

Victorian Parents' Council Submission to the Standing Committee on Education & Vocational Training

Inquiry into Teacher Education

The Victorian Parents' Council, established in 1959, represents the interests of parents of children attending independent and Catholic schools in Victoria.

The VPC believes

- that parents are the primary educators of children
- that education is a collaborative effort between schools and families
- that family-school partnerships are beneficial for all; and
- that children thrive where such relationships exist.

To achieve this end the VPC believes that working with parents and families should be a compulsory unit of pre-service teacher training.

In 1979 the VPC made a submission to a State inquiry into teacher education arguing that "the dedicated, well-educated and well-trained teacher is the most important factor in our children's education". It highlighted the need for compulsory training in working with children with disabilities, identifying learning problems, and the need for better training in "professional technique".

Twenty-five years later these issues are still important, but increasingly we are seeing the recognition of the importance of the role of parents in schools.

Teachers and principals have little professional preparation for developing partnership with parents. US research confirms that one of the most significant challenges to conducting effective teaching programs is the lack of instruction on parent and family involvement that educators and administrators receive in their professional training.

A research synthesis by A Henderson and K Mapp published in 2002 found, inter alia, that

- programs and interventions that engage families in supporting their children's learning at home are linked to student achievement; and
- when programs and initiatives focus on building respectful and trusting relationships among school staff, families and community members, they are more effective in creating and sustaining connections that support student achievement

It went on further to state "the ways parents are involved at school should be linked to improving learning, developing students' skills in specific subjects, and steering students toward more challenging classes. Parent involvement programs should also be designed to develop closer working relationships between families and teachers."

US research also shows that pre-service teacher training on working with parents and families does make an impact. A 1999 study by Katz and Bauch reported that new teachers felt prepared and engaged in a diverse number of parent involvement practices because they had received relevant training. This training included the skills

to promote home-school partnerships, how to handle parent –teacher interviews, how to make home visits, how to deal with difficult parents, and how to effectively use parents as volunteers in the classroom.

Although opportunities may exist to gain such experience once the teacher is in the classroom, if they have already received the training they can enter the new classroom ready to immediately set about creating a relationship with families and therefore improving the educational outcomes of their students.

The VPC would submit that pre-service teacher training must include working with parents and families.

Susan Hughes
Executive Officer
Victorian Parents' Council
Tel: 03 9804 0906
P O Box 647
Hawthorn VIC 3122

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