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Chapter 4 Home-School-Community Partnership

4.1 Introduction

Parents have a unique knowledge and understanding of their children, being their first and most influential educators. Home-school cooperation is thus important to the educational outcome of children. Much research has concluded that active parental communication with schools is one of the key variables associated with school effectiveness. The more effective involvement the parents are with their children's schooling, the more the children are likely to do well. To keep in pace with the educational development and strengthen the sense of responsibilities of the younger generation, both parents and teachers need to acquire and improve their skills in working with one another.

Schools should take the initiative to enhance home-school cooperation and communicate with parents. With their initiation, this would assist in deepening home-school cooperation. The school can serve the community through the provision of multi-learning experiences for students' whole person development. The active participation of the school head and staff in community activities will foster stronger ties with the community, which will bring about positive image for the school concerned.

An effective home-school-community partnership will allow schools to tap more fully into the resources of other stakeholders in the community in order to enrich the quality of education offered. Furthermore, it will facilitate better co-ordination of these resources for the promotion of students' development in their life-long learning.

4.2 Roles and responsibilities of parents

In the belief that strengthening the roles and responsibilities of parents will enhance home-school cooperation, the following paragraphs give an overview of the roles and responsibilities of parents

1. As partners of the school, parents' roles should include:

- a. playing an active role in the education of their children;
- b. understanding the learning and development of their children;
- c. showing an active interest in their children's schooling;
- d. participating in activities related to the education of their children;
- e. co-operating with the school and other parents in the interests of their children's education;
- f. understanding the school vision and mission and playing an active role in communicating with schools;
- g. be supportive to school's implementation of educationally desirable policies;
- h. be aware of their rights and responsibilities in relation to the education of their children and to become school's assets for the school's smooth operation; and
- i. providing opinions and suggestions for school improvement.

2. As clients of the school, the responsibilities of parents should include:

- a. understanding the learning process of their children;
- b. understanding the operation of the school;
- c. appreciating the child's performance at school;
- d. understanding the assessment mechanism of the school; and
- e. exploring other matters related to the educational development of their children

3. As decision-makers of the school, parents should:

- a. vote in or stand for the election of parent managers on the SMC; and
- b. put forward views about what the school is doing and make suggestions on how it should be run.

4. As home-educators, parents should:

- a. provide basic care and guidance towards the good behaviour and habits for the whole person development of their children; and
- b. keep school staff informed of their children's progress and significant events that may affect their children's learning.

4.3 Home-School partnership

4.3.1 Policy and opportunities for parental participation

1. To develop a home-school cooperation policy

Schools should develop their own policy to promote the role of parents in school affairs, including parental participation in decision-making. An open and inviting school atmosphere will certainly encourage parents to participate in the school's affairs and help foster mutual trust. In drawing up the policy, the SMC has to consider the needs of the students and build on the strengths of the school.

2. To provide opportunities for parental participation

There are sundry ways of involving parents in the education of their children on a regular or ad hoc basis. Common practices that involve them in the day-to-day school work include:

- a. assisting students with their class activities;
- b. adjudicating in student competitions;
- c. helping in school functions/ ceremonies;
- d. coaching for extra-curricular activities; and
- e. assisting in the preparation of teaching aids and other non-teaching tasks.

Schools may also invite parents to serve on school committees, in particular those relating to student affairs, such as school bus committees, student discipline committees, tuckshop committees and fund-raising committees. Such involvement allows parents to join hands with teachers in contributing their ideas, experience and resources for improving school operations.

Parents can also serve on the SMC as managers to raise their concerns and give advice on the education that students receive. Partnership with parents in school governance will provide management with wider perspectives and better knowledge when making decisions.

The spirit of SBM is thus realized through the broadening involvement of key stakeholders (including parents and the community) in school education. In particular, the process of decentralization from EDB to SMCs and SMCs in turn sharing this decision-making power with other key stakeholders will harness the support of the community for bottom-up initiatives pertinent to the needs of individual schools.

4.3.2 Means of effective communication

It is important that there are channels for two-way communication between schools and parents. The following are some examples:

1. To develop a climate and setting conducive to home-school cooperation

Schools should instill a warm atmosphere to encourage parents to visit and attend school functions. Parents should be made to feel that their presence is welcome and their involvement appreciated. In interviews related to children's problems, there should be sensitivity to parents' feelings and respect for their points of view. Moreover, schools should take care to protect the privacy of students and parents. Suitable rooms can be arranged for interviews and meetings. Space permitting, schools may also consider designating an activity room/ meeting area to conduct various home-school activities. Such moves will build up the goodwill which is a prerequisite for effective home-school partnership.

