



# Family-School Partnerships Framework— A guide for schools and families

## Case Studies

The Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau developed a series of case studies to show different ways in which family-school and community partnerships have improved student learning.

- Coodanup College, WA: working with parents helped to empower teachers, change parents' views, and improve student literacy and learning behaviour.
- Glenroy College, VIC: engaging a youth worker helped build relationships with students, their families, and teachers—resulting in improved reading, numeracy and attendance.
- Holy Cross College, NSW: developing strong partnerships with students and families helped parents to gain confidence in supporting their children's learning and wellbeing.
- Killester College, VIC: involvement in numeracy events helped parents to better support their children's learning, which resulted in higher maths scores.
- Longford Primary School, TAS: working with parents to improve their skills, confidence and willingness to engage, helped to improve literacy outcomes for students.
- Pimlico State High School, QLD: students achieved improved literacy outcomes after parents attended literacy programs to support their child's learning at home.
- Sackville Street Public School, NSW: better communication with parents helped to enhance understanding and support for student outcomes.

The *Family-School Partnerships Framework* was developed by The Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau with support from the Australian Government.

The Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau is a partnership between the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) and the Australian Parents Council (APC). For further information visit [www.education.gov.au/parent-information](http://www.education.gov.au/parent-information).



# Case Study: Coodanup College

## Family-School Partnerships Framework

### A guide for schools and families

Coodanup College, an independent public school in Mandarrah, Western Australia, has around 600 students and 60 teaching staff.

By actively engaging with parents and families, the school recognised and sought to address a range of challenges including low literacy and numeracy levels, low attendance, and high rates of behavioural incidents.

#### Project snapshot

Coodanup College looked at the impact of parent involvement on student literacy outcomes. The results identified best practice within a Year 9 class, with the aim of expanding to all junior school classes.

This project links to three of the key dimensions in the Family-School Partnerships Framework:

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

#### Project overview

The project, as part of a wider school improvement journey, refined the principles in the School Turnaround Report (Jenson & Sonnemann, 2014) into key school priorities of improving literacy, improving leadership, strengthening the positive behaviour support framework, and reforming the curriculum.

While there were some excellent practices at the school, there was no systemic approach to parent engagement and only limited guidance for teachers and staff at a whole school level.

This project involved the Year 9 Centre for Literacy and Numeracy (CLAN) class, comprising of 20 students, one teacher and an education support worker. This model has a higher staff to student ratio with a reduced teaching load aimed at maximising teachers' effectiveness and student outcomes.

#### CLAN students

Many of the students displayed behavioural problems often related to learning difficulties and poor school experiences.

#### Parents

While most parents responded to contact from the school, none had visited the school, attended a parent-teacher meeting or contacted the teacher.

Parents often had negative experiences of school and did not play an active role in their child's education.

#### Project focus and key steps

The project involved:

- Individual Learning Plans to help parents support the literacy project work at home and embed learning into home routines
- weekly contact between the teacher and parent about the child's progress in literacy and learning behaviours
- meetings between parents and the school to help students engage in positive behaviour strategies, using the college's behaviour matrix
- parent capacity building, with teachers continually modelling and reinforcing parent skills and behaviour

- communication between the school and parents using a variety of methods including online, phone calls, text messages, letters and in person.

### **Evidence base**

This project drew on research that shows effective schools have high levels of parent and community involvement, which is strongly linked to improved student learning (Family-School Partnerships Framework, 2008).

Supportive parent-teacher relationships, including more frequent and higher quality interactions, help to connect parent engagement to learning goals. This not only encourages active parent involvement, it benefits both parents and teachers, who become more aware of the child's needs and the capacity of parents to support them (Parental Engagement in Schooling in Low Socio-economic Status Communities, 2011).

In addition, structured interviews with parents indicated many wanted their child to be motivated to learn and were interested in supporting the process. However, most lacked the confidence or understanding to do this at home, and asked for more teacher support and contact.

## **Project outcomes**

### **Literacy improvement**

The school plotted the number of interactions with parents against results of a literacy assessment tool ('Survey, Question, Read') that is completed by the whole school twice a year.

There was a clear trend between the number of parent interactions and improved literacy performance. In contrast, students with low parent engagement did not show significant improvement in their literacy assessment.

### **Behaviour improvement**

Evaluation of student rewards for positive learning behaviours showed the CLAN class was the highest performing of the three Year 9 classes in 2015. The results indicate a relationship between parent involvement and improved on-task learning behaviour.

### **Parent views**

Parents reported increased expectations of their child and their own role in supporting their child's learning. They felt a partnership had developed between home and school, including a positive relationship with their child's teacher. They were better able to communicate the learning behaviours required to be successful in school and felt supported to engage in their child's learning at home.

### **Teacher views**

Teachers indicated there was an increase in effective teaching time and an improved classroom environment. Teachers commented that opening up opportunities for discussions about learning at home, and keeping parents updated on their child's progress, was powerful.

### **Student views**

Structured interviews with students revealed they were more inclined to engage with their Individual Learning Plans when their parents supported them in the process. They liked the nature of the parent-teacher relationship and found their parents engaging with the school to be a positive experience.

