

**Saulwick Muller Social Research**

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**Australian Government**  
**Department of Education,  
Science and Training**



Australian Parents Council Inc.



Australian Council  
of State School  
Organisations Inc.

**FAMILY-SCHOOL  
PARTNERSHIPS  
PROJECT**

**A QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE STUDY**

PREPARED FOR

**THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE & TRAINING  
THE AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF STATE SCHOOL ORGANISATIONS  
THE AUSTRALIAN PARENTS COUNCIL**

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## **CONTENTS**

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Introduction	4
Methodology	8
Findings and recommendations	14
Historical and social context	30
Typology of school approaches	34
Best practice	44
Survey of parents	111
Efficacy of the draft framework	121
The Key Dimensions	128
Appendices:	
Members of the Project Advisory Committee	I
Research instruments, report pro-formas	II
List of participating schools	III

## **INTRODUCTION**

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In May 2005 the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), in association with the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) and the Australian Parents Council (APC), commissioned this research on the subject of family-school partnerships. It was the third phase of an initiative launched by the Australian Government on 28 May 2004.

The first phase had consisted of a literature review. In phase two a draft framework of principles and strategies for building family-school partnerships had been developed. The task in phase three was to trial the draft framework in schools.

The draft framework was circulated among government and non-government schools across Australia, and schools were invited through their peak bodies (ACSSO and APC) to submit proposals for projects which would give effect to its principles and strategies. The idea broadly was to find out whether, in practice, these principles and strategies provided a useful foundation for building family-school partnerships.

Each school's project was to be, in effect, a piece of action research on which to base an assessment of the framework's usefulness.

To help schools meet the costs of the projects, grants of \$10,000 were made available to all participating schools. A small number of isolated schools were given slightly more in recognition of their generally heavier costs.

Saulwick Muller Social Research was engaged to carry out a number of tasks associated with the implementation of the schools' projects, and to conduct overarching research on the effectiveness of the framework. Because of the size of the research program, Denis Muller and Irving Saulwick, the principals of SMSR, formed a consortium with a team from the Australian Catholic University led by Professor Doug Clarke, Professor Phil Clarkson and Dr Janelle Young, and with another independent consultant, Simon Brown-Greaves, of Melbourne.

Denis Muller was the lead consultant and project manager.

The tasks associated with implementing the schools' projects included:

- helping schools refine their proposals and make them workable;
- helping schools devise simple but effective ways to evaluate their projects;
- helping schools report on their projects;
- administering the grants;
- setting up a website through which schools could communicate with each other during the project, and
- providing whatever advice schools needed to bring their project to a successful conclusion.

The focus of this report, however, is upon the findings of the research, both from the schools and from the overarching work of the consultants. The administrative matters are the subject of a separate report.

In this report we:

- Present the research findings;
- Describe approaches and strategies used by schools to overcome barriers to family involvement;
- Identify the elements of best practice including where possible evidence of improvement in student outcomes and school ethos;
- Present 12 case studies of projects to illustrate best practice in a wide variety of school settings, including some in Indigenous settings;
- Identify and analyse common characteristics of best practice;
- Identify and analyse key factors at work in the development of successful partnerships; and
- Make recommendations about refinements to the draft framework.

All but the last of these were specified in our contract with DEST. However, at the request of ACSSO and APC, we have made recommendations. We also have added three further ingredients.

First, we believe that to present the findings from this research without any social or historical context would be to deprive the findings of important meaning. Family-school partnerships do not exist in a social vacuum: contemporary social conditions influence the importance attached

to them, and the nature of the partnerships themselves. Therefore we have written a brief chapter about the social and historical context of the study.

Second, we have developed a typology of approaches which we believe will help the reader distinguish among the wide variety of partnership approaches we saw, without having to examine all 61 cases. The typology also demonstrates how embryonic is the implementation of family-school partnerships even in schools which, by the fact of their involvement in this project, might be expected to have given more thought to it than most.

Third, we have devoted a chapter specifically to the draft framework itself, rather than simply make recommendations about it. We believe much can be learnt from the way principals, teachers and parents talked about the framework, and from a simple quantitative analysis of the way the schools made the connection between their projects and the framework's key dimensions.

This research shows clearly that the concept of family-school partnerships is an idea whose time has come. Much of the work done in these projects delivered clear educational and social benefits of direct relevance to the lives of people. Yet it is a bold concept requiring substantial cultural change, both within schools and in attitudes to schools. Generally speaking, this cultural change is only just beginning. A long journey lies ahead if it is to be accomplished widely, but the educational and social goods demonstrated by many of the projects examined here suggest that the journey is well worth making.

The report is organised as follows:

- Presentation of main findings and recommendations;
- Description of the methodology used by the researchers;
- Social and historical context;
- Typology of partnership approaches;
- Analysis and description of best practice, including 12 case studies;
- Discussion about the draft framework and analysis of the relevance of the key dimensions; and
- Presentation of quantitative survey and discussion about barriers to family participation.

A list of the participating schools is at Appendix III.

### **Acknowledgments**

We had the benefit of being able to discuss our work with a Project Advisory Committee at certain stages of the project, and are most grateful for their contribution. The members of the committee are listed in Appendix I.

We are also grateful to the representatives of ACSSO and APC, especially Rupert McGregor and Josephine Lonergan, for their wisdom and guidance.

Four officers of DEST were of particular help: Giancarlo Savaris, Reba Jacobs, Alison O'Shaugnessy, and Amanda Murray. We would like to record our appreciation of their pleasant and constructive assistance at every turn.

Above all we thank the school communities who were involved. It was impossible to carry out this work and not come away deeply impressed by the quality of the people devising and implementing these partnerships: their energy, creativity and commitment. This was so regardless of circumstance, from the comparative comfort of middle-class metropolitan suburbs to the most exiguous conditions imaginable in areas of social dysfunction, economic deprivation, geographic isolation, and sometimes all three.



DENIS MULLER

Lead Consultant and Project Manager

July 2006

## **METHODOLOGY**

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### **Rationale**

Our overall approach to this project was informed by the findings from the literature review compiled in phase one of the Family-School Partnerships initiative, the research objectives as set out in the project tender and our own experience in educational research.

For us the important findings from the literature concerned the issue of barriers to parental involvement. We took the view that if this project was to succeed in promoting genuine partnerships between families and schools, it really needed to reach out to the parents and draw them into its activities. And not just the “usual” parents, invaluable though they are in any school community, but what we called the “unusual” – those who seldom become involved, who might not see themselves as part of the “mainstream” for one reason or another. Our approach was to design our research, and help the schools design theirs, in ways that made it as easy as possible for “unusual” families to be included.

Barriers exist in the areas of communication, culture and personal feelings, and have many origins – historical, institutional, attitudinal, emotional, social, economic, cultural, and practical. Parents have many competing demands -- work commitments, meeting the needs of all their children, childcare difficulties and a lack of time generally.

So these were important considerations behind our research design.

The project tender listed four research objectives:

1. Enable the schools to refine and implement their projects.
2. Identify and document best practice in the creation of partnerships.
3. Assess and evaluate the effect of partnerships on educational outcomes and school ethos.
4. Test the suitability of the draft framework.

To fulfil these objectives it was considered that a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques should be used, with an emphasis on qualitative, since it was vital to explore school culture, as well as the thinking behind the projects, from both the school and family perspectives. It was also necessary to find out the role played by the framework in the development of the project, and to identify the key dimensions that were identifiably part of each project.

## Details

A list of participating schools was provided by ACSSO and APC, along with brief summaries of each school's intended or actual approach to developing family-school partnerships. These summaries also provided the enrolment size of each school and gave a thumbnail sketch of its circumstances.

We set a limit of 10 schools per researcher, to ensure that schools got the individual attention they deserved. In the event only one member of the team was assigned 10. The next largest assignment was eight. The 43 schools assigned to the team from the Australian Catholic University were divided up on a geographic basis among nine researchers, some of whom had a research assistant. Feedback from the schools about the support they received, and about their relationships with the researchers, was uniformly positive.

At each school we started by conducting a site visit during which we conducted in-depth interviews with the school Principal, the person at the school responsible for managing the project, and leaders of the parent community. We also conducted a forum for parents and arranged for a survey questionnaire to be distributed among parents, completed and returned to us.

The qualitative research was designed to:

- establish linkages and good relations between the researcher and the school community;
- inform the researcher about the school's plans for the project;
- allow the researcher to gather qualitative data for our own report on the project, and
- help the school develop appropriate research instruments and protocols for keeping track of the outcomes.

A series of open questions was devised to obtain details about, and background to, the projects. Detailed questions naturally flowed from the answers to these open questions. Research instruments and report proformas are included in Appendix II.

The survey and the parent forums were part of our "outreach" element. The quantitative survey took the form of a pre-test and post-test study. For each phase of this we provided 30 hard-copy questionnaires and reply-paid envelopes per school. These were delivered by each school's researcher on each visit. We relied on the parent representatives to distribute the questionnaires

on a “best endeavours” basis specifically to parents who were not on school committees or regular participants in school activities, and who had not been to the forum. To maintain confidentiality and minimise the burden on schools, respondents were able to return the completed questionnaires directly to the project manager.

Among other things, this questionnaire explored some of the important factors that are known to create barriers to parental involvement with their children’s school. In addition to exploring those factors, however, the questionnaire was also designed to measure awareness of, and involvement in, the school’s Partnerships project. The pre-test and post-test questionnaires are included in Appendix II to this report.

The site visits were begun as early as possible after the start of Term 3 2005 except in Tasmania where they were conducted during the latter part of Term 2 (Tasmania having only three terms). The intervention of the long Dry Season holidays in the Northern Territory, coupled with the later resumption of school in South Australia, meant that the site visits there trailed the others. In a few schools the absence of the Principal or the ill-health of key individuals created additional delays, but on the whole the site visits were accomplished in sufficient time to give the schools a reasonable time to implement and evaluate their projects.

Many schools had well-developed projects and had begun to implement them before we arrived. Some schools, however, had really very little idea of exactly what they were going to do until we arrived and talked it through with them, even though they had been briefed by one or other of the peak parent bodies. In these cases it was necessary to be pragmatic about what could be achieved in the comparatively short time available. Project parameters, evaluation criteria and evaluation assessment data were devised with these limitations in mind.

Of course there were also limits to what schools were equipped to do in measuring effects. It is complex work and we needed to be careful to strike the right balance between what the schools could reasonably be expected to provide, and obtaining sufficient and reliable data for the purposes of the study. In most cases we helped schools set up straightforward systems for recording levels of family involvement in the project and for recording families’ attitudes to it. In a very few cases we were able to obtain quantitative data on student outcomes. More commonly we had to rely on qualitative data, given the time constraints.

Arrangements were made during these first visits for a second round of site visits, the vast majority of which took place in the last two weeks of November. A few took place before then, and a small number took place in the first week of December, although we minimised the number of those.

For the second round of visits, revised qualitative and quantitative instruments were prepared, taking into account the wishes and ideas of the Project Advisory Committee which met in Melbourne on 7 October 2005.

In the meantime the schools were required by the terms of an agreement they signed with us to furnish us with a progress report (most of which arrived between 23 September and 10 October 2005) and a final report (most of which arrived in early December, with a few coming in after the resumption of school in 2006). To simplify this reporting process, we devised pro-formas for the schools to use. These are included in Appendix II.

An initial instalment of \$5500 was sent to each school upon the signing of the agreement, with the remaining money being paid when the progress report arrived (\$4400) and the rest when the final report arrived. The 14 isolated schools which qualified for small additional amounts were sent that additional amount separately after their final report had been received.

While the initial round of forums and interviews was taking place, we established a website providing a bulletin board, information exchange and chat room arrangements. We provided a parent feedback facility so parents could send in confidential comments about the parent-school relationship at their school. We used the website to make available relevant research, case studies and issues papers to participating schools, and to distribute report templates. We encouraged schools to use it to show what they were doing, but usage of the website by schools and parents for this purpose was low. In other respects, however, use of the website was high, and showed the benefits of using this technology in these circumstances. We report the website usage data in the findings.

The website:

- Presented background documentation about the project;
- Provided a copy of the draft framework;
- Provided copies of the school report templates for the project;
- Provided a calendar of school terms;
- Set out the time line for the project;

- Listed the participating schools;
- Provided a bulletin board and a chat room;
- Gave details about the researchers; and
- Profiled ACSSO and APC.

It also provided a confidential feedback facility so people could tell the researchers anything they wished in private. This was used only once.

Statistics on visits to the website were kept from 1 July to 31 December 2005, and are given in the table below. The unit of analysis we have adopted is “site visits” rather than “page hits” because the latter record every page hit by the one visitor, giving an inflated idea of the number of visitors.

Date range	Number of visits
1 July to 30 September 2005	1652
1 October to 31 December 2005	3171

It can be seen that visits to the website doubled, approximately, in the second half of the research period, indicating that awareness and interest increased as the project went along.

The total number of visits – 4823 – was high. The statistics also show that the average length of a visit was approximately four minutes, and that while only three topics were posted in the chat room, each of those topics was read between 110 and 150 times.

These figures, taken together, indicate that while the site was not very actively used by school communities to share their own information with others, it was quite considerably used by visitors as a source of information, and that the material posted there was found by them to be interesting.

That chat room topics were:

*Openness, Respect and Trust*, written by Denis Muller as a stimulus to open the chat room (153 reads).

*Data Collection and Analysis*, written by a school staff member, Erin Evans, keen to find out what other schools were doing about this (111 reads).

*School Councils*, an anonymous item discussing the role of school councils, arguing that they should be strengthened as a means of giving more power to parents in the running of schools (125 reads).

These did not engender any responses on the site, but were reasonably well read.

Before proceeding to report the findings from this research project, we would add one caveat. We were appointed in May 2005. This meant the amount of time most schools had to evaluate their projects in relation to students' academic outcomes was limited, and so the amount of quantitative assessment of the effect on these is limited. However, there is considerable quantitative evidence on other outcomes, and substantial qualitative evidence about the effect on students' performance and well-being. There is also substantial qualitative and quantitative evidence concerning other criteria for judging the success of the project, particularly in relation to parental involvement. There is also ample qualitative and quantitative evidence on which to base findings about the efficacy of the draft framework.

## **FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

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### **Findings**

#### **THE PARTNERSHIPS CONCEPT**

##### **Finding 1**

This action research project demonstrates that partnerships between families and schools can:

- Improve educational outcomes for students;
- Contribute to the building of social capital in the community;
- Positively alter school culture;
- Stimulate self-growth among parents; and
- Enhance the professional rewards for principals and school staff .

These are significant educational and social gains. They demonstrate the value of the family-school partnership ideal and provide strong grounds for adopting and promoting the concept as widely as possible.

##### **Finding 2**

A survey of parents conducted as part of this study found that large majorities said that their involvement in their school's partnership project had:

- Led to their knowing more about the kinds of activities going on in the school generally (60%);
- Led to their knowing more about what their children were being taught in school (62%); and
- Been good for their children's education (69%).

These are strong findings which demonstrate clearly the benefits to parents and to the educational well-being of children that arose from these partnership projects.

**Finding 3**

Valuable though the partnership ideal is, it requires considerable cultural change. There is a need for principals and teachers to readily acknowledge and appreciate the role of the parents, not only as “first educators” but as “continuing educators”, and to see a place for them in the educational life of the school. There is a need for parents to recognise and appreciate the power and importance of their educative role, and to see the value of the attributes they can bring to the education process.

For many people this means looking at the school-home relationship in an entirely new light. This will not happen overnight. It means changing many decades of attitudes and beliefs about who is responsible for what in the raising of children. This will take time, effort and considerable awareness-raising among parents and professionals alike.

It has also profound implications for the training of teachers and for the selection of principals. The necessary cultural change requires significant attention being paid both in the academy and in the bureaucracy to the role of the parent and how it interacts with the role of the professional educator.

**Finding 4**

Developing parent-school partnerships requires a new way of thinking about issues of control and power, and creative thinking about reaching out to those who are or feel excluded. This is a particular priority in Indigenous settings where alienation from schooling can be widespread among parents. Some schools are further along the path of recognising these requirements than are others, and schools take many different approaches to making partnerships real. These approaches are informed by the school’s own circumstances: its history, the outlook and commitment of the Principal, the economic, social and geographical conditions of its community. In Indigenous settings, the introduction of Aboriginal Education Workers (or those with equivalent titles and functions in the various States), or of Indigenous parents into active roles in the school have been shown to be effective ways of creating a sense of cultural inclusiveness.

To provide a broad map of where these 61 school were on this path, we developed a typology in which schools were categorised according to what their project revealed about their progress towards the fulfillment of the partnership ideal. The types are gathered under two big groupings – what we have called the “Traditional Roles” types and the “Social Change” types. In the first group are schools where the focus of the partnership project was on the traditional educational

functions of schools. In the second are schools where the focus of the project was on responding to wider imperatives deriving from community need.

Here are the types, and the number of schools we believe qualified for inclusion in each. As we have said, schools do not necessarily fit wholly or neatly into these types. Some of the case-study schools in particular fit into more than one. However, this gives a broad idea of the distribution across the types.

### **“Traditional roles” types**

A. **THE FULLY FLEDGED PARTNERS:** Schools with an embedded culture of accepting parents as full partners in their children’s education. Four schools, including case studies C, H and J.

B. **THE CULTURE-CHANGERS:** Schools that accept in principle the idea that parents are full partners in their children’s education, but are having to undergo major cultural change to allow this to happen. Four schools, including case study B.

C. **THE ENGAGERS:** Schools that recognise the need to engage parents, where the partnership concept is still evolving, and where this work is generally a precursor to making it real. More or less entirely school-driven. Seventeen schools.

D. **THE SEEKERS:** Schools that are finding out what the needs of their parents are with a view to improving communications. Fulfillment of the partnership ideal lies somewhere beyond this preliminary work. Ten schools.

E. **THE GOVERNANCE-ORIENTED:** Schools that recognise parents as partners but give effect to it through changes to governance structures which give parents a broader role in school decision-making. Two schools.

### **“Social change” types**

A. **THE SOCIAL CAPITAL BUILDERS:** Schools that reach out to the parent body and beyond to provide resources for the building of social capital in the community. Nineteen schools, including case studies A, E, F, G, I, K and L.

B. **THE RESILIENCE BUILDERS:** Schools that supply the main resource for parents in helping keep their children at school, avoid substance abuse and other dangers, so they may have a better chance in life. Five schools, including Case Study D.

### **Finding 5**

In nearly all cases, the original impetus for the partnership projects seen in this research came from the school. This is because parents generally expect schools to take the initiative in these matters, and because the school is in a position to see more broadly the overall needs of children than can individual families.

Even where the impetus came from the parents, they tended to be respectful of the school's educational expertise. This does not imply deference. If parents feel strongly enough about an issue, they will press their case resolutely but in the main parents will need strong reasons to argue with the school over educational or child-management issues. The good Principal will nurture this parental strength in schools where there is a culture of parental engagement.

Where the impetus has come from the parents, the focus of the project has tended to be more on social issues than educational.

There are cases all through this study – including the Best Practice cases – where the school has driven the project: identified a problem, proposed a solution, and implemented it while at the same time engendering a sense of partnership, in some cases where no such sense ever existed before and did not necessarily do so at the outset.

It is perhaps to be expected that the impetus should come from the school, but this does not prevent a true partnership from developing. The sense of partnership can grow with the project: it needn't start as a 50-50 arrangement.

### **Finding 6**

Competing demands on parents' time was the most common barrier to parental involvement in the project. Disaffection arising from unhappy schooldays or dissatisfaction with the existing school was rare. However, the fact that parents placed a higher priority on other activities than those involving the school suggests that schools face a challenge to persuade parents of the benefits of according school activities a higher priority. This applies as much to primary schools as to secondary. Although in the early years (up to Year 2) there tends to be a higher level of parental involvement, it falls away from Year 3 on. Closely allied to this is the issue of effective communication with parents and in this survey 26% of parents said the reason they had not become involved in the project was because of inadequate communications. It might be added that this was a spontaneous response, not one which was invited by the survey. Moreover, since the lack of communication was a barrier in schools already paying particular attention to family-school partnerships, it is likely that it is at least as a great barrier in schools generally.

It is a matter also of educating parents in the fundamental importance of a family-school partnership to their children's education and so persuading them of the necessity as well as the opportunity to become involved. This is of particular importance to Indigenous parents, who

may have negative educational experiences and be alienated from the schooling system. Also, educating parents and communities is very important in building local community capacity.

In this regard, the wording of the draft framework's Dimension A – Understanding Roles – was commonly construed in ways that were not intended. For example, some schools tended to take it as meaning that “parents could now see what we are trying to do for their children”. In other schools it was seen as an expression of demarcation between the role of the school and the role of the home. In others again, what we took to be the intended meaning – understanding by parents about how they can contribute and by teachers about what parents can do -- was in fact the meaning ascribed to it. We make a recommendation about this later.

It is important to convey to parents that not only are they capable of being partners in their children's education but that it would be positively welcomed by the school.

**Finding 7**

Parents react best when they can see there is a connection between their involvement in the school and their own child's education.

**Finding 8**

Bringing parents into the school's life, asking their opinion, exposing them to the ways schools work, can have a positive effect on the attitude of some parents to the school when that attitude has been hostile. Hostility often springs from a sense of having been excluded, or intimidated or being fobbed off or kept in the dark. There were several cases here, including case study A, where an inclusive approach defused what had been in the past a dangerously hostile environment.

**BEST PRACTICE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS****Finding 9**

What constitutes a family-school partnership ought not be reduced to a doctrinaire definition. What makes a partnership can and should vary from school to school. Few projects among the 61 in this study sprang originally from the minds of parents, or jointly from the minds of parents and staff, but this does not, in our view, rob them of the “partnership” characteristic. What makes them partnerships is the presence of five key characteristics:

1. The school leadership’s willingness to consult and listen;
2. Their willingness to be responsive;
3. Their willingness to be welcoming;
4. Their willingness to find out the real needs of parents rather than make assumptions;  
and
5. Their efforts to nurture an open, inclusive culture.

Projects exhibiting these qualities we came to regard as “best practice”, and they are exemplified in the case studies.

**Finding 10**

We also distilled elements of best practice. These do not amount to a checklist because not all will be present in any one partnership, but they reflect to a considerable extent the key dimensions in the draft framework, as the table below shows. However, there are elements of best practice that seem not to fit easily into the key dimensions. They are:

- Be a venue for, and agent of, parental self-growth;
- Be sensitive to parents’ sensibilities;
- Show leadership, be visible and available;
- Be realistic, patient, and a bit brave; and
- Create a place that parents can call their own.

It is not necessary to force them into the key dimensions. However, they deserve explicit mention in the framework document. Those elements of best practice that do fit within the key dimensions are set out below. It shows clearly why “Communication” is out on its own as a first-order key dimension.

Key Dimension	Elements of best practice
A: Understanding of roles	
B: Connecting home and school learning	Emphasise the connection with the child's education.
C: Communicating	Use personal contact. It is the most effective form of communication. Communicate, communicate, communicate. Go out of your way to make parents feel welcome and valued. Build bridges across cultural and language divides. Make it clear you think of parents as genuine partners. Don't be frightened to ask parents to help solve big problems. Open your mind to parents' needs and attitudes. Appoint a parent/community liaison person to the staff. Acknowledge and celebrate the parents' input.
D: Participating	Give parents an opportunity to do something that interests them. Break down the teacher/non-teacher barrier by allowing for activities that are not directly education-related.
E: Decision-making	Ask for, and value, the opinion of parents outside the formal school structures. Create an environment in which parental autonomy can be fostered and sustained.
F: Collaborating beyond the school	
G: Building community and identity	Be prepared to engage in community capacity-building.

### **Finding 11**

The school Principal is the single most important factor in achieving best practice. Where the Principal is visionary, perceptive, creative, committed, open, patient and capable of leading with humility and humanity, the partnership ideal flourishes. These paragons exist. They are there in the 12 case studies and in many other schools besides.

Their secret appears to be a capacity to empower others; to recognise that good ideas can come from others; to take the attitude that "you have to have a fair dinkum crack" (as one so potently expressed it); to be able to empathise with others, especially people in hardship or difficulty, and to do all this without losing their natural authority. Genuine leadership, in other words.

However, principals are to some extent the product of their own training and of the culture of the larger organisation within which they work. Some school systems are more flexible than others. Some have devolved more power to principals than have others. Some have sought to promote managerial qualities in principals and some have not. Some are readier than others to recognise the wider role schools and principals are being asked to play, though additional resourcing

seldom – if ever – accompanies this recognition. All these factors, in addition to personal disposition, play a part in determining the extent to which principals are able and willing to value the partnership ideal and give effect to it.

**Finding 12**

Allied to this is the presence of teachers who embrace the role of families in children's education. The case studies indicate the crucial role of teachers where, for example, family maths programs are involved or other programs in which parents participate in programs involving strategies for supporting their children in the main curriculum areas. More generally, where teachers sign on to the ideal of treating parents as partners, a rich relationship between families and the school usually develops. This does not come naturally to all teachers, and in some schools the introduction of the partnership concept has meant that the Principal has had to work on achieving a substantial cultural change among the staff.

**Finding 13**

A recurring feature of the best of these partnerships projects was that they brought into the school parents who were not usually involved. In that sense, they reached beyond the P&C/P&F. Case study K provides an excellent example. Indeed we heard many times that the parents involved in the partnership projects were those who felt uneasy in meetings and other more formal settings. The project attracted them because it was practical, hands-on, often directly related to their child's education, and made them feel valued. As with most such ventures, however, it was important to have a core of committed parents to make the project work. In some cases there was a single critical parent, as in case study H; more often it was a small group, as in case studies A and E. Typically, though, these parent leaders avoided creating authority structures – committees, titles and the like – and kept any meetings informal. The emphasis was on friendship, support, and doing things that were interesting and worthwhile for their children and themselves. This approach broke down many of the psychological barriers that commonly prevent parents from getting involved in the school: a sense of inferiority; of not wanting to sit in meetings all night; and of having to confront demons from their own school days. The emphasis on the social dimension led naturally to the drawing in of other parents because those already involved were keen to champion the project among their friends, many of whom shared the same inhibitions. In this way many of the projects helped to dissolve social isolation as well as enlarge and enrich the active school community.

**Finding 14**

It is essential to be explicit about the values the school wishes to have underpin its partnership, values like co-operation, trust, and a holistic approach to education.

