

## **Primary Principals' Sabbatical Leave 2009**

### **Investigating Ways in which school leaders engage and consult with their communities in Catholic Integrated Schools to implement the new, New Zealand Curriculum.**

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#### **Abstract**

**Purpose:** - The purpose of this paper is to investigate the roles of teachers, students, parents, caregivers and whanau, the information necessary to assist the design and development of the school's curriculum, how all participants' contributions are valued and the processes used to achieve a sustainable school-community partnership. For the purpose of this study community is defined as consisting of people/families/whanau who are consistently connected to and involved in the business of the school.

**Design**– This is a qualitative study. A review of literature was conducted to identify strategies in the ways schools and school leaders (principals) have gone about connecting with the parent community to develop partnerships. The review has included peer-reviewed articles and published reports from the Ministry of Education, the Education Review Office, health and social sciences nationally and internationally. A questionnaire was developed for school principals. Principals from a cross-section of Canterbury Catholic State Integrated schools and deciles were approached to complete this is a mix of urban and rural schools we selected. Eighteen in number were interviewed. Consent to record and then transcribe the completed

interviews was sought from individuals. The confidentiality of schools has been respected by not identifying any by name, only by the title – School A. The original questionnaire is located in Appendix 2 .

**Key words** curriculum development • role of principals • students and parents in school development • achievement • school-community connectedness • consultation with Maori • school-community engagement.

## **Introduction**

The Ministry of Education has instituted changes to the New Zealand Curriculum and requires all State and Integrated schools to implement it by 2010. There is a requirement of schools to develop the curriculum to meet the learning needs of their students and the expectations of their community. “*The New Zealand Curriculum* is a clear statement of what we deem important in education. It takes as its starting point a vision of our young people as lifelong learners who are confident and creative, connected, and actively involved. It includes a clear set of principles on which to base curriculum decision making. It sets out values that are to be encouraged, modelled and explored. It defines five key competencies that are critical to sustained learning and effective participation in society and that underline the emphasis on lifelong learning.” (Sewell, K) For the Catholic Integrated Schools are further supported through the Catholic Education Office which states, ‘its influence on educational outcomes within Catholic schools and parishes is somewhat indirect. We are not a provider of education to students in classrooms or parish Sacramental/Religious Education programmes. We are, in the main, a provider of leadership & training, support & development, for those who are actively engaged leading Catholic schools

and parishes and educating students in classrooms and parish Sacramental/Religious Education programmes,’ and it concludes that ‘In all these endeavours the Catholic Education Office seeks, through its policies, budget, advice and relationships, to promote a holistic model of education for the schools and parishes it serves.’

To achieve this there needs to be effective methods of information sharing, knowledge development and consultation processes to capture and articulate the feedback of all the identified and important partners of the school community.

**Key areas of investigation with current principals were:**

1. *What roles should your teachers, students, families and whanau in the wider community actually play in the review and design of the new curriculum?*
2. *What vital information did you seek from your community for decision making about the curriculum?*
3. *What processes did you use to stimulate interest in and get feedback on your curriculum?*
4. *How will/did you inform the students and the community that their feedback has been valued and used in the design and implementation of the new curriculum?*

**Findings**

The schools interviewed were all actively involved in the process of engagement, consultation and implementation of the revised curriculum. All (18) agreed that the writing of the revised curriculum by 2010 has placed time pressure on the process. This is consistent with recent research into the implementation of the new curriculum (Hipkins.2008. p27) which stated that ‘time is a major consideration when

undertaking curriculum change.’ The report also noted a number of other concerns about change with the scheduling of professional development and strategizing activities to facilitate change. Change in teaching and learning is a constant because the needs of teachers and learners are not static in relation to their environment which is subject to pressures from a variety of sources – politics, economics, socially and culturally. The key plank of involving the community has been an area of innovation and each of the schools had a variety of engagement strategies. School connectedness has been recognised as a fundamental protective factor relating to child and adolescent health and development, school and academic achievement and involvement in crime. (Rowe et al. 2007, ERO 2008)

***1. What roles should your teachers, students, families and whanau in the wider community actually play in the review and design of the new curriculum?***

The state integrated schools found that the values were a vital place to start the curriculum design process. Pupils, parents, staff and parish were expecting to be involved in the vision and values development. The content of the actual curriculum was felt by most schools to be developed by the staff and Board and to be given out to the wider community for reflection, input and change. Each board of trustees, through the principal and staff, is required to implement its curriculum in accordance with the priorities set out in the National Education Goals and the National Administration Guidelines (Ministry of Education. 2007 p44). The importance of clear and accurate communication and consultation with parents, whanau and families and communities became a mandated expectation of schools.(ERO 2008) Consultation with the different groups that make up school communities – teachers, students, parents, and

boards of trustees – is a process that can take considerable time and thought, and may need to be spread across several years, so that schools can build pedagogy as they go (Hipkins. 2008. p27). Effective pedagogy as outlined in the curriculum document (Ministry of Education. 2007 p34-36) is very clear on what is required to relevant teaching and learning. Engagement, according to the Education Review Office evaluation, ‘ is defined as a meaningful, respectful partnership between schools and their parents, whanau and communities that focuses on improving the educational experiences and successes for each child.(ERO 2008)