2. To facilitate the communication between parents and school personnel

To a large extent, the quality of home-school cooperation hinges on teachers and staff having active contacts with parents. The school personnel should be trained and encouraged to enhance communication with parents whole-heartedly to establish an ambience in school with mutual appreciation and respect.

3. To set up a parents' network and a Parent Teacher Association (PTA)

- a. Another useful idea is for the school/ class teacher to build up a network for parents so that the problems related to children's development can be solved through support and help among themselves. The parents' network will also help the school to promulgate the principles underlying their policies and gain direct access to parents' views.
- b. Parents may also be encouraged to form small groups for experience-sharing on parenting and guidance to students.
- c. On a more formal level, the establishment of a PTA serves as an official channel for communication between the school and parents, for example in the formulation of school policies. Parent representatives will be elected from members of the PTA to serve as managers on the SMC. For information regarding the setting up of a PTA, please visit the [“Committee on Home-School Co-operation” website](#).
- d. Furthermore, parents' network can be extended to the community through active participation in the programmes organized by the FPTAs so that they can learn and support each other. For relevant information, please visit the [“Committee on Home-School Co-operation” website](#).

4. To keep parents well informed

- a. A more transparent and accountable management means better school management. Hence, schools should provide parents with regular up-to-date school information, including curriculum matters and major school development items. Difficulties

encountered when implementing various initiatives should be adequately communicated so that parents may render support.

b. The information can be disseminated through newsletters, parents' meetings and the school's homepage on the Internet. A list of school information and documents to be provided for parents is suggested as follows:

- School Development Plan, Annual School Plan and School Report
- Procedures for dealing with student matters (typhoon and heavy rain, traffic arrangements in bad weather, school rules, reward/ punishment system, sick leave reporting system, channels/ arrangements for parent-school communication)
- School calendar and holiday list
- A statement of school fees, and scholarship schemes if any. A list of all other approved collections
- A financial statement (at the end of the school year) of the expenses related to collections for specific purposes and also every incident of fund-raising activities for school purposes
- Means of communication between schools and parents
- Other relevant information e.g. information on schools' current development can be retrieved from the "Profiles of Kindergartens and Kindergarten cum Child Care Centres". "Primary School Profiles", "Secondary School Profiles" and "Special School Profiles". Schools are held responsible for the information they provided in the school profiles. These profiles can be retrieved from the "[Committee on Home-School Co-operation](#)" website.

c. It is also a common practice for schools to publish school brochures for parents and the public. The following are the suggested items to be included in the brochures:

- School history, motto/ mission, etc.
- Enrolment
- Class organization
- Teacher - student ratio
- Profile of the teaching staff (including qualifications and experience)
- Admission policy and application procedures
- Curriculum policies
- Time-tabling arrangements (including the summer timetable or examination arrangements)
- Homework policy
- Medium of instruction
- Extra-curricular activities
- School facilities

- Long-term plan and brief summary of the annual school plan for the following year, highlighting the major concerns of the year and the arrangements to achieve the school goals (Please note that the ASP in full should be available on the School's website.)
- Activities of school's PTA or matters in relation to home-school cooperation
- Other distinctive features

4.3.3 Parent education programmes

Schools or the PTA may organise parent education programmes with the help of social workers, counselors, the community and relevant government departments. Due emphasis should be placed on parenting and communication skills. Not only will this enrich parents' knowledge and skills, they will also be more confident and have a wider perspective when they have a thorough understanding on school/ educational matters. In organising parent education programmes, schools may, apart from deploying the school resources, apply for the Home-School Cooperation Project Grants, the Quality Education Fund, and collaborate with non-government organisations.

4.4 Strategies for handling complaints

Parents and members of the community may have diverging views on school policies or criticisms relating to the performance of individual staff. It is desirable that all views and criticisms, whether lodged orally or in writing, anonymous or otherwise, be dealt with at an early stage lest the situation should escalate. These cases should be handled with care and sensitivity. The SMC should look into all complaints against staff and school administration and take appropriate follow-up actions afterwards.

4.4.1 Guidelines on handling complaints

1. Set up clear and efficient complaint handling procedures

- a. There should be clear procedures that are
 - simple to operate, with clearly defined stages of investigation and responsibilities;
 - efficient, offering expeditious action and resolution within pre-determined or pledged time limits;
 - objective and free from undue influence or interference; and
 - confidential so as to protect the privacy of the personnel concerned, including the complainant.
- b. The SMC should formulate these procedures in consultation with teachers and parents so that they are acceptable to all parties concerned. All procedures so formulated should be made known to and understood by all parents and members of staff.

