



Leading School Communities in Strengthening Family and Community Engagement Unpacking the Tool

Ann Bliss

Federation of Catholic School Parent Communities

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Why are you here?

What is Family Engagement?



“Family Engagement is a shared responsibility of families, schools and communities for student learning and achievement; it is continuous from birth to young adulthood; and it occurs across multiple settings where children learn”.

(Weiss, Lopez & Rosenberg, 2010, p3)

More than 'involvement'..



The essential difference is that engagement implies:

“enabling parents to take their place alongside educators in the schooling of their children, fitting together their knowledge of their children, teaching and learning, with teachers’ knowledge. With parent engagement, possibilities are created for the structure of schooling to be flattened, power and authority to be shared by educators and parents, and the agenda being served to be mutually determined and mutually beneficial.”

(Pushor & Ruitenberg, 2005, p. 12-13)



**“The purpose of a school
is to help the family
educate the child”**

Dr Don Edgar,
Foundation Director of the Australian
Institute of Family Studies

Stopping Point



Share what your school currently does to engage parents/families in their children's learning and life of the school community.

Key Dimensions



- Communication
- Connecting learning at home and at school
- Building community and identity
- Recognising role of family
- Consultative decision making
- Collaborating beyond school
- Participating

(Family-School Partnerships Framework – A Guide for Schools and Families - 2008)

Dimensions at a Glance



Map these examples
against the dimensions

Key Message # 1



Strong family and community engagement is central to effective school reform.

Policy context



- ❖ Melbourne Declaration
- ❖ COAG goals – ‘bold’ education reform agenda
- ❖ National professional standards for teachers and principals
- ❖ CESA mission and plan
- ❖ CESA Continuous Improvement Framework

Stopping Point



- List the benefits of strong family engagement in learning and the life of the school community for:
 - Schools
 - Parents
 - Children and Young People

Core to reform – why?



A review of 51 studies on parental involvement concluded that when schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, students tend to:

- do better in school (higher grades, higher scores on standardised tests);
- enrol in more challenging programs;
- have improved attendance;
- have better social skills and adaptation to school;
- stay in school longer.

(Henderson and Mapp, 2002)

What educators are saying:



“When parents, the community, the teacher and the students share a rapport, learning occurs...Effective schools use their internal collaborative strength to seek out relationships with the community. They see parents more as part of the solution than as part of the problem. They pursue programs and activities that are based on two-way capacity building in order to mobilise the resources of both community and the school in the service of learning”.

Michael Fullan (2000) The Three Stories of Educational Reform. Kappan Professional Journal.

Strong Family and Community Engagement:



- Improves educational outcomes for students
- Contributes to the building of 'social capital' in the community
- Positively alters school 'culture'
- Stimulates self-growth among parents
- Enhances the professional rewards for Principals and school staff

Levels of Influence and Impact

- Government policy and processes
- Sector policy and processes
- School policy and processes *
- Classroom practices *
- Home practices *

“From Canberra to the Cubby House”

Who is Responsible?



- Politicians
- Bureaucrats
- Education Sectors and peak bodies
- School Leaders *
- Educators and school staff *
- Parents *
- Students *

“From Tony to Tully”

Key Message # 2



**It's everybody's
business!**

Underpinning principles



Engaged Parents are recognised as:

- ✓ The first and continuing educators of their children
- ✓ Partners in their children's education
- ✓ Integral members of school communities
- ✓ Collaborators in decision making

Key Message # 3:



How do school policies, processes and traditions invite, expect, encourage, enable and celebrate family and community engagement?

National Key Reform Project



Smarter Schools National Partnerships Parental Engagement in Schooling in Low Socio-economic Status (SES) Communities

Project's aim:

“to work collaboratively across the jurisdictions to advance the identification, promotion and implementation of good practice in parental engagement in Low SES communities as a critical factor for improving student attendance, engagement in learning and learning achievement”.

Project Deliverables



Resource Development:

- School case studies

- Online resource:

Strengthening Family and Community Engagement in Student Learning

- Annotated resource listing

- Key reference list

Key characteristics of effective practice



- Developing a school culture that values parental engagement
- Creating a school environment that welcomes parents
- Sharing high expectations about learning outcomes for all students
- Building the capacity of parents to support their children's learning
- Parents encouraging other parents
- Reaching out through personal contact

(Themes from case studies)

Key characteristics of effective practice



- Offering opportunities to parents for their own learning and development
- Connecting with parents in the early years
- Using school resources effectively to support parental engagement
- Leveraging additional resources from outside the school
- Enlisting the support of community leaders and members and community organisations

(Themes from case studies)



Strengthening Family and Community Engagement in Student Learning Resource

Designed for school communities to facilitate stronger parent and family engagement in schooling across the seven dimensions of the Family-School Partnership Framework



Strengthening family and community engagement in student learning resource



Australian Government
Department of Education, Employment
and Workplace Relations



Next 

Section introduction

Section one What is family and community engagement?