**Finding 15**

Effective forms of two-way communication between school and home are central to the successful development of family-school partnerships. Communication needs to change from occasional, one-way and socio-culturally homogenous communication to frequent, two-way and culturally sensitive interaction. It requires much more than informing parents by the school newsletter.

**Finding 16**

Shared views, actions and goals also appear to be vital. Shared decision-making is seen as being empowering for families. It gives them a feeling of ownership of the school, an awareness of parents' voices being heard, and connections with other families.

**Finding 17**

Effective communication is the single most important factor in getting parents engaged. The newsletter is never enough. The appointment of a parent liaison officer is a very useful initiative. Many of the schools used their grant money for this, and it paid off handsomely: see, for example, case study I. First, it gives immediate and concrete effect to the idea that parents are important to the school. Second, engaging parents in school life, beyond the "usual" parents for the "usual" tasks such as fund-raising, requires a sustained and constant effort. When a person is appointed to a position where parental engagement is the main focus, that effort can be sustained. It gives the school a new and highly effective means of communication: personalised and human. This research shows communication on that level to be absolutely critical to the success of a partnership approach.

**Finding 18**

As the typology shows, much of this partnership work is taking place in places of extreme disadvantage. It is clear from this research that the hardship was there and the partnership was developed in response. The good this does for students, families, the community and the school suggests that places of social, economic and geographic disadvantage might be considered priority areas for the spread of the partnership concept. This applies with particular force to Indigenous communities where people often face a combination of these disadvantages, and

would have much to gain from a collaborative, inclusive and culturally sensitive partnership. The corollary, taking into account Finding 8, is that these areas also need high quality principals.

## **THE DRAFT FRAMEWORK**

### **Finding 19**

In general, the draft framework has proved to be a sound document, endorsed by all who read it as having identified the crucial elements of successful family-school partnerships.

### **Finding 20**

Many principals – including many in the case studies -- had only a passing acquaintance with the it. Most saw it as something of a “motherhood” document. By this they did not mean to be dismissive. On the contrary, they saw the document as identifying all the ideals of family-school partnerships, and its key dimensions as being the essential bases for building such partnerships. Some also saw it as affirming their own beliefs, and the school’s own mission. But like many statements of principle, it requires endorsement at the highest level and a connection with practice at an operational level.

### **Finding 21**

A particular benefit for many principals was that the draft framework provided a means of auditing their performance against those beliefs: it caused them to take stock. Some were prepared to admit that their performance was not perhaps all that it might be. In some schools, as a result, the document had become a catalyst for change. In many schools it reinforced what was already being done.

For many schools also it had also been a vital stimulant to initiating a project, a guide to how it might be designed, and a means towards implementing it by giving them what some called a “scaffolding” to build it on. In a very few cases the partnerships project was seen as simply an opportunity to obtain some funding to do what the school was already intending to do anyway.

A further area that needs to be included in the framework is assessment and accountability. The evaluation process was something that some schools had not considered and many schools shied away from it because of the perceived complexities involved. Some sample questionnaires or surveys would be beneficial.

**Finding 22**

There seemed to be a widespread assumption among principals and teachers that this was a document for educationalists, not for the whole school community. Few parents we spoke to had even heard of it. Some respondents commented on what they saw as its academic tone and thought it would need to be simplified and made more inviting if it were to be attractive to most parents. This is of particular concern where Indigenous parents and those from non-English-speaking backgrounds are concerned. By contrast, it was common to find teachers with carriage of the project who considered it easy to use. Usually these people had read it several times and were very familiar with it.

**Finding 23**

A simple statistical analysis reveals that the key dimension most commonly nominated by principals, teachers and parent representatives as “really important” to the project was Dimension C (communicating), followed by Dimensions B (connecting home and school learning) and G (building community and identity).

Dimension C clearly emerges as a first-order dimension in the building of family-school partnerships. Dimensions B (connecting home and school learning) and G (building community and identity) emerge as second-order dimensions. Dimensions A (understanding of roles), E (decision-making) and F (collaborating beyond the school) emerged as third-order dimensions, as the table below shows.

Key Dimension	Percentage of schools saying their project related to or fulfilled this dimension
	N = 61
	%
A: Understanding of roles	38
B: Connecting home and school learning	51
C: Communicating	62
D: Participating	48
E: Decision-making	28
F: Collaborating beyond the school	28
G: Building community and identity	54

In the case study schools the pattern was very similar. The percentages look inflated because the base is small:

Key Dimension	Percentage of case-study schools saying their project related to or fulfilled this dimension
	N = 12
	%
A: Understanding of roles	25
B: Connecting home and school learning	67
C: Communicating	75
D: Participating	58
E: Decision-making	25
F: Collaborating beyond the school	8
G: Building community and identity	50

#### **Finding 24**

Two other factors emerged as important in the building and sustaining of family-school partnerships. They are not really “dimensions”, but need explicit recognition.

The first is what we will call “school needfulness”, that is, the explicit declaration by the school to the parents that it needs their help and values it, not just that it would be rather nice if it were offered. Where schools had made this explicit, the response of the parents had been generally positive and direct. They felt needed, they were shown how they could help, they willingly became engaged, they felt valued and rewarded.

The second is what we will call “outreach and sustainability”, that is, maintaining the partnership ideal beyond the catalysing project and reaching beyond the ranks of those parents usually involved in the school. Many of the projects had achieved the outreach, but the challenge was to sustain it. Some schools had insights about this which could usefully be included in the framework.

## **TIME AND MONEY**

### **Finding 25**

The research demonstrates the need for time to be invested in this kind of work. As many of the principals told us, you need to be patient. This will not happen overnight. Having worked so hard to generate momentum, schools were deeply committed to keeping the project going. To do so, however, meant that in many cases they were relying on the generosity and goodwill of staff working in their own time or otherwise “going the extra mile”. In these cases, sustainability depended upon those members of staff being available, able and willing to go on in this way. Inevitably, this is not always going to happen. In one case-study school, for instance, one of the key teachers is about to retire. This raises a fundamental question about how the partnerships work in schools can be sustained without being resourced in a way that at least reduces its reliance on the energy, goodwill and commitment of a few key individuals. It is worth remembering that this work involves cultural change, a process that takes years, no matter what the setting.

### **Finding 26**

School budgets do not allow for initiatives of this kind. The seed money provided by the grants in this research project was crucial in a number of ways. In schools where the projects were already under way the money was used to resource it better and more effectively. In other schools where the project had proceeded entirely on volunteerism, the money had allowed the school to employ someone (often a parent) in the role of parent liaison officer, thus giving a big fillip to the effort to engage parents. In areas of economic want, it allowed the school to purchase resources to help parents re-engage with education, or to help poor families participate in activities which they otherwise could not afford. If there was a single most critical use for the money, it was the employment of a parent liaison officer. This was invariably part-time, but in the nature of these things the time given by the person tended to stretch well beyond the time paid for. In that sense, the schools got very good value for money.

## **Recommendations**

### **Recommendation 1**

That the concept of family-school partnerships be promoted widely as having clear benefits for students, families, communities and schools.

### **Recommendation 2**

That remote areas and areas of social and economic disadvantage be considered priority areas for the promotion of family-school partnerships.

### **Recommendation 3**

That it be recognised that time and resources are necessary to embed partnership work in schools.

### **Recommendation 4**

That jurisdictions and sectors provide the resourcing necessary to allow family-school partnerships to grow, be sustained and become part of the established core of what schools do.

### **Recommendation 5**

That the existence of a genuine partnership be recognised, even when the impetus comes entirely from the school, so long as the relationship exhibits the five key characteristics listed in Finding 9.

### **Recommendation 6**

That the work of the case-study schools in this project be widely disseminated among schools as exemplars of what can be achieved, and that consideration be given to inviting the principals of those schools to help by participating as presenters in a national conference or some similar forum on the topic.

### **Recommendation 7**

Having the partnership ideal take root across all schools is a major undertaking requiring significant resources. Merely to circulate the framework and to hold a national forum is unlikely to be sufficient. Consideration should be given to establishing some infrastructure the main purpose of which is to encourage and guide the establishment of family-school partnerships. What is needed is a small expert secretariat which provides a clearing house for information on the topic and is a place to which schools can turn for advice.

**Recommendation 8**

That the work of schools in building community capacity and social capital be recognised as an emerging responsibility of schools in contemporary Australia, and be resourced accordingly. It should be promoted and encouraged so that over time it becomes part of the core function of schools. It seems to us that money invested here at all levels of government would be repaid several times over in the beneficial effects of improved educational outcomes and better-functioning communities. Not only this, but the community are already voting with their feet: they are increasingly turning to schools for this kind of assistance. Not to recognise this reality leaves schools caught between trying to meet these increasing demands from the community and lack of the resources necessary to do so. How this should be done is a political question.

**Recommendation 9**

That schools be given the time and resources with which to evaluate their work in this field. Meaningful evaluation can occur only after the work has been going long enough to judge whether it has been effective. Evaluation instruments should be simple and designed to measure parental engagement, identify barriers to engagement, and say something about the effect on student outcomes -- educational, social or both. Care should be taken not to require schools to carry out complex and burdensome evaluations, nor to duplicate or conflict with the data-collection already mandated by state and territory jurisdictions.

**Recommendation 10**

That with appropriate recommendations as suggested in this report, a plain English version of the draft framework go forward as a document of guidance to school communities in establishing effective family-school partnerships. It should be written in language that is easily comprehensible by people lacking close acquaintance with the jargon of education. Schools should be educated that it is not a document exclusively for them.

**Recommendation 11**

That Dimension A be re-worded to unambiguously express the idea that a key dimension of a family-school partnership is the understanding by parents about how they can contribute and by teachers about what parents can do. Perhaps something like "Recognising or appreciating the role of the home". Raising awareness among parents in recognising and appreciating the role they can play, both as "first educators" and "continuing educators" of their children is a priority. Consistent with that, it is recommended that the wording of Dimension A be changed to convey

this sense of recognition and appreciation of the parent role. The benefits of this are clearly demonstrated, especially in case studies A, C, D and J.

**Recommendation 12**

That the Framework document contain provision for schools to consider and answer these questions for itself in respect of each key dimension:

- To what extent is this occurring in the school?
- What evidence do we have from staff and parents on our performance in these areas?

**Recommendation 13**

That the Australian Council of Deans of Education be asked to consider the concept of family-school partnerships, with the Deans of Education also being asked to consider the rationale for them to be built into teacher training.

**Recommendation 14**

That the concept of family-school partnerships be commended to the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) with a view to having it endorsed by all sectors and jurisdictions with consideration of how the concept may be made real in all schools.

**Recommendation 15**

Where Indigenous people form part of a school community, care should be taken to ensure Indigenous families are communicated with in ways appropriate to their culture, that Indigenous culture and history are included in the curriculum and that all relevant areas of need, including access, health, and transport, are considered as part of project design and implementation.

## **HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT**

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Compulsory universal education of children was a contested and radical innovation in Western societies. It brought fundamental change in the relationship between the family and the state, and had far-reaching consequences for labour markets, gender roles, fertility rates and family structures.<sup>1</sup>

Relevant to this study is the change in the relationship between the family and the state. It causes us to reflect on the origins of what nowadays has the appearance of an artificial division between the social development and the training, including the intellectual development, of a child.

Traditionally the family has been considered primarily responsible for the social development of the child, and the state – in the form of schools – has been considered primarily responsible for teaching the child work-related skills and academic knowledge. Educational historians have advanced many rationales for the state's interest in doing so: the desire to provide for the needs of an industrialised economy, and to preserve the social order<sup>2</sup> are merely two, and this is not the place to debate their merits. The point is, the state did assert an interest in skill-training and the intellectual development of children for various reasons, and families had no choice but to comply.

The effect on families was tangible:

The compulsion to send children regularly to school, scrubbed and in clean clothes, was part of a process which eroded parents' discretion about the use of their children's time and labour.<sup>3</sup>

Over time, however, parents not only ceded to schools responsibility for this element in their children's upbringing, but came to expect that schools would inculcate values and behavioural

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Pavla Miller and Ian Davey, *Family Formation, Schooling and the Patriarchal State*, in M. Theobald and R. Sellick (eds), *Family, School and State in Australian History*, 1990, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, pp 1-24. See also Clyde Chitty, *The Changing Role of the State in Education Provision*, in Roy Lowe (ed), *History of Education, Vol II*, 2000, London, RoutledgeFalmer, pp285-302.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *The Origins of Mass Public Education*, in Roy Lowe (ed), *History of Education*, op.cit. pp 61-91.

<sup>3</sup> Pavla Miller and Ian Davey, op. cit.

norms as well. Research we carried out across Australia in 1998<sup>4</sup> revealed just how much parents have come to expect from schools. While that work was carried out among parents who sent their children to non-government schools, in our experience their attitudes on this matter are shared by parents generally. Parents expected the school to:

- nurture their child with care;
- allow their child to develop as well-rounded human beings;
- imbue their child with, and reinforce, the values and culture of the home;
- instil in their child self-discipline and respect for others;
- teach their child how to learn; and
- give their child enough skills and knowledge to allow them to build a future economically and socially.

Moreover, the accelerating advancement of knowledge has, if anything, widened the gap between what parents learnt and what their children learn at school. This has had the effect of discouraging parents from taking an active part in their children's skill-training and academic education beyond the middle primary years. There is much evidence about this from the present study, and it has been a constant in our research for at least the past decade.

A major consequence of these historical, social and educational developments has been the creation of a culture in which families and schools came to see themselves as parallel but largely disconnected institutions. The idea that families and schools should now see themselves as partners in the development of a child is a radical departure from this culture of separation. If the idea is to take root, cultural change is required by schools and families.

This in itself would be a big enough challenge, but it takes account only of one dimension -- what we call the traditional-roles dimension. There is, in fact, another. We call it the social-change dimension.

We are living in a time of profound change – political, technological, economic and social. In Australia the forces of change were unleashed in the 1980s with the dismantling of what has been called the Australian Settlement. Kelly<sup>5</sup> identified its five main elements: White Australia, Industry Protection, Wage Arbitration, State Paternalism, and Imperial Benevolence. While some of the pillars of the Settlement collapsed in the post-War period, industry protection, wage arbitration and state paternalism survived into the 1980s.

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<sup>4</sup> Irving Saulwick and Denis Muller, *What Parents Want From Their Children's Education*, research conducted for the National Council of Independent Schools Association, June 1998.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Kelly, *The End of Certainty*, 1992, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, pp 1-2.

Then, under the influence of the doctrines of economic rationalism, the role of government changed, market competition grew, jobs went offshore, unemployment rose, the workforce became casualised, the income distribution became less equitable. Overlaid upon this, and magnifying many of its effects, came the revolution in information technology of the 1990s, the consequent globalisation of the economy, and the explosive exposure to information.

The evidence of this research, and of other research we have carried out in schools over the past decade, is that schools have become increasingly important as sources of community cohesion and support. In many disadvantaged areas, teachers and principals are looked to for community leadership.

This is true in all such areas, but it is accentuated in the country where the professional and managerial classes who might once have shared that role are no longer present. We saw it in this study, especially in four of the case studies – A, D, E, and F. We have seen it in other research we have done: in two evaluations of the Seasons for Growth program (a program to assist children suffering loss and grief), an evaluation of the Families Matter program (a program of resilience used also a vehicle for partnerships by several schools in this project), and in a study of the effect of workload on the health and well-being of Principal-class people in Victorian government schools.<sup>6</sup>

There are also parents who were so alienated from schools in their own young lives that they are unable to approach a school with confidence. This is particularly the case among Indigenous parents, who may have encountered racism, discrimination and marginalisation in their own school days. The social isolation of alienated parents is thus exacerbated. The schools, for their part, feel responsible to assist. There are two main reasons for this.

The first is grounded in common humanity.

The second is grounded in their mandate to educate. They see that fulfilling the mandate is impossible if students arrive at school hungry, or beaten up, or terrified, or distraught, or suffering from the effects of substance abuse, or burdened by family dysfunction.

This has created a new and powerful basis for challenging the old cultural divide between families and schools. It has been fascinating to observe in the present study that it is in areas of social disadvantage that some of the best and most advanced partnerships work is being done,

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<sup>6</sup> Denis Muller and Irving Saulwick, *The Privilege and the Price*, report to the Victorian Department of Education and Training, 2003.

notably in some remote areas with significant proportions of Indigenous students. Where the imperative is greatest, so the development of the new paradigm is most advanced.

Across the 61 schools in this study we have seen an extraordinarily wide variety of approaches to the partnership ideal. Many are contained within traditional-roles dimension of the cultural challenge, but a considerable number are based upon the social-change dimension.

Through necessity, through choice, through self-centred enlightenment and for many other reasons parents are slowly coming to accept the idea of partnership. With it comes acceptance of the idea of dual responsibility with the school for the education of their children. Although the trend may accelerate it will for some time continue grow slow and be fragile. It will mean new responsibilities for schools, with consequences for resourcing, accountability measures, and teacher training.

In the next section of our report, we classify the partnership projects according to one or other of these dimensions, and briefly describe what each project consisted of.

## **TYPOLGY OF SCHOOL APPROACHES**

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In this chapter we categorise the approaches taken by schools to the partnerships concept, as demonstrated by them in their projects. As we said in the chapter on social and historical context, Australian society is living through a period of turbulence. As we also said, the notion of partnership between schools and families is in some respects novel and will take time to be recognised and accepted in all school communities.

As this typology shows, some schools are further along the path of recognition than others, and schools take many different approaches to making partnerships real. These approaches are informed by the school's own circumstances: its history, the outlook and personality of the Principal, the economic, social and geographical conditions of its community.

In this chapter – and indeed the report as a whole -- the term “school” usually means the Principal and staff, unless the context suggests otherwise. In those cases, it will mean the Principal, staff, and parents, or all of those plus the wider community. Where these wider meanings are intended, they are generally spelt out.

A word of caution. Typologies are useful ways to organise information of this kind, especially when it comes in large amounts. But schools -- like people -- are complex and not amenable to being easily pigeonholed. We have tried hard not to over-simplify the picture; even so, readers should recognise that while we believe we have captured the essence of each approach here, many schools exhibited elements of more than one type.

The types are gathered under two big groupings – what we have called the “Traditional Roles” types and the “Social Change” types. The first are schools where the focus of the partnership project was on the traditional educational functions of schools. The second are schools where the focus of the project was on responding to wider imperatives deriving from community need.

## **1. “Traditional roles” types:**

### **A. THE FULLY FLEDGED PARTNERS**

#### **Schools with an embedded culture of accepting parents as full partners in their children’s education.**

Metropolitan government primary:

This was a genuine school-parent participation involving talking with individual students and setting individual goals. The main benefit is that the students were given individual attention. There was a real sense of partnership.

Metropolitan Catholic primary:

A well-established program in which teachers train parents in literacy and numeracy, using materials chosen by the school but with parental consultation. Parents are rostered as classroom assistants in lessons timetabled to maximise parental involvement. Based on a long history of parents being regarded as full partners in education.

Metropolitan government primary:

The project built on the strengths the school has developed in maths teaching by extending the special family maths program. This involves parents teaching parents how to help their children with maths, with professional support from teachers. A substantial commitment of three nights’ preparation was required of parents who were to deliver the information to other parents.

Metropolitan Catholic secondary:

This was a major project to improve homework, involving focus groups and surveys, production of an issues paper, a website dedicated to homework solutions, and the development of an action plan. Seventy-two members of the school community were involved. A substantial piece of school-community partnership on a topic of direct relevance to students, parents and teachers.

### **B. THE CULTURE-CHANGERS**

#### **Schools that accept in principle the idea that parents are full partners in their children’s education, but are having to undergo major cultural change to allow this to happen.**

Regional independent secondary:

The schools had embarked on a “restorative practice” behaviour program, only to find that this meant engaging parents on a scale never before contemplated. This led to a decision to embark on changing the school’s culture so that parents would be recognised as real partners in their children’s education.

Metropolitan government primary:

This school used a number of approaches –play groups for pre-school children and their parents, and quite comprehensive bi-lingual workshops to educate parents about bullying, road safety, parenting skills, and to equip them to participate in the classroom as helpers. It was specifically designed, among other things, to “empower” and “give a voice to” parents, an aspect with alarmed some staff. It was also designed to make parents feel comfortable at the school.

Rural government primary:

The school used an off-the-shelf early-years literacy program to enhance students' learning, among other things by involving parents directly in the classroom and at home. This attracted considerable parent interest, with up to 60% of parents from the cohort involved and many more scheduled to be trained.

Remote rural government primary:

A collection of eight school-initiated activities, some off-the-shelf programs, some home-grown, designed to bring parents in as classroom helpers, improve communications between the school and parents and provide support to parents. Here the emphasis was on a cultural shift among parents more than the school.

### **C. THE ENGAGERS**

**Schools that recognise the need to engage parents, where the partnership concept is still evolving, and where this work is generally a precursor to making it real. More or less entirely school-driven.**

Remote government primary:

This was a small but determined attempt to re-engage a community of parents in especially isolated and difficult circumstances, where many of the parents themselves had had bad experiences at the school. The project involved the appointment of a parent liaison officer and the creation of an induction package to make parents more familiar with the school.

Metropolitan government primary:

The main activity of the project was a theatrical production involving students, parents and members of the community, which appeared to draw in many families who otherwise had not been involved in school activities. The project seemed to generate much enjoyment in the school community. The lesson is that something that captures the imagination can engage many people and enhance self-esteem and pride.

Outer metropolitan Catholic primary:

The project consisted of an induction program for parents of pre-school children about to start school.

Outer metropolitan government secondary:

The school developed an internet site for students' and parents' learning with a view to enhancing the capability of parents to be involved in their children's education. It is an environment in which more than 80% of students and their families are from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

Regional government primary and secondary:

A collaboration between schools with a range of initiatives for engaging parents, providing them with supportive programs such as Families Matter, improving student learning, attendance and behaviour, building teams of parents and staff, clarifying roles, improving communications between homes and school, and finding out how community services can be more effectively integrated into the school.

Regional government primary:

The school introduced a "restorative practice" program as a tool to manage student behaviour, and implemented an initiative in which postcards were produced by the school as a vehicle for

communicating with parents and for promoting the school. The restorative practice program will involve parents, but was in its embryonic form.

Metropolitan government secondary:

This school used an off-the-shelf program designed to bring schools and families together in helping adolescents to read better and study more effectively. It showed small but encouraging beginnings and demonstrated how existing resources can be harnessed for building partnerships.

Remote Catholic primary:

The program consisted of literacy workshops for parents conducted by two Indigenous school officers. Nine parents, on average, attended. This was considered a success in a very difficult environment where engagement with education is not a high priority. A more personalised approach to parents may have resulted in more attending. This was acknowledged by the school, and reinforces a discovery made by many schools that just sending home a newsletter is not sufficient to communicate effectively with parents if partnership is what you want.

Metropolitan Catholic primary:

The project consisted of a survey of parents to establish needs, and the creation of weekly meetings and multicultural morning teas as the first step in building greater connections between the school and the parent body. A new parent reference group was established with a wider role than the traditional P&C had had. This also broke down a parent clique which had controlled the P&C for generations.

Metropolitan government primary:

A comprehensive school-driven program to improve communications with families and induct new staff. Some useful survey work was done to hear what parents want. Many activities flowed from it: nutrition programs, conservation activities, establishment of a garden.

Metropolitan government secondary:

An attempt to improve school-home communications using the intranet, but this ran into problems because of logistical problems such as passwords. A homework centre was started but failed, and a survey of parents attracted few responses. The intranet site seems to have been taken up by staff but there is no evidence that anyone else regards it as useful.

Remote regional government secondary:

Through the employment of a competent and well-connected part-time project officer, the school has engendered a spectacular increase in parent contact and participation, especially in parent-teacher interviews. The secret has been using personal contact and individual invitations.

Remote regional secondary:

The school used DVDs to communicate to parents who have low or non-existent English language skills, so they can find out how their children are progressing. An innovative approach in an Outback setting. Visual representations are considered to be far more useful for this purpose than written reports.

Remote regional secondary:

This project is an example of "choice theory" in which students are invited to negotiate with the teaching staff over what they want to learn and how, with the parents being involved in a three-way "chat". It is being tried in a largely Indigenous setting where it is hard to keep students at school and to get parents involved in education.

Metropolitan Catholic secondary:

A school-initiated but parent-driven program involving the adoption of “choice theory” and the training of a core group of parents in how it works. Their role then is to educate other parents in the theory, which is designed to promote understanding of people’s behaviour and self-responsibility for actions.

Regional Catholic primary:

The project involved two programs, both introduced at the initiative of parents. One was an off-the-shelf program designed to improve children’s self-reliance (You Can Do It); the other was a program to enhance IT skills among parents so they were better able to help the children with their schoolwork.

Metropolitan government secondary:

A two-phase project consisting of English-language classes for NESB parents, and a series of parents’ workshops on issues affecting their children’s literacy and numeracy. The project was a catalyst to get parents involved in the school’s decision-making, as well as improving the parents’ English. Its main purpose was to engage parents more in the life of the school.

#### **D. THE SEEKERS**

**Schools that are finding out what the needs of their parents are with a view to improving communications. Fulfillment of the partnership ideal lies somewhere beyond this preliminary work.**

Metropolitan Catholic primary:

The school employed a parent-school project officer to consult stakeholders, survey parents and report on ways of developing partnerships. This was foundational work from which a future partnership may grow.

Metropolitan government secondary:

This was simply a survey of parents devised by the school, with no partnership element. At least it may provide feedback on which to base future decisions, but the survey instrument might be too complicated.

Regional Catholic secondary:

A modest program of qualitative and quantitative research by the school among parents, and a social event to recognise parent contributions to the school. Parents contributed to the design of the survey.

Rural government primary:

An embryonic but wide-ranging program to find out what parents want and how to engage them in the school. A part-time Community Liaison Officer was appointed, a Family-School Action Team established, a survey done to find out the needs of parents, and a induction pack created.

Metropolitan Catholic secondary:

This was not a piece of action research but a lot of talk about the current situation and about the concept of partnerships, based on qualitative and quantitative research carried out by external consultants. However, it provided the basis for some creative thinking about how a family-school partnership might be constructed.

Metropolitan government primary:

This was an attempt by the school to increase parent participation in school activities generally by use of newsletters, information nights and so on, with limited success. It was driven entirely by the school. Again this may turn out to be foundational.

Regional government secondary:

A limited project involving a proposed survey of parents and an audit of the existing quality of family-school partnership at the school. Final results were not available because of a shortage of time to finish them.

Metropolitan independent secondary:

This project consisted largely of qualitative and quantitative research and administrative exercise designed to find new and more effective ways of connecting with parents. Like many of this type, its usefulness as the foundation for a genuine partnership will depend on how the school responds to what it finds.

