PARENT PAYMENT POLICY

TRANSPARENCY FRAMEWORK FOR SCHOOLS
TO GO HERE

**Purpose**

The following elements enable increased transparency and accountability for the implementation of the Parent Payment Policy.

* Revised Chart of Accounts
* School level ‘Test of Transparency’ checklist
* Practical tips for schools to engage parents
* Sharing good practice
* Clear payment categories

**Chart of Accounts**

The schools Chart of Accounts was upgraded on 1 January 2016 to enable specific reporting of parent payments across the three categories of Essential Student Learning Items, Optional Items and Voluntary Financial Contributions.

**Engagement with parents when considering the school parent payment charges**

It is important for school communities, parents, key stakeholders and the Department to understand how schools are implementing the Parent Payment Policy at the local level. A simple tool, on which schools report openly, provides a good practice framework on which the policy implementation can be regularly reviewed.

Greater transparency can be achieved if school councils as a matter of course engaged more broadly with their community when developing their parent payment position.

Parents and the broader community play a vital role in supporting successful learning outcomes for children. Research tells us that the most meaningful partnerships are those where schools, parents, students and the community work together to focus on student learning[[1]](#footnote-1).

The [*Framework for Improving Student Outcomes*](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/management/improvement/Pages/FISO.aspx) provides the [*Families as Partners in Learning* dimension](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/management/improvement/Pages/dimension4parents.aspx). This includes case studies and resources for early childhood professionals, school leaders and teachers with information on the importance of family partnerships, strategies from best practice examples of family partnerships and, tools and resources to assist in the development of successful family partnerships.

Open, authentic and purposeful consultation with parents in developing and reviewing the school’s Parent Payment practices as they relate to the school learning program has the ability to leverage good outcomes for schools.

Schools already have processes in place to enable contribution of parents in school decision-making. However, in respect to the implementation of the Parent Payment Policy at school level, there needs to be active engagement and communication with parents to assist them to understand the link between the school’s curriculum and proposed parent payment decisions. As the context of each school is unique, schools choose from a range of strategies to engage families in school decision-making processes. Whatever the particular engagement strategies used by the school, at a minimum they should:

* advise parents of the proposed costs of the learning program
* explain the rationale and guidelines for the proposed costs
* provide opportunities for a diverse range of parents to express their viewpoints, and
* openly address any concerns before a final decision is made.

Outlined below are suggestions for the parent engagement process which includes some strategies and questions for consideration.

* School council to request and encourage community feedback and opinions and to make themselves available for parents.
* Parents are encouraged to interact with the school council by presenting views personally or by signed letters, responding to surveys and involvement in school council subcommittee or group activities.
* Schools to advise parents of the proposed costs of the program and provide the rationale for their approach.
* Parents to be invited to attend and observe the school council meetings when discussing the school’s implementation approach to the Parent Payment Policy.
* Parent perspectives and opinions should be acknowledged and valued and their concerns addressed
* Consider any impacts of proceeding with the proposals that do not have support from most parents in the community if the concerns are related to the level and/or transparency of costs

Some considerations for school councils:

* Is engagement with parents genuine and encouraging open dialogue?
* Are parents aware of the school’s processes in place for the community to be engaged on formal/informal decision-making, reviews and new policies? *How?*
* Has the school considered and developed effective ways to engage with non-English speaking parents and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups? *What are they?*

**Self-assessment Transparency Checklist**

The Framework for Improving Student Outcomes recognises that the greatest impact on student outcomes is the home environment. When schools strengthen relationships with families and community organisations, they can tap into the environment that has the greatest impact on students. There is an expectation that as part of a whole of school approach, a positive school environment is created in which parents are welcomed, respected and valued as partners in their children’s learning.

The following checklist will assist schools in their implementation and compliance with the Parent Payment Policy and enable self-assessment of open and transparent processes and practices. Schools are strongly encouraged to work through the checklist at least annually.

Does your school:

* have a consultation process with parents in respect to the school’s parent payment approach and charges? *What is it?*
* have a clear written process for hardship arrangements? *How is this communicated?*
* communicate the policies and charges to all parents in an accessible and clear way? *What are the strategies for engaging Culturally and Linguistically Diverse parents and families and other hard to reach parents and families?*
* have written material that clearly explains the charges being requested across each of the three categories?
* review and test that the implementation of the policy and charges is well-understood by all parents? *What is the process for review?*
* regularly review its compliance with legislation and Departmental policy? *What is the process for review?*
* report on the activities and projects that Voluntary Financial Contributions have supported and funded? *How is this reported back?*
* give advance notice (and a minimum of 6 weeks before the end of school the year) for parent payment requests for the following year and as much notice as possible for other payment requests arising throughout the year?
* have a nominated contact person(s) for parents to discuss issues and difficulties in making the requested payment?
* provide students with appropriate alternatives if they do not participate in camps, excursions or other activities that school deem to be essential?
* keep details of payment and non-payment confidential?
* treat every student equally regardless of whether parent payments are made and ensure no child is excluded
* ensure necessary reporting to school council is de-identified to ensure that the identity of parents experiencing hardship is kept confidential

School leaders are encouraged to reflect on strategies used to implement good practice in parent payments. School leaders and councils should consider:

What needs to change or improve or adapt? What do we need to help improve our practices?

**Sharing good practice in relation to parent payments**

School councils sometimes have difficulty in accurately estimating what money is actually needed to meet program expectations based on judgment of the capacity and willingness of parents to pay. Most schools strike the right balance but others have very low response rates.

Sharing positive strategies that schools use to encourage and assist parents to contribute, increases awareness of what and how other schools manage their parent payment policies.

Some good practice school initiatives to encourage parent contribution include:

* Flexible parent payment plans that enable payments to be made more progressively and if necessary, payment period and amounts can be renegotiated and varied
* Making payment options available online or in ways that are less onerous for parents
* Consolidating items and services so parents can select a package that they can afford, e.g. for this payment amount you get X, for this additional amount you get X and Y
* establishing strong relationships with local communities and organisations to source supplies at competitive prices
* purchasing second-hand text books from former students to be used as class sets.
1. Campbell, C. “How *to involve hard to reach parents: encouraging meaningful parental involvement with schools*”. National College for School Leadership Autumn 2011 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)