' and his well established views on the authentic Catholic school still resonate at this time. The Catholic school needs to be a living faith community whose members operate in a constructive partnership. It should be a place where Gospel values and Church teaching are reflected in its policies, its practices and the positive relationships of all the community members. It is the focal point of our learning communities, critical to the mission of the Church in post industrial society.

The Catholic school should promote excellence in its teaching and learning in a creative environment. Education needs to be seen and accepted as an enjoyable and rewarding pursuit able to be easily accessed at any stage of life. The school community should be willing to adapt to change and to play a proactive role in the current educational debate. The Principal and the teaching staff need to be supported as they attempt to come to terms with the ever changing needs of students and the pressures of an increasingly demanding society.

Truth, trust and shared wisdom are important hallmarks of the authentic Catholic school. These should be evident in the positive relationships of its community members, its openness to criticism and renewal and the maintenance of structures which invite real involvement in its operation. The school's policies and procedures should demonstrate that it affirms the personal worth of each member of the school community and it recognises, shares and celebrates success in all forms of life and learning.

Leadership within the school community is intimately involved with the Christian value of service. There are many creative minds and hearts which need to be harnessed in pursuit of the objectives to be found in the school's vision and mission. Catering for the needs of all community members will involve innovative and sympathetic approaches to ensure that each student achieves to his or her potential. The Catholic school should exhibit a spirit of hopefulness and joy and all community members should feel welcome in the school and be affirmed for their contribution to its success.

## **HISTORY OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

The history of Catholic education in this country is a proud and colourful one and parent involvement has been punctuated with periods of intense negotiations with governments to maintain their freedom of educational choice. Post World War II Catholic education was typically the responsibility of the clergy in parishes, supported by the members of religious orders who struggled valiantly with extremely limited resources to provide a comprehensive education for Catholic children. In primary schools, spiritual and financial leadership was provided by the parish priest assisted by the religious who were responsible for the education program. Strong emphasis was placed on the sacramental program within the school.

In the early years, parents had little involvement in the decision making processes of the school which they financially supported, as well as contributing to the welfare of the local parish. Many parents had not been able to avail themselves of higher education opportunities, many had not completed secondary education and did not feel confident to become involved in educational issues. Hence the educational program was seen as the responsibility of the religious and the small number of lay teachers who were employed in Catholic schools. There was little or no accountability to the community for the education program, with parents respecting the authority of the religious teachers and the educational success of the school mainly being determined by results achieved at public examinations. There was even less parent involvement in decision making in the secondary schools which were conducted predominantly by the religious orders.

However, parental involvement was strong in the area of community building with fund raising activities such as concerts, balls, fetes and bingo raising much needed funds to improve the school's resources. The school tuckshop, whilst providing a reliable source of finance for the school also became a favoured meeting place to discuss school issues. In the sixties, local Parents and Friends Associations began to form with an agenda which promoted parental freedom of choice in education, continued fund raising activities and pressured governments to improve the funding for Catholic schools.

In the seventies, the face of Catholic schools began to change dramatically. Religious orders who had been the backbone of the system could no longer maintain their presence and lay teachers moved in to accept positions of responsibility, both as educational and religious leaders. In response to the changes, in the late seventies the Church conducted major research, Project Catholic School, on the future of Catholic schooling. Leadership within the Catholic school was a significant issue. The number of religious was declining both in the religious institute and systemic systems. Catholic Education offices in the dioceses were established to support the management and operation of schools.

A number of schools, particularly those conducted by the religious orders who were finding it difficult in maintaining their presence in schools introduced College or School Boards based on the shared wisdom model developed by Mary Mc Kinney. They operated under the Interim Constitution for Boards in Catholic Education introduced by the Queensland Bishops in 1984. In 1990, the Bishops approved the

Constitution which gave Boards responsibility in the areas of policy making, provision and maintenance of school plant, budgeting, communication and curriculum.

In the eighties and nineties, the number of clergy in the parishes continued to decline and parish amalgamations meant that the parish priest could no longer be as involved with the school as he had previously been. As boards became established, many were seen by members of the community as boards of 'governance' which would protect the interests and charisms of the orders whilst handing over the conduct of schools to lay administrators. The composition and effectiveness of boards varied widely and though parents were included in the list of stakeholders there was difficulty in clarifying the role of the local Parents and Friends Association and its relationship with the school or college board. Many boards recruited members from outside the school community as they were seen to have particular expertise to contribute, whereas in many instances the parent access was limited to selection of parent board representatives by school administrators, not through the established parent organisation.

