Pune, India

PCMC English Medium School, Bopkhel

Seeing parents as partners in children's holistic development

WORLD'S BEST SCHOOL
Community Collaboration

FUNDAÇÃO Lemann

WORLD'S BEST SCHOOL PRIZES

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Introduction

PCMC English Medium School, Bopkhel, in Pune, India, has created a cultural dynamic centred on close ties with the community, and partnering with parents to help students develop holistically.

Profile:

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Country:
India

Region:
Pune

School type:
Public school

Location area:
Town

Student population:
201 to 325

Prize Category:
Community Collaboration

"Our mission is to impact the lives of children from low-income communities, helping them to maximize their potential and change their lives."

— Sushma Pathare, Headmistress, PCMC English Medium School, Bopkhel

In-depth look

CONTEXT AND CHALLENGE

PCMC English Medium School stands in a small, remote village in Bopkhel, India, and is run as a Public Private Partnership (PPP) between the Akanksha Foundation NGO and the local government. Most of its students come from low-income families, where many parents dismiss the importance of education due to a greater need to earn a living.

One of the school's mantras is 'Parents as partners', which has helped guide the school's focus on improving its students' learning environment. Knowing that parents have a profound impact on children's learning, the school makes home visits to better understand the home environments,

build strong relationships with parents, and impress upon them the importance of education.

The school also focuses on developing the necessary skills to navigate and succeed in the 21st century. The Akanksha Foundation's values of 'Be the Change' have prompted the school to exemplify such behaviour in their work, for example in the strength of their community outreach.

Because many within the wider community have low incomes and schooling, the school has faced challenges in getting families involved with its initiatives.

In some cases, parents felt ill-equipped to help their children, either because of their own lack of education or by overlooking their children's social, emotional, and basic health needs.

The school's rural location also raised some issues, such as lack of internet access, and there were problems with dropout rates and domestic violence.

"Skill building with the parents was a challenge," said Priyanka Netake, a teacher at PCMC English Medium School, "and so was building capacity with the parents." At times, the faculty had to take on extra responsibilities to engage with parents and teach them new skills – even something as small as learning how to use a new device.

"If the priority is not education for parents, how are we going to convince parents to take interest in the studies of the child?"

Priyanka Netake, Teacher, PCMC English Medium School, Bopkhel
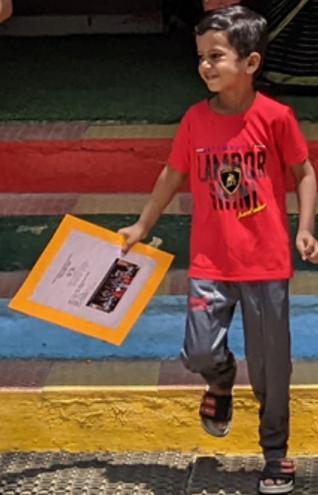
EXPERTISE AND APPROACH

To address these issues, the school implemented a number of initiatives to give parents the tools and skills to holistically support their children. The hope was that students' families would be able to build better lives for themselves while giving parents more ownership in their children's education. "We keep the child at the centre and whatever decisions we make," said Sushma Pathare, the school's Headmistress. "Whatever goals we set, it always keeps the child at the centre – it's a whole child approach: not just the child but the whole family, the safety and wellbeing of the family."

Some examples of these decisions and initiatives include working with local doctors, grocers, and religious leaders to help create programmes that help families in financial need, supporting them with free medical check-ups and 'Master Chef' style cooking classes to teach about healthy and balanced diets. At the same time, students receive a weekly meal plan and take part in an initiative of eating fruit daily to keep them on track for their healthy diet goals, which has had an impact at home, too, where parents have started to follow the same nutrition plan.

To work on the emotional needs of its students and their families, the school created a School Management Committee (SMC), where members focused on teaching parents how to help their children study, as well as how to support their social and emotional learning. These SMC team members and counsellors scheduled meetings and offered parents therapy for any background or finance-related distress. They also got a better sense of the home environments, and overall contexts, and gathered information on how to improve holistic development. These visits helped in building positive relationships with the families.

In their monthly meetings with parents, the school covered topics from skill building – such as how to improve parenting skills or social and emotional learning – to financial advice and training, like introducing them to government schemes, and providing entrepreneurial guidance. The idea is to give parents the opportunity to eventually become educators themselves.

OUTCOMES AND RESULTS

For some parents, these schemes have worked to great effect, allowing them to become emotionally stable enough to help support not only their own children but others as well. The programmes have ultimately helped create a more vibrant and tight-knit community.

