

Case Study: Glenroy College

Family-School Partnerships Framework

A guide for schools and families

Glenroy College is a small co-educational school in north Melbourne, with a diverse population comprising more than 40 nationalities, including a high proportion of students with English as an additional language and an increasing number of students with refugee status.

Glenroy College values its diversity and strongly believes all its students can achieve to a high standard.

Project snapshot

Glenroy College introduced initiatives to strengthen family-school partnerships and links with community agencies with the aim of improving student outcomes including reading, numeracy and attendance and a focus on students at risk of disengaging from school.

These initiatives link to five of the key dimensions in the *Family-School Partnerships Framework*:

- ✓ Communicate
- ✓ Connect learning at home and at school
- ✓ Recognise the role of the family
- ✓ Collaborate beyond school
- ✓ Participate

Project overview

The project aimed to build stronger relationships with families of students identified as at risk of disengaging from school with the support of an Engagement Project Officer.

The Engagement Project Officer started working with 47 students and their families by:

- communicating regularly to build strong relationships
- providing one-on-one counselling for students
- working with teachers, welfare staff and the careers coordinator to identify appropriate pathways for students
- working with school staff to build an understanding of issues affecting students and their families to improve home-school communication
- liaising with a wide range of community agencies and linking families with services where needed.

The project was overseen by a School Community Action Team, which included representatives from community agencies.

Students

Most of the 47 students were in Year 7 at the start of the project. Due to a range of issues—including the high mobility of many families—there were two cohorts:

- the long-term cohort of five students who worked with the Engagement Project Officer for at least two years
- the short-term cohort of ten students who worked with the Engagement Project Officer for one year.

The remaining students either moved away or transitioned to another education or other setting during the project.

Evidence base

This project was informed by a 2008 literature review by Melbourne University (Lamb & Dulfer) which identified 36 factors for disengagement, ranging from school absences and poor academic achievement to personal attributes and family culture. The Engagement Project Officer's work was estimated to have a direct influence on at least 25 of these factors.

The project was also informed by research undertaken by the Inner North Local Learning and Employment Network, which showed many young people aged under 16 years in the City of Moreland had poor school attendance, with the majority of the young people disengaged from school in the 14–15 age group, and some as young as 11 years old. The research also found that due to data collection and privacy issues, the extent of disengagement was 'hidden from public view'.

Project outcomes

Throughout the project, data and evidence was collected to measure the impact of the Engagement Project Officer on student outcomes.

Outcomes were measured using student attendance, English, mathematics and NAPLAN data, as well as teacher feedback and other sources.

Both the long-term and short-term cohorts showed improvements in reading, numeracy and attendance.

Traditionally, results for students at risk of disengaging from education are expected to decrease over time, so this improvement highlights the importance and impact of the assistance provided by the Engagement Project Officer.

The following overall growth is based on a small cohort.

Reading

- Long-term cohort: 1.48% increase over two years. Short-term cohort: 2.43% increase over one year.

Numeracy

- Long-term cohort: 2.04% increase over two years. Short-term cohort: 0.53% increase over one year.

Attendance

- Long-term cohort: 5.5% increase over two years. Short-term cohort: 2.6% increase over 15 months.

Additional outcomes

Other outcomes included:

- stronger links with primary schools and a positive impact on younger siblings
- stronger links with community agencies and a more coordinated approach to supporting families
- support for students and families through the transition to another school, alternative education setting or employment pathway
- strong interest in the project from other schools.

Challenges

Many of the families had negative experiences with schools and agencies in the past and were wary about future engagement. Many also experienced a range of challenges including financial difficulties, family violence, substance abuse and mental health issues.

In addition, there was a low level of family engagement at the school, with previous engagement initiatives having mixed results.

Inconsistent school attendance by students also minimised the impact of intervention and made it difficult to track progress.

Achieving a coordinated approach with other support agencies was challenging when families, schools and support workers had expectations that were not clearly defined.

The high mobility and turnover of workers engaging with the families and high mobility of students and their families posed another challenge.

The workload of the Engagement Project Officer included addressing complex needs of the students and their families, which could be stressful, and families at times became dependent on that support.

Project success factors

The Engagement Project Officer had experience working with community services and at-risk students. The officer's role focused on supporting students and their families, who were often more willing to engage with someone who was not a teacher.

The school's leadership was committed to the project, which provided a strong message about the school's commitment to success through partnering with families.

There was an understanding that success looks different for different students and families. While the main aim was to improve student literacy and numeracy, successful outcomes also included transitioning to other education settings.

Lessons learnt

The project highlighted the importance of:

- being able to employ a qualified and experienced youth worker
- support from student welfare staff to ensure a coordinated approach to student engagement
- a coordinated approach with community agencies to address the complex and significant issues faced by students and their families

- tracking student data to identify issues and provide appropriate support, including a more coordinated and informative approach to data at the network and regional level
- support from organisations such as Local Learning and Employment Network, local government and community agencies
- stronger relationships between primary and secondary schools to identify students at risk of disengagement.

Future directions

Based on the success of the project, Glenroy College will continue to consolidate and build on the work of the Engagement Project Officer to improve family engagement and communication throughout the school.

This will include working with students and families to improve family engagement and develop continued understanding of student disengagement and intervention.

Glenroy College will also work closely with local primary schools to identify students at risk of disengagement as early as possible so appropriate support can be provided.

In addition, the school will consolidate links with community agencies and further develop relationships to better support students and their families.

Developed by the Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau. The Bureau is a partnership between the Australian Council of State School Organisations and the Australian Parents Council, with support from the Australian Government. Visit the [Department of Education and Training](#) website for more information.