### **Additional outcomes**

As parents became more engaged with the school and the learning process, four parents began their own higher education studies in 2015. This provided a positive role model at home and also within the community. An 18-year-old sibling also expressed aspirations in education and started work experience.

Teachers reported increased confidence and feeling empowered to assist students with their literacy and learning behaviour, with the support of parents.

And for the first time in more than seven years, a parent joined the school board.

## Challenges

Teacher changes affected continuity of strategies and implementation, and there was a need to balance time for building parent relationships with other school priorities.

The diverse needs of the CLAN group also posed a challenge at times, including external agency requirements and transient families. This was combined with broader challenges in low socio-economic status communities, such as distrust of authority.

### Project success factors

Aligning this project to school priorities was a key part of its success. The strategies directly supported the school's literacy outcomes and positive behaviour support framework. This gave more purpose to staff activities with parents and supported school leaders to work with teachers and discuss which strategies had the greatest impact in the classroom. The parent engagement team had a clear agenda and understood how their efforts contributed to the bigger picture.

An effective team including student services, transition officers and administration helped drive the initiative. Roles were clearly defined within the team and staff were committed to the project, meeting fortnightly to review planning and interventions.

Another factor that contributed to the success of the project was the structure of the CLAN class, which allowed for more time and support for staff to regularly engage with parents.

## Lessons learnt

This project demonstrated that parent engagement strategies, implemented with a team-based approach and clear purpose, played a significant role in improving learning outcomes.

This research project highlighted that:

- positive behaviour can be strengthened by actively building relationships and partnering with parents on learning goals and outcomes
- literacy strategies can be strengthened by re-defining parents' involvement from passive to active support for their child
- parent involvement needs to be structured and guided for parents to have a sense of purpose.

## Future directions

As the school's improvement journey continues, it will expand on the findings of this project and embed these strategies across Years 7 to 9.

For the best chance of sustainability, the school will further develop these strategies and include them in the operational plan, with clearly defined roles and targets linked to literacy and positive behaviour support.

The school will also use tools to further evaluate parent engagement efforts within the school and to build on the efforts of the Year 9 CLAN class.

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.

# 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.

# Case Study: Holy Cross College

## Family-School Partnerships Framework

A guide for schools and families

Holy Cross College, a Year 7–12 Catholic boys school in Ryde, New South Wales, had 650 students in 2016 with more than 40% from a language background other than English.

Holy Cross College aimed to deepen parent understanding of how boys learn and build the capacity and confidence of parents to support their children's learning and wellbeing. The project strengthened the sense of partnership among students, families and teachers, increased student wellbeing, and increased satisfaction and involvement in school initiatives.

### Project snapshot

The Holy Cross College project aimed to provide parents with a better understanding of how boys learn by implementing school-based initiatives including 'Target Setting' and 'Parents in Touch' to improve learning outcomes.

Through this project, the school built a model of parent engagement that complements its broader strategies for school improvement.

The project links to six of the key dimensions in the Family-School Partnerships Framework:

- ✓ Communicate
- ✓ Connect learning at home and at school
- ✓ Build community and identity
- ✓ Recognise the role of the family
- ✓ Consultative decision-making
- ✓ Participate

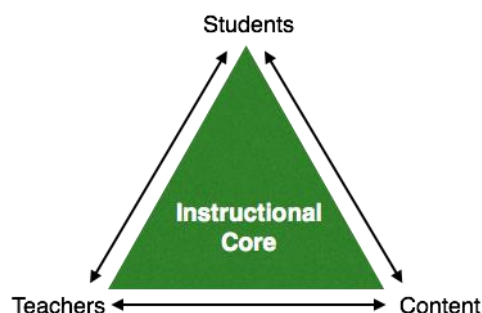
## Project overview

There were two main parts to this project:

- 'target setting' for students to determine and work towards personal learning targets
- active engagement of parents in their son's learning and target setting.

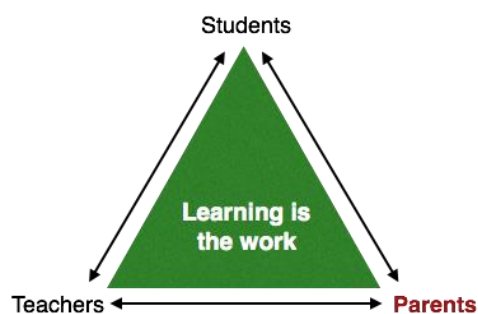
As part of an overarching journey of school improvement, the school considered Elmore's model (2010) of the instructional core, which focuses on interactions between teachers, students and content in the classroom.

### *Elmore's model*



Holy Cross College expanded this model to include parents, shifting the school's traditional understanding of the learning relationship to include parents.

### *Holy Cross model*





## Target setting and parent engagement

Parent engagement initiatives to support the 'target setting' process included:

- Horizons Night to explain the target setting process
- Target Setting Meetings with parents, student and homeroom teacher
- Parent–Student–Teacher Interviews with a focus on targets
- mid-year meetings with each student to discuss aids and roadblocks to achieving targets
- regular 'Parents in Touch' evenings to discuss learning and wellbeing issues
- Family School Partnership Group—established around topics of interest: Learning, Wellbeing, Social and Community Connections, Faith Development and Home School Communication
- Parent Online Portal—including individual student attendance and performance data, and information on assessment tasks
- use of technology to enhance communication with families.