2. Assign suitable post(s) to deal with complaints

- a. Suitable person(s) should be assigned to deal with complaints. All staff are required to report complaints to the assigned person(s). Depending on the nature and implications of the complaint, the SMC or its authorized team (not a single person) will deal with it.
- b. To avoid possible conflict of interest, any staff member who is the subject of a particular complaint should not handle the case concerned, supervise the investigation, or sign any correspondence to be directed to the complainant.
- c. Where a complaint involves persons known in their private capacity to a staff member responsible for handling the case, or concerns matters in which the staff member has a vested interest, he/ she should declare interest. If a case of conflict or potential conflict of interest is established, the staff member concerned should be denied further access to any information relating to that complaint.

3. Respond to the complainants readily

The school should respond promptly to complaints. In the case of a complaint reported in the mass media, the school should respond to both the complainant and the media expeditiously. Para. 4.4.2 gives schools more suggestions on how to deal with

situations when complaints are reported by the media. Complainants should be advised of the person to contact if they would like to enquire about the progress of the investigation. When it is anticipated that the investigation cannot be completed within a short time, an interim reply reporting the progress made should be issued to the complainant. After the investigation, the complainant should be informed of the result as soon as possible, including the remedial actions taken and/ or to be introduced.

4. Make referral whenever necessary

When there is suspicion of corruption or other criminal offence, the SMC should refer the case to the ICAC or police for further investigation.

5. Solicit suggestions from the complainants

The complainants should be encouraged to suggest ways for improvement. If the problem has been fully discussed in a positive way, both the school and the complainant will have a better understanding of each other, thus inculcating a culture of collaboration.

6. Keep confidentiality for all complaint cases

All complaints should be dealt with in the strictest confidence. Information should be confined to those person(s) responsible for the investigation. The investigator(s) should avoid disclosing any information to other members of the school or even their spouse.

7. Document the information properly

Complaints are valuable pieces of information for reflection and review of existing policies and practices. As such, they should be recorded properly for future reference when deliberating on improvement or preventive measures. The SMC should maintain a register of complaints, monitor progress and enquire about outstanding cases at appropriate intervals. Upon closure of a particular case, a concise report containing the findings, recommendations and follow-up actions (if any) should be filed in the school complaint register.

8. Provide a channel for appeal

The complainant has the right to appeal to the SMC if he/ she is not satisfied with the result of the investigation. However, he/ she should be prepared to provide solid reason(s) and documentary support.

4.4.2 Dealing with the media and public bodies

Complainants may sometimes approach the media or public bodies for assistance. When the complaint is reported in the media or referred by outside bodies such as the ICAC and the Consumer Council, the situation will be more complex. The SMC must stay calm and exercise tact lest the case should have a detrimental effect on the school's image. The following paragraphs outline some hints for schools and many of the principles in Para. 4.4.1 are also relevant:

1. Credibility

Preferably, such incidents are to be handled by the SMC direct. Should the SMC decide to delegate school staff to handle the investigation, the authorized team should comprise senior management staff. Lay members or parent representatives may also be invited so as to gain public confidence.

2. Communication

- a. The investigation team may arrange meeting(s) to discuss matters with the complainants or their representatives or the referring party, so as to obtain a clear picture of what the complaint is about in the first instance.
- b. The SMC should make sure that all staff are fully informed of the incident and watch out for the spread of negative feelings among the staff.

3. Support

The SMC may consider seeking third party support on professional issues, for instance, psychologists and solicitors.

4. Good public relations practices

- a. To ensure consistency in the messages conveyed, there should be a spokesperson for the school authority to answer the public or mass media. This person must be in the full picture regarding the case and familiar with the school's policies and operation.
- b. The school should give a quick response to the public about the complaint, that is, the school may announce what actions it has taken or the preliminary investigation results within one or two days.
- c. The SMC should decide on further actions, such as arranging press releases, or giving the complainant or referring party interim replies at appropriate intervals in the course of the investigation.
- d. In giving information to the press, the SMC should consider whether there will be any legal implications. The information should be clear and to the point. The SMC should observe the relevant provisions in the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance and ensure that the information so released is, to the best of its knowledge, correct and unbiased.

5. Review

Upon the completion of a case, the SMC should evaluate the whole matter, in particular the public relations strategy employed. Conclusions should be drawn from the incident so that improvement may be made in ways to tackle similar complaints in future. All such incidents, including the evaluation, should be recorded.