## **PRESENT**

The parent organisation has reached a point where there needs to be significant reculturing and restructuring if it is to move forward and for all community members to accept their responsibility as partners in the future Catholic school. Parent leadership should provide essential support to the Principal and staff in constructing a quality education service. Principals are under increasing pressure and require the mobilisation and coordination of the total resources of the school community to ensure that each child achieves to his/her potential.

The present structure of parent participation and leadership in decision making through separate entities e.g. boards and the P & F does not easily encourage the development of authentic partnerships. Many P & Fs still operate as they did almost half a century ago, out of a predominantly fund raising orientation. It is clearly evident that parents are not convinced that participation in a monthly meeting where the main agenda is obtaining volunteers for the next fund raising function constitutes an authentic educational partnership. Of course such activities are vital to the building of the school community but they bear little relevance to what is happening to children in the classroom. We must ensure that when encouraging parent participation, the school administration takes into account family and work related responsibilities. There are many family configurations and working commitments but there is a greater degree of flexibility in employment and technology has made communication much easier than in previous generations. All parents are interested in their children's education and all have a contribution to make. It could be argued that the transitory nature of many local association executives is not conducive to effective involvement in educational decision making. Hence there is the requirement to engage parents early in their association with the school and to induct them meaningfully into the decision making process. It is disappointing to note how the initial enthusiasm of young parents is lost when they do not see themselves as partners in their child's education. Many Principals have instituted arrangements whereby the resources of the parent community are used to great effect and they are genuine in

their attempts to involve parents in decision making. Schools where there is extensive cooperation and collaboration usually have great commitment from the parent body.

There has developed confusion among parents as to the role and operation of boards and their relationship to the parent organisation. Boards were established after Project Catholic School to be involved in policy making, leadership and goal setting and over the years have operated with varying degrees of success. At present, the vast majority of Catholic schools are systemic and a considerable amount of policy emanates from diocesan offices and education boards. Parents who have been surveyed on the operation of boards within their schools are uncertain as to their role and responsibility. To many parents, the board appears to be based on a business management model of policy formation with little relationship and accountability to the community and to the daily operation of the school. This impression contrasts starkly with the parent concept of partnership which promotes cooperation and collaboration in the decisions which directly affect the performance of their children. Particularly in small schools where there is a limited parent population on which to draw, the presence of two organisations in a school without clear roles and responsibilities does not assist effective decision making.

## **FUTURE**

Catholic schools have become the focal points of our learning communities, critical to the Church's evangelising mission. They encourage lifelong learning and reach out to those who support their value systems. With the decline in the number of clergy and religious within parishes and schools and in Church attendance, the only experience many parents and children will have with the Church will be through their involvement with the Catholic school. This situation imposes great responsibility on the leadership of the school to not only provide for the community's educational needs but also for their development in faith. Such a task must be shared by the whole community. This means that parents must accept their responsibility for the future of the Catholic school in supporting the Principal and staff and being prepared to work in partnership with other community members to achieve the school's goals. Every parent is interested in their child's education and must be prepared to play a role in the development of the educational and faith community that is the contemporary Catholic school.

Parents, as major partners in Catholic education want to share in the decisions affecting their child in an educational and spiritual sense, they want to support excellence in teaching and learning at school and at home and they see their involvement in the school from that perspective. In no way does this imply an incursion into the professional role of the teacher in the classroom but the development of a mutual support system which has as its aim the achievement of each child's potential. The result of such support, based within the school community, will be greater acceptance of, and responsibility for, the school's educational project. Hence the development of a framework for the operation of authentic partnerships will be the responsibility of the school community itself. No two schools have exactly similar needs hence it will be the local community which is best able to decide the vision, direction and operation of the educational project and the most effective and efficient method of decision making.

The Vatican document referred to previously states that parents have a particularly important role to play in the educational community since it is to them that 'primary and natural responsibility for their children's education belong'. Parents need to be acknowledged in this primary role as educators and as major partners in the education process. Such a close relationship with the school implies a partnership with mutual rights and responsibilities. Characteristics of authentic partnerships include open and honest communication, cooperation, collaboration, shared decision making, equitable outcomes, respect and trust between partners. In effectively harnessing the community's resources, the school administration will not only be able to make better decisions but will have the expectation that the community, not just the Principal and staff, will take responsibility for them.

The recent Bishops' project *Catholic Schools for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, endorsed by all the Bishops in the dioceses in Queensland, provides an excellent guide to the direction of parent involvement and leadership in the future Catholic school. Three critical concepts related to parent leadership are identified in the report:

- (a) The school as a Christ-centred community of learners,
- (b) Authentic partnerships, and
- (c) Accountability.

