

school



Mere and Semisi were a little nervous to begin with – it was their first parent-teacher night. Neither parent had been involved in the school much before. This time when they got the note about the parent-teacher meeting they decided to make appointments to speak to some of their daughter Losana's teachers. It all turned out okay. The English teacher said Losana was beginning to take part more in class discussions and the maths teacher said her marks were improving. Both Mere and Semisi felt proud.

Why school is good for our kids

As Pacific parents, most of us came to Australia with the aim of providing our kids with greater opportunities and a better future. We know that for them, education will be vital to getting a good job and gaining financial security. It's tough here for kids who leave school before the end of Year 10. The ones who complete secondary schooling and go on to TAFE or university studies have a real advantage. They're more likely to find a well-paying job. And, one day, they are more likely to be the people speaking out for our community.

For many Pacific parents it was different, and education was not so important when we were growing up.

The challenge for Pacific parents now is to help our kids get the most from their education – from their first day at kindy and beyond. With our support, kids will take to learning more easily, grow more confident at school and be happier. To support them, we need to get involved, even though in our culture parents do not traditionally play an active part in formal education.

The early years

The early years at school matter because they set the foundation for later learning success. Starting school can be a bit scary. But children from our community, who don't speak English at home or who are learning English at school, face extra difficulties in joining in classroom and playground activities.

You can help by:

- showing them where they will be going to school before their first day
- going along to the school open day for new students
- asking them how school was each day – whether they are getting on with the teacher and making friends
- finding time to tell stories and read to them
- if work and other responsibilities allow, volunteer to help the teacher in the classroom. Schools are always looking for parents to help out and get involved
- Be positive. If you have a positive attitude toward education, it will rub off on your kids.

As kids progress

There are lots of changes as our kids move from infants to primary school. Then there is a big change when they start high school where the teachers, the environment and many of the other students will be unfamiliar. At high school there are also new subjects to study. Sometimes these changes can worry our kids. At times they might lose interest and not want to go to school.

As parents, we need to stay positive about and interested in their education. There are some practical things we can do:

- find out about the school and any after-school activities or programs for parents. Under the NSW Youth Partnership with Pacific Communities, some schools in Sydney city, and in the south west and western suburbs, run specific programs for Pacific students and their parents
- make sure your kids go to school each school day. NSW law requires children aged 6 to 15 years to go to school
- check that your kids have the right books and sports gear to match their daily school timetable so they can fully participate in school activities
- keep tabs on whether your children are doing their homework
- get to know the teachers. The NSW public education system encourages parents to work in partnership with teachers. If you have concerns about your kids' education, make an appointment to speak to their teacher. All schools organise parent-teacher nights which are a good chance to meet the teachers

- attend parent information evenings at the school, for example, on the subject choices available in senior high school
- read all your kids' school report cards.

Being part of the school community

Parents are welcome in NSW public schools and can have a say in decisions on how schools are run through bodies like school councils. Most schools have a Parents and Citizens Association (P&C) that meets regularly to work on improving facilities at the school. By attending association meetings, you can meet other parents and share information.

You can also be involved on a different level through volunteering to help out at the school canteen, school sports events or working bees.

In addition, several Sydney high schools with large numbers of Pacific students have employed liaison officers. Their job is to support and encourage parents to be more involved in schools.

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Helping our teenagers in high school

We all want our kids to do as well as possible in high school. Good results will open doors to further study and better jobs. But how can we support them, especially when what they're learning may be hard for us to understand?

Simple things you can do include:

- help your kids find out about jobs that match their interests and abilities. The careers advisor at school is a good source of information. When kids have a clearer idea of what they want to do with their life, they can choose the right subjects at school and focus on reaching a goal
- encourage your kids to develop a study routine so they get used to putting aside time in the evening for revision and homework. You need to make sure they have a quiet place to study either in the home or the local library
- if a subject is causing your child problems, talk to their teacher
- make sure your children eat well, get daily exercise and have enough sleep. If they refresh their bodies and minds, concentrating on school work will be easier
- keep providing encouraging words to your children!