4.5 District and community resources

4.5.1 Regional Education Offices

Four Regional Education Offices (REOs) provide comprehensive and integrated services to schools and the public. The REO positions itself to take a lead in education development in its region. It is responsible for, and responsive to, the needs of students, teachers, schools and other stakeholders it serves. The main duties of REOs are as follows:

1. enhancing school development;
2. networking teachers/ schools at the district level for dissemination of good practices and experience-sharing with a view to promoting quality education;
3. implementing education policies;
4. overseeing the quality of education in schools and providing professional support to schools on administration matters as well as learning and teaching;
5. handling matters relating to closure and reprovisioning of schools;
6. regulating kindergartens and other private schools; and
7. providing other services, including handling public enquiries and complaints, providing placement services to students in need, etc.

4.5.2 Government departments

A number of government departments provide resources and support for district-based activities regarding youth work, family services and health issues.

1. Home Affairs Bureau

a. The Commission on Youth

[The Commission on Youth](#) encourages better cooperation between Government departments, voluntary agencies, district organisations and private organisations involved in youth service provision.

b. Family Council

The Family Council is an advisory body to the Government. The Council actively promotes family core values, namely "love and care", "respect and responsibility" and "communication and harmony". The attainment of these core values will help foster greater harmony among families and the community. Establishing the "Happy Family Info Hub" helps to promote a culture of loving families. It provides links to a wide array of family-related information.

2. The Hong Kong Police Force

School Liaison Programme

The Hong Kong Police Force first introduced a school liaison programme in 1974. Currently, there are 34 School Liaison Officers and 51 School Liaison Officers (Secondary) under the [Police School Liaison Programme \(Chinese only\)](#). Objectives are as follows:

- a. to establish a good relationship between the police and the school community - children, teachers and parents;
- b. on the basis of this relationship, to give school children an understanding of the role of the police and a respect for law and order;
- c. to make school children aware of various dangers which they may encounter, such as the dangers of involvement in crime, drug abuse, triad association, hooliganism, sexual temptations and abuse and road traffic etc.;
- d. to alert school children and school authorities to the need for crime prevention in all its aspects;
- e. to instil a sense of discipline and positive values in school children at risk through group or individual discussions with them;
- f. to refer suitable cases to the relevant multi-agency programme for follow-up action, in consultation with the social workers, school management and parents; and
- g. to act as the focal point of contact on behalf of the Police Community Relations Officer between local Police and the District Social Welfare Office as well as the school management.

Roles of School Liaison Officers and School Liaison Officers (Secondary) include:

- a. advise school management on the enforcement of the law in regard to unruly behaviour of students in the school;
- b. conduct group/ individual discussion with school children at risk to instil a sense of discipline and positive values in them;
- c. after discussion with the school management and parents, refer suitable cases to the relevant multi-agency programme for follow-up action; and
- d. give lectures on crime related topics including drugs, triad and other relevant issues to strengthen students' awareness in various crimes with a view to preventing them from falling into preys of bad elements.

3. Independent Commission Against Corruption

a. Services provided by Community Relations Department

- produces multi-media moral education packages for schools which dovetail with the curriculum;

- launches a “[Moral Education Web](#)” to facilitate teachers’ access to moral education resources produced by the ICAC and sharing of experience in promoting positive values among pupils;
- organises learning projects for students on the importance of upholding positive values;
- produces cartoons embedded with anti-corruption messages for students;
- conducts talks for graduating students in secondary and vocational schools as well as universities;
- joins hands with other organisations in organising different programmes to promote positive values and work ethics amongst the youth;
- operates a youth website “[Teensland](#)” and a children's website “[Kidsland](#)” that inculcate positive values in the younger generation.

b. Services provided by Corruption Prevention Department

- provide free and confidential corruption prevention advisory services to schools;
- develop best practice checklists to help schools strengthen their governance structure and inject appropriate internal control measures in their daily operations.

4. Department of Health

The Department of Health safeguards the health of the community through promotive, preventive, curative and rehabilitative services. For more information, please visit the following websites:

- “[Department of Health](#)”
- “[Centre for Health Protection](#)”
- “[EatSmart Thematic Website](#)”
- “[Central Health Education Unit](#)”
- “[School Dental Service](#)”
- “[Student Health Service](#)”

5. Social Welfare Department

- a. The Social Welfare Department, through subvented Non-governmental Organizations, provide a continuum of preventive, developmental and remedial welfare services to young people aged 6 to 24 years old to address the multifarious and changing needs of young people in a holistic, integrated mode of service.
- b. The Social Welfare Department has also developed a comprehensive network of welfare services to cater for family needs through the provision of a continuum of preventive, supportive and remedial services with objectives to preserve and strengthen family as a unit, to develop caring interpersonal relationships, to enable individuals and family members to prevent personal and family problems and to

provide suitable services to meet needs that cannot be adequately met within the family.