In this section we explore in more detail the nature of effective family and community engagement by looking at contemporary educational policies and related research. We also examine the definitions of common terms, dimensions, elements and underpinning principles of effective practice.

Section two Why is family and community engagement important?

In this section we explore the benefits and outcomes of effective family and community engagement for students, families and the school. We also examine the supporting structures that need to be in place to develop and sustain effective family and community engagement practices.

Section three Steps to strengthen engagement

This section will assist school communities to use the school planning cycle to strengthen engagement. As part of a four step model, schools will be able to use a new *School Assessment Tool* to assess where they are on a continuum of engagement and to prioritise areas for further action.

Section four Strategies, case studies and resources

After the school has decided on areas for further action this section will be a useful aid to help schools refine suitable strategies.

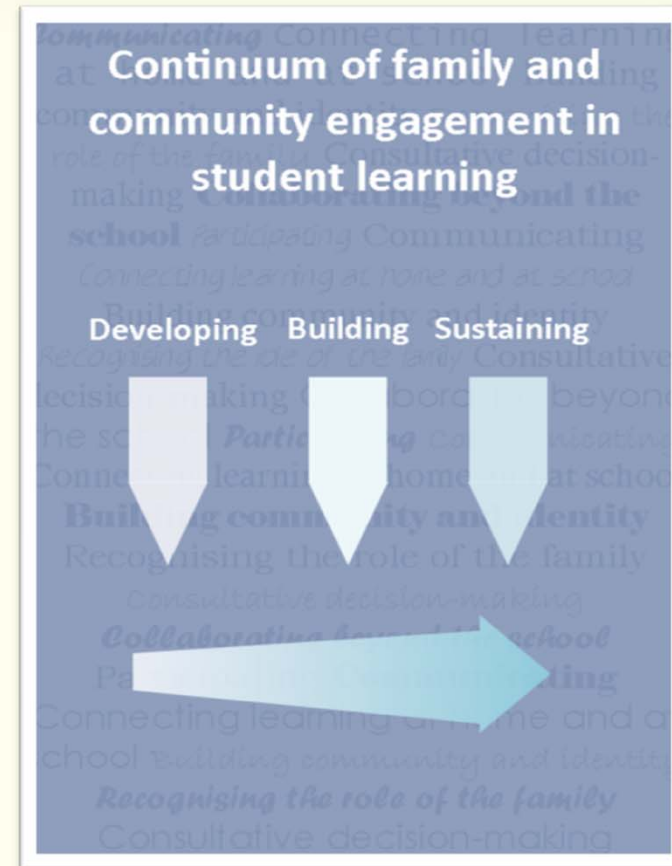


Elements of effective practice

Literature related to family and community engagement acknowledges that school communities lie along a continuum of engagement in student learning as shown in the following diagram. The literature identifies common elements of practice that positively impact on student learning outcomes along the continuum.

This resource adapts these elements to align them with the seven dimensions. For convenience four elements have been selected for each dimension. The elements form the basis of the *School Assessment Tool* which allows school communities to assess where they are on the continuum of practice.

 Click on the paper clip on the (PDF) left hand menu bar to access the attachment *Dimensions of family and community engagement at glance*



Outcomes

Outcome statements have been developed for the seven dimensions outlined in the *Family-School Partnerships Framework* to provide schools with guidance about the types of practices and behaviours the school could achieve when there is an increased focus on family and community engagement. These outcomes are the result, consequence or impact of focused action and can be measured or evaluated through the collection of data or observation.

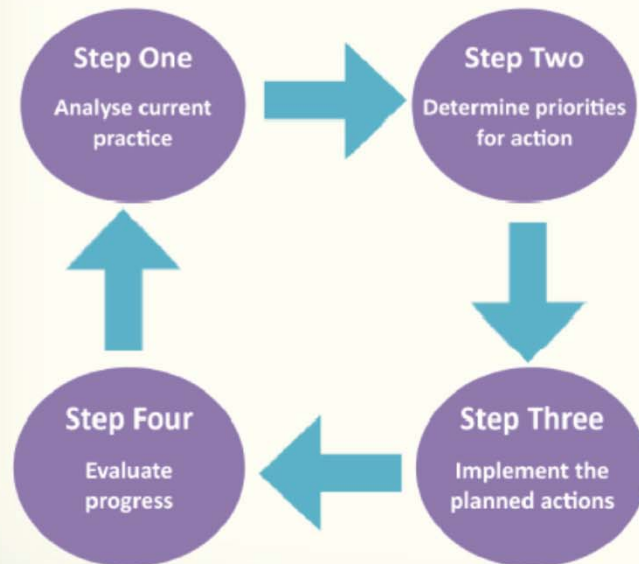


To read the outcome statements for the dimensions, click on the paper clip on the (PDF) left hand menu bar to access the attachment *Dimensions of family and community engagement at a glance*