Students interviewed as part of the project described the approach as 'that triangular thing between the teacher, students, and parents' with the understanding that 'it's a three-way conversation'.

The project was overseen by a committee involving the school leadership team, a parent and 'critical friends' including the Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau.

### Evidence base

Holy Cross College had been gathering data and documenting its journey over two years with the assistance of a grant and partnership with the Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau. This involved three stages.

Stage 1: data gathering, including school enrolment data (which had been declining), student performance and wellbeing data, parent participation data at school events, and a parent survey on issues relating to their son's learning and wellbeing.

Stage 2: student focus groups, teacher focus groups and parent interviews.

Stage 3: review of enrolment, performance and wellbeing data, and looking at parent participation in the target setting process and related initiatives.

## Project outcomes

### Parent engagement

Parent interviews indicated changes in parents' confidence in relation to their children's learning and wellbeing:

*'When they're in high school the input of a parent seems to disappear. But with target setting, you have to sit down and talk to your son.'*

*'[Target Setting] helps the parents become engaged as well I think. It's good that the school pushes to make [parents] become involved...When a mark comes back which he doesn't like, we'll sit down with him and say, "Okay, what didn't you do that you think you could do?" That all came out of the target setting as well, whereas before we probably would have said, "Study more".'*

*'By having the target you engage the parents and I felt that when he started high school...I felt like I started high school too; I felt like I had no way of knowing what to do. I felt a little lost. [With target setting] you feel like you have something, you have a hold on what's happening. You're involved in their education.'*

### Student success against learning targets

The number of students meeting or exceeding their personal learning targets increased.

The school believes the improvement with each iteration of Target Setting has come from the greater engagement of parents, as they collectively build confidence and capacity in relation to their son's learning.

### Student wellbeing

There was an increase in student wellbeing and sense of connectedness within the school, with parents and the community (based on ACER Social-Emotional Wellbeing Survey data).

Students had higher positive perceptions of their home life, school life and connections to the community compared with the national average, with students rating school life at 13% above the national average.

### Teacher language and engagement

The language and engagement of teachers in relation to parents in the target setting process was another indicator of success. Teachers said:

*'I think having the parents involved certainly gives them some ownership as well into their son's educational journey. Also, it's just a way that everybody can put their cards on the table.'*

*'The parents were...so excited about this idea and being brought into the conversation with the extended interviews we have at the beginning of the year. It gives something to be accountable for.'*

*'Parents have to be involved at the beginning of the year when we're discussing the targets... it must open up some lines of communication with boys and parents at an age when boys virtually say nothing or, you know... 'How was school?' 'Good'. And that's all you get.'*

### Additional unintended outcomes

As part of the target setting process, teachers were asked to reframe the way they traditionally engaged with parents around boys' learning.

Teachers now lead an annual Horizons Night for parents where the target setting process was explained and relationships were formed that became the foundation for home-school communication throughout the year.

### Qualitative data

The qualitative data from student focus groups was a rich and significant source of information for the parent engagement and target setting initiatives.

The student focus groups provided a valuable insight into what students thought about parent engagement in their learning and in the life of their school, debunking the common belief that teenagers, and in particular boys, do not want their parents involved in their learning.

The boys said they want their parents to:

- understand what they're learning, how to help them, and what's going on at school
- respect who they are and where they are at—based on a contemporary understanding of learning, not parents' memories of school
- be involved with the school—and for the school to communicate regularly with parents about things that matter (not just a note at the bottom of the school bag).

In relation to the target setting process, the boys made observations such as:

*'The language has definitely changed in my house. It's gone from, "Have you done your homework?" to "Are you on track to achieving your target? What can we do to support you, to help you to achieve this target?''.'*

### Challenges

- Encouraging parents and helping them better understand how important their role is, and that students wanted their involvement/engagement.

- Working around structural barriers of a school environment to allow greater ‘access’ to the school for families—the use of technology was critical in this regard.
- Maintaining the momentum and keeping parents, staff and students engaged—this required a flexible approach.

### Project success factors

A supportive and ‘visionary’ school leadership team.

Building the evidence base and understanding the ‘Why’ before embarking on the ‘What’ and ‘How’.

Understanding that parent engagement is not a program or a standalone initiative—it needs to be clearly defined, intentional, strategic, meaningful and connected to the broader learning and wellbeing work of the school.

Bringing in ‘critical friends’ early and being informed by the Family-School Partnerships Framework contributed to a greater understanding of parent engagement and provided a clearer direction for the parent engagement strategy.

Developing a whole-school understanding of parent engagement and the target setting process.

Ensuring there is more than one ‘champion’ especially in the event of key parent and/or staff turnover—it is necessary to build a ‘critical mass’ of supporters in key roles.

## Lessons learnt

Holy Cross College’s experience has shown that many elements of the Elmore model are transferable across school contexts, both primary and secondary.

Wellbeing and student perception data provided an important perspective and added richness to the evidence base for this project.

A key lesson was that context matters—schools need to tailor their efforts and respond to the needs and aspirations of their own students and school community.