- c. For details of youth work and family services, please refer to the [“Services for Young People”](#) and [“Family and Child Welfare”](#) webpages of the Social Welfare Department.

6. Environmental Protection Department

a. Hong Kong Green School Award (HKGSA)

- The Environmental Campaign Committee (ECC), the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) and the Education Bureau (EDB) have jointly organized the HKGSA since 2000. The Scheme is divided into Pre-school, Primary School and Secondary School Categories.
- HKGSA aims to encourage schools to formulate a school environmental policy and implement an environmental management plan towards a green school, enhance environmental awareness, develop environmentally-friendly attitude and promote green practices among school managers, teachers, non-teaching staff, students and their families.
- The assessment criteria for the Primary School and Secondary School Categories are Environmental Policy and Campus Environment, Environmental Management Measures, Environmental Education Plan and Implementation, and Environmental Education Effectiveness.
- For details, please refer to the [“ECC” website](#).

b. Student Environmental Protection Ambassador Scheme (SEPAS)

- The ECC, the EPD and the EDB have jointly organized the SEPAS since 1995 for all primary and secondary schools.
- SEPAS aims to develop in students a sense of responsibility towards the environment, nurture leadership among them and encourage them to take positive initiatives in improving the environment.
- The ECC provides Student Environmental Protection Ambassadors (SEPAs) with Basic Environmental Badge (BEB) and Specific Environmental Badge training to enable them to acquire basic environmental knowledge and skills, and in-depth knowledge on specific environmental topics respectively.
- With a “train-the-trainer” approach, training for the BEB Assessment is organized for teachers to train them to be Qualified Assessors of the BEB for their SEPAs.
- For details, please refer to the [“ECC” website](#).

c. Environment and Conservation Fund

- The Environment and Conservation Fund (ECF) provides funding support to schools for the installation of green features such as green roof, renewable energy facilities and energy efficient devices at their school campuses.
- These minor works projects aim to demonstrate and promote energy efficiency and environmental education.
- The minor works projects are vetted by the Environmental Education and Community Action Projects Vetting Subcommittee.
- For details, please refer to the [“ECF” website](#).

d. Environmental Resource Centres

- The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) has established 5 Environmental Resource Centres in Hong Kong as well as a mobile centre:
 - Fanling Environmental Resource Centre
 - Tsuen Wan Environmental Resource Centre
 - Wan Chai Environmental Resource Centre
 - Lung Fu Shan Environmental Education Centre
 - Kennedy Town Environmental Exhibition Centre,
 - a mobile centre that visits various districts
- All six centres offer a variety of educational displays, information and activities, each with its own special attractions for public, schools and organisations to visit and partake in.
- The services provided by the centres are mainly as follows:
 - Guided visit of centre (Indoor and Outdoor)
 - Educational programme and workshop
 - Internet service
 - Loan service for education kits
- For details, please refer to the [“EPD” website](#).

7. Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority

- a. Joins hands with other government departments and voluntary organisations in organising public education programmes to protect youngsters and children from the harmful effects of indecent and obscene articles. Major activities organised include:
- a Meritorious Website Contest to promote safe and smart use of the Internet;

- a mock-up news reporting programme jointly organised with RTHK to help students understand the Control of Obscene and Indecent Articles Ordinance (COIAO);
 - an Internet video contest to promote the healthy use of the Internet among youngsters; and
 - a student ambassador training scheme to recruit students to help promote the COIAO.
- b. Conducts about 200 student talks and 100 parental workshops each year to promote the safe use of the Internet, including the use of filtering software and the distribution of free filtering software to parent participants.

4.5.3 Non-government organisations

1. The personnel of the Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), mostly professionals in various fields, may have served the district for a long period of time. Their services will complement the educational services in the community. Schools may consider working with the local NGOs in planning school activities on civic education and social services.
2. Schools and NGOs working in collaboration can avoid duplication of effort and teachers can, as a result, spend more time on the area of teaching and learning. In participating in programmes organised by NGOs, schools may establish better relations with the community. Their active participation in community activities will enhance the image of the school, thereby gaining better community support.