It is critical for the future of Catholic schools that they maintain, as a primary function, the promotion of a living faith community. Faith development cannot be seen as just another area of the school curriculum but needs to be shared with all community members. Society is in a state of momentous change and is presenting formidable challenges to our institution of family. Robert Reich, in *The Future of Success* says, 'The deepest anxieties of this prosperous age concern the erosion of families, the fragmentation of our communities and the keeping of our own integrity intact.' With the Catholic school becoming, for most families, the only face of the Church in their lives and the increasing number of families not sharing the Catholic tradition, it is essential that the school provides opportunities for effective religious celebrations and faith education of all community members. Our tradition is founded on gathering together, telling the story, sharing the meal and celebrating. Thus parents have a responsibility, in partnership with staff, to uphold and strengthen the foundational Christian values and to develop their own faith commitment and their knowledge and understanding of Church and its mission in the world.

The contemporary Catholic school community calls on its members to become lifelong learners, operating in a constructive and collaborative partnership. In today's Knowledge Society, the role of the teacher is being reappraised and is becoming one of learning facilitator and co-learner. Professor Andy Hargreaves, in his publication *Teaching in The Knowledge Society* identifies the role of teachers as partners with parents in the development of professional learning communities. He sees them as catalysts of the Knowledge Society by;

- promoting deep cognitive learning,
- teaching in ways they were not taught themselves,
- working and learning in collaborative groups,
- developing and drawing on collective intelligence,
- building a capacity for change and risk, and, most importantly
- treating parents as partners in learning.

In its accountability to parents and the community in general, the school needs to genuinely collaborate in its decision making so that parents are involved in the education planning for the school as a learning centre and that they understand how children are progressing individually within that plan.

The major partners in the education process need to be identified and organised in such a manner that their roles are promoted and respected by all community members. The pivotal figure within the school is the Principal who has the religious and educational leadership role and ultimately makes decisions on behalf of the school community. The Principal's role in recent years has become extremely onerous and more responsibility has been assumed by willing leaders. Unfortunately, the situation has been reached where there is difficulty in encouraging excellent educators to accept leadership roles. Apart from the purely educational and spiritual, there are many decisions which fall outside these dimensions and the Principal requires considerable support to ensure that the best decisions are being made in the interests of the total community.

It will require some reculturing of the community to accept the importance of parent leadership in the Catholic school. It will be the parents, first educators and long term members of the community, who will play a major partnership role in shaping the Catholicity and the educational outcomes in schools. This reculturing will see authentic partnerships being developed where parents are welcomed and respected as decision makers in policy formation, vision and mission, teaching and learning, curriculum, assessment and reporting, technology, finance, planning, community building and, most importantly, community faith development. The result of such a partnership will be a community acceptance of ownership and responsibility for the school's total educational project.

## **EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN THE COMMUNITY**

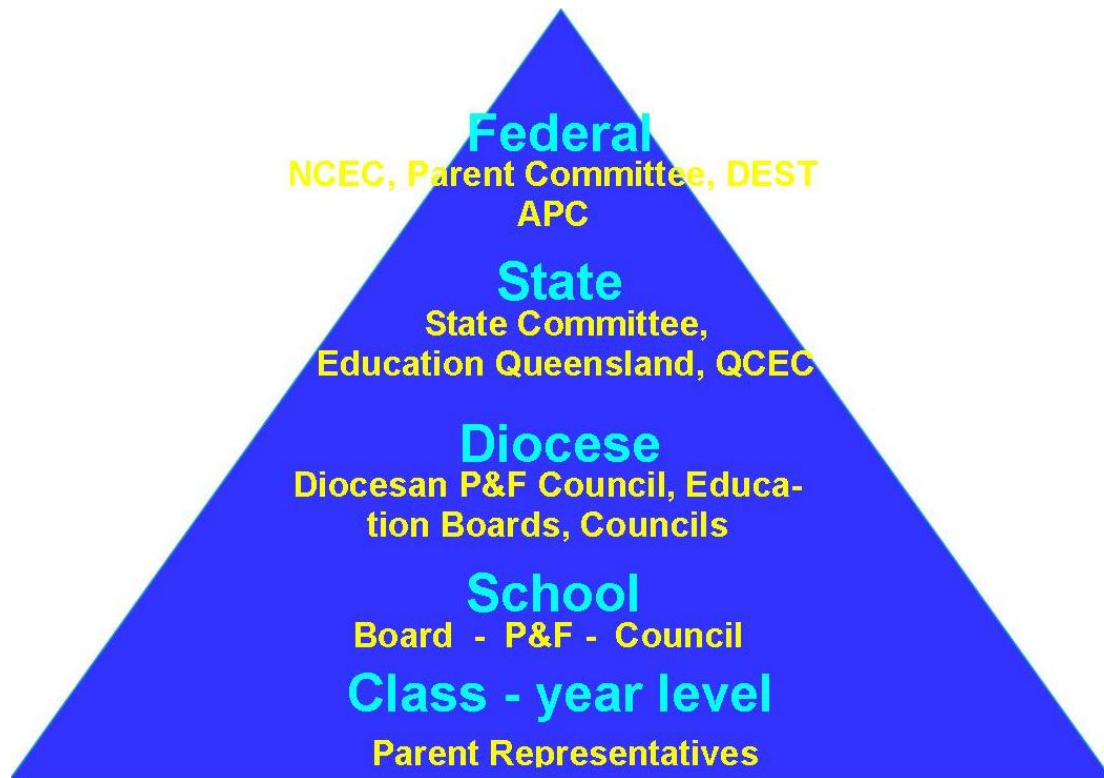
Obviously, the partnership developed between the home and the teacher in the classroom is the most important one for the student to reach his/her potential. However, parents have an important role to play in the wider educational field at various levels. Governments, at both state and commonwealth level, recognise parents as critical stakeholders in the education process and are moving to ensure that they are appropriately represented on all the important educational authorities and committees.