## Future directions

The initiatives commenced in this project have become core business for the college, fully embedded into the life of the school. Future work will include:

- further integrating technology to support parent engagement with target setting
- follow-up focus groups and interviews
- ongoing reflection on the effectiveness of the parent engagement strategies to support target setting
- support for new families and staff regarding their participation and engagement
- writing up the case study in the form of research paper(s) for peer review and publication.

Holy Cross College has become known for its innovative approaches to target setting and parent engagement, and is sharing this journey with other schools.

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# Case Study: Killester College

## Family-School Partnerships Framework

### A guide for schools and families

Killester College is a Catholic secondary college for girls, located in Springvale, Victoria. There are over 900 students, and many of the students' parents speak a language other than English at home.

The school's core values include 'welcome to all people especially the most vulnerable'.

Killester College implemented a series of numeracy activities to increase parent engagement, and found that students achieved higher maths scores the more their parents engaged with their learning.

#### Project purpose

Killester College introduced a variety of communication tools and opportunities for engagement with parents of Year 7 students to strengthen the impact of education at home, leading to better learning outcomes for students.

This project links with five of the key dimensions of the Family-School Partnerships Framework:

- ✓ Communicate
- ✓ Connect learning at home and at school
- ✓ Build community and identity
- ✓ Recognise the role of the family
- ✓ Participate

#### Project overview

The school sought to establish stronger partnerships and utilised the school's Family Learning Centre to empower parents to take their place alongside teachers as educators of their children.

The project targeted Year 7 students and their parents to increase parent engagement for better numeracy outcomes.

The school invited all 156 Year 7 students and their parents to participate in the project, with 112 parents agreeing to be involved.

Many parents were initially unsure about their ability to influence better achievement in numeracy.

#### Project focus and steps

##### Events

Three events were organised:

- Term 1—Introduction to Year 7 Numeracy Program (attended by 45 parents)
- Term 2—Maths is Fun event (attended by 30 families)
- Term 3—Maths Learning Walk (attended by 10 families).

The parents and students who attended these events became the 'experimental group'.

##### Communication

The school increased the range of school-home communication tools and opportunities for engagement including Facebook, Twitter, Skoolbag, email and SMS to enhance connections.

The school made regular contact with parents throughout the year to promote the events and activities, and used interpreters at parent meetings.

## Monitoring numeracy results

The project monitored student's numeracy results, to gauge the differences in assessments of students involved in the project compared with rest of Year 7.

## Background and data

The school had a focus on lifting numeracy standards, and the transition program for incoming Year 7 students provided an identified target group. The incoming Killester students completed an *On Demand* test, which is a resource to see how students are tracking over time, to measure maths skills at the end of Year 6 and then again in Year 7 so data could be examined and improvements made.

The students also participated in NAPLAN testing in Year 7, which provided further data about numeracy achievement.

## Semester 1 reporting

Reporting on the first semester of Year 7 showed that as parents engaged in more numeracy events, numeracy results for students increased.

Parents attended	Mean score of student
0 events	6.12
1 events	6.72
2 events	7.07
3 events	7.15

Of the 156 students in the Year 7 cohort, 34% had parents attend at least one of the maths events.

## On Demand testing results

The maths results from Year 6 were relatively similar in each of these four groups of students.

However, a significant difference occurred during Year 7, with students whose parents attended events more frequently achieving higher scores.

The same trend was also observed in growth in maths capacity as measured by the two On Demand tests.

Parents attended	Nov 2014 results	Sept 2015 results	Growth
0 events	4.00	6.7	0.7
1 event	3.95	6.5	0.5
2 events	3.96	7.0	1.0
3 events	3.98	8.2	2.2

## NAPLAN

NAPLAN results indicated that Killester College students performed above the state in each area tested. In numeracy, 94% of the Year 7 students achieved above the national minimum standards (better than the previous year's group, at 87%).

## Journals

Students were encouraged to reflect on their weekly progress and challenges in maths in weekly journals.

Parents were asked to contribute their reflections, and found the journals a useful tool to monitor their daughters' attitude and focus.

The journals also provided an opportunity for feedback and communication with the teachers.

## Student reflections

*'I spend a lot of time on maths at home. I receive help from my teachers and Dad.'*

*'My Mum and Dad help me when I have homework—a lot of the time I am not good at fractions.'*

*'I made a mistake and learnt from it—now I know what to do if I come across an equation like that.'*

*'I received support from my teacher, class discussion, parents and homework club.'*

## Parent feedback

*'I like open plan learning and so does my daughter. I enjoyed participating in each of the evenings, and have a strong belief that parent participation pays off.'*

*'Our daughter is very happy for us to be involved in her school life. She enjoys mathematics, is progressing well and talks openly at home about her learning and progress.'*

*'From my experience of the Maths Walk it has enabled me to assist my daughter reduce her stress levels by helping her prioritise homework tasks, and being able to explain the nature of the activities.'*

*'We observed how interested and engaged the students were in each of the activities and we value the engagement that Killester is offering to us as parents.'*

## Maths staff feedback

Regular meetings of Year 7 maths teachers were held to monitor the project's progress. Staff members were asked to provide feedback:

*'I thought it was a great idea and would support it in the future.'*

*'Intentions were good but it was difficult to motivate parents or engage them.'*

*'My opinion is that to achieve the intended outcomes, far greater numbers of parents should be engaged in a research project like this.'*

## Challenges

Many students come from families who speak a language other than English at home, and many were not familiar with a schooling culture that fosters parent engagement. Despite this, many parents were still willing to participate in the project and were supported by having interpreters at parent meetings. This was significant in facilitating better communication.