***2. What vital information did you seek from your community for decision making about the curriculum?***

The key information that was sought was on the values, vision, virtues, curriculum principles, key competencies and the nine learning areas of the NZ Curriculum. The varied responses were influenced by decile level and rural/ urban situations. Access to education is one of the major determinants of health and wellbeing - Social and economic policies have a determining impact on whether a child can grow and develop to its full potential and live a flourishing life, or whether its life will be blighted.(WHO 2008) In New Zealand ‘the system of school choice designed to promote competition between public schools has resulted in a school system that is more inequitable than most other industrialised nations and far more segregated on the basis of race, socio-economic status and student performance.(Melville. 1998). In the context of a change in the curriculum and of government, differences between schools and accessing equitable outcomes will add to the principal’s ability to manage and lead.

All of the eighteen schools put their vision and their mission statement to the wider community for reflection and comment. In terms of the curriculum a variety of methods were used to inform the community about the proposed emphasis of the revised curriculum. A common element that engaged the community at a high level was the input and formation of the leaver's or graduate's statement 'What we would like our students to be when they leave school'. This was something that they all enjoyed being involved in. Finding out what parents would like to know about the revised curriculum and how we could give that information in manageable quantities was a key question and had a high response level. For schools which have a high proportion of their roll identifying as Maori, the concept of developing a Graduate Profile is clearly expressed in the soon to be implemented Maori medium curriculum statement (Te Marautanga o Aotearoa. 2008) which summarises the most important qualities and characteristics of a graduate of Māori-medium education through the school working together with its community, whānau, hapū and iwi to 'include high levels of educational achievement, a wide range of skills and quality career choices.'

***3. What processes did you use to stimulate interest in and get feedback on your curriculum?***

The following range of activities is a summary of the main ones mentioned by the study participants. They are not listed empirically. The activity which appeared to be the most effective was the use of outside facilitators.

- School newsletter
- Home/School partnership
- Community meetings

- Innovative consultation with Maori/ Pasifika groups e.g. P.I.Ps (Parents in Partnership)
- Senior students/ School council input
- Wine and Cheese food nights
- Random telephone sampling
- Surveys
- Innovative ICT sites
- Red paper communications with prizes for returning surveys (a house type of colour paper was used for all communications on Curriculum Review)

Research evidence shows that effective partnerships between schools and parents, whanau and communities can result in better outcomes for students. The better the relationship and engagement, the more positive the impact on student's learning.(Biddulp et al cited in ERO 2008) Many New Zealand schools are participating in the Ministry of Education's project Home-School Partnerships and in a recent report state ' the research literature is unequivocal in showing that parental involvement makes a significant difference to educational achievement.(MOE 2008)

*4. How will/did you inform the students and the community that their feedback has been valued and used in the design and implementation of the new curriculum?*

The feedback element of the design implementation of the revised curriculum was rich and varied. The community meetings in the smaller rural schools were well attended. This intimacy gave a large degree of satisfaction to all elements of the school community. The larger mostly urban schools found interest groups

responding to questionnaires and then feedback about how their input had modified or changed the process, was well received. The school councils were a most effective way of involving pupils and conveying appreciation. A strong suggestion from a variety of schools was a newsletter should be written to the pupils explaining what has happened and how the curriculum was changing within a term. There was strong feedback that the school/parish newsletters had to highlight elements of the revised curriculum on a very regular basis so that it was kept as a high profile item and did not become an isolated process.

### **Conclusions and Practical Implications**

The key to effective consultation is that a response to a proposal is to be always listened to with an open mind, always aiming for ownership. Being prepared to go back to the starting point is a key to honest and real consultation and has been witnessed during this investigation. A practical implication in managing democratic decision making and community involvement appears that there is a need for leadership training.

A mix of informal and formal tools to meet the diverse styles of key stakeholders is required, always accepting that each school community has its unique and special character. Successful engagement between schools and parents, whanau and communities is influenced by the extent to which partnerships are valued, and by the awareness and responsiveness of each school to its community.(ERO 2008) A practical implication for Catholic Integrated Schools would be to keep the Parish community in the process of Curriculum and Charter Reviews.



The process observed in the investigation showed the sample of schools(18) were honestly trying in a variety of innovative ways, to consult and involve their community in the design of their revised curriculum. The goal is to make the revised curriculum a living, real and connected source document. In short, parenting affects students' achievement by shaping the child's identity as a learner and through setting higher expectations for the child (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003 cited in MoE 2008)

A practical implication and future research topic would be to investigate how schools have maintained and developed Next Steps in Curriculum and Strategic Reviews.

The process of the implementation of the revised curriculum has really focussed schools on participation, inclusiveness and democracy.