In essence, the school learned that parents – as stakeholders – can play a critical role in developing stronger and healthier relationships across the entire student population, both at school and at home. Parents became a powerful voice in how the school shaped its educational practices. This collaborative leadership also brought out positive change in the wider community's attitudes towards public health.

Parents have now formed committees that provide families with a voice but also focus on involving the community as a whole to plan

celebrations, creating a sense of equality and inclusiveness. This has also turned the community into a learning hub, where people can learn to use different forms of technology, creating a greater connection with the outside world.

Key Steps
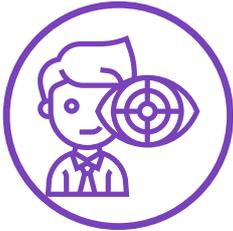
GOAL AND VISION

The school felt it was important to create a list of goals and have a clear understanding of what vision it wanted to achieve. The goals gave stakeholders clarity on the direction the school was taking, and how their programmes would benefit the wider community. Everyone involved referred to the outlined vision while prioritising or finalising any systems and structures.

The clear goals were also useful in explaining the school's proposed initiatives while collaborating with parents. They helped the school build a better rapport and got the parents' buy-in.

COMMUNICATION AND ROLE CLARITY

The next step was to communicate and explain the purpose and reason behind each goal to all stakeholders, collectively and through one-on-one talks or sessions. Understanding the "what", "why", "how", and "by when" behind each goal helped everyone see the reality behind the ideas and put thoughts into action.

IDENTIFYING STRENGTHS AND BUILDING CAPACITY

To ensure a smooth collaboration, it was important to identify each team member's strengths and make them clear to the entire team. The school created spaces, like meetings and check-in calls, in which members could speak freely. The school believed it was important to have everyone on the same page in order to reach its goals.

IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM TOGETHER

Once the team and stakeholders knew and understood the goals and the overall vision, the next step was to work together to review the work the school was doing. The school anticipated that the team would encounter several challenges in its work and wanted the wider community and faculty to help identify the core problem the school needed to address. This was how they identified the main question of "How can we provide continuity in learning for our children?"

CLEAR EXPECTATIONS AND SMALL STEPS

To reinforce their expectations, the school held regular, monthly meetings with parents and different stakeholders. There were also weekly and fortnightly parent classes on how to support children in academics, what kind of resources the parents could use, and whether those resources were easily available and affordable for parents.

Teachers and counsellors also facilitated Parent/Teacher "student" meetings to set expectations on routines and to extend socio-emotional support. In this way, the school and parents took small steps together towards the goal of continuity of learning.

BUILDING A STRONG BOND WITH THE COMMUNITY

As a foundation, and to ensure safety, trust, and equality, the school focused on building a strong "trusted relationship between the school and the wider community". To do so, the school created different routines like weekly home visits and well-being calls. These made parents feel included and ultimately brought the school, teachers, parents, and community closer.

The school also introduced the socio-emotional learning (SEL) approach, which helped parents manage their own emotions and their behaviour towards their children.

A SPIRIT OF CONTINUOUS LEARNING

Teachers are encouraged to stay abreast of the latest technology and pedagogies in order to deliver the best learning experiences for students. The school also took a similar approach to parents, asking them what it was their child (or children) could learn that they (the parents) could not. By doing this, it became easier to boost the parents' confidence and heighten their engagement in their child's learning.

Parents showed readiness and a continuous learning spirit – they learned how to better use technology and began collaborating with their children to enhance their learning as well, in preparing their child for presentations, for example, or co-creating projects to strengthen the student's conceptual understanding.
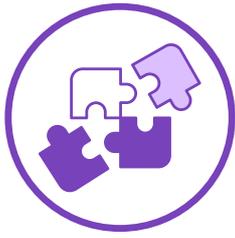
INCLUSIVE APPROACH

The next step was to create a culture of inclusion that endorsed everyone's talent and skill set. Creating an open space also allowed faculty to learn from each other and improve their educational practices. Parents also took part in conversations about the school's teaching practices and social initiatives so they could contribute and shape the discussion.

IMPROVE AND SCALE-UP POLICIES

To better provide a holistic educational model for students, the school outlined three "key buckets" – a type of forum for parents to provide feedback. These three key buckets were Academic Achievement, Socio-Emotional Learning, and Community Engagement. Taking the feedback on these three topics, the school then used the information to shape its policies and help guide faculty to make realistic decisions.

Advice and Guidance

The parents are the "pillars" that will ultimately engage with and impact how the child is nurtured, as well as the direction of their education. It is therefore important the school or institution focus on collaborating closely with parents and other community members. Equally critical is believing that parents are partners and that they have untapped potential that could be leveraged to the benefit of the student's holistic development.

More information

Watch this school's video