## Project success factors

The project built on the success of the school's Family Learning Centre in supporting parent engagement.

The student outcomes clearly show the value of a strategy that uses parent engagement, especially in the early years of secondary schooling and in transitions.

The use of journals as a learning tool encourages students to reflect on their progress and contributed to the positive outcomes of this project.

Similarly, events such as Fun with Maths and Maths Learning Walk were valuable curriculum events in the school calendar.

## Lessons learnt

The project has shown the importance of:

- the commitment of staff to establish the three-way partnership between parents, students and school
- good communication, planning and resources to ensure effective implementation of parent engagement activities
- the support of the Family Learning Coordinator for these initiatives
- strategies to communicate effectively with the school's culturally diverse parents.

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# Case Study: Longford Primary School

## Family-School Partnerships Framework

A guide for schools and families

Longford Primary School is in a village of around 3,500 people near Launceston, Tasmania, and has 242 students.

The school's motto 'Strive for success' reflects the belief that all children can learn and the commitment of staff to ensure each child reaches their full potential.

When Longford Primary School supported parents to increase their own skills, confidence and willingness to engage, their children showed improved literacy outcomes.

### Project snapshot

The aim of the Longford Primary School project was to increase parent engagement to improve literacy outcomes for Preparatory students.

The project links to three of the key dimensions of the Family-School Partnerships Framework:

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

### Project overview

The Longford Primary school project involved one Prep class and one Prep/Grade 1 class. The project commenced in 2014 and aimed to increase parent engagement in reading with Prep students to improve literacy outcomes.

As the project evolved, the focus shifted to provide parents with the skills and confidence to engage with the school, which had a positive impact on

educational outcomes. This also enabled the school to outreach and address challenges faced by many families, and led to connecting parents to other support services.

### Project focus and key activities

#### *'Treasure chest' reading rewards*

Children were offered a small reward from the 'treasure chest' after returning a home reader 10 times. This proved so successful (and expensive) that it was raised to 20 returns.

#### *Come in from the cold/parents reading with children*

The school found it difficult to entice some parents into the classroom before school to read with their child.

As a result, parents were invited into the classroom in the afternoons instead. This resulted in 12–15 parents regularly engaging in the afternoon session to play games and read with their child.

#### *Outreach for parents*

The project was supported by outreach activities and a Parent Liaison Teachers Assistant (PLTA) who helped develop relationships with other parents and liaise effectively between the school, parents and other services. The PLTA was a parent at the school who shared their own experience of overcoming challenges as a single parent.

A parent room was set up at the school became increasingly popular, with many parents stopping by for coffee and a chat after dropping their children at school.

### ***Kitchen Capers***

Kitchen Capers, a cooking program had proved successful at Longford Primary School in previous years. It aimed to provide information on nutritious meals, budgeting for and making food rather than buying pre-packaged. It provided an opportunity for families to meet, develop relationships and feel more comfortable in the school environment.

The PLTA revised the cooking program to consider family budgets, and based it on the question: 'What can I do with 500 grams of mince'? Participants met weekly for five weeks to make a different main course and dessert. The school completed two blocks of the program with nine parents.

### ***Home Reading Social Story***

Home Reading Social Story saw students taking home digital cameras to photograph different situations and write a story to accompany the photos.

This helped to encourage students to practice literacy skills in everyday situations in the home.

### ***Parent education***

As the parents became more involved in the school and gained confidence, they began to discuss their own literacy needs and other issues, such as the need to improve their skills and find employment.

The school received support from the Family-School Community Partnership Bureau and the Tasmanian Association of State School Organisations to connect with an adult literacy and numeracy program. As a result, some parents undertook courses in reading and writing, community services and information technology.

## **Evidence base**

### **Recognising the need for parent engagement**

The school tracked parent participation and engagement (being a parent helper, participating in parent afternoons etc.) in Prep classes over several years, finding assessment results were lower when parents were not involved in their child's school or classwork.

## **Project outcomes**

- There was an increase in children's rates of home reader return and reading levels during the project.
- October Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS) literacy and numeracy testing showed most students were within, above or well above the expected range.
- Results of Waddington Reading and Spelling Diagnostic tests administered at the start of 2015 reflected the successes of the previous year, with most students performing within or above the expected range on these tests.
- Improvement in reading levels, with most of the Prep students progressing from level 1–3 in February 2014 to level 7–10, level 11–14 or level 15+ by September 2015, and Grade 1 students progressing from level 7–10 in February 2014 to level 5–20 or level 21 or above by September 2015.
- A number of parents began to regularly assist at the school's Breakfast Club and cook for fundraising events.
- Students were proud of their parents for 'going back to school' and completing training. For parents this increased their confidence and capacity, and encouraged them to participate more actively in the classroom.
- One of the parents took on a position in the Parent Association.
- Parents established a 'Food Bank' that involved cooking and freezing a variety of meals to be provided to families in times of need.