Metropolitan government secondary:

The main vehicles for this project were the Families Matter program, and some literacy and numeracy programs. While there was clearly a partnership element in the Families Matter program, there was none in the literacy and numeracy programs.

Regional government secondary:

An attempt has been made to communicate with the wider community, and to improve the school's communications with different sections of the community.

## **E. THE GOVERNANCE-ORIENTED**

### **Schools that recognise parents as partners but give effect to it through changes to governance structures which give parents a broader role in school decision-making.**

Metropolitan government primary:

The school carried out foundational survey work which found that the school had not been communicating with parents as well as it thought, and that there was some alienation from the P&F among the wider parent body. This provided the basis for a number of school-driven initiatives, including a program of workshops and information sessions for parents, better reporting on student achievement using better software, and a review of the governance structures, especially as they touched on the P&F.

Regional Catholic secondary:

This was an attempt to involve parents and students more in the decision-making of the school by replacing the school P&F with a new and more broadly based council. These appear to be first steps in changing a very conservative culture.

## 2. “Social change” types

### A. THE SOCIAL CAPITAL BUILDERS

#### **Schools that reach out to the parent body and beyond to provide resources for the building of social capital in the community.**

Metropolitan government primary:

This was a two-part project: pre-school education for very young children (0 – 4) delivered by two teacher volunteers, and a community room where parents and members of the wider community could come for company and support, as well to enhance their IT skills. In an isolated and impoverished community, the response was extremely positive, with the parents taking control of the activities in the room. Data showed spectacular gains for the children who attended the pre-school program.

Remote regional government primary:

The school recognised the need to engage with three disengaged or disadvantaged target groups: Indigenous families, newly arrived migrants whose first language was not English, and fathers. This is a small but important step towards that objective. The employment of a parent as a community liaison officer indicated that the school saw a direct role for parents in communicating with other parents.

Regional government secondary:

Two school-initiated programs, one standard and one home-grown, were successful: Families Matter and an Indigenous parents’ literacy program. These clearly succeeded in building capacity in the parent body and spilled over into benefiting students by providing new and positive role modelling by parents.

Regional government primary:

The school used two well-established programs to help parents improve their parenting skills, especially in dealing with adolescents, and to give them an additional reason to connect with the school.

Remote government primary:

This project consisted of a wide-ranging attempt by the school to find different ways of connecting with largely Indigenous parents. It included employing two parent-liaison officers, and conducting workshops for parents in literacy, mathematics, values education and middle-years schooling. It was consistent with the school’s broad community-outreach philosophy.

Remote government primary:

A painstaking project to involve Indigenous parents in programs of mental health and resilience, showing clear signs of progress towards that objective, and with a consequent decline in violence in the school. There was other evidence of improved emotional resilience. A gentle, participatory program to build trust between school and the community, and to give the community ownership of it in a very troubled Indigenous setting, it appears to have had encouraging early results.

Metropolitan government secondary:

This project consisted of providing a room for use by parents and the wider community, and the delivery of a parenting skills program.

**Metropolitan government primary:**

A genuine partnership of schools and families in which the school set up a framework for “buddy families” to welcome new families from NESB, but with the actual work depending on the families and not the school. Once they had become “buddy families” their participation in the school’s life increased. Also the school did a survey of teachers’ needs and parents’ skills.

**Regional government primary:**

This was a program of two conferences for parents on topics such as resilience, child development, parenting, learning and behaviour and the development of social skills. These were delivered by an outside guest speaker described as an expert in child development, learning and development. In between the two conferences there was a bridging session for parents conducted by the school.

**Regional government primary:**

This was a large program of four separate initiatives designed to bring parents and the wider community into the life of the school: the creation of a permaculture garden; the building of a sculpture; a volunteer system for helping children learn to read, and parent forums to improve communication at each year-level. All of this was co-ordinated by a Community Enhancement Officer. It seemed very original and energetic.

**Metropolitan Catholic primary:**

Many of the families at this school live in housing commission high-rises and do not speak English as a first language. The program was designed to reach out to these people and bring them into the social life of the school, as well as to help them understand what was going on by translating the newsletter for them at oral readings. There were outings and other social events, and the overall view was that it had succeeded in bringing some of these families closer to the school.

**Metropolitan Catholic primary:**

The project involving the establishment of a play group to provide a service needed by the community, and to help young children and their parents make the transition to school. It grew from an average attendance of 6 children to 14 per session during the period of the research.

**Regional Catholic primary:**

The focus of this project was community-building through the employment of a Family Liaison Officer to improve parent participation in school life, improve communication by the school to the home, allow the school to work more effectively with families in crisis and improve the community’s knowledge of the support available at the school. It was made successful by the energy and visibility of the FLO, who got out among the community and let people know what was going on.

**Regional Catholic primary:**

This was a very gentle family-oriented program to integrate marginalised Sudanese families into the school and wider community. It is not a partnerships program exactly but provided a strong foundation on which a partnership could be built, and the school community has learnt a lot about what makes partnerships work.

**Metropolitan Catholic primary:**

This involved the creation of a room for parents to gather, during and after school, to break down isolation and provide a home-out-of-home for people from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. A teacher is provided to attend once a week and listen to what the parents want to do, and then help them get it done. Obviously a force for the building of inter-ethnic understanding as well as providing a way for people to improve their language skills and giving them a rare social outlet.

**Regional Catholic secondary:**

The school conducted a standard survey with limited success, but then initiated useful work among recently arrived refugee parents to listen to their problems and seek to integrate them into the school community and connect them to parents in the wider community. It was a good example of a genuine school-community partnership.

**Regional government secondary:**

The first part of the project was the adoption of the Families Matter program; the second part was a survey to look at problems associated with students working long hours and so finding life difficult at school. The school took this up with the local chamber of commerce and guidelines are to be developed among employers. The results were not known at the time of writing.

**Metropolitan government secondary:**

The most disadvantaged school in its state according to state education department indicators, this school's project consisted of a large and multi-faceted program to benefit parents as well as students. Parents were encouraged to set up their own forum, at which they made decisions about school nutrition policy, their own return to education, and ways in which they could help the school contribute to overcoming serious racial tension in the community. The forum and its associated programs received vital support from the school's leadership and specialist staff, such as the psychologist. It was an extraordinary program of community capacity-building.

**Metropolitan government primary:**

This was a comprehensive outreach program to bring parents and elderly people into the school with a view to enriching the educational experiences of the students and to make the school more of a community centre. There was a special program for very young (zero to 4-year-old) children to prepare them for school, in the hope their parents will choose to come to this school.

## **B. THE RESILIENCE BUILDERS**

**Schools that supply the main resource for parents in helping keep their children at school, avoid substance abuse and other dangers, so they may have a better chance in life.**

**Metropolitan government secondary:**

This project consisted of a series of three programs -- two for Year 9 students deemed to be at risk, and one for parents -- designed to break down the risk factors, improve parent skills, and strengthen the links between school and home. It integrated parents strongly into a genuine partnership approach to helping students who were on the brink of dropping out.

**Remote government secondary:**

This was a multi-faceted program to keep a largely Indigenous population of students at school by teaching them relevant skills in which they were interested. It involved creating a school-within-a-school to accommodate students with disruptive behaviour patterns. The program was developed by a forum of parents, school staff and local TAFE representatives. Parents had substantial input and provided volunteer support.

Regional government secondary:

The school took the first steps towards the implementation of the Families Matter program.

Regional government secondary:

The school took the first steps towards the implementation of the Families Matter program.

Metropolitan upper government primary:

The main part of the project was a program (You Can Do It) designed to increase the self-reliance of students and to build their confidence, in a comfortable demographic where an active parent body had a tendency to be over-attentive to their children's needs, and the children tended to have a fear of failing to live up to expectations. A project to build a large external mural based on You Can Do It designs, galvanised fathers, mothers, teachers, and students and became a strong force for school community cohesion.

## **BEST PRACTICE**

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A main objective of this research was to find out what worked best in creating family-school partnerships.

Parents, principals, and people with carriage of the various projects were all asked specifically about this during the site visits by the researchers.

The researchers too were asked to make their observations of what seemed to work best.

Of course what works well in one place might not work as well in another. Therefore, this chapter of the report is presented in two parts.

**Part One** identifies all the elements of best practice that emerged from the research. The element is given in bold type, and a selection of quotations is then given to illustrate the point. These quotations come from parents, principals, people with carriage of the projects, and from the researchers.

**Part Two** consists of 12 case studies which demonstrate how these elements work in a variety of school settings. Obviously not every element is present in every case – and that is just the point: not all are needed in every place to get a good result. The idea is to show how they were successfully combined by different schools in different circumstances.

### **Part One: The elements of best practice**

These elements are not presented in a rank order of importance because their relative importance will depend on the circumstances of each school. Instead they have been arranged into broadly associated groupings.

These are addressed mainly to principals since they come from principals in response to the question: *If you were asked by a fellow Principal to advise on how to build a partnership with parents, what would you say?* However, they apply to the school leadership and staff as a whole.

**1. Tap into the interests of parents .**

*They formed a walking group. It came up through the meetings (of the parents): people talking about losing a bit of weight or feeling inactive.*

*We had a fun shop and we got volunteer parents coming in to tell us their experience of art and craft. We have a knitting class, a facial skin-care and make-up class. They love it.*

*Focus on something that specifically involves them working with their child. Offer workshops to parents so that both parents and their children are actively involved.*

*While the room is available every day for parents, it is "Activity Thursday" which has attracted the parents and brought them into the school community.*

*Parents enjoyed the opportunity to engage in "hands-on" experiences of activities that their children are using in and out of their classroom.*

*Making events fun, attractive and "easy" for parents is important. For example, with our conference, the combination of an excellent guest speaker, an attractive local venue, good food, individual folders with useful written material, cost free, all together made a "package".*

**2. Break down the teacher/non-teacher barrier by allowing for activities that are not directly education-related.**

*There's a scrap-booking club. It means people are coming into the school a whole lot more often.*

*We've started up the breakfast club, and a lot of staff come and can interact with the kids and get to know them on a different level outside the classroom. We've also had some of the parents from the more remote areas bringing in some of the kids.*

*Try and have a morning session which the parents can organise for Father's Day or Mother's Day or Easter and have a morning tea.*

**3. Use personal contact. It is the most effective form of communication.**

*Word spreads much better by word-of-mouth.*

*If you wrote in the newsletter saying that if people had a concern about a particular matter they could ring me, nobody would come.*

*One of the rules we have in contacting parents is that we do it verbally, so a lot of stuff on the phone, a lot of visits, because paperwork doesn't work for my community.*

*Phoning parents seems to work and they are more likely to participate when this is done.*

*Personal invitation, one-to-one conversations, discussions with smaller groups are an essential addition to written material in the school newsletter or local paper. It makes individual parents feel valued, needed and recognised, reaches those who don't read all of the weekly newsletter and gives parents a better understanding of the event, what they may gain from it, gives them an opportunity to ask questions and builds a sense of belonging.*

*Personal invitations for the parents to participate. The newsletter does not really work.*

*The activities are advertised in various ways, on the large external noticeboard and in the newsletter, but the low literacy skills of many parents means that word-of-mouth about the enjoyable time is proving very effective.*

*It's really become apparent that contacting individuals and overcoming language barriers on a one-to-one basis is vitally important in giving the school the knowledge of what its own community needs and so the families know that their needs are being taken into account.*

#### **4. Communicate, communicate, communicate.**

*Having multiple methods for communicating to parents about events is important.*

*Involve parent representatives who can be advocates for the project.*

*Publicise events via a number of means and include a draw card (e.g., dynamic presenter, children seeing their parents present an activity) and include follow up advertising of the initial night with quotes and photos.*

#### **5. Be a venue for, and agent of, parental self-growth.**

*We've had one young woman enrol at TAFE to go back and do Years 11 and 12. She started having kids when she was at high school, and is academically really quite capable. This group has given her the strength to say I might have a bit of a crack.*

*Empowering parents, especially those with poor education, by showing them the way then pulling back. Leaders emerge among parents and that gives it sustainability.*

*One or two have gone off and got jobs, and two have started at TAFE.*

*The group gives me confidence, self-esteem and (knowledge about) how to communicate with my son.*

*A lot of our parents want some IT training. The Parent Power group was used to promote the idea. Seven or eight currently are coming to computing.*

*TAFE are going to run a program for Indigenous mothers. They're not necessarily our parents, but they are part of our community, and that is consistent with the idea of community capacity-building.*

*Parents will come to the school to gain information for their own needs as well as for their children. For example, organising a first aid course or computer class enhances their social skills.*

*Our major success was the provision of a literacy tutor package for Aboriginal parents. Eight parents completed the course. Our moving the course off campus to start was very beneficial and [made it] less threatening. As parents' confidence developed they were at ease to come to the school to deliver literacy support for students. Having parents work with students has been great for our Aboriginal students and it has provided excellent role models for our students.*

*Parents have been funded to attend outside sessions on "Parenting in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" covering learning styles and helping your child succeed at school, and a session on understanding mathematics.*

#### **6. Ask for, and value, the opinion of parents outside the formal school structures.**

*Involving them in decisions, taking things to them and saying, look, we would really like your input. Go beyond the school council and Parents and Friends. These people think of those groups as a bit high-falutin' for them, policy and that sort of stuff.*

*We've changed the format a bit because it was getting a bit too formal, a bit P&F. So we got rid of the paperwork and decided to just give everybody a say.*

*The establishment of structures alone does not always ensure that parents will engage with these structures whole-heartedly unless they have had some input into how these structures were established. No amount of formal structures can replace the human element.*

#### **7. Create an environment that encourages parental autonomy.**

*It's always been in their hands where they go with it and I think that's very important.*

This response captures what many schools were doing in projects that involved providing parents with a room they could use for their own purposes. Typically the parents had assumed control of what went on in the room and of deciding the activities they wanted to start up. Very often these entailed excursions for parents or having speakers in to talk about topics of interest, or undertaking courses or improving skills such as the ability to use a computer. Sometimes the parents had needed help from the staff to get started because they lacked experience in organisation or leadership, but natural leaders soon emerged where they were given the scope to do so. This was not about creating a locus of power to rival the Principal. In these situations, parents' own confidence grew from exercising autonomy over their own form of involvement in the project, not from seeking to trespass on the Principal's prerogatives.

### **8. Emphasise the connection with the child's education.**

*Even the most reluctant person will say, what does that mean for my kid?*

*The Principal noted that often the activities involved the children and their parents. This meant that the parents were working with their children, but not in the classroom. The school also was reminded about how proud the parents are of their original cultures.*

*The data indicate that the parents appreciated the opportunity to gain up-to-date information and knowledge on how children best learn mathematics.*

*The project confirmed that parents are more likely to become involved if the involvement is about their child and that they see that their input is valued.*

### **9. Go out of your way to make parents feel welcome and valued.**

*You need a culture that is welcoming and approachable. You could set them up in a five-star room, but if they don't feel welcome and comfortable they won't come.*

*The teachers know me and they welcome me in. And I don't have to go through the front door and the office.*

*Make the school a welcoming place. Organise a social gathering like a sundowner – an afternoon when the staff and the parents get together and have a drink. Or maybe a welcome barbecue. A whole lot of things like that.*

*First and foremost, it is important to respect people and make them feel comfortable coming into the school.*

*An environment needs to be developed in which parents feel valued, able to make suggestions, and know that these suggestions will be considered and followed up.*

### **10. Build bridges across cultural and language divides.**

*So do you get parents from different cultural backgrounds coming?*

*Yes. We got Iraqis, Somalis, Thais, Italians.*

*We organised a cultural awareness visit to the Buddhist temple. The next week we went to the Holocaust museum. The next one we are going to is an Aboriginal centre.*

*Following some serious incidents involving different racial groups, we got together some interested and slightly pro-active Vietnamese kids and a similar group of Aboriginal kids, did some work with them separately, and said, "Now we're going to have lunch together". So we brought them together and no one hit each other, so that was encouraging. We then ran a couple of workshops with these kids. We invited the parents to participate as well.*

**11. Be sensitive to parents' sensibilities.**

*We need to look more with Indigenous parents at not dragging them into an office and closing the door, but having a different setting, maybe our "welcome room" or somewhere outside where we can sit down and have a yarn.*

*A lot of Indigenous parents had bad experiences at school – at this school, most of them. Some have had no education, so they feel threatened by coming.*

*At Fitzroy we took the secondary staff and the kids' work out to the communities and put the kids' work up, put on some food, and people just came in and met the teachers and saw what their kids were doing at school.*

*You need to shed some Western approaches when trying to engage traditional and remote Indigenous people. Having a reasonable time-scale to achieve relationships between non-Indigenous and Indigenous is essential. Documenting the essence of these interactions and processes is as beneficial for incoming Western staff, as it is for indigenous people.*

**12. Be prepared to engage in community capacity-building.**

*We've got the PALS program (Partnership Acceptance Learning Sharing). It's a way of getting school communities – and that means parents, different agencies like the town council and the police and students working together on a project that has cultural significance and brings together black and white, basically.*

*If there's a blue at the weekend, it'll often get acted out in our yard at recess and lunchtime, and the reverse: if there's bullying in the school, it can become very ugly for parents.*

**13. Show leadership, be visible and available.**

*You have to set the example yourself about the relationship you want to have with the community. The role model as Principal is crucial.*

*We never promise to do anything we couldn't and weren't prepared to do, and anything we said we would do we have done.*

*Be visible. Even just coming out in the mornings and evenings and saying good morning or good afternoon. (Principal) is always out there and you don't feel any strain talking to him.*

*The approachability thing is huge. People can ask any question and get an answer straight away. So issues get nipped in the bud.*

*The driving force for this project came from the Principal.*

**14. Be realistic, patient, and a bit brave.**

*You can't just suddenly turn on this sort of stuff. It's fairly slow.*

*Start small. Dip your toe in. Have a crack. Be willing to take a bit of a punt. Back yourself that it will work and, if it doesn't, don't beat yourself up about it because there'll be a better idea later.*

*We need to move in millimetres, not even small steps.*

*It isn't something that will happen overnight.*

### **15. Make it clear you think of parents as genuine partners.**

*We're here for one purpose: to help your kids. We can only do that if we are partners with the parents. There has to be a very effective triangle: the home, the school and the child.*

*Include them (parents) in the decision-making from the beginning.*

*Allowing and encouraging collaboration between the school and parents in decision making processes – it has to be real collaboration and not superficial.*

### **16. Don't be frightened to ask parents to help solve big problems**

*We suspended sixteen kids mainly for being at school but not in class, wandering around all day. We had quite a big backlash from the parents: why are you suspending our kids all the time? The AIEOs (Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers) came up with the idea of getting the parents in and having a meeting, to see what we could do to address the issues. I was a bit worried. We thought we were going to get this whole pile of manure all over us. But we actually had some parents who stood up and some good points. One of the parents suggested a barbecue, and the parents and the kids came, as well as the teachers.*

*The restorative justice stuff we do when the kids have been suspended: we ask the parents to come in for a re-entry interview with the kids. Sometimes it can be a three-minute conversation, and sometimes it can be quite a long process. But it gives the parents a chance to listen to the school's side of the story and see what the school is doing. The parents like to come in and do the re-entry interview. It's giving them some sort of control and they feel they've had a say and they have some ownership of what's happening.*

### **17. Open your mind to parents' needs and attitudes.**

*Get feedback on what you've done. Do a survey or something to find out what parents want.*

*Establish key parent representatives in each class and canvass ways parents would like to be involved.*

*The school needs to accept parents have lots to offer and it is good to listen to what they say.*

*Parents want to be asked about what they want to happen. They value being given options for meetings and school involvement. They want their 'thinking' to be considered. They are very appreciative of the 'respect' the school has shown them though the survey.*

*Ask parents what they they need to know, and act on it.*

*Listening is important if you want to build partnerships. You have to find out what people think instead of starting with presumptions.*

### **18. Appoint a parent/community liaison person to the staff.**

*A Community Liaison Officer, though not a paid position yet in the school seems an integral part of making projects with parents really work in an environment where staff are very busy.*

*Have a key staff member who is a driving force and liases frequently with the parent co-ordinators.*

*Have someone on the staff as a liaison person with time to do the role rather than just fitting it on as an extra.*

*A staff co-ordinator and parent committee for organising events is important.*

*A Sudanese parent had been appointed to the project role and was now undergoing support and training at the local Migrant Resource Centre.*

*The allocation of a staff member to organise activities for parents was a masterstroke as it took the school's interest in the parents' welfare to a deeper level.*

*The person working to enhance the relationship between home and school should be a person who cares about the welfare of parents.*

### **19. Create a place that parents can call their own.**

*This project worked! The setting up of the physical venue of the room, with all its accoutrements, indicated the school's considerable commitment to the parents.*

*Give the parents some space where parents can come and collect information, talk to each other, maybe run some program for the parents.*

*Giving the community ownership of a space where they feel comfortable encourages parents to come into the school in an informal way and overcomes some reluctance to come to the school.*

### **20. Acknowledge and celebrate the parents' input.**

*Throw a party.*

*Acknowledge and value the contribution of all volunteers.*

## **Part Two – Case studies**

In this segment we present 12 case studies which we believe illustrate best practice in creating family-school partnerships.

Because we recognise that best practice in one place may not be best practice in another, we have selected the case studies from a broad range of settings: metropolitan, urban regional, rural, and remote.

We have also selected them because they offer a broad variety of projects:

- engaging non-English-speaking families;
- working with parents whose children are very alienated;
- training parents to work alongside teachers in the classroom;
- providing community-oriented services;
- finding creative ways to keep Indigenous students at school;
- binding the school community together to cope with social transformation;
- providing outreach to newly arrived families, including refugees;
- responding to extreme disadvantage and inter-racial community violence;
- providing parents with opportunities to improve their own skills; and
- building resilience in families and students.

Nine are Government schools and three non-Government. They were chosen because they embodied what we came to regard as best practice in creating family-school partnerships by exhibiting the qualities essential to these partnerships that we identified in our findings. These were:

1. Willingness to consult and listen.
2. Willingness to be responsive.
3. Willingness to be welcoming.
4. Willingness to find out the real needs of parents rather than make assumptions.
5. Efforts to nurture an open, inclusive culture.

Many other schools in this research project were also doing excellent work. To present all of them, however, would be to swamp the reader. Instead we have collected the final reports of all the other schools in an appendix, so there is a complete record of the work done. This appendix is available electronically from the Department of Education, Science and Training.

The case study schools are not identified because they were promised at the start that they would not be, and that all interviews were unattributable. They are given a letter of the alphabet to distinguish them and to make sense of the cross-references in other parts of this report.

## **CASE A**

### **Name and description of project**

#### *Early Learning Centre and Parent and Community Centre*

These are two separate but related initiatives.

The Early Learning Centre prepares children aged from birth to four years for school, and at the same time educates their parents in how to assist with the child's development.

The Parent and Community Centre is a social support centre for parents and anyone in the community who feels in need of it. The Centre consists of a converted classroom which the school has furnished in a homely manner with settees, easy chairs, dining table, and computer.

There is a weekly meeting there. Free child care is provided in an adjoining room. A small one-way window allows the parents to look in on their pre-schoolers while they are being cared for.

### **Background**

This primary school of 280 students is located in a low socio-economic area where unemployment is high and family dysfunction common. About half the students are on the local equivalent of the Education Maintenance Allowance and there is a high percentage of single parents.

Six years ago, two senior teachers initiated the two elements of the project. At the time the school was looking for ways of arresting a long-term decline in enrolments and of staving off the possibility of being merged with another school or closed. The current Principal was new and almost one-third of the teaching staff had just been replaced. A cultural change was under way. Its main element was to re-connect the school with its community, from which it had become estranged.

When the two teachers proposed the idea of a parent centre, linked with the provision of pre-school education, the Principal saw it as a means of giving effect to the cultural change he wished to bring about. The initiatives had – and continue to have – his full support, and the teachers concerned spoke most warmly of him.

An experienced kindergarten teacher was enlisted to assist in setting up the Early Learning Centre.

A parent who is highly active in school-related activities at a state and national level also happened to work as a teacher's assistant at the school. She harnessed her energy to the cause, and this clearly helped in maintaining momentum.

### **Engaging parents**

The teachers in the pre-Kinder program and in the early years of primary were sensitive to what parents were saying about wanting to bring their toddlers into the school, and creative in setting up a special program for them. They were also sensitive to what parents said about their social isolation, and proposed setting aside a room that could be used by parents as an informal meeting place.

The teachers obtained the support of the Principal, and at first provided leadership to the parents in setting up the community room. Gradually they relinquished this leadership role to the parents as the capacity grew in some of the parents to lead.

The school recognised that many of its parents had had bad experiences of school, so took pains to ensure they could come and go without passing through the “front office”, which is an intimidating place for some parents.

In summary, the school listened, responded to real needs, and created a welcoming place which was easy for apprehensive parents to enter.

### **What the Principal said about the project**

*School wasn't a particularly pleasant place for a lot of our parents, so there is a reluctance to come into school. You come in when you're angry or something's gone wrong. As adults they often lack self-esteem or the confidence to be involved in programs.*

*The group started off as a support group. The initial topics were behaviour management. But we couldn't have it as "come to the parenting group" because people had this thought that if I go there, they'll think I'm a bad parent. So it had to be couched in the terms of coffee and a chat.*

*At first [the teachers] raised questions about whether they were having trouble with their children. The group now really set their own agenda. It's developing into a powerful group. Our challenge is to keep bringing new people in so it doesn't become so tight that others can't get in.*

*We started off with six or seven. Now they regularly get 14 or 15 and up to 20 if there's a guest speaker people want to hear. Word-of-mouth is the strongest source of new members.*

*At times some of the participants will disclose things which are fairly harrowing. One of the participants has gone back to school [to complete her secondary education] pretty much on the strength of what she heard at the meeting.*

### **What the teaching staff said about the project**

The Kindergarten teacher who conducts the Early Learning Centre:

*When I came here six years ago, there was a pre-Kinder playgroup for the kids who were going to be in Kindergarten next year. The first question lots of mums asked was, can my little one come too? That meant their toddler. Of course I said yes.*

*Then talking to the mums we found this was the only centre for the mums and dads and the community to come in this area.*

*We moved down to the bottom end [of the school buildings] where there was an empty wing and this really facilitated the growth of all these things because they could come in the bottom door, and they could make it their own.*

*We've never wanted the feeling that they're the parents and this is the school and never the twain shall meet.*

The teachers who facilitates the community centre:

*We could see a need from the people we spoke to. Sometimes they needed to know, what do I do? I can't get him to bed. He won't eat his tea. Doesn't want to come to school. It has built up really strong empathic connections between the whole group. When people feel you care about them, you can be a good communicator, you can develop that connectedness, it doesn't take very long for a parent to start to have a trust in you and in others in the group. And sometimes there hasn't been a dry eye in the house, when some parent has felt safe enough to divulge something really important that's happening at home that's impacting on their children and that we need to know about at school. I find that the most rewarding.*

### **What the parents said about the project**

*We've got good word out in the community. Out and about in the supermarket I'll hear parents say they want to bring their children up to [this school]. They've heard about*

*the good things that are going on. So the message is getting out there that this is a nice school to come to.*

*They mean it's nice to walk into, it has a friendly atmosphere, the positive good vibes that the school gives off. They see things like the Community Centre.*

*It's a home away from home.*

*What's said in this room doesn't go out of the room. So you can talk about problems.*

*I've been to counsellors and they judge you. And here you talk to other mums and it's not like that.*

*I can go on and talk to the kids' teachers and get them involved. It's not just our problem any more. It's a shared problem.*

*And they're on your level, not like some Supreme Being.*

### **Researcher's observations**

The project appears to have acquired legitimacy among parents because it is responsive to their needs and because the school staff have allowed the parents to take control as their confidence and capabilities have grown.