Steps to strengthen engagement

The steps described in the following pages align with a typical school planning cycle and as such the school community (staff, families, students and community members) should be involved in all the steps. When the school community is included it is more likely that all groups within the school community will take ownership and be more committed to action.



Within each school community there will be key people and organisations who can assist families and community members engage in the processes.

Key support people and organisations

Relevant education officers supporting Aboriginal and multicultural education, and other community focused officers.

Local community groups providing advice about Aboriginal education.

Representatives of the culturally and linguistically diverse communities enrolled in the school.

School and regional parent representative bodies.

Local government, non government and community organisations, employers and tertiary institutions.





Strengthening family and community engagement in student learning

School Assessment Tool (Reflection Matrix)

The purpose of the School Assessment Tool

The *School Assessment Tool* has been developed to assist members of the school community (students, parents, staff and community members) assess current family and community engagement practices and to evaluate their progress when implementing strategies to strengthen engagement.

This tool has been developed to align with the seven key dimensions of effective practice identified by the *Family-School Partnerships Framework – A guide for schools and families (2008)*.

By using the *School Assessment Tool*, schools will be able to identify where they are placed on a continuum of engagement and where work can be celebrated and further developed.

Elements of the School Assessment Tool (pages 5-11)

1. The seven dimensions

The *Family-School Partnerships Framework* classifies activities into seven key dimensions. The dimensions provide the basic structure of the *School Assessment Tool*. They describe how school communities can strengthen engagement with families and the community to improve student learning outcomes. This diagram shows one of the dimensions.

3. Elements of effective practice

Examples of effective practice to achieve the intended outcome for the dimension. Four examples of effective practice have been provided for each dimension.

2. Outcome statement

Outcome statements provide schools with guidance about the types of practices and behaviours the school could achieve. The outcomes can be measured or evaluated through the collection of data or observation.

Dimension 1: Communicating

Effective communication is a two-way exchange between families and schools that involves information sharing and opportunities for schools and families to learn about each other.

Outcome

Effective two-way communication between families and schools to regularly seek and share information about student achievements and learning needs, school policies, practices and community initiatives.

4. Stages of engagement

The three stages, *Developing*, *Building*, *Sustaining*, within each dimension represent a continuum of engagement.

Throughout this tool, the stages of engagement build on each other, ensuring that good practices at the *Developing* and *Building* stage will progress to the *Sustaining* stage.

Elements of effective practice	Stage of engagement			Your current stage
	Developing	Building	Sustaining	
Using a variety of communication methods to seek and share information	The parent representative body and school keep families informed of upcoming events in a variety of ways, including regular print and electronic notices, in the languages spoken in the community. For example, the school uses newsletters, flyers, e-mails, translated phone calls, and text messages in the home languages of families as needed.	School staff collaborate with the parent representative body to develop connections with families through multiple two-way communication tools, including personal calls, e-mails and notes. For example, parents who are not fluent in English are given up-to-date information through bilingual staff or parent volunteers who are available at their convenient for their families.	Families, the community, and school staff communicate in numerous interactive ways, both formally and informally. For example, school and parent leaders help lead in community forums, use appropriate forms of media, including community radio and newspapers, and networks, including other social networking, to engage parents.	Not been yet Developing Building Sustaining Don't know
Reporting student achievements in culturally sensitive and respectful ways	Information about student achievement is clearly communicated to families in relevant community languages. For example, interpretations are used during parent/teacher interviews.	Teachers implement a systematic effort to maximize family participation at parent/teacher meetings. For example, translating information into community languages, holding the meetings at a variety of locations, offering flexible times, follow-up telephone calls to parents who do not reply to invitations.	School in collaboration with the parent representative body offers information to families to assist them to participate collaboratively in parent/teacher conversations. For example, a calendar of meetings to review assessments and testing programs, such as NAPLAN, is published at the commencement of the school year.	Not been yet Developing Building Sustaining Don't know
Consulting with all families to identify issues and concerns within the school	Leaders of the parent representative body and representatives from the school staff complete a parent involvement survey. The results guide the development of parent involvement programs. For example, the members of the parent representative body and the principal meet to discuss the survey results and plan strategies to address the findings.	The parent survey is translated into multiple languages and communicated in various ways, including in person, online, by post and by phone, and made available to all families. Results are posted on the school's website and discussed. For example, the parent representative body supports a range of activities to discuss survey results with families and send additional feedback.	Parent survey results are reflected in the school plan. For example, programs, policies and practices are developed collaboratively by students, teachers, school leaders, families and community members to meet the needs of families as identified in the survey.	Not been yet Developing Building Sustaining Don't know
Ensuring that all families have access to school leaders	School leaders have a visible presence within the school. For example, school leaders make a point of being at the school's entrance when families drop-off/pick-up their children.	The principal and other school leaders meet regularly with parents in small groups or one-to-one as needed, in school and in different community locations. For example, school leaders and members of the parent representative body organize meetings with families of workers often to discuss issues such as homework expectations and changes to school policy.	The school has formal and informal structures to support families to build connections with school leaders. For example, the school provides families with a range of contact options and operates an 'open door' policy for families.	Not been yet Developing Building Sustaining Don't know