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Desforges, C. & Abouchaar, A. (2003). *The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment: A literature review*. ( Research report No 433 Department for Education and Skills). To retrieve this report google “C Desforges & A Abouchaar”

### **Recommended Reading:**

Partners In Learning: Parents’ Voices. September 2008  
Education Review Office [www.ero.govt.nz](http://www.ero.govt.nz)

Partners in Learning: Good Practice. September 2008  
Education Review Office [www.ero.govt.nz](http://www.ero.govt.nz)

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McNeely, C.A. Nonnemaker, J.M. and Blum, R.W. Promoting School Connectedness: Evidence from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. *Journal of School Health* 2002;72(4):138-146

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## Appendix I

Questionnaire conducted with individual school principals as part of the Principal's Sabbatical Leave study 2009 – Christchurch

### **Investigating Ways in which school leaders engage and consult with their communities to implement the new, New Zealand Curriculum.**

*Reference: The New Zealand Curriculum – Requirements for the Board of Trustees. p44.*

**Qualitative Interviews with Practicing School Principals across the decile range in Christchurch** (is it important to stay urban or include rural? – could throw another angle in the tangle☺)

1. What key messages/information do you think the community will need prior to any school-community consultation on the new curriculum?
2. Who are the main partners for your school to consult with in the development of the new curriculum?
3. What roles do you think each of the identified community partners should play in the review and design of the school's curriculum?
4. How does your school propose to support classroom teachers and the community develop the new curriculum at the classroom level?
5. What process(es) has the Board of Trustees used in the past to consult with its community on curriculum matters?
6. How is the school organised to promote participation, inclusiveness and democracy?
7. What changes to this process do you envisage being made to manage the review and design of the school's new curriculum?
8. What vital information do you think needs to be sought from the community?
9. What process(es) does the Board of Trustees have for the effective consultation of Maori?
10. What processes does the Board of Trustees have in place to inform all participants of the results of their involvement?
11. What role do community agencies play in the development of the new curriculum?
12. If there were opportunities for workshops on community development for principals and Boards of Trustees would you see that as valuable in the development process for the new curriculum at your school?

NB 'Partners in Learning: Good Practice' Education Review Office September 2008  
P23/24/25

*Belonging, Connectedness and Self-worth: Building Socially Sustainable Communities Through a School-based Student Support Program* – Dr Lana Zannettino. Journal Of Wellbeing June 2007, Vol.1(1), 1-14.

BoT chairpersons – do you want to interview them for a response to this sort of development??

The above questions could also be reworded so you could use a likert scale for responses ie Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree

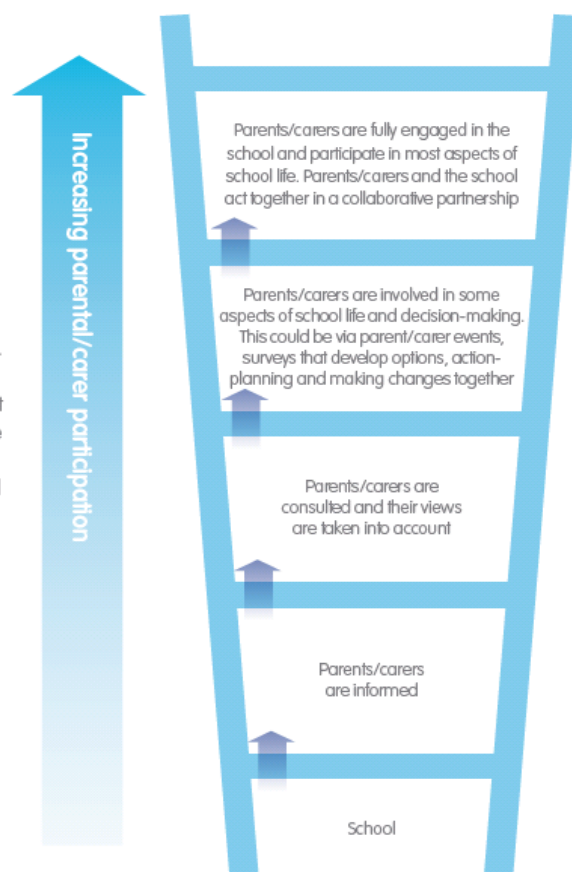
## APPENDIX II

# Ladder of parental/carer participation

Different levels of participation can be represented as a "ladder" (see the diagram opposite) in which each rung represents increased empowerment and shared responsibility. Schools should:

- consider the purpose of participation
- consider the diversity of those involved
- ensure it is representative
- select methods carefully
- provide timely feedback
- make participation interesting and rewarding.

Higher levels of participation and engagement from parents/carers can also include challenge and criticism. The school needs to be prepared for this and to deal with it in a constructive and transparent manner.



Ref: Healthy Schools. Engaging Parents and Carers. Guidance for Schools.

[www.healthyschools.gov.uk](http://www.healthyschools.gov.uk)