Responsiveness to needs has been crucial, and the needs have been many. These parents needed somewhere to turn for advice about parenting and for "downloading" their emotional burdens among people who respected their confidences and did not judge them.

Friendships have been forged, and networks created that have gone beyond the confines of the school community, breaking down isolation, building up self-confidence, and allowing people to learn how to cope.

The benefits to the children's education appeared to be that the parents were more in touch with what was happening at school, felt integrated into the education of their children, felt empowered to communicate on an equal footing with teachers, and were fortified in being able to deal at home with the social circumstances that had a disruptive effect on the children.

Data on the effects of the community centre are largely anecdotal and qualitative. However, membership data indicate that the number of people coming to the community centre has grown from about six to about twenty, and they are beginning to include people from the wider community. Considering the history of disengagement between the parents and the school, and

the significant level of disadvantage in the parent community, this is remarkable progress in a couple of years. It again illustrates that these are long-term projects.

The effects on the children's education was described by one teacher thus:

*I guess it's the homeliness: the home feel and connection. These kids can feel really comfortable here. And some of these children have very difficult home times. This is an extension of the safety we provide.*

The Principal:

*The kids are seeing how to model conflict-resolution, rather than coming in and bellowing at someone and threatening to thump them. Which is what happens quite often in our community.*

Data on the Early Learning Centre are startling. The figures in the tables below were provided by the school after an at-risk assessment had been made in 2005 of the 36 children in that year's kindergarten cohort.

**Impact of Early Learning Centre attendance on student-at-risk factors**

	Attended Centre (n = 20)	Did not attend (n = 16)
Not at risk	19	6
At risk	1	10

It can be seen that of the 20 children who had attended the Early Learning Centre, only one was assessed as being at risk. By contrast, of the 16 in the cohort who had not attended the Centre, 10 were assessed as being at risk.

## **CASE B**

### **Name and description of the project**

#### *Multicultural learning community*

There were several aims to this project to build a stronger community between the school, with 90% of its students from non-English speaking backgrounds, and the parent community. These aims were to:

- Establish and maintain a play group for pre-school children and mothers for children who will be entering the school in Kindergarten;
- Initiate a more comprehensive transition program than in previous years, beginning in Term 3 with Kindergarten Orientation, continuing in Term 4 2005 for children who will enter Kindergarten in 2006;
- Conduct a series of eight bilingual workshops for parents with topics requested by parents, e.g. parenting skills, road-safety, anti-bullying, bilingualism; and
- Conduct a parent excursion so that parents experience the educational learnings that children gain through such an event.

### **Background**

This primary school of 205 students serves a concentrated area of social disadvantage in a high-density suburb of south-western Sydney. The 90% of families from non-English-speaking backgrounds speak 16 different languages and come from Europe, the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific.

The school has a considerable commitment to supporting these families, providing community language teachers, translating and interpreting services, and an English as a Second Language (ESL) team.

In 2004 it set out to re-form its parents' association, going out of its way to include Asian and Middle Eastern parents by holding weekly parent meetings in Vietnamese and Arabic.

Initially some staff had resisted the project, expressing concern about giving parents "a voice" and empowering them to take on guided leadership roles. It was a priority of the Principal to change this culture.

### **Engaging parents**

This project was driven by the Principal's conviction that the school had a mission to reach out and involve parents who, because of language and cultural barriers, were not engaged with the school. First she had to overcome doubt and resistance by some staff to the idea of empowering parents. Then it was a matter first of listening closely to what parents said their needs were.

The imaginative responses – English language assistance, parent excursions to interesting places – and the consequent creation of social networks among parents from different cultural backgrounds resulted in parents being provided with something they enjoyed, and could feel themselves benefiting from.

This “enjoyment” factor was important in engaging these parents and helping them overcome their shyness. This was achieved not only by the activities already mentioned but by creating a place where parents could come together to knit, sew, or garden.

### **What the Principal said about the project**

The Principal said that the fundamental aim of the project had been to develop the involvement of parents in the school and that this was being achieved gradually. As a result of the project there were more parents coming to the school through the play group, the parent excursions and the workshops. More were coming to social and major school events and more had become involved in different activities, such as gardening, craft activities and in sewing children's costumes. More listened to the messages at assembly and this had been a crucial change for the parents with little English.

The next stage would be to gradually involve parents in classroom activities. Cultural differences made this difficult as the Vietnamese parents saw the classroom as the domain of the teachers while many of the Arabic parents did not have self-confidence or enough English. An underlying aim had been for the project to achieve professional learning for the teachers, many of whom had dismissed hope of parents being involved. The Principal hoped that the teachers would see that parents can be willing if the right type of communication develops with them. The Principal commented that the teachers needed to see that “education” extended outside the walls of the classroom.

The Principal commented that she thought parents could be gradually involved in classrooms through the use of bilingual big books for literacy sessions. If these books were not available for purchase it could be possible to have some developed. It was also hoped that some could be involved in helping small groups of children in art and craft lessons or mathematics but this would only happen gradually and parents were mentored. She also saw it important to have the parents making decisions about their involvement so they felt valued and not just “told” what they should do by the Principal or teachers. Therefore to change this focus, from 2006 the name “parent workshop” would be changed to “parent information session”.

### **What the person with carriage of the project said about it**

The deputy Principal was responsible for organising and maintaining the playgroup and the transition program. The playgroup has proven to be a significant success with more mothers attending through the year and more people outside the immediate vicinity of the school hearing about it. She has learnt that the Islamic Council recommends it.

The transition program went for eight weeks with mothers and children attending two hours a week for the first four weeks then leaving the children for the second four weeks.

The second excursion to the Powerhouse Museum had attracted more mothers and made them very enthusiastic about having more such outings.

### **What other staff said about it**

Staff commented that there had been a significant change in the involvement of parents. One of the teachers commented:

*We've found that parents learnt a lot from the workshops and that they are now communicating more with each other. They like to see each other and they were very excited on the excursions and these helped them learn what their children learn.*

Teachers felt that more parents were helping in other areas, such as making costumes for the school concert. Teachers were pleased with the “parent excursions” as teachers had had difficulty convincing parents of the value of such events for children. Teachers commented that more parents had attended Book Week in 2005 than previously and asked advice about various books for their children.

### **What the parents said about it**

*The workshops are good because we're all from different cultures and different backgrounds but every single Mum is going through the same thing. You know, you realise that as a parent it doesn't matter whether you're Greek, Australian, Arabic, you have the same issues.*

*We feel like we know more about what's happening in the school now. We understand more about how the school is teaching our children. We enjoy each other's company and the relationship we have with other parents and the teachers.*

*The workshops have done this. Encouraging people to come along and participate. You think, what information are they going to provide? You go along and it's a lovely social atmosphere and it encourages you to go again to the next one, then the next one. You learn something from each workshop.*

*No one had heard of this school before. With the letter drops about the playgroup and more mothers bringing their children, it has now raised awareness about the school.*

### **Researcher's observations**

The parent excursions had had a significant effect and the parents had been on a second excursion to the Powerhouse Museum. They were proud as they recounted that they were the largest adult group to go there. They strongly requested that the school organise more of these next year. They commented that more mothers had attended the second excursion.

The playgroup, linked with an extensive transition program, had helped both children and mothers be more confident about starting school, as the children were more familiar with the school itself and comfortable with the other children.

This project has used best educational practice in that it started where it could pick up the parents at a point of common understanding and gradually build. The "hands on" approach ran through the workshops, excursions and the play group. The improvement in the confidence of parents, particularly the Arabic mothers, was obvious between the first and second forum. It was delightful to see the bonds of friendship that had developed. It was particularly heartening to see their pride in commenting that they were a true multicultural community.

This project confirms that 'best practice' can only develop from identifying the specific needs of the particular school and parent community. There is no single formula. There needs to be consultation and communication in a non-threatening way between all sections of the school community: Principal, parents, teachers, students. This project demonstrated that more than

one approach can be successful. The Principal initially referred to the several arms of the project and these have been a significant feature of this project's success.

**Summary of findings from data collected by the school:**

Evidence of changes effected through each initiative to improve communication between the school and families was observable in the parent interviews as discussed above and is available in several documents that the school produced:

- Increased numbers of parents and children attending playgroup;
- Increased numbers of parents participating in parent workshops;
- Increased numbers of parents participating in both Arabic and Vietnamese support groups;
- Increased numbers of parents participating in P & C;
- Increased numbers of student being enrolled for Kindergarten for 2006 compared with previous years;
- Increase in parents attending second parent excursion;
- Positive comments from parents to researcher in parent forum;
- Letters of appreciation from parents;
- Evaluation of parent workshops;
- Photographs that demonstrate parent participation in more activities;
- Request from parents for continued workshops in 2006 and more parent 'excursions'; and
- Observations from teachers about the positive changes that have occurred. For example, teachers said that more parents were helping in other areas, such as making costumes for school concert. Teachers were pleased with the 'parent excursions' as teachers have had difficulty convincing parents of the value of such events for children. Teachers commented that more parents had attended Book Week in 2005 than previously and asked advice about various books for their children.

## CASE C

### **Name and description of project**

*Effective Partnerships in Action: Family Maths for Years 5 and 6*

The school has had a strong commitment to home-school partnerships in mathematics for a number of years with the running of the Family Maths Program in Prep, Year 2 and Year 4. The teachers and School Council agreed that this program, which has been so successful and well supported by the parent community, be extended to Years 5 and 6.

However, it was agreed that the present format of the program - one off 'theme' nights run by the teachers, with some parent involvement in administration and organization -- was not adequate as it did not address the key objectives of the project:

For parents:

- Become informed about the teaching and learning of mathematics in Years 5 and 6;
- Have an opportunity to engage in 'hands on' activities that their children are doing in the classroom;
- Gain an insight into how children best learn mathematics, from recent research; and
- Be informed as to the transition from Year 6 to Year 7, in relation to mathematics education.

For students:

- Have an opportunity to work with their parents in the types of mathematics activities they undertake at school;
- Provide them with assistance in Mathematics through knowledgeable and supportive parents; and
- Provide them with positive role models as they see adults using and exploring mathematics.

For teachers:

- Build on the important links already established between home and school;
- See improved student engagement and confidence in learning mathematics; and
- Gain further professional development.

It was decided to revamp the Family Mathematics Program by conducting four sessions over four nights, three of which would be information nights for parents and the final night would be a family maths night that would involve parents in the presentation of the activities.

The first night would be introductory session with someone to talk to the parents about how the emphasis is on mathematical thinking and problem solving.

The second night would have an external 'expert' presenter exploring problem solving in fractions, decimals, processes, chance and data.

The third night would include teacher and parent presenters, giving parents an opportunity to present in preparation for the family maths night.

The last night would be a traditional family maths night with the parents presenting the activities and teachers supporting them.

### **Background**

This primary school of 395 students is located in a comfortable middle-class enclave in one of Melbourne's most desirable eastern suburbs. It is an area of high socio-economic families, with minimal numbers of people from non-English-speaking backgrounds, and low proportions of Educational Maintenance Allowance recipients. The school had a small number of international students for the first time in 2005.

Student achievement in all areas of the curriculum is very high as indicated by the fact that the school consistently performs above like-school and statewide benchmarks in numeracy, literacy and the arts (visual and music). Family expectations for student achievement are high and more than half the students go to independent schools after Year 6.

The challenge has been to engage parents and families, many from professional backgrounds, who have competing demands on their time.

The Family Maths program over the past 15 years has attracted 95 % attendance by families but it was felt it needed reviewing and extending for the reasons already mentioned.

### **Engaging parents**

Knowing that many of its parents were professionals with heavy commitments elsewhere, but also with a strong commitment to their children's education, the school devised a means by which it could make the most of the parents' skills and reward them at the same time by giving them a more direct role in their children's education.

This was the basis for a longstanding program of parent involvement, underpinned by a culture of openness to parents.

By skilling up the parents in the way maths is taught these days, coupled with encouraging parents to teach their children in ways they themselves had learnt maths, the school presented parents with an enticing mixture of respect for their own learning and a chance to learn something new, while at the same time fulfilling their desire to give their children the best start in life.

In summary, it was about understanding how to switch their parents on, being open to the idea of parents as teachers, and providing them with the reward of knowing it was all about their children's education.

### **What the Principal said about the project**

*Because the family maths program works so well in those [early] years we thought it would be a logical extension to bring it into the middles years. We thought we could develop a link between Yrs. 5 & 6 and transition into Yr 7 as well.*

*It fits into the [partnerships] framework because in this community parents have high expectations of the children doing well at school and they want the best for their children. This project will develop those links between family and home and acknowledge the importance of parental assistance as part of the education project.*

*I would hope the parents develop a better understanding of how mathematics is taught in Years 5 and 6 at our school, develop some skills in assisting their children at home and maybe gain some knowledge about that transition to secondary school as well.*

*Judging from the discussion, attendance and engagement on the nights I'd say it was a very positive experience for parents, students and teachers.*

*The parent feedback endorsed the new structure and suggested it be used for the junior and middle school.*

If another school asked for your advice about establishing a family-school partnership, what would be the main advice you would give?

*Include it in your school charter and program budget (if an activity such as Family Mathematics).*

*Survey parents regarding ways they would like to be involved in their children's learning (provide a range of examples).*

*Use this to develop a vision as to what type of family-school partnership you want to establish.*

*Establish class parent representatives and meet with them to establish their role and possible action.*

*A key is to have a member of staff, preferably non-teaching (Deputy Principal) who is the main driver and focal point of liaising with parents.*

### **What the teaching staff said about the project**

The two key teachers from the upper school who were involved in the project were interviewed.

*It was terrific. Parents went away feeling they had some practical ways they could assist their children at home and an appreciation of the importance of talking to their children about how they are working problems out, rather than just getting the right answer.*

*A highlight was finding parents with hidden talents who wanted to "have a go" at presenting mathematics activities to their peers.*

*The feedback from parents on each night was very positive and on the last night more than 16 parents indicated they would like to be involved in some capacity in the future. Given the time of the year the attendance of 46 families (total of 96 parents and children) of a possible of 98 was very encouraging.*

### **What other staff said about it**

The Years 5/6 staff said it was particularly affirming for the children to see their parents having fun doing maths like they do in the classroom. Also the opportunity for parents to ask the teachers questions while they were modelling what happens in the classroom helped clarify how key concepts are developed, and cleared up any misconceptions parents might have had. There was a noticeable difference with the children's homework and the discussion of it at home with their parents.

### **What the parents said about the project**

*Generally maths is one part of the curriculum children need help with and I find quite often I know what the correct answer is but not the correct process to use and it can be very confusing for your child if you're telling them one thing and they're learning something different at school.*

*The methods have changed so much since we went to school. As the children go through various levels the methods are quite different. Some of my children catch on quickly but it's challenging for those who don't.*

*Important too as everyone tells you that maths is not difficult and it isn't if you have the tools. So if you have got the tools we can open it to our children and make it enjoyable for them.*

What were the best things to come out of it?

*Gaining a lot more confidence to discuss maths in things we do at home or shopping such as the other day when shopping Caitlin said how much is 30% off, I said you can work that out and we talked strategies in the shop!*

*Parents having the confidence to present mathematics activities to their peers and children.*

*A new way of interacting with the children and knowing how ask specific questions to get the children to explain their thinking.*

*Realising that games can be a powerful way to engage children in mathematics.*

### **Researcher's observations**

Quite clearly the new Principal and the deputy Principal were the key motivators and drivers of this project. There is a sense that the application was written with little consultation with the wider school community apart from a brief presentation to School Council and the School Leadership Team.

The Principal was eager to meet with the researcher to develop up the program and set a structure in place for canvassing parents to become involved.

The parents were extremely supportive of the project and agreed that the present Family Maths nights, while providing a wonderful opportunity for parents and children to engage in maths activities together, did not inform them as to how maths is taught, or provide them with ways they could assist their children at home.

There was a strong commitment to be involved but the timing, late in the year, was a hindrance.

The fact that there was a strong commitment to Family Maths nights already well established in the Junior School with 93-99% attendance was a strong endorsement. Similarly the concerns expressed by parents that they want to know how they can assist their children with maths at home without confusing them by showing them they way they were taught at school was a positive endorsement for the project.

Parents play a very active and supportive role in the school and have done so for many years. It is very much part of the culture of the school. This was evident in the discussion with the Principal and deputy and also at the parent forums. There was a relaxed and friendly ambience and parents felt comfortable to openly express their views and concerns.

The school was especially fortunate in having a highly committed deputy Principal who is passionate about parent involvement and parent-run Family Maths nights based on the original model, and an enthusiastic parent community who like to socialise together and support the school in whatever way they can.

## **CASE D**

### **Name and description of project**

*Guiding and supporting teens: Taking a triple focus, girls, boys and parents*

The project had three prongs that targeted certain twelve Year 9 girls, nine Year 9 boys and their parents. The students were assessed by their teachers as being at risk of disengaging more from school. They were experiencing social problems or isolation or they demonstrated challenging behaviour problems. While the project built on two existing programs for parents and girls, this was the first time the school had had the opportunity of offering a boys program and a simultaneous parenting program that targeted the parents of selected students.

*Girls Going Great* – a seven-week program of 2.5 hours each week held during school time and consisting of craft, companionship and learning behaviour strategies to improve connecting and communicating with others. The female chaplain and School Guidance Officer facilitated the program.

*Boys Bouncing Back* – a seven-week program of two hours each week held during school time where boys participated in school sessions and other active pursuits e.g. playing pool, laser force a pursuit game. The program included assisting the boys to develop resilience, improve their communication, set goals and practise anger management. A Head of Department and a deputy Principal facilitated the program.

*Teen Triple P* (Ralph & Sanders, 2002) – a four-week program of two hours per session held once a fortnight for parents of the selected young people. The Positive Parenting Program aimed to manage common developmental issues and teenager behaviour problems such as disobedience, aggression, peer relationship problems, school-based difficulties, family conflict and other everyday difficulties experienced by parents and teenagers. The school chaplain and guidance officer facilitated the program.

## **Background**

This secondary school in Queensland has 950 students who come from families with a lower/middle to middle socio-economic background. A large number of parents experience financial hardship and find it difficult to meet costs associated with their child's education. About half of the students live in single-parent or blended families. The school has a reputation for supporting students who have challenging behaviours and as such it often attracts students who have had difficulty in other schools. Approximately 20% of students have English as a second language and the school has a reputation for high levels of tolerance and inclusive practices. Young people with physical and intellectual disabilities are integrated into the school, and staff work with families to ensure positive outcomes.

## **Engaging parents**

Personal contact was the key here. Many of the parents were disaffected by schooling and needed direct personal encouragement from the school staff to become involved. The school also provided programs which supported what parents were trying to do in sometimes very difficult circumstances.

The program resonated with parents: it met their needs in this area. It was not so much a case of finding out what the needs were – this much was fairly obvious – but of persuading parents that the school could help them and was willing to do so.

It took the work of five dedicated staff to do this. A big lesson from this project is that in some situations the commitment of time has to be almost open-ended.

The celebration at the end of the program seemed to cement the partnership.

## **What the Principal said about the project**

*The project has been a great success and we will continue it next year as much as we can. We don't normally have the money to be able to do some of those things. The self-esteem that came with being able to take parents and the students to the celebration dinner and guarantee they would turn up was wonderful. I think the celebration graduation dinner was fantastic and parents were so proud of their kids. The way the students presented themselves on that night -- their decorum -- these kids don't get that very often and that is what made it so special.*

*I would say that because of this program parents are now much more willing to come to school but you can't break down the barriers in such a short time.*

What about different ways you encouraged parents to come.

*In the past we have had the good parents come along and we failed to encourage the ones we wanted to come. We recognise that people like [guidance officer] and her efforts to phone each one with an invitation that made it all happen. The parents gained so much from each other.*

*One of the girls who still continued to have difficulties was able to sit down with me and she suggested she should go on a report sheet - that is where we monitor their behaviour very closely -- and in the end her sheet was marvellous. But she made the suggestion herself. I believe this program has helped these kids see things in a different light. And at home too parents are working to get along with their teenagers and it is working.*

**What the person with carriage of the project said about it [Guidance Officer]**

*[Parent leader] and I felt so elated after each session and we felt we were really accomplishing something. With the girls when we took them out on an excursion, we felt it was really worth it. They often said, "Thank you, we really enjoyed that", and then if things started to go wrong for them that came to us to talk about it. Similarly, the parents . . . even the one girl who left the program, her mother kept coming and said she gained so much from it. She even attended the celebration dinner.*

*The students can now say I respect the person even if I do not like their decision.*

*Teachers have said some of the girls no longer backchat and they are starting to see changes.*

*We would like to try using these kids next year as mentors and see how that goes.*

*Certainly we will run more parenting programs. We will open it to all, but we will still target particular parents.*

**What other staff said about it [School Chaplain]**

*I think it was really successful. It would be good to get more parent participation but we are dealing with low socio-economic families and that is always going to be the hardest thing to get to happen.*

Have you and other staff discussed new ways of inviting parents to come along? I know you used personal phone calls to parents but have you discussed other ways you could try in the future.

*This time it was very school-focused and perhaps we could use other community groups as well: for example, church groups, RSL, and ask these groups to help us to facilitate parts of the program.*

What feedback have you sought?

*All the parents have been very positive. Many of these parents have had negative relations with schools but now they feel more positive. We used surveys with parents.*

What about staff?

*At first some staff thought we were rewarding students for being difficult but they soon saw the turn-around with so many of these students and they were grateful for the program.*

### **Researcher's observations**

The project achieved its goals. There were five dedicated staff who took a keen interest in the program's succeeding and they supported the students to the highest degree, always believing they were capable young people who could do well if given the opportunity. Each time I visited the school I felt welcome and each member of staff showed the highest level of support for the project. As a team they had worked out ways of budgeting the funds so that the Year 9 boys and girls and their parents all benefited. This project proved to be a way of connecting disaffected parents who were not regular participants at the school. The celebration breakfast and dinner brought these families together and some connections were made with parents planning to meet for dinner together at a later date. For some single parents this was particularly welcomed. Making a personal telephone call to parents and inviting them to participate in the parent program was a very good strategy.

## **CASE E**

### **Name and description of the project**

*Family and Community Capacity-Building*

The project consisted of a mosaic of no fewer than 20 initiatives encompassing programs on mental health, resilience, stress, learning habits, bullying, cross-cultural tolerance, self-esteem, parenting skills, and academic performance.

The chief elements for the purposes of this research were called Parent Power Plus, and Forming Friendships. Both of these elements involved parents as partners in decision-making and in implementation.

Parent Power Plus was an initiative of the school's psychologist and grew out of a program she had devised to engage Year 8 students in their schooling. It consists of a weekly meeting at the school where parents can discuss issues relating to their children and raise any matters they wish about what is happening in the school. It is convened and chaired by a parent, with the Principal, school psychologist and chaplain in attendance.

Forming Friendships consisted of breakfasts for members of the various ethnic groups, and a series of excursions to cultural sites such as places of worship.

### **Background**

This secondary school of 594 students serves one of Perth's most economically and socially deprived areas, as measured by Western Australia's SEI index. It is located in a housing estate with high incidences of single parents, teenage pregnancies, low income, unemployment and welfare dependency. Its student body is drawn from some 50 nationalities. More than one-third of the parents were born overseas, and 27 languages other than English are spoken at home.

The estate has also been the locus of serious cross-cultural violence between two large ethnic groups, the Aboriginal community and the Vietnamese community, stemming from the death of an elderly Vietnamese woman after a raid on her home by a group of Aboriginal youths.

About five years ago this violence spilt over into the school community. At this point, the school began a concerted effort to improve race relations. This led to the creation in the school of the Forming Friendships program. It is run by a Vietnamese woman who has been engaged by the schools to liaise with the Vietnamese community, with help and support from an Aboriginal and Islander Education Officer and the school's parent community generally.

Forming Friendships runs periodic breakfasts at which traditional foods are served, giving those who attend a small taste of the other cultures with whom they share the neighbourhood. It also promotes cross-cultural friendships and seeks to reduce bullying and isolation among students. As part of the current project, there are plans to conduct further cross-cultural activities.

Parent Power Plus has also become an important point of social connection generally for some of the parents, who live in isolated and needy circumstances.

In addition to providing a bridge between parents and the school, it has evolved into a source of educational advancement for parents. For example, some of the parents expressed a wish to renew their own schooling and the Principal arranged, with the concurrence of the Parent Power group, for a visitor from the local TAFE to come and speak to them about how they might do this.

The Principal, who had been in the school for six years, had a clearly articulated vision for the school and for enhancing the role of parents in it. The essence of this vision was captured in a phrase, “Engaged in Learning” and the first step in this was community capacity-building.

### **Engaging parents**

The school psychologist was in touch with a number of Year 8 parents over a wide range of issues affecting their children’s schooling, and saw how remote they felt from the school system, how marginalised and disempowered they felt generally, and how socially isolated they were.

The school provided a room off to one side of the grounds where parents could meet without having to come through the front office – again. Initially the psychologist and chaplain helped the parents to come together by personal contact and encouragement, and moderated their initial discussions about their needs. The Principal sat in to listen, to answer questions and provide explanations where required.