5. The matrix

The matrix combines the descriptions for each element of effective practice, with examples, across the three stages of engagement.

6. Overall rating for the dimension

On completion of the matrix schools will be able to clearly identify and rate their current stage of engagement for the dimension after all statements in the matrix have been considered.

Overall rating: Not been yet Developing Building Sustaining Don't know

Connecting learning at home and at school

The information presented in this dimension is designed to assist schools set priorities for action as part of the school planning process. The attachment *Dimensions of family and community engagement at a glance* provides further information about this dimension including the elements of effective practice and outcome.



Click on the paper clip on the (PDF) left hand menu bar to access the attachment *Dimensions of family and community engagement at glance*





Successful strategies include:

- development of kits and resources to help families work with children at home
- families involved in setting goals for their children's learning (personalised learning plans)
- cultural activities, including camps, conducted for families and students
- teachers using student tasks to involve families in student learning
- students and families work together on projects such as murals, art shows, and kitchen gardens, research projects.



Connecting learning at home and at school case studies

<i>The power of respectfulness</i>	<i>Effective partnerships in action: Family Maths for years 5 and 6</i>	<i>School and Community: working together Series</i>
<p>Bradshaw Primary School Irrkerlantye Unit Northern Territory Student enrolment 297 Irrkerlantye Unit enrolment 65</p> <p>Reaching out to parents by a student support officer and teachers and a commitment from the school leadership to genuinely listen to parents have resulted in the development of respectful relationships between parents and the Unit.</p>	<p>Case study G: South Australian primary school – <i>Family-School Partnerships Framework</i></p> <p>The school built on important links already established between home and school through a series of workshops designed to enhance the capacity of families to support their children’s mathematics learning.</p>	<p>This resource contains numerous case studies that may provide strategies that could be used in similar settings.</p>
<p> Click on the paper clip on the left hand menu bar to access the attachment <i>School case studies in parental engagement</i> (pg 4–6)</p>	<p> Click on the paper clip on the left hand menu bar to access the attachment <i>Family-School Partnerships Framework</i> (pg 32–33)</p>	<p>Read the full case study at http://www.whatworks.edu.au/</p>



Connecting learning at home and at school resources

Secondary school strategies – Tip sheet	MakingCents© Copyright 2009, Finance First Partnership	74 Ways for Families to become Partners in Learning
<p>Research and experience indicate that family participation in their child's education diminishes as children and young people move through their school years. To help halt this decline in participation, secondary schools can reduce some of the common obstacles to family involvement that stem from the organisation and curriculum of the school, and can help families cope with the challenges of adolescence.</p>	<p><i>MakingCents</i> is a financial literacy program for primary children aged 7–12 and includes curriculum materials and guidelines to support teachers as well as a guide to help parents with their child's understanding of financial concepts like credit, banking and budgeting, with the aim of building healthy money habits for life.</p>	<p>A list of useful suggestions for families to follow that encourages them to become partners in their child's education.</p>
<p>http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/commrel/familiesaspartners/ts3sscholstrats.pdf</p>	<p>http://www.makingcents.com.au/</p>	<p>http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/commrel/familiesaspartners/ts10helpchild.pdf</p>



Key Messages



- #1 Strong family and community engagement is central to effective school reform
- #2 It's everybody's business
- #3 School policies, processes and traditions need to invite, expect, encourage, enable and celebrate family and community engagement

From here...



**What message will you take
back to your school
community?**

What are you going to do?