## Challenges

It was challenging to continue the momentum of the project as the students changed classes. For example, the higher-level classes had a stronger focus on morning reading at school rather than formal at-home reading.

The transient nature of some families meant that some results were inconsistent.

It was not possible to engage all targeted families. Some participated for a short time but did not maintain commitment.

Changes in staff at the school and the role of the principal and teachers also sometimes challenged the consistency of approach.

As the program developed and expanded, lack of time became an issue. In particular the PLTA often spent many extra hours completing tasks, talking with parents and supporting families.

## Lessons learnt

The project demonstrated the:

- vital role of successful home-school relationships in educating children
- valuable role of an outreach/liaison facilitator in fostering effective home-school relationships
- need for professional learning to ensure school staff understand the needs and challenges of families and communities
- need to promote avenues for parents to access training
- importance of accessing relevant information and materials such as the *Family-School Partnerships Framework* to support these projects
- need to ensure students do not 'slip under the radar' as families become increasingly transient.

## Project success factors

Recognising the need for a PLTA to facilitate parent engagement was critical to success, as was selecting the 'right' person who could maintain good relationships with other parents.

Establishing a dedicated space where parents can meet and build relationships.

Support for the project by the whole school community including school leaders, teachers and parents, was important.

Also important was the support from Advidity training and 26TEN providing training, tutoring and access to formal courses for parents.

## Future directions

The parent room will continue as a place for existing parent group members to meet and foster relationships with new parents.

The school will expand the PLTA outreach position to increase formal outreach activities across the school and utilise the *Family-School Partnership Framework* to inform future decision-making.

Support for the Home Reading Social Story initiative will be expanded.

The school will collaborate and share the outcomes and lessons of this project with other schools in the local area.

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.

# Case Study: Pimlico State High School

## Family-School Partnerships Framework

A guide for schools and families

Pimlico State High School is a co-educational independent public school in Townsville, Queensland, with 1,745 students across Years 7 to 12.

The school's aim is to provide a supportive environment to enable all members of the school community to develop to their full potential.

### Project snapshot

Pimlico State High School aimed to improve literacy outcomes for students from Year 8 to 9 attending the school's literacy programs, by providing opportunities for parents to support their child's learning at home.

The project links to three of the key dimensions of the Family-School Partnerships Framework:

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

### Project overview

The project focused on two groups of Year 8 literacy students from 2014 as they moved into Year 9. Other literacy teachers and students were also keen to be part of the project.

### Literacy classes

Pimlico State High School offers Support Literacy and Numeracy Classes for students in Years 7, 8 and 9 who do not meet National Minimum Standards (NMS) in one or more literacy components and are Language other than English exempt.

At the time of this project, more than 30 students attended these classes three times a week, with class sizes 10 or below. There was an additional Literacy Support class for students who were under NMS, but not significantly below. Close to 100 students attended these twice weekly classes, which had a maximum of five students.

### Project focus and key steps

The project focused on increasing attendance and engagement of students by improving communication with parents, and using data to set goals and track improvements.

### Linking goals to data

Literacy teachers received training in gathering and analysing literacy data to ensure individualised literacy programs were deployed for each student.

Students had regular discussions with literacy teachers about their NAPLAN and other test results, and used this data to make decisions about their literacy goals.

Teachers gathered pre and post-test data in six-week cycles to help measure the progress made in that period.

Each student had a different learning journey built on their individual goals.

By visually recording the literacy journey for students in their literacy learning journals, the school enhanced student-teacher conversations around progress, setting goals and celebrating successes.

## Communication

Parents received letters at the start of each six-week cycle informing them of their child's literacy goals. Regular teacher contact informed parents of progress and offered practical strategies to reinforce literacy lessons during the six-week cycle.

Literacy was also included in the mid-semester and end-of-semester report cards to keep parents informed of progress.

## Evidence base

Information and data gathered prior to this project helped the school to identify key focus areas and develop strategies to support the project.

### Communication survey

Communication issues between the school and parents were identified in a Education Queensland Parent survey, which prompted the school to focus more on effective communication strategies.

### Family-School Community Partnership workshop

In 2014, the Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau conducted a workshop involving parents, students and staff to help identify where the school was positioned across the seven key dimensions in the *Family-School Partnerships Framework*.

Results indicated that communication with parents needed improvement, specifically around the curriculum, as did recognising the role of the family in supporting their child's learning.

### Attendance

Prior to starting this project, data on students attending Literacy Support classes showed a decline across all groups. Non-attendance was 34%, and this rate increased as students moved from Year 8 to Year 9.

There were approximately eight requests from parents per semester to have their child withdraw from the Literacy Support program, with the majority of these requests from Year 9 parents.

### Literacy results

Before the project started, the majority of students were not achieving the expected improved literacy outcomes (Progressive Achievement Tests Reading and NAPLAN testing), despite smaller student/teacher ratios and targeted goals.

### Student focus groups

Two small focus groups of Year 9 Literacy Support students were established to identify the strengths and weaknesses.

Strengths included the small numbers of students in the group, liking the teacher, and the fact parents thought the classes would help.

Weaknesses included relevance to student needs, students thinking the classes were boring, and missing other classes to attend the literacy class.