This was a case where personal contact with parents, listening to their needs, responding in a way that overcame their shyness and disengagements from schooling, and then responding by finding ways to meet their aspirations for resuming their education all played a part.

It then allowed the school to involve the parents in tackling some of the major issues confronting the school community, mainly racial intolerance, but also diet and the fare sold at the tuck shop.

### **What the Principal said about the project**

*It’s a bit like putting together a jigsaw and it’s coming together quite nicely. The TAFE stuff is a big plus: the opportunity to get adults back into education is something we’ve really been able to use successfully this year. That’s going to grow quite dramatically and that’s because we had the Parent Power group.*

What drove that?

*We discovered by accident that the TAFE were going to run some adult education programs, and said they wanted to do it here. And we said, “We’ve probably got some people who would want to join you.” A NOW [New Opportunities for Women] program was one of the things we talked about.*

*So we have seven or eight parents in one of our rooms every Monday learning how to turn on a PC and find something on the Net. It’s really quite useful and it sets an example for their kids and other parents.*

*The intention of Forming Friendships is to make it inclusive of all the cultural groups in the school, of which there are in excess of 50. So we’re trying to broaden the base, but*

*not just in a way that gets everyone together en masse. Like all these things, it's got to grow according to its own capacity.*

*So [co-ordinator] takes groups of kids on various excursions [including to the Buddhist temple].*

How were the kids chosen for the excursion?

*We just got the kids to ask their mates. We said, "Don't ask one of your own. Think outside your own square. Ask a mate from a different culture group." That's much more powerful.*

Any sense that the level of racial tension has fallen off?

*Difficult to answer. You never know when it's working. What you do know is when it's not working. And I can say at the moment that there are no obvious signs of any racial tension in the school. In that sense, it is significantly different from what it was four years ago. The school is, by every measure, a harmonious place.*

*I don't know what those measures are, but when you haven't got them, Jeez you know.*

*The most significant adult group in the school are, of course, the staff. If you can begin to demonstrate to them that there are cultural changes in the school that are going to make their jobs easier because the kids are going to be more connected with learning, and the staff begin to get a bit of a buzz out of that, it changes their perceptions about their work.*

Is that happening?

*Oh yes. That's a very important aspect and it's something all of us have a responsibility to sustain and to celebrate. We're not suddenly some enlightened group of people but we are at least in tune with the community, and know that our core business is to do the best we can for these kids – but in an environment where we get support from parents.*

Do they have a sense that the parents are partners in the education of their kids?

*Yes, much more so now. When I first came here there was a view that parents were not supportive of the school. Now there is no view at all that they are not supportive. There's been a turn-around.*

*And there's no more in-your-face [confrontation]. Parents come in and say, "I've got an issue. I want you to help me sort it out." They come to me or the staff and sort it out. It's a very powerful process.*

*For a lot of our parents, their own experience of school wasn't that flash. So why should they trust us?*

*There are probably four or five kids a year in our school who don't come to school because their parents can't afford to send them -- the shoes, the clothing, the lunch. They say to me it's cheaper for my kids to watch television than go to school.*

*I go into a fair number of homes, meet the parents on their territory. And the circumstances in which they live is both sad and humbling. They are so resilient. There's a richness in the family. Every parent of every child in our school wants the best for their child. So I say to my teachers, give them your best. And they do.*

### **What the key staff said about the project [School psychologist]**

#### Parent Power

*We're getting five to eight regularly at those parent meetings. It takes a lot of constant effort. And the tenacity has paid off. It's okay to have Parent Power with a few.*

*And one of the things I will have to do next year is to do a whole lot more to inform teachers about the benefits of having parent involvement. Because we (the leadership and the parent leaders) just take that as a given.*

*The good teachers, when the exams are due in, will see that a child who is going through hell because she's depressed gets a doctor's certificate and will work with the parents. The others will not. They'll say the marks are due in, and that's that.*

*I don't know how some of these kids are upright and vertical, knowing what they go through at home. So I have to go to the boss and get him to intervene.*

Have these initiatives shown enough promise to be worth persevering with?

*Oh yes. All of them are sustainable. This project has made Forming Friendships work because it has paid for the breakfasts.*

*It hasn't been so easy to involve the Aboriginal community because, to them, talk is cheap. But in fact there is a cultural thing there: Aboriginal people don't like to eat in front of others.*

*We've got a long way to go, but Forming Friendships has created a link (between cultures). The more we can empower the parents to have a life of their own, the more powerful will be their impact on the rest of the school. It's not a project driven by Student Services: it's a project driven by the parents.*

Has the racial tension improved?

*I think it's improved because the level of tension in the community outside is higher but it hasn't been translated into the school because those children that are out there in those feuding families are coming to school. Normally they wouldn't be here. Not only that: their parents are letting them come to school.*

### **What the parents said about the project**

#### Parent Power

Why is it called Parent Power?

*Because the parents run it. It was [the school psychologist's] baby and I came on board because I had issues with the canteen and what-have-you. You can meet new people,*

*have your say; if you don't want to have your say, have a coffee. [The Principal] always comes to the meeting and anything can be discussed.*

*It was really bad here a few years ago with the Aborigines and the Vietnamese. You speak to people and you hear, oh [the school] was bad. And I say, yes, well that was then, but since [Principal] has been on, I just don't hear anything [like that]. Everyone I've spoken to speaks very highly of him. You feel so welcome with him. It's like speaking to another parent, never mind a Principal.*

*They do everything to get parents on board, let them know what's happening in the school, come and have a look.*

### The weekly breakfast

*Someone told me one of the kids in the breakfast program had said he thought Thursday (the breakfast day) was Christmas or some feast day because he got to eat some food on a Thursday morning.*

### **Researcher's observations**

This was a most remarkable school. The programs and activities covered by the Partnerships project represented only a fraction of the total school effort to build a sense of community, overcome inter-ethnic tensions, support parents and help children break out of the cycle of disadvantage which many of them would otherwise be consigned to, probably for life.

The Principal was widely credited with having achieved an extraordinary cultural change during his time at the school, and he allowed his staff and parent body a wide field of discretion within which to work, always towards the goal of having parents as well as students "engaged in learning".

The school psychologist was a key figure in reaching out to the parents. She had become a friend and confidante to some of the parents.

The school building where the Parent Power meetings were held had become a focal point for the parent community. This was where issues of genuine concern to parents were discussed. It appeared as if this forum would take over from the P&C as the main parent forum in the school.

The Parent Power initiative provided a way to bring parents into the school's decision-making processes in many other ways, and to provide a means by which parents could themselves resume their schooling through the school's connections with TAFE.

There were no quantitative data from this school: the projects, of their nature, were not amenable to number-crunching. As can be seen, however, there was persuasive qualitative evidence that the project was working.

## **CASE F**

### **Name and description of the project**

*Retention and Participation Program*  
*Engagement and Enrichment through the Arts and Sport*  
*Re-engagement Centre*

These three separate but inter-related programs make up a comprehensive suite of programs designed to:

- overcome in younger students a reluctance to attend school;
- remedy anti-social behaviour in a small but disruptive minority of students; and
- keep students constructively engaged at school by providing them with alternative studies tailored to their interests and designed to enhance their employment prospects.

Each program is in turn made up of a variety of elements.

The Retention and Participation Program consists of a Come To School Bus run, a morning nutrition program, a Welcome Room for parents, a student mentor system and a volunteer reading scheme.

The Engagement and Enrichment program consists of music and sport initiatives, and the creation of a reconciliation garden.

The Re-engagement Centre is a kind of school-within-a-school where at-risk students will be located in two houses adjacent to the main campus where they will have intensive lessons in very small groups, where their conduct will be monitored by community elders, and employment-related opportunities created. It is intended to work with the TAFE to offer practical courses in such fields as mechanical engineering and cattle mustering. Students will be selected into the centre on the basis of their risk profile. It is not to be an easy option for students who simply misbehave.

## **Background**

This secondary school with an enrolment of 738 students, serves an isolated community, draws students from a broad range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, most of whom come from blue-collar households at best. The professional and managerial families in the town tend to send their children away to school.

Forty per cent of students come from Indigenous families, and another ten per cent from Muslim families. There are also significant minorities of students from Middle European backgrounds, and for many students English is a second language.

The cyclical nature of the mining industry, the isolation of the town and the harshness of the climate combine to create a transient population among both students and teachers. This has had something of a debilitating effect on school morale and on the image of the school. The present Principal has declared that she is committed to the school for a minimum of five years and this in itself appears to have had a positive impact.

The combination of economic disadvantage, ethnic diversity, and transience has led to troubling levels of student disengagement and, among a small minority, seriously disruptive behaviour. This in turn discourages even keen students.

The three elements of the project are directed specifically at overcoming these negatives and creating positive incentives for all students.

Much depends on the availability of government funding. Some initiatives, although adopted in principle, have not been implemented for want of funding.

The school has attracted considerable financial and in-kind support from local businesses, and benefits from a substantial investment in local education by a large multi-national mining company. The school's linkages in these areas are strong.

Between our first and second visits, the school had had a major behavioural incident as a result of which 16 students had been suspended. The school convened a meeting of parents and about 50 turned up to discuss the issues. What the staff feared would turn into an unpleasant confrontation in fact turned out to be a most constructive discussion, leading to the holding of a barbecue which many of the suspended students attended. Their behaviour seemed to improve thereafter.

### **Engaging parents**

Many ways were used to reach out to the parents: a breakfast program; taking teachers out to Indigenous communities to show parents what their children had done in school (rather than the conventional parent-teacher meetings in the school); using personal contact to bring parents in to forums to discuss specific ideas such as the Re-engagement Centre, and when a crisis arose responding openly by inviting aggrieved parents in to talk about the suspension of their children.

The school also employed a number of Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers whose main responsibilities included staying in touch with Indigenous parents.

Again personal contact, an open culture from the Principal down, an obvious willingness to be sensitive to parents' needs, and a preparedness to put an effort into finding creative solutions for students at risk all contributed to the engagement of parents in this very demanding setting.

### **What the Principal said about the project**

*I'm very pleased that we've made lots of positive steps forward. With the re-engagement centre we had to get approval from the district and from the local council which, hooray, we got last night. It will be running in term 1 2006.*

*The more important thing is that the project has given us a strategy and way of approaching things we needed dealt with and the opportunity to reflect on how we're going and to make sure that as we move forward, we engage parents.*

*We have approval for the re-engagement centre to operate out of two residential properties that have now been re-zoned. Only five minutes' walk from the school, it has a staff of three people, a teacher, one AIEO and a half-time chaplain. His role is not so much about curriculum but about pastoral care and the relationships with the Aboriginal community.*

I just heard you talking about the profiling of the kids you are going to select into it.

*Yes. We have spent a lot of energy training [the teacher for the centre]. That includes making sure we've got the right child. It's no good putting in a re-engagement program kids who should be in mainstream school.*

*So we're really targeting the kids who would get lost, to re-engage them in education or training or online learning or employment.*

And you said your profiling will be around things like attendance, attitude, academic performance and basically kids who, because of these factors, are at risk of dropping out?

*Yes, and those major mental or physical health issues that put kids firmly in the at-risk category.*

*And the re-engagement centre is a full-service model that give parents more of a one-stop shop in addressing the educational needs of their child.*

*And experts will come in and talk about things like how to dismantle a car engine, plant a garden, create an irrigation system.*

And the governance of the centre?

*Key stakeholders, parents, community representatives. That would include TAFE and [a large company which has invested substantially in the school], maybe the town council. And we're going to have a "Closer to Parents" operational committee.*

*The Come-to-School bus we have had running for only one day because we can't get a driver.*

*The breakfast program has been up and running since August. Where we've had most success is over the past six weeks when we've been running it around the pool. It started with a Tuesday and it's now Tuesdays and Thursdays.*

*And we've got the PALS program (Partnership Acceptance Learning Sharing). It's a way of getting school communities – and that means parents, different agencies like the town council and the police and students -- working together on a project that has cultural significance and brings together black and white, basically.*

*The biggest part of our partnerships project was to start talking more specifically with our disengaged parents. The Partnerships funding enabled us to target specific groups and get them to come in and sit and talk with us about what they thought the issues were in the schools and for us to sit and listen very carefully to what they were saying. And we asked them for solutions and the most important thing we did was to feed back to them the contents of our meeting and our commitment to what we said we were going to do.*

*This is all controlled through [Deputy Principal]. I try to delegate and stay out of the way.*

*The Welcome Room was something we started last year and is being used quite well by parents. The volunteer reader program has seven adult volunteers and that is absolutely brilliant. Some are parents. Another is the mayor.*

*We've got our little [Reconciliation] garden out the front and that program is going beautifully. We've got a 300-seat theatre which is a shared facility with the local council. The students go out there with wheelbarrows and [the police officer] was out there one day helping them shovel manure. It was hugely successful. And again there was a little bit of seed money from [a large multi-national mining company].*

What would be the main advice you would give another school?

*You need to be open and transparent and willing to listen, to not be defensive about any aspect of your school and to go in with a clear idea of what you're already doing for the kids. You don't know until you truly listen to parents what they are saying. And only promise to do what you really intend to do. Be honest about what doesn't work.*

## **What the people with carriage of the project said [Deputy Principal] and Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers [AIEOs]**

### The breakfast program

Deputy Principal: *We identified 35 kids who continually come up to the AIEOs asking for lunch. We targeted those students.*

*We've also had some of the parents from the more remote areas bringing in some of the kids.*

*We're looking at opening it up to parents, but there are only three or four staff involved at the moment, and we need more for safety around the pool.*

*We started that a couple of weeks into term three. At one stage we had about 22 students and this morning we had eight, average about nine or ten.*

### What causes the fluctuations?

*One factor is the weather. Lately it has cooled down a little bit so some of the kids aren't coming as much. It's more comfortable to stay at home when it's cooler. When the weather hots up we tend to get a lot more kids coming in for the air conditioning. And it's free food as well.*

*But we have a core group of kids who come consistently at least once a week. And that's about 15, majority boys and majority Indigenous, although it is open to everyone, and quite a few from out of town.*

*The kids are now a lot more receptive when we ask them to do something. They listen more. They understand we're going out of our way for them and they're really good. They clean up, they pack it all up themselves, put in requests for breakfasts next week.*

### What do the parents feel about these things? Do they feel they have any role?

*A lot of them are very grateful for it. Other than that they don't have much to do with it.*

### Re-engagement centre

#### Any ideas for getting Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents involved, and whether they need different strategies?

*The strategies aren't different for actually getting parents into school, but what you do with the parents once you get them to school is very different.*

*The only strategy for getting them in is to keep inviting them in, keep in contact with them, so when I ring up and say hi, this is (name) from the high school, and they go, Oh God, what's he done now? you still keep the relationship going.*

*But we need to look more with Indigenous parents at not dragging them into an office and closing the door, but having a different setting, maybe our "welcome room" or somewhere outside where we can sit down and have a yarn.*

AIEO: *We always make them feel welcome. And we always say, if you have any problems, give us a ring.*

And do you have any sense of how they actually feel? Do they actually feel welcome?

*Some do.*

Deputy Principal: *I think the fact that the parents ring if they're concerned about something, that when they come in really cross and are able to sit down and discuss what's been going on, means they are comfortable when they're here, I think.*

### **What Indigenous parents say**

The engagement of Indigenous parents is a complex matter. History and the survival -- even vestigially -- of paternalistic attitudes continue to create difficulties. Indigenous parents, even those closely familiar with the school, pointed to occasions when they had felt slighted.

This is not to derogate from the extraordinary progress attained by the school in creating partnerships with its parents, Indigenous as well as others. But a fair rendering of the overall picture needs to include what Indigenous parents say on this subject.

What follows is taken from a forum of Indigenous parents as well as some individual interviews.

The first exchange concerned the setting of the Re-engagement centre.

Parent 1

*This sounds fantastic, but how about the children who totally lack parental support? Are they to be included?*

Principal

*We know some of our children have care-givers who change. They really are the target group here. We're working very closely with Juvenile Justice and DCD because they are the people who are caring for these kids.*

*It's probably about 10 per cent of kids out of our 700. This small group will get picked up by all of the programs. But kids from good families will also get picked up, because it's not as if Mum and Dad don't care, it's just the child just doesn't like the way traditional education works. So it's quite a broad group of children but they all exhibit the same type of behaviours.*

Parent 2

*There are students in the community who are not attending school. We need to make something attractive for students to come to school.*

Principal

*It's about relevant curriculum. For some of these kids sitting in the classroom getting ready to sit the next test is not what they want to do.*

Parent 3

*Until it's tried we don't know if it will be successful, but it's a fantastic start.*

Deputy Principal

*At the meeting this morning there was some concern that these programs would be seen as a reward for doing the wrong thing.*

Parent 3

*There's always that chance, but if these kids are causing disruption in the room and preventing other kids from learning, you have to do something. If you can do something positive rather than send the kid to detention . . .*

Parent 4

*And a lot of them will work at that until they get the suspension.*

What are some of the recipes for good parent-school partnerships?

Parents

*Educating the parents.*

*Writing things in understandable English.*

*Things that take away that shame factor.*

*Cultural understanding and tolerance.*

Separately from the forum, individual parents were asked: To what extent do you feel you are partners in your children's schooling here?

*I do in some aspects, and in some I don't. When they misbehave, you know you're involved then! When they've done good things, you don't.*

*Sometimes if something happens and you do come in as a parent, you get shot down.*

Can you talk to [the Principal] about that?

*Yeah, we've talked to her about it and she's good.*

*Yes, we always approach her on that.*

So it's not her knocking you down?

*No, it's not her, it's others.*

What about other Indigenous parents? Do they feel welcomed here?

*Some do and some don't. Some because they had bad experiences at school, and others who don't have much involvement don't know anybody, so there's a bit of an uncomfortable feeling when you come in.*

*The teacher often hears what they want to hear, and not what you want to tell them.*

*If they suspend your kid and you come in and ask why, they always want to tell you what's best for you.*

What about this re-engagement centre: is there going to be a real partnership element to it, or will it just be the school running it?

*It'll start off with the school running it until they really get the parents involved. You've got to really push the community to get anything done. The whole community.*

*And you've got to keep reminding them.*

*But they have barbecues that get the parents in.*

What's the secret to get the parents involved?

*A lot of phone calls.*

*A lot of home visits.*

*A lot of follow-up.*

*Persistence.*

*And give them some training. Life skills.*

*And you've got to let them tell you what they want, not you telling them what you want.*

*Which was good at the two meetings of parents [after the suspensions]. The parents did get up and say what they wanted and what they saw as problems.*

And they had a sense of being listened to?

*Yes, I think so.*

### **Researcher's observations**

As with so many of the disadvantaged schools observed in this study, this secondary school appears to have struck it lucky with a Principal who is passionately and energetically committed to giving students the best possible chance to break out of the cycle of economic and social deprivation.

Her appointment nearly two years ago led to changes of personnel among the school leadership, most of whom are now women, and they appear to form a cohesive and determined team. As it happens, it is women who also provide most of the leadership among the parent body and in the Indigenous community. This somewhat matriarchal network has a readily shared

understanding of the causes and consequences of the issues, and of what is needed to tackle them.

The school is also closely networked into the other relevant services – police, juvenile justice, state welfare, the TAFE, and health providers.

A police officer is attached to the school as part of a pilot project by the WA Police Service to assist with early intervention among young people. He was an active participant in an hour-long meeting to discuss the implementation of the re-engagement centre. A youngish and friendly man, he had none of the authoritarian bearing stereotypically associated with police. He had an easy relationship with the Principal, feeling quite at liberty to wander in and out of her office, rifling in the desk drawers for confiscated mobile phones and keeping her up to date as he went about an investigation into a rash of mobile thefts.

The meeting to discuss the implementation of the re-engagement program was chaired by an Aboriginal and Islander Education Officer and attended by various agencies and six parents, one of whom was the father of a couple of tearaways who freely admitted his boys were a problem, and explained their troubled family background. The parents had significant input into the discussions.

There had been very significant progress towards the establishment of the Re-engagement Centre, the breakfast program was well under way and the other elements of this multi-faceted project all seemed to have moved along. Again it was not a setting conducive to gathering quantitative data, but the qualitative evidence of progress was strong. Parents of the 16 suspended students had participated in a constructive forum to discuss behavioural issues; parents ran a car pool to help each other attend the breakfast program; a substantial body of parents formed part of the committee set up to establish the Re-engagement Centre and decide on what should be offered there.

## **CASE G**

### **Name and description of the project**

#### *Welcome new arrivals*

This project was focused primarily on strategies to engage families with the school, and in particular to find innovative ways to support “new arrivals”.

The project group was primarily focused on active strategies to make the transition to school for new parents/ families as smooth as possible.

A number of activities were implemented over the two to three months of the research, including:

- Appointment of project co-ordinator;
- Establishment of a two-tier buddy scheme;
- Teacher/staff skill register;
- Commencement of multilingual website;
- Cook/ talk/ share programs where different cultural groups hosted culinary events for families; and
- Parent morning coffee meetings (run just prior to school assembly, so families could combine the two events).

### **Background**

This primary school is a multi-campus 500-student primary school in the suburbs of Adelaide, with a significant multicultural population. Its catchment includes substantial areas classified as low socio-economically, although there are some areas of high SES. About one-fifth of students receive government support.

The school is located on the fringes of Adelaide and attracts students from the surrounding rural area as well as the suburbs.

It is one of the most ethnically diverse schools in South Australia with 45% of its students coming from non-English-speaking backgrounds. More than 50 nationalities are represented in the student body, including 1% Indigenous.

Few of the NESB families had traditionally become involved in school activities and the main focus of this project was to engage them more effectively.

### **Engaging parents**

This was an example of how a school was able to use its own position in the community to create social networks among parents. Its Buddy system connected families who would otherwise

probably not have become connected, overcoming barriers of culture and language, and creating a welcoming atmosphere for new arrivals.

Personal contact with parents by the project co-ordinator – a parent appointed by parents – was critical, as was the preparedness by the school to empower the parent body in this way.

Also the “Cook, Talk, Share” activities were not overtly educational, nor did they require any particular expertise. However, they provided an enjoyable social occasion, so once again the “enjoyment” factor was important.

### **What the Principal and project group said about the project**

Preliminary feedback suggested that family attendance had dramatically increased during this time.

Interestingly, the parent who had been selected to take on the co-ordinator’s role for the project was picked by other parents, including the chair of the P&F and chair of the school council as well as the Principal.

The project group was active and had met regularly with a clear understanding of the aims of the draft framework.

Three of the core parents group, including the project leader (funded by this project) were passionate and enthusiastic about the project. All were committed to taking the project into the new year.

The parents felt that the project was positive and had made good progress. They stated that their aim was to link every new family into the school community, and to achieve this via a two-tiered system. For those parents who wished to engage in the intensive “buddy” program – to assist with induction for new arrivals and to meet/ greet and have ongoing contact as required.

For those less able to give time, a second tier of support – telephone based, was proposed. New families and their “buddy” families would be matched on the basis of language, year level and gender.

The parents saw this aspect of language and communication as central to successfully building sustainable partnerships.

The parents commented that the program to date had “created a friendlier atmosphere” and that “...people seemed more confident in their communication with the school”.

One parent commented that involving parents and students in the “cook/ talk/ share” program was

*“... whole lot better than going to McDonalds!”*

*Gaining 25 Buddy families already has shown the willingness in our school community to help other families at a level not normally offered within the school. It has definitely become an area to work on and hopefully the number of Buddy families will increase over time and the benefits of allocating a Buddy Family to families who are new to the school will be appreciated.*

*Employing a Parent Partnership Coordinator to offer a personal contact has definitely been a good way forward. Personal contact is very important especially when dealing with people from a different language background.*

*It isn't something that will happen overnight and it's an ongoing project which may need amending to suit the relevant family backgrounds and numbers.*

*It's also becoming apparent that if we contact families early on in their time at the school they are more willing to look at areas to help in. We have one parent, whose child starts next term, who has already asked to be involved in Governing Council.*

### **Researcher's observations**

The project appears to be truly driven by parents for the school community. The results to date are promising, and the feedback thus far suggests that the partnership project initiatives are sustainable, with a high level of parent involvement.

This school has unique language and communication issues – with a significant number of families from non-English speaking backgrounds. Over 100 families come from Chinese arrivals; and more than 30 each of Korean and African origin.

The project has turned into this rich multicultural environment to create effective linkages that appear to be relevant and stimulating higher levels of participation.

There is some debate as to how effective or well utilised the web site may be. The school is aware of this and will monitor hits into the 2006 year. The energy and creativity of the group was apparent, and my sense is that the project has sufficient impetus to proceed into the New Year.

### **Data**

Comparing the number of people attending social events such as the Parents & Friends Coffee Mornings & also the Cook, Talk, Share sessions showed Cook, Talk, Share had 5 at its first session this term & 12 at its second. Already there were six willing cooks lined up for 2006. Twenty-five families had signed up to be buddies.

## **CASE H**

### **Name and description of project**

*Personality, Resilience and Learning Styles – Understanding Our Children and Ourselves*

The school held a conference for parents in this regional Victorian town and surrounding areas around the topic of “Personality, Resilience and Learning Styles – understanding our children and ourselves”. The conference consisted of two sessions, each lasting for four hours and held at a comfortable venue in the town, with lunch provided.

The guest speaker was Dr Loretta Giorcelli, who is a consultant in the fields of child development, special education and learning and behaviour in children and adolescents. She covered a variety of topics relating to stages of child development, parenting issues, understanding children’s temperament and learning styles, building emotional resilience in children, learning and behaviour, and social skills in children. The material also looked at family-school relationship and ways parents can support their children in their learning and school life.

A shorter bridging session was held between the two main presentations for several interested parents, by the parent group’s president who was the project co-ordinator. This session provided an opportunity to discuss issues and ideas gained from session 1 and practical applications for these in family and school life.

The major initiators of the project were the Principal of the school and the project co-ordinator.

They worked closely with parents, teachers and children in the development of a family-school partnership that focused on:

- How to cope with different personalities within the same family;
- Buoyancy and resilience;
- Developing advocacy and leadership skills (as parents and in the children);
- Dealing with meeting the children's emotional needs whilst dealing with stress in one's own personal relationships;
- Sibling rivalry, competition and quarrelling;
- Self-esteem for the children and for parents;
- Peer pressure and the ways that children can deal with it;
- How to break recurring patterns of poor child and parent reactions to given situations
- Father-child relationship; and
- Step-parenting and the issues that may come from this in regard to discipline at home and in school behaviour.