Recent educational reforms within federal and state jurisdictions rely on the cooperation of, and collaboration with, parents who form the most effective link between schools and the local community. Many government decisions in education are justified on the presumption of parental support which may not necessarily be the case. It is critical that the authentic voices of parents are heard in these domains so that government can take decisions which are consistent with the best interests of the school communities.

To ensure their effectiveness as representatives of either their own sector or on behalf of all parent organisations, parents need to beware of the background and implications of educational decisions and this can be obtained through their recognition as partners in the important educational decisions in their individual schools. Apart from their appreciation of the needs of children, parents bring their own professional judgment

and their role as teacher, learner and advocate to the decision making process in Catholic education. They continue to receive invitations to be represented on boards and authorities within the Catholic sector at both diocesan and state level but their confidence and effectiveness can be restricted by not having a comprehensive local knowledge to critically examine all the implications of the issues being debated.

### **Dimensions of parent involvement**



### **POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT**

Parents are increasingly called upon to interact with the political system to maintain their right of freedom of choice in education and to ensure that fair and equitable resourcing is provided to the Catholic system.

Unfortunately, many elected representatives are unfamiliar with current educational issues, particularly the situation in Catholic schools, with many tending to regard them as ‘private’ schools. There is a definite need to inform elected and prospective representatives of the true position in our schools and to seek their assistance in resourcing our schools to an acceptable level and to express the opinion of the school community on legislative action relating to education. It must always be understood that our parents seek appropriate education funding for all students, not just for those in the Catholic system, and the peak parent organisations in the state collaborate very productively to achieve this aim.

Many schools have established appropriate relationships with members of the political parties and they are regularly invited to school functions and parent meetings. It is critical for the future that these relationships be developed and strengthened. The

establishment of political action committees in the schools will improve the ability of communities to interact with the political process. The introduction of community cabinet meetings throughout the state has enabled local associations and the diocesan councils to meet with senior political figures. It is essential that in this communication, parents are aware of the current educational issues from the Catholic school perspective.

Parents have multiple roles to play in the Catholic school and in the wider educational environment. They are teachers, learners, supporters, advocates, decision makers .... partners. By harnessing the shared vision, commitment and expertise of its community, the Catholic school of this century will be characterised by quality Catholic education and a truly professional spirit, providing a genuine service to the student and to the future of our nation.

*All parents are interested in their children's education.  
Every parent has something to contribute.*

## Bibliography

Beare, H. *Creating the Future School*. (2001).  
Routledge Falmer, London.

*Diocese of Cairns Catholic Schools for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Defining Features*. (2002)  
Diocesan Education Service, Diocese of Cairns, Queensland.

Dwyer, B. *Creating Tomorrow's Catholic School: Challenge to the Imagination*.  
2005 Ann D Clark Lecture. Catholic Education Office, Parramatta.

Dwyer, B. *Catholic Schools at the Crossroads*. (1986)  
Dove Communications, Victoria.

Hargreaves, A. *Teaching in the Knowledge Society*. (2003).  
Teachers College Press, New York.

Jackson, Anthony W, and Davis, Gayle A. *Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. (2000).  
Teachers College Press, New York.

McLaughlin, D. *The Dialectic of Australian Catholic education*.  
International Journal of Children's Spirituality, Vol 10, No 2, August 2005.

Pascoe Susan, ed. *Values in Education. College Year Book, 2002*.  
Australian College of Educators, Deakin West, ACT.

*Queensland Bishops' Project: Catholic Schools for the Twenty-First Century - A Report to the Queensland Bishops*. (2001)  
Queensland Catholic Education Commission, Brisbane.