### Parent phone interviews

Phone interviews with parents provided further feedback about the literacy classes and how best to provide information to parents. Most indicated they had an understanding of why their child was undertaking the literacy classes, a desire to be kept informed of their child's progress, and an interest in supporting their child with literacy at home.

## Project outcomes

The project saw a greater commitment from parents and students to the literacy classes, with a decrease in requests for students to be removed from these classes. Attendance increased to 90% across the Years 7, 8 and 9 Literacy Support classes, and 95% for students in the two Year 9 focus groups.

Almost all of the students in the two focus groups recorded improved literacy results in their targeted literacy area in their 2013 (Year 7) and 2015 (Year 9) NAPLAN tests.

Student feedback about the program included:

*'My spelling has got better. I even told my mum she had spelled something wrong and I was right.'*

*'I like how I get to say what we work on and that my teacher talks to me about how I am going all the time.'*

Since the strategies were implemented, the school has also received positive feedback from parents about students' literacy improvements.

### Project success factors

The challenge of several teachers leaving during the project presented an opportunity for new teachers to band together to make the program work, despite their limited literacy teaching experience. They embraced training and the philosophy of enabling students to manage their own literacy learning.

Individualised programs were built on each student's specific literacy needs and the six-week cycle enabled everyone to be focused on the goal.

Teachers recognised the benefits of timely and effective parent-school communication. Parents became more supportive of the program as they came to understand how the literacy classes operated and received updates about their child's literacy progress.

The school appointed a Head of Literacy and Numeracy, who supported teachers to develop teaching skills and resources. This resulted in the development of a user-friendly database for literacy teachers to record and track each student's literacy goals.

## Challenges

The departure of several key personnel from the school during the project was the main challenge to overcome. As a result of staff shortages, literacy classes started later than planned.

## Lessons learnt

- Engaging parents with their students' learning had a positive impact on literacy results.
- Parents who were regularly informed of their children's literacy improvements became more engaged and supportive of the program.
- Regular phone calls to parents from teachers to celebrate literacy achievements developed strong rapport between school and families.
- When students are given a voice in their learning, their commitment and engagement increases, with positive impacts on their achievements.

## Future directions

Given the success of this project, the school is keen to introduce a school app with more accessible literacy resources and strategies for parents to use with students, to support their literacy goals.

The app/website technology will also facilitate faster and more convenient information sharing with parents about their children's six-week literacy goal setting journey.

The school will also implement the project more broadly to encompass all literacy groups from Year 7 through to Year 9.

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.

# Case Study: Sackville Street Public School

## Family-School Partnerships Framework

A guide for schools and families

Sackville Street Public School is a primary school with over 500 students in Ingleburn, South Western Sydney. The school's strong traditions and high expectations of quality academic, cultural and social programs are actively supported by students, staff and parents.

The school's vision is for learning to be underpinned by formative assessment practices and innovative teaching in modern spaces throughout the school.

Sackville Street Public School increased parent engagement through initiatives ranging from physical display boards to social media and software apps, resulting in improved student outcomes.

### Project snapshot

Sackville Street Public School considered whether increased communication with parents through a variety of means would improve student achievement.

The project links to six of the key dimensions of the Family-School Partnerships Framework:

- ✓ Communicate
- ✓ Connect learning at home and at school
- ✓ Recognise the role of the family
- ✓ Consultative decision-making
- ✓ Collaborate beyond the school
- ✓ Participating

### Project overview

The aim was to explore ways of increasing the engagement of parents and the school community to better support student outcomes.

The project was cyclical, first focusing on changing teaching methods, then encouraging active parent engagement, and finally auditing and reviewing, which lead to further changes and improvements.

### Project focus and key steps

Sackville Street Public School examined teaching methodology across its teacher workforce, which included a mix of experienced and beginning teachers. This informed the school's approach to teaching, curriculum, syllabus and modern learning.

There was a clear focus on improving literacy and using formative assessment processes to adjust teaching and learning in the classroom. This presented an opportunity to include parents and the school community—promoting real partnerships for greater inclusion, understanding and celebration.

The school recognised the use of social media in bringing parents into everyday classroom learning, providing greater access to and understanding of their child's learning goals and, importantly, how as parents they could support this.

### Evidence base

School staff and leadership determined a starting point for the project using the *School Assessment Tool* with support from the Family-School & Community Partnerships Bureau. This identified community and parent engagement a key focus area.

School staff visited other schools already engaging in formative assessments, particularly those reporting student learning success with the Early Action for Success Program (EAS). Staff attended professional learning and collaborated with these schools to increase their knowledge.

## Project stages

### Stage 1

- Teachers researched self-directed learning, reflecting on programs and using data to inform teaching.
- Teachers communicated with parents about class activities, special events, progress and achievements using the Class Dojo app, and encouraged parents to talk to their child about their learning.
- Meetings were held within the school to show how formative assessment works in the classroom.
- Parents were welcomed into the classrooms to see how their children were progressing.

### Stage 2

- Teachers adopted a project-based learning methodology. Parents were informed about what students were doing in class and how parents could assist at home.
- Parents were invited to visit the classroom to see the projects and listen to student presentations.
- The school focused on celebrating achievements and encouraging positive behaviour, with letters sent to parents when students performed well in class.