### **Background**

This is a primary school of 300 students in the Victorian goldfields, a rural area which is also an important tourist destination. It serves a monocultural community of low to medium socio-economic status, and the challenge was to broaden the community's valuing of difference.

The school was involved in the National Safe Schools Project, which focused on community connectedness and on strengthening relationships at school. Two Principal issues emerged from its work in that project:

- Parent education; and
- Learning styles.

The school saw the present project as a way of extending and developing work that had already begun in these areas.

### **Engaging parents**

Here was a case where the appointment of a vibrant and energetic parent to make the project happen was of great importance. Personal contact with parents by this person and a core team of parent helpers was also most important.

This really did seem to be a joint enterprise of the Principal and the parent co-ordinator where decision-making was genuinely shared.

The activities were tailored to what parents had said would interest them, so again listening to parents' needs was important, as was the provision of an enjoyable venue, a good meal and an interesting speaker.

### **What the Principal said about the project**

*We felt that our involvement in the National Safe Schools' Project provided us with a direction for the future development of our work with parents, the school and community. This present project seemed an ideal way to put into effect some of the ideas we had as a result of our work in the previous project.*

*There has definitely been a change in school culture, though it would be difficult to quantify this. For example, in the transition meeting with the pre-schoolers, I was listing all the things that [project co-ordinator] has done, and I found there was a common language I was using that was appearing in our documents, in the forums and conferences, and in our own staff meetings.*

*We are sharing ideas about children and their welfare. It has provided us with an opening, a permission, to talk about children in a very open way. I was interested in the way some parents were disclosing things in front of a big group at the conference. I thought it was interesting there was so much trust, which is quite significant. This is a measure of people's growing understanding and willingness to share their ideas about learning with each other, and with the teachers.*

*If you want to support at-risk children, you have to get parents engaged so they are learning alongside everyone else how to be competent parents who don't necessarily know all the answers. This notion of sharing is really significant.*

### **What the teaching staff said about the project**

*We have been pleased at the way parents have been continuing to come into the classroom, particularly as they are not just coming into the junior grades as is the usual way to help out with the literacy block. We do have a core group of parents who are very involved with the school, but they are a pretty enthusiastic group, and we've gradually seen more and more parents showing interest in greater involvement.*

### **What parent representatives said about the project**

*We've, that is the core group of parents, have been working to extend parent involvement in the school for a while now, particularly after our experiences in the National Safe Schools' Project. I think the idea of having guest speakers to talk on things that concern all of us, for example, resilience, bullying, different ways of learning, will be of great benefit to our own understandings, and to what happens in the classroom. It's also a great way to join with parents from other schools and communities, and to see how much in common we share. All of this really makes the school a strong*

*place for the children, as they can see how parents and teachers are working on the same issues.*

*While this was a reasonably expensive exercise, with the travel and accommodation costs, the benefits that came from having such a good speaker, and such a professional conference/forum in an attractive venue more than compensated for the possibility that we may have gone over budget. A major difficulty, however, was child-care, which will need to be followed up if we do the same next year.*

### **Researcher's observations**

The major driver for this project was the president of the parent club who worked closely with the Principal and with a core group of four or five parents. The project co-ordinator is a social worker, and was able to bring in some of those skills into her work with the parents, and in organising a number of activities that involve parents and the school.

The Principal fully supported the initiatives that the core group of parents took. She also noted that the other staff members were fully supportive of the project. The forum where the guest speaker addressed the parents seemed an outstanding success. Issues that were addressed were those that the project co-ordinator and the Principal had spoken of earlier as being of concern in their particular school and community. Of particular interest was the way that these two women worked with a group of 10 or 12 parents for between-forum activities. This follows a successful PD practice of trialling strategies in the home and classroom, and then reporting back to the next session for discussion, evaluation and further development.

The school seems to have met all the objectives it set for itself in this project and is now looking for ways to take them further. The conferences/forums were an excellent idea, and they were very well supported by parents not just from the town but some of the surrounding areas and schools. Each conference attracted 50-plus people. The conferences/forums were very professional, with the venue being attractive and the catering excellent. Many books were ordered, at the speaker's suggestion, for the parent library.

A major reason for the number of parents attending and remaining involved was the one-to-one invitation and talking to individuals that the project co-ordinator, in particular, and the core group of four parents, undertook: personal invitations to parents,;encouraging them to attend; and highlighting particular aspects of the forum/conference that the parent might find interesting. It was very time-consuming, but it was also effective. They are trying to gradually extend relationships by using their core group of parents to work in the wider school community.

## **CASE I**

### **Name and description of the project**

*Extending school and family partnerships through school-based projects*

The project initiatives were essentially a continuation of existing projects:

1. The fountain project: A local artist has designed a water sculpture that represents the school values and beliefs. The parents and children are working together to complete the mosaic tiling around the fountain.
2. Parent forum: Each year level has a parent representative. These representatives encourage communication and school involvement among parents within that classroom. The parent representatives meet on a regular basis to achieve common goals for the school.
3. Minor initiatives: Recruitment and maintenance of Support-A-Reader Volunteers; permaculture garden; healthy eating plan for the school canteen menu.

### **Background**

This primary school in regional Queensland has 411 students, and is situated in a semi-rural community with a population of approximately 1500 people. It is a low-medium socio-economic area where approximately half of the students come from a single-parent family. The school values and encourages parental involvement and believes the co-operation produces positive outcomes for their students.

The Principal has recently retired. When he first came to the school he inherited a school that was somewhat fractured and apart from its community. He spent much of his energy developing strong school-community relationships. A parent was employed as a community enhancement officer to improve communication between parents and the school.

The importance of this has been increased by the pressures of a large new housing development, which is turning this semi-rural village into a town. In the face of this social transformation, the school is anxious to bed down strong community ties to help preserve the unity that has been developed in recent years.

The school's community enhancement officer plays a vital role in strengthening parent-school relationships. She is instrumental in providing opportunities for interaction between parents, school and the wider community.

A number of school-community projects have already been done as a result of the school's vision of "learning and growing together".

The acting Principal has been at the school for a number of years. She has continued to foster the positive parent-school relationships.

### **Engaging parents**

The appointment of a community enhancement officer was of critical importance here. The school was alive to the concerns in the community about the consequences of the incipient housing development which was going to transform their village, and was prepared to be the venue of community capacity-building, using a range of initiatives aimed at attracting the involvement of many people with different talents and interests.

It was similar in some ways to another school where a mural had been built. Fathers became engaged when they were able to see it as a "building" project, not an "arts" project. Here, people became involved because they were approached personally, the school showed it understood their needs, and the various elements of the project provided activities than a wide range of people could enjoy.

### **What the Acting Principal said about the project**

*We have spent a considerable proportion of the school budget over the past three years in a small weekly wage for one of our parents to act as Community Enhancement Officer.*

*This grew from a need to enhance parent involvement and provide impetus and support for a number of projects.*

*The Community Enhancement Officer has worked closely with the Principal and Deputy to:*

- *give a voice to parents through organisation of appropriate communication channels;*
- *encourage parent involvement in projects and develop strong partnerships with our school and the greater community;*
- *recruit and train a "pod" of volunteers from the community to improve students' reading; and*
- *develop and maintain the Parent Representative Group which has responsibilities of communication between administration and classroom, fundraising and supporting curriculum initiatives.*

The acting Principal was very supportive of, and extremely pleased with the outcomes of the Partnerships project:

*We achieved one of our goals for the year embedding our philosophy/foundations in our school identity. We connected more families, shared experiences, and students are more aware of our philosophy and our school identity. We have been very successful in fulfilling our objectives for the project.*

*Having a community enhancement officer has been the secret to our success. Every school needs a [School Community Enhancement Officer]. She has been pivotal in harnessing parents. She has communicated profusely through newsletters, supervised activities children want to be involved in that link to the curriculum.*

*Anything visual works. Has to be tangible. Not visual – doesn't work. Face-to-face is best.*

*Parents need a space of their own to meet. Our room downstairs has been very successful in welcoming parents, allowing them to meet and have a coffee and chat. It's their own space and they feel part of the school community.*

#### **What the person with carriage of the project (CEO) said about it**

*Parent forum is important. The class reps are there to give verbal support and friendships to the parents in the class. They pass messages on and listen to what the parents have to say.*

*The parent forum gives parents a voice. It's a face to face opportunity to share and say what they want to.*

*Parent forum has huge potential. Lowest number in attendance 6. Highest 25. Parents perceive the parent forum as their own -- they can say what they want. The P&C is not seen in such a positive light: more about jobs you have to do.*

*Parent forum is now looking at whole-school nutrition. Policy decisions about the tuckshop will be linked to curriculum. Parents are really enjoying this. But there is a small group of negative parents.*

*It has been very time consuming – communicating all the time.*

*I would like to see others owning the process so that it is more community driven. It is a great job for a parent.*

#### **What the teaching staff said about the project**

*The school has been fractured in the past. We really needed a different vision, one that included the community and effort. Our school logo and motto "learning and growing together" is a great example of working together.*

*This area used to have a village feel to it. The children were raised by the village, the whole village, not just the parents. We want to maintain this. With the big housing development coming in, we really needed to consider how we could publicly live our motto.*

*A local artist was engaged for the fountain project that has the motto around it. It will represent safety, respect and learning. After school workshops have been very successful in making the tiles and now placing the tiles around the fountain.*

*Parent forum has been very positive. Key parent reps for each class have encouraged greater participation. The little projects have added to their participation.*

*Having a school community enhancement officer has been very successful. Parents know they can go to her with anything.*

*Giving the parents a voice and a space has been vital to the success of this project.*

### **What the parent representative said about the project**

*The school has a wonderful community spirit. When I came here I felt welcomed. You become part of the community immediately.*

*I'm involved in the fountain project at the moment and the after school workshops.*

*The fountain project looks fabulous and the tuckshop healthy lunch day has been a huge success. Great to see what we can accomplish.*

*Have got some more parents interested, but still the same people doing things. Most belong to both P&C and Parent Forum.*

*I like the way [School Community Enhancement Officer] is there to encourage us and keep the communication going. It's been an eye-opener how much she does. I'm not sure how it would go if we didn't have a person like her.*

*It's been terrific. Everybody loves the fountain and how it looks as they come into the school. Teachers are working with us to improve the tuck shop meals and what they are teaching the kids about healthy foods.*

### **Researcher's observations**

This school has a vision of school community partnerships. They have already set things in motion by employing a school community enhancement officer to foster strong communicative links and active community participation.

This together with the formation of a parent forum (in addition to the P&C) gives parents and community members a voice have empowered this school community.

It is a very welcoming school community. Much is already in place to facilitate strong parent-school relationships. A number of projects are already underway. The fountain project was to be completed by the end of 2005.

There is a room available for parents and visitors. The school has limited space so it is shared with the music teacher. The sign outside the door says, "Parents' and visitors' meeting room. Please feel welcome to use this room for Information Exchange, Discussions, Learning Workshops, Lunch breaks and Social Activities". Tea and coffee are readily available. This is suggestive of the extent that the school is willing to go to foster happy and positive parent relationships, and to encourage the parents to stay at the school and interact with each other.

The School Community Enhancement Officer plays a vital role in forging a strong bond between school and community. She seeks out opportunities that may add to the learning and participation of parents and the wider community in school initiatives.

The focus is on trying to capture the interest and the active participation of parents who are not readily available or are not as active in school initiatives as the current group .

All these factors, in addition to the enthusiasm and forward thinking of the Principal, suggest that the school could be an exemplar for schools wishing to engage in successful and effective family-school partnerships.

## **CASE J**

### **Name and description of project**

*RAISe – Raising Achievement in Schools (e)*

The project consists of training volunteer parents in basic classroom skills and in special literacy and numeracy programs, then rostering them into classrooms where they work alongside teachers in block teaching of these core subjects.

### **Background**

This Catholic primary school of 408 students in an old inner suburb of Perth serves an area that is being rejuvenated by a steady influx of young professional and middle-class families. The school has a highly stable population, 80 per cent of which are considered to identify themselves clearly as Catholic. Only about 7 per cent of households qualify for a health card.

The school is growing steadily as it progressively introduces a second stream of students. This will take the enrolments from 400 to about 600.

Over at least the past decade, the school had developed a culture in which parents had been actively encouraged to participate in the delivery of education in partnership with the teachers. There was a positive intention to try to bring parents into the classroom, as part of this.

About four years ago, a teacher of a year 1 class was approached by a number of parents wanting to assist in the classroom. She ran a workshop for as many of her parents as wanted to come, and from those who attended she drew volunteers to assist her as required. This is essentially the model that is now being expanded across the schools in the specific curriculum areas of literacy and numeracy. The former Year 1 teacher is now an Assistant Principal.

At the request of the teaching staff, the P&F resolved to provide additional resources in the specific areas of literacy and numeracy. When the new resources had been purchased, the teaching staff gave demonstrations to the P&F to show them what had been bought and how it would be used.

The school now wanted to take this one step further and provide workshops to show parents how to use these resources at home. The objective was to have consistency between the teaching techniques used at home and those used at the school in literacy and numeracy.

The present Principal inherited this culture of parent partnerships and, according to the teaching staff and to the parent leadership group, has been responsible for both placing sensible boundaries around it and deepening it. His message to parents is, “This is your school”.

### **Engaging parents**

This school had been engaging its parents for a decade or more. The culture of openness to parents was well-established. The parents had been specifically invited by the two key teachers in this project to come and talk about curriculum materials for use in the classroom.

This well-educated parent community, accustomed to being part of the decision-making in the school, responded enthusiastically and were then asked if they would like to learn to use the materials themselves with a view to helping out in the classroom.

There was great appeal in this because it gave them a concrete way of helping their children learn.

### **What the Principal said about the project**

*With the numeracy, of the 30 parents who came to the workshop, something like 20 are currently working in classrooms, but they're saying there are looking forward to the other three workshops. We've planned four, one each different aspect of numeracy. We've done the numeracy on number, and next year we'll do measurement, space, and chance and data.*

*We got about 30-odd to all our literacy workshops as well.*

*They loved it. All the materials the staff had asked the P&F to purchase were there and they formed into groups and they had a great time handling the materials and putting things together.*

### **Much overlap between parents who participated in the literacy and numeracy workshops?**

*Some, but we had more fathers in the literacy workshops and none in the numeracy workshops.*

*Ninety per cent of the parents who came to the workshops flowed on to classroom support.*

*Most our children are above the State benchmarks in literacy and numeracy, but how much is attributable to this project is difficult to say.*

### **How did you draw the parents in, who don't usually participate?**

*Once the decision was made to double-stream the school, the school was never going to be the same again. We said to the P&F we're going to need support from the parents. Once you've got two classes of one year-level, we want to make sure both are doing the same things. And parents were already helping anyway. So if we could get parents working in the double stream, we could get additional parents involved.*

*We want to encourage parents to work in classrooms and do it in a manner that is the way the teachers do it. If you don't train the parents, they won't know what to do. They'll do it their way. And parents want to know, they like to know that when they come into class, they get direction. By getting a bit of direction, they get more confident and feel good about it. Doing it properly and with consistency.*

### **In some schools the teachers might be most uncomfortable having parents that closely involved.**

*It's not a problem.*

### **How do you develop that culture?**

*When I enrol a family I talk about three things, and the rest of it flows from there.*

*Number one, we work hard here to develop an environment that is safe, friendly, caring, loving and collaborative. We want to connect the school to the child. Once the child is connected, the parents will just automatically feel connected. That's the foundation.*

*Then once the parents feel connected to the school, we work on that partnership. I go to some lengths to explain the importance of the partnership, of having parents supporting the school. The more they support the school, the more they support the child.*

*There'll be issues along the way, but if the relationship between the parents and the school is strong and there's trust, we'll overcome these little things.*

*And we tell them, this is your school. You are welcome to come here. How can you develop relationships with parents if they don't come here, don't feel welcome?*

*Each morning fifteen minutes before school starts, we open the doors, there's music playing and parents come in.*

*There are times when parents can have another impact on the school and we've experienced that here. We have to overcome these fears or issues because if we concentrated on that, then you'll never have parents in the school. So we continually work on that.*

*We need to model behaviour that we expect in return. I try to treat everyone here the way I'd like to be treated myself. You have to work at it. If you allow children's behaviour to get out of line and don't do certain things about it, don't support your teachers and don't let the parents know, then it will get worse. If you allow parents to come in and bully or talk to staff and don't do something about it, it'll happen again. You have to address things when they happen. Not three days later. You have to have a standard. We refer to it all the time. You create an expectation.*

So when you're hiring staff, you're listening for signs that they are going to be open to having parents in their classroom in a collaborative way?

*Yes, and generally we ask referees how the teacher deals with parents. What is the teacher's relationship with parents like? How does the teacher deal with conflict? Always our teachers are open to having parents ask.*

### **What teachers with carriage of the project said**

*As the year progressed, in Year 2, for example, there has been less parent participation than at the start of the year. I don't why. The teachers would like them to be there every day. It's not lack of teacher enthusiasm.*

*Some teachers are saying to the parents, come when you're available, rather than rostering them every Tuesday. Some parent prefer the flexibility.*

What do you hear back from the teachers about this sense of partnership?

*For the parents who are in the classroom, definitely they feel they are onside with them.*

*The younger the kids, the more parent involvement. By Years 5, 6, 7, the parents feel the nurturing phase is over, and they back right away. There's also an element of the kids not wanting them there in the older grades.*

But the training equips them for all grades?

*Yes. I had a range of parents from K to 7.*

*A lot of parents in maths said they don't want to help their kid (at home) because they think they're contradicting the teacher. Whereas we say, the more ways a child can learn to solve a problem, the better. So we say, show them your way because it might work for them.*

*But when a child's learning to read, we've found some parents were covering up the pictures, sounding out the words, and it was going against how they were being taught. And that's how the workshops grew. We needed to educate the parents. The kids need to see the pictures: that's a big part of learning to read. Covering them up is really not helping them.*

### **What parents said about the project**

What did you think of the workshops?

*Fantastic, absolutely fantastic.*

*When you're in a classroom you've got more tools. It gives you the ability to elicit the answer from children without giving it away.*

*I loved the maths, the numeracy one. And the literacy one was great. It was fun and hands-on and we were playing games.*

Did it do anything for your ability to help your child at home?

*I suppose it showed me the way my children are being taught, because when you add up there are all sorts of different ways.*

*And it taught me it's not the final product that matters so much as the process. That was really important.*

(All had been in the classrooms as well.)

Does it have effect on your sense of being a partner in your children's education?

*I think it has to. It enhances communication and that two-channel is open, and if you feel more confident in the classroom, you're going to feel more comfortable being there. Sometimes it can be quite threatening if a kid asks you a question you can't answer.*

*Absolutely, yes. One of my children has had a few learning difficulties, and when I get the opportunity I can reinforce what the teacher has gone through. And it's re-education for me, because the older you get, the more you've forgotten. So you can learn all the basics again.  
A lot of parents have forgotten the basics.*

*My child has had learning difficulties too, and I've learnt about the way he's being taught to spell. That helps me tremendously to help him.*

Do parents in general have a sense of being welcomed into the school?

*I think so. We don't really talk about it, but it's a fantastic community at this school. It's quite tangible. Everybody is happy to help everybody, and that has to be a by-product of the partnerships.*

How widely known do you think this workshops project is?

*I found doing your survey, and they were parents who weren't involved in the school, that 98 per cent of parents knew about it, and knew the school valued it. The newsletter was one of the major influences in their getting the information, that and talking to other parents.*

So this partnerships project is just another way of making the partnerships that already exist work?

*Yes. I've been at the school four years now and under the current Principal and staff I have to agree with that. Right from kindy, I've been encouraged to come into the classroom.*

### **Researcher's observations**

This school had a "feel" about it: as soon as you walked into the place you had a sense that it was an unusually positive environment. The Principal came straight out of his office as soon as he heard my voice at the reception desk, shook my hand, took me in directly to his office and began to talk rapidly and enthusiastically about the school, the program and the day he had mapped out for me. This included a staff morning tea at which there were birthday cakes and singing for staff whose birthday fell on or about the day.

The assistant principals, who had carriage of the project, spoke with great warmth of the Principal's leadership and his willingness to build on the work of an admired predecessor, as well as of his openness and humaneness in his dealings with students, staff and parents. These were themes I heard repeatedly, from staff, parent representatives and the parents who came to a forum in the evening.

The existence and promotion of clear and common values was a feature. The values espoused by the school were framed in a visually bold document hanging in the foyer directly opposite the front door. Values were referred to frequently, as was the importance of consistency between the values of the home and of the school.

## **Case K**

### **Name or description of project**

#### *The Parent Reference Group*

The project consisted of establishing and maintaining a parent group within the school community that is not bound by traditional structures or traditional relationships between the school and parents. Its functions are to promote multiculturalism in the community, increase participation by parents in the life of the school, improve communication between the school and families, and reduce social differences.

The group holds regular informal Wednesday morning meetings which parents are encouraged to attend and meet with a community liaison worker. The group also organises multicultural morning teas where a range of ethnic foods are sampled and people from different ethnic groups in the community are brought together.

A parent centre in the new library is being set up, providing books, magazines and electronic materials on parenting and primary education.

An advertising campaign using posters and a column in the school newsletter has begun to inform the community of the existence and function of the parent group.

### **Background**

The school is situated in a suburb of lower socio-economic standing in outer western Sydney. There is a diverse range of languages and cultures in the local community. Sixty per cent of the children are from an NESB background and the figure for Kindergarten in 2006 will rise to 70%, reflecting increased migration into the area. A community liaison worker has been employed five hours a week for a number of years, undertaking pastoral work and occasional home visits.

The new school leadership proposed a project involving a body that would reach out to parents and help them in their integration into the local culture and school community and welcome their participation in school life.

A feeling was expressed that, while the school had traditional parent structures such as a mothers' club and a fathers' club, anxieties and tensions had diminished their effectiveness. Power had been exercised in these bodies by a limited few over a number of generations. It was felt these parent groups merely served the school's interests as fundraising bodies and that a new group was needed that could operate outside traditional structures and whose ownership would lie in the hands of many parents. In addition, traditional parent body structures in the school had not embraced the multicultural aspects of the school community. A new parent group networking with the community liaison worker would act as voice for parents in passing on information to the school community.

### **Engaging parents**

It was the pastoral role of the community liaison worker which was seen as a bridge into the partnerships. This person had been employed in this role for 20 years, and had established good links with the various groups in the parent body. This demonstrates the need to invest time in initiatives like this. Newsletters, advertisements and other such devices were used as back-up but not as the primary vehicles of communication. The parents had also become engaged because the new group had none of the old power structures, and was invited to play a role far wider than the conventional one of fund-raising.

### **What the Principal said about the project**

The Principal is relatively new to the school and indicated a need for the school to embrace the wider parent community. He was aware that while schools often speak of parent partnership they often don't have the systems or structures set up where they can meaningfully reach out to parents. He indicated that in his view there was a need to reach out and take advantage of the richness and the ideas that come from parents in the broader community.

*If people are given a voice and are invited to be part of a community it certainly gives a greater ownership and where the school and the parent committee work hand in hand it raises the number of ideas and amount of communication that goes back and forth...what I hope is to see the impact of that on our children.*

It was also important to the Principal that parents are always made welcome. He indicated a need for teachers at the school to be open and welcoming at all levels, being aware of the need for care and safety of the children but also being available to parents as they drop off their children in the morning or collect them in the afternoon at the assembly and prayer.

*Parents who don't often feel they have something to contribute are welcome. This is especially important in a school with such a large number of NESB parents. They don't knock on doors – we need to invite them and then incorporate the richness of their culture and their ability to contribute to the community.*

The Principal saw the appointment of the community liaison worker as epitomising the value of family within the school. He praised the work and outlined the qualities of the incumbent as:

- having a sense of vision;
- being a lateral thinker;
- encouraging parents to use their own skills and creative insights;
- being qualified in the area e.g. counselling;
- having good interpersonal skills; and
- having a knowledge of children, parents and teachers.

The Principal indicated that in his view the project was a “huge success” as indicated by the way people had been brought together, had communicated well and dealt with some difficult situations and challenges. He attributed much of the success to the dedication, experience and availability of the community liaison worker who was described as “a dynamic and community-spirited person”.

The outcomes of the project in the Principal's view were seeing the parent reference group meeting on regular occasions, the dialoguing on education that was taking place and the development of community spirit which was evident. The Principal said he felt that the objectives of the project had been achieved in that the parent group had acted as a catalyst for change and redefinition of parent roles in the school. The school had long wished to reform all of the existing parent structures and now this process of change had begun. It was too early to measure the effects of this change on the students yet there was the feeling that they would be influenced ultimately by their parents.

The Principal also said he felt that the success of the parent group was due to the informality which had been fostered and which allowed people to open up and express their personalities, even people who had poorly developed English skills. He regarded the personal contact as what had worked with the project.

*There was a feeling of whenever we walked over to the meeting room when [community liaison worker] was there with a group of parents as being a very welcoming atmosphere, with the pre-school children playing and all of the parents talking...*

The parents in turn were happy to see the executive present as they felt they could freely express their ideas and opinions.

The Principal indicated that it was also important for the school leadership to keep the teaching staff informed and “on board” with the project. It was also important to reinforce to parents the idea that education was a joint project of home and school:

*We are reminding parents that they are here with us. It's not we're the teachers and we start at 9 and finish at 3 and they take over. It's about being together.*

At the same time the Principal spoke of a constraint to this ideal.

*One of the things that really impacted on me is the trust which parents have in teachers in this school. That's a wonderful thing but it's also a concern say when they did not demand answers when asbestos was found in the school playground or when a teacher went on protracted leave. These are cultural mores – the belief that the teacher knows everything so things are out of our hands. This kind of attitude makes partnerships much more difficult.*

### **What the person with carriage of the project said about it**

*I have worked in this [role] for 20 years so it's very familiar ground for me...*

The community liaison worker stated that she felt that the major objectives of the program had been achieved. The parent reference group was meeting regularly, communicating well and providing a participative and inclusive effect on the school culture. The school executive was impressed and supportive of the efforts of the multicultural liaison worker. Most teachers were onside. The culmination of her work this year was the multicultural morning tea which served to build community spirit and orientate families of new students to the school. There was a “tremendous response” to this day with over 200 people drawn to it “ who stayed and wouldn't go home”.