Reich, Robert B. *The Future of Success: Working and Living in the New Economy*  
Vintage Books, USA. 2002.

*Strategic Renewal Framework for Catholic Schools Archdiocese of Brisbane 2002 – 2006*.  
Brisbane Catholic Education, Brisbane.

*The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century*. (1999).  
Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), Commonwealth Government, Canberra.

*The Catholic school on the threshold of the third millennium*. (1998).  
Congregation for Catholic Education, St Paul's. N.S.W.

## **ANNEX A**

### **CATHOLIC SCHOOL COMMUNITY COUNCIL**

How do parents demonstrate leadership in the process of delivering the best educational and personal outcomes with the employment of the most effective community resources?

The future Catholic school will be a living learning community with its members operating in a constructive partnership. It will be through collaborative and cooperative decision making processes that school communities will be able to set realistic goals and take responsibility for their achievement.

It is proposed that a new organisation be established which will effectively harness the resources of the total community and assist the Principal and staff in the decision making process. It could replace both the present Boards and the Parents and Friends Associations. The parent community at present is an underutilised resource. Many have skills and expertise which could be of great assistance to the Principal and staff in educational planning and performance. Church documents emphasise the development of authentic partnerships where decision making is cooperative and collaborative. In future, the school should also be able to access significant groups within the wider community with professional qualifications to assist with students' educational, personal and employment needs.

An example of such partnership is the Catholic School Community Council which provides an opportunity to strengthen relationships in the school and to develop a team approach to ensure a high quality and accountable educational entity.

The Council builds on the excellent work being done by parent groups, boards and school administrations at present and attempts to integrate the present organisational functions by seeking to engage with all the important partners for the improvement of outcomes for our children. There needs to be a coordinated approach so that human and material resources can be used to the best advantage of the school community.

It is important to ensure that all members of the community have the opportunity to participate in the educational project of the school. However, school communities throughout the state vary greatly in their compositions, size, access to resources and time restraints and hence each has to have the flexibility to adapt the structures to suit local circumstances.

Effective participation by all community members is the key to the Council's success.

## **Membership of the Council**

The Principal and the Parish Priest/ Religious Institute have the ultimate responsibility of nurturing the Catholic identity of the school and providing quality Catholic education, and the school is accountable to its community. As the numbers of clergy and religious decline it will be essential to retain parish/Church/religious congregation links in schools for the benefit of both students and parents. All community partners including staff, parents and students are represented on the Community Council with the parent body playing a prominent role in extending the school's outreach to the wider community. Schools are now regarded as a vital community learning resource and recent government initiatives have brought into prominence this relationship of the school to the wider community. Future success will demand that these links, particularly in the secondary area, be developed and strengthened.

## **Role of the Principal**

The school Principal has the task of leadership of the learning and faith community and the primary function of the Council is to assist the Principal in this role. With the expertise of all community representatives being brought to bear on decision making, it is felt that the Principal will have more confidence in decisions taken on behalf of the school community.

## **Relationship to the Parents and Friends Associations**

The Council creates a structure which integrates the activities of the local associations so that parents are directly involved, along with the other interest groups, in the decisions which affect their children. The traditional fund raising activities can be incorporated into the community building function of the Council.

Parents are seen as critical members of the learning community and their interests will be well represented on the council. In the organisation, the Chair will be a parent of children who are presently in the school and the council executive will also contain a significant number of parent members.

## **Relationship to Boards**

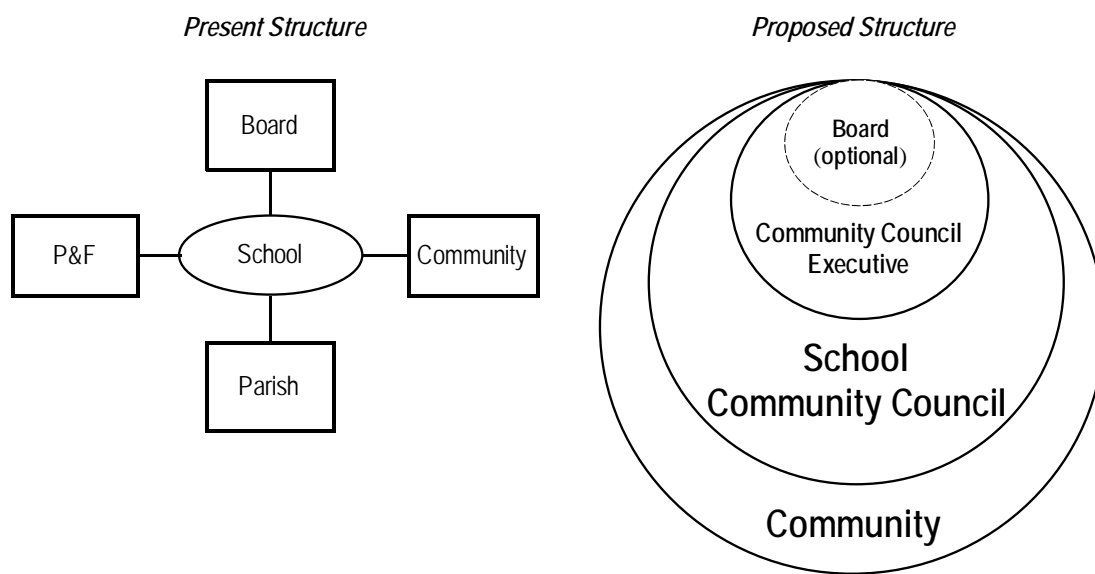
During the past twenty years, a number of schools have instituted boards with particular functions including policy making (e.g. enrolments, fees), financial planning and facilities management with varying degrees of success.