### Stage 3

- Teachers connected with parents through Class Dojo, email, phone calls, face-to-face meetings and the school Facebook page.
- Afternoon social gatherings with families were introduced each term, which were well attended by students and their families.
- Teachers used the Showbie app to upload learning experiences for students

to work on at school and home, which enabled teachers to provide immediate feedback and support. Parents were able to view their child's work and teacher feedback, and become more involved in the learning process.

## Communication strategies

- The school Facebook page provided a forum for parents and the community.
- Focus groups enabled parents, students and teachers to share their aspirations.
- Professional and organisational development was teacher-driven, with Professional and Organisational Development Groups enabling staff to test and use formative assessment in their classrooms.
- A visual display wall in the staffroom with all K–6 students placed in their cluster of current achievement served as a reminder to teachers of the importance of a whole community approach.



- Visual display learning walls in classrooms encouraged students to visualise their own learning and celebrate achieving their learning goals.



- Teachers used the Class Dojo app to share information with parents about events and student achievements, to answer questions and share photos.
- The Skoolbag app alerted parents to information such as newsletters and notes, and enabled parents to notify the school when their child was absent.

### **Keen Kinders**

The 'Keen Kinders' kindergarten transition program included afternoon tea for parents to meet school staff and other parents, and fortnightly sessions for parents and their children to join the current kindergarten classes. A Keen Kinders email address was created so parents and families could communicate directly with school staff.

### **Coffee, Cake & Chat (3Cs) and Multicultural Parent Meetings**

3Cs provided an opportunity for parents to be involved in school policy and decision-making in an informal setting. At 3Cs parents discussed a variety of topics such as the use of Mathletics and Reading Eggs programs, strategies to support K–2 literacy development, what formative assessment looks like in the classroom, consultation on the school's three-year strategic plan and consultation on the school's anti-bullying policy. There was also a Multicultural Parent Meeting each term, based on the same topics.

### **Project outcomes**

The school monitored its initiatives through a variety of means, both quantitative and qualitative.

A 'Community Engagement Committee' was formed to track data and reflect on the effectiveness of the strategies.

Evaluation and monitoring tools included the *School Assessment Tool and Matrix*, surveys, a project website to document the journey, data collection on parent attendance at events and student learning achievement.

Outcomes included:

- The school's Facebook page received more than 660 'likes', with one post reaching over 7,000 people.
- Focus groups provided a forum to inform the creation of the three-year school plan.
- Professional and organisational development provided opportunities for more tailored learning and development for teachers.
- Visual displays provided a representation of student progress, encouraged conversations on improving educational outcomes, and provided a focus for teachers, students and parents to recognise and celebrate achievements.
- The Class Dojo app was used by 20 teachers and the Skoolbag app was downloaded by 400 parents, enabling regular communication between the school and families. One parent said 'I get so excited at work when a Dojo message comes through from the teacher about my son's achievements'.
- Keen Kinders had 35 participants each week and parents commented on how much this helped with the transition. Kindergarten enrolments rose from 55 in 2015 to 87 in 2016.
- 3Cs and Multicultural Parent Meetings received positive feedback from parents. In particular they appreciated the opportunity to learn new ways to support their child's learning, access to school leaders and staff, and forming new friendships with other parents.

### **Student outcomes**

Since introducing the various strategies to improve parent to school contact, the school has had a dramatic downturn in suspensions and other serious incidents of negative behaviours. School data showed a significant decrease in negative behaviours from 38 incidents in 2014 to 10 in 2015 (as at October).

The school attributes this result to the intentional focus of the introduction of formative assessment practices and communication with parents.

*'We are getting on top of our behaviour issues through a number of ways but one of the most effective has been the Class Dojo app. It gives me a direct line to parents, which the child is aware of and vice versa'.*

There has also been an encouraging improvement in literacy data at the school.

## Challenges

A key challenge was the number of changes in the leadership team and frequent movement of staff which caused concern about stability and consistency, and presented a challenge when building relationships with parents and families.

Collecting qualitative community feedback was also a challenge. Responses to surveys and other data collection remained low despite promotion via social media and the school newsletter but the school is committed to continuing work to improve this.

### Project success factors

One of the most significant changes the school made was the use of technology, which improved communication between the school, families and the community.

The use of Class Dojo provided immediate and personal two-way contact between the teacher and home, enabling parents to ask the teacher questions and teachers to share information about their child's learning journey through messages, photos and videos.

The focus on using data to determine student learning goals and achievement enabled teachers to keep track of progress.

## Lessons learnt

- Stability in school leadership supports relationship building with parents and the community.
- The establishment of a Community Engagement Team was an effective strategy to improve parent engagement.
- Tracking student behaviour, achievement outcomes and transition data, is crucial in providing appropriate support to students.
- *The Family-School Partnership Framework* and *School Assessment Tool* were helpful in supporting family engagement.
- Achieving outcomes for all students is a community responsibility and support for stronger relationships between schools and community is paramount.

## Future directions

The School Strategic Plan includes strategies to build family and community partnerships and outlines the processes to engage parents and the community as partners in learning. It places a priority on communication as a two-way exchange between families and the school, and on staff actively communicating and engaging parents and the wider community.

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.