*We had food from people we had never even seen here before.*

*An outcome of the multicultural morning tea was a sense of curiosity which has been established about the school. A new family expressed that they were very impressed and were looking forward to coming to the school in 2006. A sense that the school community appreciates where people come from and that they can have a voice has been expressed. In the past parents felt that because their language skills were lacking they could not attend meetings but now they feel they can contribute.*

### **What the parents said about it**

*It was really like a think tank. It was very open. We had people who came in, moved out, came back and we had no pressure.*

*There were fresh ideas all the time.*

*We felt comfortable, very comfortable.*

*[Liaison worker] tried hard to make it as open and as seemingly open as possible.*

### **Researcher's observations**

*I feel there is an enormous tension between the school and the parents' needs and rights.*

This statement by the community liaison worker indicates one of the motivations driving a sea change currently underway in the school. There has been an acknowledgment that in the past the school has not addressed its multicultural aspect with its projects. The actions of the school executive and the community liaison worker combined with new elections for parent clubs have provided the opportunity to establish a new parent body more in keeping with the multicultural nature of the school.

The school is seeking to overcome past failures and limitations in school-community relationships and to put aside a "them and us" mentality. It wishes to be seen in future as a truly multicultural school where the community is genuinely and fully involved.

The process of establishing a new parent body is necessarily a careful and patient one and the group is working steadily on a number of fronts. It needs to be carefully nurtured otherwise it will collapse easily. The project is being guided successfully through its early phases by confident, energetic and committed staff with much hope for the future.

## **Case L**

### **Name and description of project**

*Connecting with our new arrivals*

The project plan involved:

- finding effective ways to consult with and engage the new migrant groups- primarily Africans or Sudanese origin;

- increasing the level of involvement of the local Migrant Resource Centre in the work of the school;
- employing and training a Sudanese family member as an aide to assist in the project deliverables; and
- running some relevant activities to test effective engagement actions for the Sudanese families.

### **Background**

This is a 200-student Catholic primary school in Tasmania serving a generally lower SES demographic. Traditionally it has not had a high level of involvement by parents and families. Like a number of the other schools in Tasmania, it has had a recent influx of migrants of African background, mainly Sudanese. This has presented an enormous challenge for the school. However, by contrast with the existing population, many members of the Sudanese community are tertiary educated and come from professional backgrounds in Africa.

At the start of this project, the school had made some progress on its project. However, for such a tiny school it was an ambitious undertaking, and the Principal was finding the resourcing of the project a “stretch”. The grant money enabled the school to employ and train a Sudanese parent in a liaison role.

By the end of the research period, a number of milestones had been completed. A Sudanese parent had been appointed to the project role and was undergoing support and training at the local Migrant Resource Centre.

By the end of the research period, this parent had already run some in-school activities. Some had focused on information exchange and others were craft or food-based. She had also co-ordinated the first parent-teacher interviews for some of the Sudanese families, which have already led to some changes in strategy for some students and their families.

The project is very focused on improving the learning outcomes for the students, and anecdotally this is already providing some positive outcomes.

A total of six ‘gatherings’ had been run or were planned before the end of 2005, and the school’s ESL co-ordinator was attending so she could make positive connections with the families.

### **What the person with the carriage of the project said about it**

Over the course of the project, I have been in regular contact with the Principal. The impact of the project on him has been profound. He described the school's growing insight into the challenges facing the Sudanese families as "deeply humbling and moving."

He has described the learnings so far as particularly valuable in terms of improving the possibilities for the young Sudanese students.

It has also spurred the school to promote intensive language courses for new arrivals with the local Migrant Resource Centre, as well as improving the relationship with the local secondary college as the primary school has tried to stimulate sharing of resources and promote continuity for students as they move from primary to secondary school.

### **Engaging parents**

First, this school made a leap of imagination that many individuals and institutions find difficult: it put itself in the shoes of the newly arrived migrants and reflected on what they might need. The school then looked around for ways of meeting those needs. Its own thin resources forced it to look outside. It identified English-language tuition as critical and set about finding ways to meet that need. It also appreciated the qualities within the Sudanese community and the appointment of a Sudanese woman to co-ordinate the project not only reflected this level of appreciation, but created an immediate bridge into the community. Once again the appointment of a parent in a liaison role has proved pivotal.

### **Researcher's observations**

Due to the nature of the project, and difficulties getting the families into the school (as well as the obvious language issues) I have not been able to meet with any of the Sudanese families.

In hindsight, this was an ambitious project which has nonetheless so far had a very profound and positive impact. Despite the modest project objectives, the learnings so far appear to be significant.

It would seem that the Principal has little support in a resource sense – although the project is obviously well supported in a conceptual way by his team.

The appointment of one of the Sudanese parents as an aide and coordinator is significant and the Principal is adamant that this will continue into 2006.

In terms of the Draft framework, this project is all about stimulating basic communication to fundamentally improve learning outcomes. Given the history of the school, and the previous lack of connections with the new migrant group, the project has been successful – albeit in a modest way.

Outcomes have been very concrete and basic – but important. The Principal commented that the:

*“provision of correct uniforms and a tailored payment schedule”,*

and

*“having the first effective parent-teacher interviews (in some cases, the first time the Sudanese parents had met their child’s teacher)”*,

were in themselves significant outcomes.

## **SURVEY OF PARENTS**

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Parents at all 61 schools were invited to participate in a two-round survey on their awareness of their school's project and their intentions about becoming involved. There were also questions about their own school days and their level of satisfaction with their children's present school. The purpose of the survey was not only to test levels of awareness and attitude to the project but to test whether barriers existed to their participation.

We obtained 903 responses to the pre-test survey and 263 matched responses to the post-test survey. While these are respectable numbers, the comparatively low response rate for the post-test can probably be put down to the fact that it was conducted at the end of the school year, and the usual distractions of the pre-Christmas period militated against people's involvement. Even so, we believe the data reported here give a good indication of parents' levels of awareness and engagement, and tell us something about barriers to participation.

We had no ultimate control over the sample, but we have no reason to think the parent representatives who went to the trouble of assisting us would have not done their best to include as wide a range of respondents from the parent community as practicable. On the assumption, then, that the sample was random, the matched-sample size of 263 yields a sampling variance of about plus or minus 6.5% at the 95% confidence level. The sample of 903 yields a sampling variance of about plus or minus 3.2%. The overall response rate is not calculable since the questionnaire was distributed on a "best endeavours" basis by volunteer parents in each school and we do not know how many were actually distributed. The average response rate per school for round one of the survey was 65% and for round two 31%.

The main finding is that competing demands on parents' time was the most common barrier to parental involvement in the project. Disaffection arising from unhappy schooldays or dissatisfaction with the existing school was rare. However, the fact that parents placed a higher priority on other activities than those involving the school suggests that schools face a challenge to persuade parents of the benefits of according school activities a higher priority. This is a communications challenge.

## Round 1

**Question 1.** Have you heard of a new project in the school to get parents more involved in the work of the school?

TABLE 1: AWARENESS OF PARTNERSHIPS PROJECT

	Total	Gender		First language		Occupation		
		Male	Female	English	Other	Prof/ Mgr	Clerical/ Trade	Semi/un -skilled
Base	903	133	765	740	161	263	173	79
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	77	71	78	76	78	81	76	75
No	22	28	21	23	17	19	23	25
Don't know	1	2	1	1	4	*	1	--

Given that efforts were made to reach as wide a cross-section of parents as possible, it is encouraging to note that 77% of the parents surveyed knew about the partnerships project.

Knowledge tended to be higher among females rather than males.

**Question 2.** (Asked of respondents who had said they knew of the project): Are you, or will you be, involved in the project?

TABLE 2: INTENTION TO BE INVOLVED IN PARTNERSHIPS PROJECT AMONG THOSE WHO KNEW ABOUT IT

	Total	Gender		First language		Occupation		
		Male	Female	English	Other	Prof/ Mgr	Clerical/ Trade	Semi/un -skilled
Base	691	94	593	565	126	212	131	59
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	69	77	68	66	81	70	56	68
No	30	23	32	33	19	29	43	32
Don't know	*	--	1	1	--	*	2	--

Of those people who said they did know about the projects, 69% said that they intended to be involved.

Given the need to promote parent involvement in schools, this is an encouraging figure. It is further encouraging to note that 77% of men said they intended to be involved, and that 81% of people whose first language was not English said they intended to be involved.

**Question 3.** (Asked of those who knew of the project but had said they would not be involved): Would you like to be involved in the project?

**TABLE 3: DESIRE TO BE INVOLVED IN PARTNERSHIPS PROJECT AMONG THOSE WHO KNEW ABOUT IT BUT HAD NOT YET DECIDED TO BE INVOLVED**

	Total	Gender		First language		Occupation		
		Male	Female	English	Other	Prof/Mgr	Clerical/Trade	Semi/un-skilled
Base	210	22	188	187	24	62	56	19
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	40	41	39	41	25	40	38	37
No	60	59	60	58	75	58	63	63
Don't know	*	--	1	1	--	2	--	--

Those who said that had not actively planned to be involved asked if they would like to be, and a significant minority – 40% said they would.

This suggests that beyond the initial take-up of a project by parents, there is a residual group who would become involved but additional work has to be done to win them.

**Question 4.** (Asked of those who responded “No” to Question 3): It's perfectly OK not to be involved, but could you say the main reason why you would not like to be involved?

**TABLE 4: REASONS FOR NOT WISHING TO BE INVOLVED IN PARTNERSHIPS PROJECT**

	Total	Gender		First language		Occupation		
		Male	Female	English	Other	Prof/Mgr	Clerical/Trade	Semi/un-skilled
Base	126	13	113	109	18	36	35	12
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Work commitments	30	30	29	32	17	36	46	42
Lack of time/too busy	25	31	25	22	50	28	26	8
Family commitments	17	23	16	17	22	17	9	25
Already involved in other school groups	13	8	14	15	6	31	6	--
Other commitments	10	--	12	10	11	6	3	25
Last year child will be at the school	10	--	11	11	--	8	14	17

\* Respondents sometimes gave more than one answer to this question. Therefore the percentages do not add to 100.

Those who said they would not be involved indicated that work and other commitments took priority. It would seem that the challenge for schools is to successfully argue the value of time spent in school activities compared with time spent on other things, since there is little evidence in this survey to suggest fundamental alienation from schools.

**Question 5.** (Asked of those who said in answer to Question 1 that they had not heard of the school's project): Would you be interested in finding out about the project, or not?

**TABLE 5: INTEREST IN FINDING OUT ABOUT THE PROJECT**

	Total	Gender		First language		Occupation		
		Male	Female	English	Other	Prof/ Mgr	Clerical/ Trade	Semi/un -skilled
Base	200	37	162	171	28	50	40	20
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Interested	77	70	79	79	68	76	68	90
Not interested	23	30	21	21	32	24	33	10

A large majority (77%) of those who had not heard about the project said they were interested in finding out about it.

Again this underlines the importance of effectively communicating with the parent body, because there are signs here of widespread interest, at least in principle, about what is going on.

**Question 6.** (Asked of those who said not interested in response to Question 5): It's perfectly OK not to be interested, but could you say the main reason why you are not interested?

**TABLE 6: REASONS FOR NOT WISHING TO FIND OUT ABOUT PARTNERSHIPS PROJECT**

	Total	Gender		First language		Occupation		
		Male	Female	English	Other	Prof/ Mgr	Clerical/ Trade	Semi/un -skilled
Base	46	11	34	36	9	12	13	2
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Lack of time/too busy	37	27	41	39	33	42	46	50
Work commitments	24	27	24	25	22	25	46	--
Family commitments	13	9	15	17	--	8	8	--
Already involved in other school groups	11	--	15	14	--	8	15	50
Last year child will be at the school	9	9	9	11	--	8	8	50

\*Respondents sometimes gave more than one answer to this question. Therefore the percentages do not add to 100.

Again, lack of time and the pressure of other commitments were given as the most commonly offered reasons for not being interested in the project.

**Question 7.** Where do you get MOST of your information about what is going on in the school?

**TABLE 7: MAIN SOURCE OF INFORMATION ABOUT SCHOOL ACTIVITIES**

	Total	Gender		First language		Occupation		
		Male	Female	English	Other	Prof/ Mgr	Clerical/ Trade	Semi/un -skilled
Base	903	133	765	740	161	263	173	79
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
School newsletter	78	73	79	78	88	79	80	78
Talking to other parents	28	17	30	29	25	28	27	37
Talking to teachers or staff	25	26	25	26	24	25	24	30
Attending school meetings	23	20	24	23	25	24	21	29

Clearly the school newsletter is the main source of information for parents, but informal personal channels of communication are also important. Indeed other evidence from this study shows that these informal channels are particularly important for engaging parents in the life of the school, as opposed to merely informing them about what is happening.

**Question 8.** Thinking back to your own school days. Would you say that, on the whole, your own school days were:

**TABLE 8: HAPPINESS OF RESPONDENTS' OWN SCHOOL DAYS**

	Total	Gender		First language		Occupation		
		Male	Female	English	Other	Prof/ Mgr	Clerical/ Trade	Semi/un -skilled
Base	903	133	765	740	161	263	173	79
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Very happy	35	36	35	30	55	37	31	32
Reasonably happy	54	51	54	58	36	57	59	54
Not very happy	8	8	8	9	4	5	9	14
Not at all happy	2	4	2	2	1	2	1	--
Don't know	1	2	*	*	1	*	1	--
MEAN	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.4	1.2	1.1	1.0

Means are derived from very happy +2 to not at all happy -2. The mid-point is zero.

A majority of parents were not ecstatic about their own schools but neither were they highly critical. Our qualitative evidence from this study suggests that among parents who had been alienated from school as a result of their own experiences, those now prepared to be involved in the partnerships project had overcome this alienation, in many cases as a result of the partnerships initiative. In these cases the partnerships initiative had been going for some time before this fieldwork was done.

In places of socio-economic disadvantage, where alienation of parents most commonly existed, it was clear that the projects had played a major role in gradually overcoming this alienation.

**Question 9.** On the whole, how satisfied would you say you are with your experience as a parent at this school where the Family-School Partnerships project is being conducted?

TABLE 9: SATISFACTION WITH CHILDREN'S PRESENT SCHOOL

	Total	Gender		First language		Occupation		
		Male	Female	English	Other	Prof/ Mgr	Clerical/ Trade	Semi/un -skilled
Base	903	133	765	740	161	263	173	79
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Very satisfied	48	47	48	47	52	45	41	52
Reasonably satisfied	41	41	41	42	34	43	51	37
Not very satisfied	3	5	3	3	2	5	2	3
Not at all satisfied	1	2	*	1	1	*	1	--
Don't know	7	5	8	6	11	7	5	9
MEAN	1.4	1.3	1.4	1.4	1.5	1.4	1.4	1.5

Means are derived from very satisfied +2 to not at all satisfied -2. The mid-point is zero.

A very large majority (89%) of parents said they were satisfied with their experience as a parent at the school now attended by their child. Very few were dissatisfied and hardly any were very dissatisfied.

TABLE 10: EFFECT OF PARENTS' OWN SCHOOLDAYS AND SATISFACTION LEVELS ON PARTICIPATION IN THE PROJECT

	Know of, and involved in, project	
	Yes	No
Base	478	210
	%	%
Happiness of own school days		
Very happy	39	32
Reasonably happy	50	57
Not very happy	8	8
Not at all happy	1	3
Satisfaction with experience as parent of this school		
Very satisfied	55	43
Reasonably satisfied	38	46
Not very satisfied	2	4
Not at all satisfied	*	1

These two questions about parents' own schooldays and their satisfaction with their experience as parents, were included in the survey because it was hypothesised that these two factors might be barriers to parental involvement in the project.

These hypotheses are not borne out by the data. Neither the relative happiness of a parent's own schooldays nor their level of satisfaction with their level experience as a parent at their child's school is a barrier to involvement except at the margins, where the tiny proportion of the very unhappy or the very dissatisfied are less inclined to be involved.

The real barrier is the priority parents accord to being involved in the school when compared with other calls on their time. It seems to us that changing parents' time priorities by convincing them of the importance and benefits of spending time involved with the school is the major challenge for schools. A vital component of meeting this challenge is excellence and thoroughness in communications with parents.

The evidence of this survey also suggests that the small proportion of parents who were not at all happy with their own schooling were more inclined than others to report that they were not satisfied with their experience as parents at the present school. Having said that, 65% of such parents said they were satisfied with their experience as parents.

## Round 2

**Question 1.** No matter what you said at the start of the project, which of these statements best describes your involvement in the project?

TABLE 11: INVOLVEMENT WITH PARTNERSHIP PROJECT

	Total	Gender		First language		Occupation		
		Male	Female	English	Other	Prof/Mgr	Clerical/Trade	Semi/un-skilled
Base	263	32	229	226	36	65	45	24
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Involved all through	46	59	44	45	53	48	42	54
Involved part-way through	9	3	18	9	6	11	2	13
Pulled out part-way through	8	13	7	8	11	12	9	8
Not involved at all	37	25	38	38	31	29	44	25

Whereas 69% of parents who knew about the projects said they intended to be involved, in fact about 63% of those who participated in the follow-up interview indicated that they had been involved, at least to some extent.

**Question 2.** (Asked of those who said they had pulled out part-way through): Which ONE of the following comes closest to the MAIN reason why you pulled out:

**TABLE 12: REASON FOR PULLING OUT**

	Total
Base	21
	%
On at wrong time for me	33
Too much else on	29
Health reasons	14
Didn't interest me enough	10
Didn't feel I could offer much	10

Reasons for pulling out tended to reflect pressure on people's time and the associated issue of prioritising referred to earlier. There is some evidence of disengagement but it is not large.

**Question 3.** Thinking for a moment about what your children are being taught at school: As a result of your being involved in this project, would you say:

**TABLE 13: LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE OF CHILD'S EDUCATION FROM INVOLVEMENT WITH PARTNERSHIP PROJECT**

	Total	Gender		First language		Occupation		
		Male	Female	English	Other	Prof/ Mgr	Clerical/ Trade	Semi/un -skilled
Base	167	24	141	141	25	46	25	18
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Know more	62	67	62	62	68	57	56	78
Made no difference	29	25	30	31	16	35	40	11
Don't know	9	8	8	7	16	9	4	12

Tables 13 and 14 below suggest that participation in the project increased parents' knowledge of their child's education and of what was going on in the school.

**Question 4.** And thinking now about the kind of activities that go on in the school generally, such as sporting or fund-raising events or working bees: As a result of your being involved in this project, would you say:

**TABLE 14: LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE OF SCHOOL ACTIVITIES FROM INVOLVEMENT WITH PARTNERSHIP PROJECT**

	Total	Gender		First language		Occupation		
		Male	Female	English	Other	Prof/ Mgr	Clerical/ Trade	Semi/un -skilled
Base	167	24	141	141	25	46	25	18
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Know more	60	58	62	57	76	52	72	56
Made no difference	34	42	32	38	8	46	20	33
Don't know	7	8	6	5	16	2	8	11

**Question 5.** And would you say that your being involved in this project has probably:

**TABLE 15: EFFECT ON CHILD'S EDUCATION FROM INVOLVEMENT WITH PARTNERSHIP PROJECT**

	Total	Gender		First language		Occupation		
		Male	Female	English	Other	Prof/ Mgr	Clerical/ Trade	Semi/un -skilled
Base	167	24	141	141	25	46	25	18
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Been good for your child's education	69	58	70	70	64	72	60	67
Made no difference	14	13	14	13	16	13	16	22
Not been good for your children's education	1	--	1	1	--	--	4	--
Too soon to say	15	29	13	16	12	15	12	11
Don't know	2	--	2	1	8	--	--	--

A large majority (69%) of the parents who had been involved in the projects said that their involvement had been good for their children's education. This was especially so among females.

**Question 6.** And would you say that as a result of this project:

**TABLE 16: EFFECT ON SENSE OF PARTNERSHIP FROM INVOLVEMENT WITH PROJECT**

	Total	Gender		First language		Occupation		
		Male	Female	English	Other	Prof/ Mgr	Clerical/ Trade	Semi/un -skilled
Base	167	24	141	141	25	46	25	18
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
More like a partner	68	71	68	69	68	67	56	67
Less like a partner	1	--	1	1	4	--	--	--
Made no difference	22	13	23	23	12	28	28	22
Don't know	9	17	8	8	16	4	16	11

A large majority (68%) of parents who had been involved in the projects also said that the experience had made them feel more like partners in their children’s education. While nearly a quarter said it had made no difference, almost no one said it had had a negative effect.

**Question 7.** You said you had not been involved in the project. It’s perfectly okay not to have been involved, but which ONE of the following comes closest to the MAIN reason why you did not become involved:

**TABLE 17: REASONS FOR NOT BECOMING INVOLVED WITH PROJECT**

	Total	Gender		First language		Occupation		
		Male	Female	English	Other	Prof/ Mgr	Clerical/ Trade	Semi/un -skilled
Base	96	8	88	85	11	19	20	6
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Too much else on	45	50	44	47	27	37	30	67
Lack of communication	26	25	26	27	18	42	50	17
Wrong time for me	20	25	19	15	55	16	20	17

As we have noted already, pressure of time forces parents to prioritise, and some place higher priority on other commitments than the school. Overcoming this is a major challenge. Closely allied to it is the issue of effective communication with parents and in this survey 26% of parents said the reason they had not become involved was because of inadequate communications. It might be added that this was a spontaneous response, not one which was invited by the survey.

## EFFICACY OF THE DRAFT FRAMEWORK

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School principals tend to be practical people. Although they are often thoughtful, they have more than enough to do and seldom have time to reflect deeply about documents like the draft framework that come across their desk. A common remark they make about their working day is, “The urgent displaces the important”.

It is not surprising, therefore, that many had only a passing acquaintance with the draft *Family-School Partnerships Framework*, and had little by way of detailed comment to offer. Most saw it as something of a “motherhood” document. By this they did not mean to be dismissive. On the contrary, they saw the document as identifying all the ideals of family-school partnerships, and its Key Dimensions as being the essential bases for building such partnerships. Some also saw it as affirming their own beliefs, and the school’s own mission. But like many statements of principle, it will be put away and seldom referred to unless it is linked organically to a program which demands reference to it.

### ***Principals’ comments***

*It is a lot of common sense in the thinking behind it. It has good ideas. You read it once, but schools are busy places.*

*We had a look at the principles and the dimensions. They seemed pretty self-evident. That sounds dismissive and it’s not meant to. F and G, they are things that happened but not out of this project but out of things we’d been doing over the past couple of years.*

*An affirming document for this school in that it matched many of the school’s beliefs.*

*If we hadn’t gone through what our vision statement is for our school before starting this project, these would be some of the key principles that we would need to say the school vision is.*

*There isn’t anything outstandingly new in this, but it’s a very comprehensive framework. Pretty good.*

*We built the school on the basis of parent-school partnership. The document captures all of those things and endorses them. So it really strengthens our mission. It was affirming and empowering.*

*It contained the essence of the partnerships concept. It made sense. It was the sort of stuff that was my passion. The most important thing in education is getting the parents involved. If they get involved, the students do better. You need community involvement in the school.*

A further benefit for many principals was that the draft framework provided a means of auditing their performance against those beliefs: it caused them to take stock. Some were prepared to admit that their performance was not perhaps all that it might be.

In some schools, as a result, the document had become a catalyst for change. In many schools it reinforced what was already being done.

For many schools also it had also been a vital stimulant to initiating a project, a guide to how it might be designed, and a means towards implementing it by giving them what some called a “scaffolding” to build it on. In a very few cases the partnerships project was seen as simply an opportunity to obtain some funding to do what the school was already intending to do anyway.

***Principals’ or teachers’ comments***

*Guided us – stated the obvious in what we were trying to investigate.*

*Let me remember what it was about. Yeah, it gave us some signposts for what we wanted to do. We had a pretty good idea ourselves, some of the staff and parents.*

*It was really helpful in thinking about the project design and I kept referring to it as I went along.*

*We learnt that you need really tightly organised planning that is documented. We used the framework to structure this. We used the seven key dimensions of family-school partnerships to develop a grid and work out our tasks. Our core parent group met weekly to do this, develop our plan. The parents found the grid really helpful too. I need a scaffold. The framework allowed you to see the overall plan and break it up into steps.*

*(Staff member) wrote the application with the framework in mind and that the whole project was conceived around it. (The key dimensions) were also used as a guide in developing the school’s own questionnaire for parents. The framework informed how we went about the questionnaire and the rest of the project. We used them all.*

***Researchers’ comments***

*The coordinator stated that she often used the strategies and guiding principles in the document and revisited it when necessary. The strongest message that was gained from the document was that parents were “not just here to talk with you but to work with you”.*

*It was the foundation document for the teacher in charge of the project who communicated its key dimensions to the team. It was implicit in the daily activities of the parents and teachers involved in the project.*

*The draft framework was “good guidance”. She (Principal) could “always refer to it with the staff.” It was a useful framework and worked well.*

*The draft framework informed the whole thing. He (Principal) likes it as it is. It is very useful. It is going to inform the future of the project.*

*The draft framework certainly informed the project. The feedback was that the framework was very usable and broad enough to cater for different contexts.*

*It was not used as some sort of checklist, but rather a set of principles to guide their practices.*

*The Principal stated that the draft framework helped her to think about how to integrate cultures, so even the proposal had been a vehicle for changing thinking. The framework then allowed the parent liaison officer to check where she believed the school was in relation to the framework. The framework clearly provided an intellectual space to consider how a school might respond to different aspects.*

In some schools the conception, design and implementation of the project had all preceded the framework. These schools tended to check their project against the framework's precepts. The connections were, on the whole, clearly evident.

***Researchers' comments***

*The school did not build its program on the framework but there were clear connections to parts of it as indicated in the table above.*

*There were connections with the Draft Framework and one of the parents at the school was involved with putting it together but they did not use it and those who knew of it had not read it.*

*The idea for Parent's Voice came before the Family-School Partnership Framework was announced.*

*While the school did not use the draft framework at all – and in fact two of the people I spoke to on my final visit did not even know it existed, the general program and approach does fit within the framework structure.*

*While the framework was not available and therefore was not considered when the project was conceived, a number of aspects were apparent in the project. The Principal also recommended that advice to any other school should include to be aware of the framework and realise that any project has to be an holistic thing that considers many aspects of the framework.*

In a few schools, the Principal had not engaged with the document at all. It had been consigned to the filing system or passed over to a member of staff for use as that person saw fit in carrying out the research project.