This idea of a community council does not create another level of decision-making within the school but promotes flexibility in the future structure of school management and operation. It coordinates and integrates the present process which is generally confined to the experience of the teaching staff and brings the expertise of the wider school community into the decision making and accountability process.

Large schools, particularly those with religious institute affiliations, may see the benefit of having both a Council and a policy making board of governance but both must remain accountable to the community and act through the community. Thus, those elected to such a board will have a direct relationship with the school and would be required to serve a period on the council before appointment to the board.

However, in the vast majority of schools, it is felt that the Community Council can successfully incorporate the policy making function. The orientation of the Council is on the learning outcomes for students and supporting the Principal and staff in providing a quality learning environment.

## CATHOLIC SCHOOL COMMUNITY COUNCIL



### School Community Council

- Membership of all partners
- Focus on school organisation and operation
- Elected executive of community members
- Accountable to the school community
- Meets at least once per term, using technology for communication
- Forms sub committees in areas of school operation

### Council Purpose

- Create a supportive learning and faith community,
- Focus on the total development of each student,
- Improve student achievement by enhancing the relevance and delivery of the curriculum and promoting excellence,
- Enhance the accountability of the school and system to parents, and
- Increase the degree to which parents are involved in their children's learning at school and in the home.

### **Advantages to parents**

- Parents become partners in the school's education process whose views are valued.
- Parents contribute to the shared goal of improving student and school achievement and take responsibility for the decisions made.
- Parents have a vehicle through which to express opinions.
- Parents are kept informed and contribute to what is occurring in the wider education debate.
- Parents are integral to the faith development of the school community.
- Community resources are mobilised to assist school programs, family needs and student learning.

### **Composition of the Council Executive**

- Parents (including Chair)
- Principal / Deputy Principal
- Parish Priest and/or Parish representative and/or religious institute representative
- Staff – teaching and non-teaching
- APRE / Campus Minister
- Student(s) – Principal approval
- Community representative(s)

### **Suggested Sub Committees of the Council – to include at least one Executive Member**

- Vision, Mission, Renewal
- Religious Education, Personal Development, Community Faith Development
- Teaching, Lifelong Learning
- Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting
- Finance, Facilities, Planning
- Child Protection, Health and Safety, Behaviour Learning, Risk Management
- Community Building
- Technology

### **Meeting Frequency**

- Full Council – once per term
- Council Executive – at least twice per term
- Sub committees – as required
- Effective use of technology for communication

## **Elections**

- Members of the Council Executive are elected by their constituency
- Community members may be co-opted
- Student member to be elected by students and recommended by Principal
- For schools with boards
  - Members must have served at least one year on Council Executive before being elected to the Board
  - Board members elected by Council

## **Terms of Office**

- Term of office is the calendar year
- Council Executive - 1 year. Re-elected each year. Can remain for three consecutive years but then must break for at least one year
- Council Chair - 2 year term. Can be re elected for another term

## **Council operation**

- Prominent role of Principal
- Consultation with all partners
- Members develop overall goals
- Improvement planning
- Accountable and reports to community regularly

## **Principal's role**

- Guidance and support, leadership
- Collaborative and cooperative approach
- Works with Chair
- Provides information to the community
- Answers questions
- Develops the school profile - enrolment trends, demographics, mission statement, priorities, education plan, facilities, resources, parish links
- Involves partners in decision making

## **Parent access**

- Regular meetings, communication
- Minutes
- Finance, budgets

- Annual reporting
- Master education plan
- Newsletters
- Constitution

### **Characteristics of Council**

- Focuses on student learning
- Sets priorities for improving student achievement
- Promotes meaningful involvement
- Understands roles and responsibilities of members
- Keeps well informed on school policies
- Represents diverse views
- Adopts clear procedures for decision making
- Communicates activities effectively to the community
- Resolves conflicts maturely
- Maintains high standards
- Maintains mutual trust and respect of all members
- Has a shared vision
- Operates with a spirit of hopefulness and joy
- Promotes lifelong learning

### **Training/Induction - Council Executive**

- Initial training on role and responsibilities
- Team and community building, partnerships
- Community faith development
- Ongoing – education initiatives, skills for meetings and financial obligations, leadership
- Code of ethics

## **Benefits of a School Council – Building a Christ-centred Learning Community**

- **Integration**
  - Creates a communication channel across the school community.
  - Executive members aware of all roles and responsibilities
  - Every community member has a role to play and accepts responsibility for decisions
  
- **Composition of Council Executive**
  - Maintains balance of stakeholders
  - More effectively prioritises the education process
  - Includes all interest groups
  
- **Term of office**
  - Creates a desired turnover in positions
  - Allows an effective contribution to be made
  
- **Parent participation**
  - Establishes educational partnership and develops a team approach
  - Shares decision-making
  - Focuses on student development and achievement
  - Reduces anxiety over contentious issues
  - Harnesses parent expertise
  
- **Principal's pivotal role**
  - Develops an accountable learning community
  - Creates a forum to explain initiatives, share decision-making.
  - Ability to hear directly of parent opinion
  - Parents offer support and expertise
  - Coordination of community faith development
  
- **Teacher participation**
  - Improves communication between parents and teachers and provides a better understanding of the reasons for curriculum initiatives and organisational decisions
  - Encourages teachers to be creative, innovative and to be respected for their efforts
  
- **Parish / Community / Religious Institute representation**
  - School becomes Christ centred learning centre
  - Maintains the charism of founders
  - Allows external perspective
  - Allows members with special expertise to become involved
  - Outreach to the wider learning community
  - Establishes links with employment and training providers
  
- **Student participation**
  - Acknowledges their position in the education process
  - Participate in decisions affecting students and accepts responsibility for them
  - Present student viewpoint and communicate decisions to student population

## References

### **Catholic Schools for the 21st Century – The Queensland Bishops' Project. August 2001**

#### **Strong Catholic identity and giving witness to Christian values**

- *The ecclesial nature of the school will be reflected in the 'community of communities' within Church, students, staff, parents and families.*
- *Attention will be given to mutuality and partnerships both within and among its separate communities.*
- *Strong partnerships with parents and opportunities for ongoing adult faith education will assist with the integration of faith and life.*

#### **Open and accessible to all who seek its values**

- *The mission of the Catholic school will extend to all families who identify with, and seek the values of, Christ.*

#### **Holistic curriculum**

- *Ideally, teachers, students and parents will be lifelong learners and the school culture will support this community of learners who are all actively engaged in their own teaching and learning process.*
- *Parents and students will be consulted on whether the curriculum and learning environment are functioning effectively for them.*
- *Schools will be accountable to parents for providing a quality education and for making efficient use of resources.*

#### **A community of care and right relationships**

- *Parents and other community members will be actively involved in the school and will be an integral part of the education process.*
- *Each school community will implement collaborative decision-making structures, processes and procedures which allow for the appropriate involvement of members of the school community.*
- *Recognition will be given to the primary role of parents in the education of their children and the partnership between parents and staff will be characterised by mutual trust and respect.*
- *Parents will accept responsibility for keeping themselves informed about the school's educational programs and their child's progress.*
- *The physical design of the school will create spaces which will accommodate parent and community activities.*

#### **Staffed by qualified, competent people who give witness to Gospel values**

- *Each school community will develop a shared understanding of their school's story and purpose and grow in confidence in articulating their faith and shared values.*

## **The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – 1999.**

*Australia's future depends upon each citizen having the necessary knowledge, understanding, skills and values for a productive and rewarding life in an educated, just and open society. High quality schooling is central to achieving this vision.*

*This statement of national goals for schooling provides broad directions to guide schools and education authorities in securing these outcomes for students.*

*It acknowledges the capacity of all young people to learn, and the role of schooling in developing that capacity. It also acknowledges the role of parents as the first educators of their children and the central role of teachers in the learning process*

*The achievement of these common and agreed national goals entails a commitment to collaboration for the purposes of further strengthening schools as learning communities where teachers, students and their families work in partnership with business, industry and the wider community.*

### **QCEC Renewing Catholic Schools in Queensland:**

*'A self renewing Catholic school by its very nature involves the total school community in such ongoing efforts.'*

*Relationships – The Catholic school will foster positive human relationships among students, staff and others associated with the school.*

*Parental Involvement – The Catholic school will recognise the decisive role of parents as the first and foremost educators of their children. This is achieved through the involvement of parents in a partnership relationship in the provision of education programs designed to aid the family and in the development of policy and management of the school.*

### **Reporting on Student and School Achievement – Cuttance and Stokes - March 2000**

#### ***Best practice in managing children's educational development***

- *Schools and parents develop an effective partnership to support the learning of students.*

#### ***Best practice in reporting on school programs***

- *Schools have a planned strategy for informing parents about their programs.*

- *Schools facilitate opportunities for parents to receive advice and discuss their child's progress and how they can support their child's education.*
- *Communication strategies are tailored to meet local school community circumstances and conditions.*
- *Parents are encouraged to interact with school staff and other parents on an informal basis.*
- *Parents participate in providing input to school decision-making and feedback in reviewing the effectiveness of school policies and programs.*

### ***Best practice in reporting on school achievement***

- *Schools report annually to parents on their success in achieving goals and performance targets.*
- *Parents are provided with benchmarks against which to assess the achievement of the school on a number of outcomes*
- *Parents are provided with a range of accurate and reliable school performance and effectiveness information.*
- *All schools in receipt of government funding report accurately to parents on their achievement in accordance with an agreed public reporting framework.*
- *Schools and school systems promote a culture of accountability by providing parents with access to school achievement information.*

## **Characteristics of a Lifelong Learning School Community**

*The school community which encourages lifelong learning:*

- *has a written organisational strategy, available to all, for developing the full human potential of each community member;*
- *involves the school community in the maintenance of a culture of quality and respect for high standards in everything it does, and in continuous improvement programs;*
- *increases the resources available to the school by harnessing the skills, talents and knowledge of administrators, parents, business leaders, retirees and other members of the community to create new learning opportunities and implement school strategies;*
- *makes links with the world of work which enrich students' knowledge and experience and facilitate a 'learning ' approach to adult life;*
- *develops a curriculum based on the enhancement of personal skills and values to improve knowledge and understanding, and to enable students to manage change throughout their lives;*
- *uses modern and information technologies widely across all disciplines, including the exploration of collaborative learning opportunities through networks;*

- *looks outward to the world, promoting a sense of justice, tolerance and understanding of different races, creeds and cultures in all students;*
- *stimulates home-school cooperation and involves the family in the life and work of the school;*
- *expands lifelong learning in all community members by involving them in the development of learning plans, guides and mentors;*
- *broadens the vision of community members through a wide range of cultural experiences and extracurricular activities; and*
- *celebrates learning frequently as a desirable, permanent and enjoyable habit for all.*

*Longworth and Davies, Lifelong Learning, 1996.*

*"The future of the Church and Society passes by way of the family."*

Pope John Paul II.

*The climate and role of the educating community is constituted by the interaction and collaboration of its various components: students, parents, Principals, teachers and non teaching staff.*

*Parents have a particularly important role to play in the educating community since it is to them that primary and natural responsibility for their children's education belongs. It is necessary to foster initiatives which encourage commitment but which provide at the same time the right sort of concrete support which the family needs and which involve it in the Catholic school's educational project.*

*The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium, 1998.*

*Partnership between a Catholic school and the families of the students must continue and be strengthened..... so that the educational goals of the school may be realised.... It is not a question of convenience, but a partnership based on faith. Catholic tradition teaches that God has bestowed on the family its specific and unique educational mission*

*The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School, 1988.*

*Parental interest is a more potent influence on children's learning success than parents' occupation, educational level, cultural background or family income level.*

*Snodgrass, 1991.*

*No two groups have more to gain from working together to help children become effective adults than the family and the school.*

*Parents who understand the education system and the difficulties schools face are a valuable source of support which schools cannot afford to underestimate.*

*Teachers who understand the value of parents and engage them effectively in their children's learning maximise their educational opportunities.*

*Parents recognise that school education is a vital part of lifelong learning .... However, they also want it acknowledged that while schools and teachers change over time, parents remain the consistent, continuing influence in the education of their children..... Parents and families influence fundamentally the attitudes and values which their children possess and bring to school. Parents are essential guardians of school education in partnership with many individuals and organisation.*

Free, 1987.

*Parents are partners in education not merely as people who are co opted. Partnership implies that there is no choice.*

Beare, 1987.

*'When families and schools work together to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in school, but throughout life. In fact, the most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is not income or social status, but the extent to which that family is able to;*

- (1) create a home environment that encourages learning,*
- (2) express high (but not unrealistic) expectations of their children's achievements and future careers, and*
- (3) become involved in their children's education at school and in the community.*

US parent researcher, Anne Henderson.

*The more the relationship between family and school approaches a comprehensive, well planned partnership, the higher the student achievement.*

Henderson and Berla.