***Principals' comments***

*We looked at it initially and it guided some of the things we've done. But it's not on my desk. I could find it for you in the files. We looked at it when we drew up the proposal, but the project has developed a bit of a life of its own.*

*I think this is the second time I've looked at it. [Staff member] printed it off and gave me a copy. I took it home and went scan, scan, scan. And after that anything about our project that was related to this was purely by osmosis. I'd be lying if I told you we used this document as a guide to planning. It's mainly come out of plain commonsense and our educational heads.*

*Schools are inundated with frameworks, protocols and policies. It would be useful for someone to come in with the framework and outline it and go through how schools might use it. It would have been useful to have a regional workshop for the successful schools when the projects started.*

**Researchers' comments**

*The Principal was only vaguely aware of the framework and scored its usefulness 6/10.*

In three cases the Principal and staff could make no connection between the project and the framework at all. These were schools in which the project had foundered from the start and had been kept afloat largely by assistance from the research team.

The reasons were complex and varied. Rehearsing them here adds nothing to the sum of knowledge about family-school partnerships. However, it does tell us that extreme isolation coupled with longstanding and difficult social circumstances, can impose acute strain on school staff. This is made worse when the school is small and the load falls almost entirely on one or two people. It should be added that this does not apply just in Indigenous settings.

**Researchers' comments**

*While the Principal and the liaison officer talked broadly about the draft framework, they found it impossible to associate it with the activities of the project.*

*The Principal was unfamiliar with the draft framework and was unable to discuss the connection of the key dimensions with the project conducted in the school.*

*The Principal was not familiar with the Family Schools Partnership Framework despite having received a copy of the document and emails about the central importance of it to this project.*

There seemed to be a widespread assumption among principals and teachers that this was a document for educationalists, not for the whole school community. Few parents we spoke to had even heard of it. Some respondents commented on what they saw as its academic tone and thought it would need to be simplified and made more inviting if it were to be attractive to most parents. By contrast, it was common to find teachers with carriage of the project who found it easy to use. Usually these people had read it several times and were very familiar with it.

***Principals' and teachers' comments***

*The Framework is very readable and it is easy to put stuff under each category.*

*Found to be very useful particularly in the planning stage. However, this document needed to be interpreted for the parents. Indeed it needed to be just about rewritten by (staff member) so they could understand it. Maybe a new edition written for families would be the way to go. Use visuals.*

***Parents' comments***

The parent interviewed had not seen the framework document but was addressing it almost unconsciously:

*They're all things that have been drummed into us and they're things that we talk about all the time – so I think subliminally these are all terms that we have implemented and used.*

*Too much jargon. I got it from the Education Department. I have a teaching background and I knew what Brendan Nelson had been saying about this and I wanted to see where he was going with this. But it's jargon and it's not grass-roots. If you want to publish to schools, you want to make it warm and inviting.*

***Researchers' comments***

*Although they had all been given a copy of the framework they did not know what it was when I asked so clearly had not used it.*

*The draft framework definitely connected. The key participants (parents) did not use the framework, however, and were not really aware of it.*

A few principals and teachers saw the draft framework as having long-term uses: a document they could use as the basis for handbooks, for staff-induction programs, and for continuing guidance with their partnership projects now and in the future. The corollary was that most did not see it being used in this way. Most saw it as a stimulus for this project and had not looked beyond that. If it is to take root as an essential part of the development of school communities, much educative and awareness-raising work lies ahead not only among educators but among parents.

***Principals' comments***

*A significant help in giving an overall view of the many dimensions necessary in engaging parents, and keeping an overview of the whole process while focusing on just a couple of areas at any point in time. The framework document would be a useful basis for engaging staff new to the school (handbook perhaps, with local examples), in helping them interact with parents and guardians, with the quite different climate from what they may encounter in southern schools. Would also be a useful guide for School Councils, so that they develop a shared vocabulary to inform how they engage the wider school community.*

**Researchers' comments**

*The construction and elaboration of the school framework is through small steps that will build a lasting culture over years rather than grand gestures. Parents need to see that what they have talked about is responded to, although not necessarily undertaken in the specific way discussed.*

General opinions about the framework were favourable. It was useful for articulating the partnership ideal and how the ideal might be realised. It resonated with principals and teachers because it affirmed their own experiences. This gave it credibility. One Principal said that in order to properly understand how the framework might be applied to a school, it was necessary to carry out some research among the school community to find out people's expectations about the partnership ideal. It was also necessary to "embody" the partnership ideal in the way the school was run.

**Principals' and teachers' comments**

*The framework would be very useful for new schools, new principals or staff-members new to a parent-school partnership-building role. The 7 dimensions are really helpful to focus on.*

*I can't see anything wrong with the framework. It is very practical and topics are those parents are interested in. The issues are what parents are interested in.*

*It makes you aware of possibilities and where you might go and what other schools may do.*

It is helpful for you to think about the way the school interacts with the community?

*The framework itself is fairly limiting if you do not have the body of research underneath it. That is the only thing that made me really change the operation of the school in certain ways because of that understanding. I believe that most schools have some sort of lip service to the partnership— all school talk about the partnership between the school and the community. I did a little informal thing (referring to a meeting with other school principals) and all the people sitting there, of which there were 12, talked about it, but only one person could articulate one way in which they did that.*

Is the danger that the framework becomes —“oh yes we are doing that”?  
Yes. . .

So the framework is only useful if you have examples and ideas?

*Or do you embody it? I believe we are working towards the embodiment. It is still important as it provides a theoretical understanding which underpins what you do.*

**Researchers' comments**

*They have found the Framework very supportive, and would have possibly liked a little more guidance or information or possibly examples from other schools, to get started*

*and see what other things are happening. On the other hand, because it was so open, it enabled them to use their own initiative and put forward their own ideas.*

*The teachers thought that the draft Framework was useful in articulating the significant areas that a school needed to consider for any initiative of this kind. They wished to focus on 'relationships' and the Framework affirmed this. They were pleased that the Framework echoed elements of their school vision, in particular the principles which underpin effective family-school partnerships.*

## The Key Dimensions

Principals and people with carriage of the project in the school were asked:

Which Key Dimensions of the framework did the project fulfil or relate to? Which of those were the really important ones in each case?

A simple statistical analysis of the responses to this question (n = 61) reveals that the Dimension most commonly nominated as “really important” to the project was Dimension C (communicating), followed by Dimensions B connecting home and school learning and G (building community and identity).

Dimension C clearly emerges as a first-order dimension in the building of family-school partnerships. Dimensions B (connecting home and school learning) and G (building community and identity) emerge as second-order dimensions. Dimensions A (understanding of roles), E (decision-making) and F (collaborating beyond the school) emerged as third-order dimensions, as the table below shows.

Key Dimension	Percentage of schools saying their project related to or fulfilled this dimension
	%
A: Understanding of roles	38
B: Connecting home and school learning	51
C: Communicating	62
D: Participating	48
E: Decision-making	28
F: Collaborating beyond the school	28
G: Building community and identity	54

Principals and teachers, when asked to identify the dimensions most relevant to or important for their project, often said that they were inter-connected or that they were all important. This suggests that the dimensions in the document are real and not mere abstractions.

### ***Principals' and teachers' comments***

*All dimensions are important but for each situation there would be a different focus, depending on the specific nature of the school and its existing communication with its parent community. For this school, G “Building Community and Identity” was paramount because of the different languages and cultures. Within this*

*“Communicating” was essential. These were important for B “Connecting home and school learning” as there was a need for parents to understand the educational culture of the school as well as the curriculum and much more work is needed on this for the future. Then A “Understanding of roles” was important for these parents before they could effectively be involved in D “Participating”. The other dimensions may gradually be developed over time.*

The following set of comments from one Principal is a good illustration of the way principals spoke about the dimensions and the interpretations they placed on them.

*Understanding Roles – I think yes we began to see more clearly the way parents are working and they began to see how we are trying to help their teenagers as much as we can so I think there was a greater understanding of roles through this project.*

*Communication is the major one in that we targeted young people at risk and also worked with their parents. Quite often these parents are disaffected as they may have had a difficult schooling. Even parents at the P&C who tend to be the engaged parents could see that by working with these young people it was actually helping their teenagers too as more students became engaged with their studies.*

*Connecting home and school learning was also good in that parents felt they could come up and have a talk about things.*

*Participating too – I would say this project gave parents the confidence to participate in the learning process.*

This set of comments from another Principal illustrates the effect of the project and the connections he made between those effects and the key dimensions:

*‘Communicating’ and ‘building community and identity’ were the Principal focus dimensions of the project and these dimensions were initiated at an informal level. The level of communication between parents has been facilitated by the project and the school has gained kudos from this. The parents stated they felt an increased sense of themselves as part of a school community and noted that, for some isolated parents, the school community could be their family, now that they had the parent room in which to talk and share. This has led naturally to an increase in parents participating as they have initiated school activities, for example, a parent choir. Connecting home and school learning has happened at an informal level, as noted above, where learning about computers helped parents help their children with similar tasks. The school plans to extend this area and develop a greater understanding of roles with the parents. The parent room has given parents an opportunity to make decisions about what they will be involved in and again, this will be extended by the school in 2006 into more curricula areas of decision-making. Similarly, collaborating beyond the school is on the school’s agenda for 2006 when curriculum and parenting experts could come and speak to parents as one of the activities. Meanwhile the parents are organising out-of-school holiday excursions as a group, where they together take their children out. This will be the first time some of these parents have ever participated in such an event.*

Those comments also illustrate the inter-connectedness that many saw in the dimensions:

*A (Understanding of roles) was the main one. All the others flow from that. Dimension A is unique to our context here, because when we delved into what was going on, we found we had different perceptions of what schools should be doing for kids and what AIEOs should be doing. Some parents thought AIEOs were advocates for their kids, but they are not. (AIEOs are Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers, known colloquially as “vowels”).*

This description from a researcher also illustrates the inter-connectedness of the dimensions:

*For this project the really critical aspect was initially D (participating) but ultimately it was E (decision-making) and that was the main aim of the project. The school was also very concerned about G (building community) as they wanted parents to start to refer to the school as their school and to see themselves as an integral and vital part of the school community. The other aspects of Communication and Understanding of roles and Connecting home and school learning were part of the process of the initial participating and the decision-making.*

One school was moved to synthesise the dimensions:

*We crunched them. Originally we had all of them but combined them into three themes. We felt some of them were interconnected. For example, ‘communicating and decision-making -- can’t really look at one without the other. If this number is kept, they need to be defined more clearly.*

We would not presume to speculate too much on why some of these dimensions were more commonly exhibited in the projects than others. The reasons for the pre-eminence of Dimension C (Communicating) are so obvious as to need no further explication, and Dimensions B and D almost define the core purposes of any family-school partnership. However, concerning the other dimensions we would add this:

Many schools want it to be clear to parents from the outset what the roles of the school and the family are. This is certainly the case in places where there is a history of inappropriate parent behaviour at the school, but more positively it is also the case in schools that are anxious to awaken in parents an awareness of their role as “first educators” and “co-educators”.

The extent to which schools want to raise this awareness varies, of course. Their decisions about this are usually grounded very deep in the school culture. Where there has been a culture of openness between the school and parents, then Dimension A is accorded great importance. This is also the case where attempts are being made to create a culture of openness where it does not already exist. Where the culture is still closed, as it were, Dimension A tends to be accorded less importance because it is assumed that everyone already “knows their place”.

The reason for Dimension E's being third-order we think is clear-cut. Related in a way to Dimension A, Dimension E was clearly seen by many schools and parents to be primarily, though not exclusively, the preserve of the school. Even in schools with a very open culture, parents wished to look first to the school, as the expert educators, to propose ideas or solutions. In these schools, parents were happy to be engaged in discussion – indeed they made it clear they expected to be engaged in discussion – but ultimately they looked to the Principal or the teaching staff to make the decisions. We encountered no schools where the parents expected to share decision-making power equally with the Principal or teaching staff, at least in areas associated with this research.

It may be that Dimension E would be better named “Consultative decision-making”. This would more accurately reflect the reality on the ground.

Dimension F tended to be seen as a less specific statement than the others. It tended to be distinguished from Dimension G and Dimension B, but schools treated it as a rather vague idea falling between those two. This lack of concreteness we believe is the reason for its being a third-order Dimension.

Dimension G, it seems to us, represents an area of rapidly increasing importance for schools, one which goes well beyond their traditional function as educators to that of community capacity-builders, or social capital builders, as we have called them. Some – indeed many – schools have not only perceived this but are embracing it with energy and creativity. We saw a considerable number of schools where it was being accorded high priority. They tended to be in socially and economically deprived areas and remote areas where the plight of the students made it impossible for schools to fulfil their primary duty of educators without also dealing with the causes of the students' distress .

Two other factors emerged as important in the building and sustaining of family-school partnerships. They are not really “dimensions”, but need explicit recognition.

The first is what we will call “school needfulness”, that is, the explicit declaration by the school to the parents that it needs their help and values it, not just that it would be rather nice if it were offered. Where schools had made this explicit, the response of the parents had been generally positive and direct. They felt needed, they were shown how they could help, they willingly became engaged, they felt valued and rewarded.

The second is what we will call “outreach and sustainability”, that is, maintaining the partnership ideal beyond the catalysing project and reaching beyond the ranks of those parents usually involved in the school. Many of the projects had achieved the outreach, but the challenge was to sustain it. Some schools had insights about this which could usefully be included in the framework.

In general, though, the draft framework has proved to be a sound document, endorsed by all who read it as having identified the crucial elements of successful family-school partnerships. Schools need to be educated that it is not a document exclusively for them. A simpler version might be prepared for an audience of parents.

# **APPENDICES**

## **APPENDIX I**

### **MEMBERS OF THE PROJECT ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

Members of the Project Advisory Committee were:

The Hon Terry Aulich, Executive Officer, Australian Council of State School Organisations

Mr Rupert McGregor, Project Manager, Australian Council of State School Organisations

Mr Ian Dalton, Executive Director, Australian Parents Council

Mrs Jo Lonergan, Australian Parents Council

Ms Grainne Norton, Parent/Community Educator, National Catholic Education Commission

Mr Richard Pryor, President, New South Wales Primary Principals Association

Mr Andrew Blair, President, Australian Secondary Principals Association

Mr Bev Norman, Principal, Hilliard Christian School, Tasmania

Ms Joanne Howard, Director, Schools Central Canberra, ACT Dept of Education and Training

Mr Steve Glew, Manager, Strategic Planning and Policy, WA Dept of Education and Training

**APPENDIX II**

**RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS,  
REPORT PRO-FORMAS**

## Saulwick Muller Social Research

**Irving Saulwick:** 3/326 Beaconsfield Parade St Kilda Ph 613 9537 2192 Fax 613 9525 3948 e-mail [irvings@ozemail.com.au](mailto:irvings@ozemail.com.au)  
**Denis Muller:** L2, 234 Queensberry Street Carlton. Ph 613 9349 3994 Fax 613 9349 4442 e-mail [denismuller@bigpond.com](mailto:denismuller@bigpond.com)

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### FAMILY- SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS PROJECT QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

#### Participant's Informed Consent

Saulwick Muller Social Research and our colleagues at Australian Catholic University and the Banks Management Group have been asked to support schools participating in the Family-School Partnerships Project, funded by the Department of Education, Science and Training.

We are all very experienced in working with schools.

If you are a Principal, member of the school staff, or a leader among the school's parents, you are likely to be asked to participate in a discussion-style interview, either one-on-one or with a small group of others. You are also likely to be asked to help arrange, and participate in, a parent forum at the school.

If you are a parent, you may be asked to complete a brief questionnaire either in person, on the phone or online, and participate in a parent forum at the school.

During our visits to schools, we may ask to take photographs of activities that form part of the school's initiative, in order to convey a sense of how the initiative is developing. With the consent of the school and the people photographed, we might wish to put these on the special website that is being set up as part of this research, or use them to illustrate our report. We would only use the photos and identify the people in them, with the prior consent of all involved.

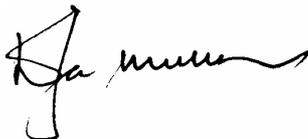
Otherwise we promise that at no time will we identify you or the school's students by name in any report or published materials arising from the project. Any quotations used will not be attributed, and any data used will not identify the school.

If you consent to participate on this basis, we would be most grateful. You are free to withdraw this consent at any time without giving reasons.

If at any time you have concerns about this project, I would encourage you to call me on (03) 9349 3994).

If you agree to participate, please complete the consent form below, and give it to the researcher when he or she visits the school. Alternatively you may post it to Saulwick Muller Social Research, PO Box 560 Carlton South, Melbourne, Victoria 3053.

Yours sincerely



**DENIS MULLER**  
Principal and Project Manager

## Saulwick Muller Social Research

**Irving Saulwick:** 3/326 Beaconsfield Parade St Kilda Ph 613 9537 2192 Fax 613 9525 3948 e-mail [irvings@ozemail.com.au](mailto:irvings@ozemail.com.au)  
**Denis Muller:** L2, 234 Queensberry Street Carlton. Ph 613 9349 3994 Fax 613 9349 4442 e-mail [denismuller@bigpond.com](mailto:denismuller@bigpond.com)

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### FAMILY-SCHOOLS PARTNERSHIPS PROJECT QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

#### Participant Informed Consent

##### CONSENT FORM

I ..... of .....  
..... School, agree to participate in the project outlined above. I understand that I will not be identified by name in any photographs, presentations or published reports regarding the project without my permission, and that nothing I say will be attributed to me or used in a way that will allow me or the school to be identified. I further understand that I can withdraw my consent to participate at any time.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Saulwick Muller Social Research

**Irving Saulwick:** 3/326 Beaconsfield Parade St Kilda Ph 613 9537 2192 Fax 613 9525 3948 e-mail [irvings@ozemail.com.au](mailto:irvings@ozemail.com.au)  
**Denis Muller:** L2, 234 Queensberry Street Carlton. Ph 613 9349 3994 Fax 613 9349 4442 e-mail [denismuller@bigpond.com](mailto:denismuller@bigpond.com)

### FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS PROJECT

#### Questionnaire for parents at the START of the project (to be administered by the school project team)

Note to interviewers: This questionnaire is designed to be either read over the phone or given to the person to complete in your presence. If the person elects to do it over the phone, you will need to get their phone number and make a time to ring. You will also need to record the name of the interviewee so you can go back to the same person at the end of the project.

**School name** .....

Dear Parent,

We are helping your school with a project designed to get parents more involved in the work of the school. It would help greatly if you would take a few minutes to answer this very short questionnaire.

You can fill it in on a paper copy, answer it over the phone, or fill it in online.

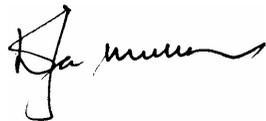
- If you fill it in on a paper copy, please give it back to the parent representative who gave it to you. That person will post it back to us.
- If you answer it over the phone, the person who interviews you will post it back to us.

- If you answer it online, the address is [www.partnershipsproject.edu.au](http://www.partnershipsproject.edu.au) and follow the prompts on the home page . The questionnaire will be automatically recorded when you submit it.

Even though we ask you to put your name at the end, it will not be connected to the answers you give. It is there only so we can come back and ask you some similar questions when the project is over.

If you have any questions at all, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Thank you for your time.



DENIS MULLER  
Principal and Project Manager

**FAMILY-SCHOOLS PARTNERSHIPS PROJECT  
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PARENTS – Round 1**

**Please put a circle around ONE number for each question**

**Question 1.** Have you heard of a new project in the school to get parents more involved in the work of the school?

Yes            1

No             2

**If you said YES, please go to Qn 2. If you said NO, please go to Qn 5.**

**Question 2.** Are you, or will you be, involved in the project?

Yes            1

No             2

**If you said YES, please go to Qn 7. If you said NO, please go to Qn 3.**

**Question 3.** Would you like to be involved in the project?

Yes            1

No             2

**If you said YES, please go to Qn 7. If you said NO please go to Qn 4.**

**Question 4.** It's perfectly OK not to be involved, but could you say the main reason why you would not like to be involved?

Please write in. You can write just one reason or more than one.

.....  
.....  
.....

**Thank you. Now please go to Question 7.**

**Question 5.** Would you be interested in finding out about the project, or not?

I would be interested	1
I would not be interested	2

**If you said I WOULD BE INTERESTED, please go to Question 7.  
Otherwise please go to Question 6.**

**Question 6.** It's perfectly OK not to be interested, but could you say the main reason why you are not interested?  
Please write in. You can write just one reason or more than one.

.....  
 .....  
 .....

**Thank you. Now please go to Question 7.**

**Question 7.** Where do you get MOST of your information about what is going on in the school? Do you get it from:

The school newsletter	1
Talking to other parents	2
Talking to teachers or staff	3
Attending school meetings	4
The media (newspapers, radio, etc.)	5
The school website	6

Somewhere else (**please say where**) .....

.....

**Question 8.** Thinking back to your own school days. Would you say that, on the whole, your own school days were:

Very happy	1
Reasonably happy	2
Not very happy	3

Not at all happy	4
Don't know/can't say	5

**Question 9.** On the whole, how satisfied would you say you are with your experience as a parent at this school where the Family-School Partnerships project is being conducted? Would you say you are:

Very satisfied	1
Reasonably satisfied	2
Not very satisfied	3
Not at all satisfied	4
Don't know/can't say	5

**Finally, just a few questions about you and your family.**

**Question 10a.** Which ONE of the following best describes your MAIN occupation?

Full-time work in the paid workforce	1
Part-time or casual work in the paid workforce	2
Full-time home duties	3
Other	4

**Question 10b.** And if you live with a partner, which ONE of the following best describes your partner's MAIN occupation?

Full-time work in the paid workforce	1
Part-time or casual work in the paid workforce	2
Full-time home duties	3
Other	4

I do not live with a partner

5

If you answered IN THE WORKFORCE (full-time or part-time) for EITHER person, please go to Question 11. Otherwise go to Question 12.

**Question 11.** Which of these best describes the job of those of you in the workforce?

	You	Your partner
Professional	1	1
Senior managerial	2	2
Middle managerial	3	3
Clerical/sales	4	4
Trade	5	5
Semi-skilled	6	6
Unskilled	7	7
Not applicable	8	8

**Question 12.** Which ethnic group do you feel you most closely belong to?

Indigenous Australian	1
Non-indigenous Australian	2

Other (please say which) .....

**Question 13.** Is your first language:

English	1
Or	
A language other than English	2

If a language other than English, please say what it is: .....

**Question 14.** Are you:

Male	1	Female	2
------	---	--------	---

**Question 15.** Are you aged:

18 to 24	1
25 to 39	2
40 to 54	3
55 or over	4

**Question 16.** Is there anything you would like to add?

Please write in

.....

.....

.....

.....

**This information will be detached from your answers and no one will know what you have said.**

Your name (please print) .....

Today's date .....

Thank you for your assistance. It is greatly appreciated.

Saulwick Muller Social Research

## Saulwick Muller Social Research

**Irving Saulwick:** 3/326 Beaconsfield Parade St Kilda Ph 613 9537 2192 Fax 613 9525 3948 e-mail [irvings@ozemail.com.au](mailto:irvings@ozemail.com.au)

**Denis Muller:** L2, 234 Queensberry Street Carlton. Ph 613 9349 3994 Fax 613 9349 4442 e-mail [denismuller@bigpond.com](mailto:denismuller@bigpond.com)

### FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS PROJECT

#### Questionnaire for parents at the END of the project

**NOTE: WE SHOULD GO BACK TO THE PARENTS WHO FILLED IN THE FIRST-ROUND QUESTIONNAIRE.**

Note to interviewers: This questionnaire is designed to be either read over the phone or given to the person to complete in your presence. If the person elects to do it over the phone, you will need to get their phone number and make a time to ring. You will also need to record the name of the interviewee so we can match the data from the first round.

**Record school name .....**

Dear Parent,

We spoke to you a few months ago about a project in the school to get parents more involved in the work of the school.

Now we want to see whether you became involved, and whether you have a view about the project.

Once again you can fill it in on a paper copy, answer it over the phone, or fill it in online.

- If you fill it in on a paper copy, please give it back to the parent representative who gave it to you. That person will post it back to us.
- If you answer it over the phone, the person who interviews you will post it back to us.
- If you answer it online, the address is [www.partnershipsproject.edu.au](http://www.partnershipsproject.edu.au) and follow the prompts on the home page . The questionnaire will be automatically recorded when you submit it.

Even though we ask you to put your name at the end, it will not be connected to the answers you give. It is there only so we can match this questionnaire with the one we did at the start.

If you have any questions at all, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Thank you again for your time.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Denis Muller". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and a long, sweeping underline.

DENIS MULLER  
Principal and Project Manager

**FAMILY-SCHOOLS PARTNERSHIPS PROJECT  
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PARENTS – Round 2**

**Please put a circle around ONE number for each question**

**Question 1.** No matter what you said at the start of the project, which of these statements best describes your involvement in the project?

- I stayed involved all the way through 1
- I didn't start but got involved part way through 2
- I started but pulled out part way through 3
- I didn't get involved at all 4

**If you said I STARTED BUT PULLED OUT PART WAY THROUGH, please go to Question 2.**

**If you said I DIDN'T GET INVOLVED AT ALL, please go to Question 7.**

**If you gave any other response, please go to Question 3.**

**Question 2.** You said you pulled out part way through. Which ONE of the following comes closest to the MAIN reason why you pulled out:

- I had too much else on 1
- It didn't interest me enough 2
- I didn't feel I could offer much 3
- I wasn't made to feel welcome by the school staff 4
- I wasn't made to feel welcome by other parents 5
- It was on at the wrong time for me 6
- Other (please say what) .....
- .....

**Question 3.** Thinking for a moment about what your children are being taught at school: As a result of your being involved in this project, would you say:

I know more about what my children are being taught than I probably would have otherwise 1

Or

It has made no difference to how much I know about what my children are being taught. 2

Don't know/Can't say 3

**Question 4.** And thinking now about the kind of activities that go on in the school generally, such as sporting or fund-raising events or working bees: As a result of your being involved in this project, would you say:

I know more about the kind of activities that go on the school than I probably would have otherwise. 1

Or

It has made no difference to how much I know about the kind of activities that go on in the school generally 2

Don't know/Can't say 3

**Question 5.** And would you say that your being involved in this project has probably:

Been good for your children's education 1

Made no difference to your children's education 2

Not been good for your children's education 3

Or is it too soon to say 4

**Question 6.** And would you say that as a result of this project:

I feel more like a partner with the school in my child's education	1
I feel less like a partner with the school in my children's education	2
Or	
It has made no difference to how I feel in this regard	3
Don't know/Can't say	4

**Please go to Question 8.**

**Question 7.** You said you had not been involved in the project. It's perfectly okay not to have been involved, but which ONE of the following comes closest to the MAIN reason why you did not become involved:

I had too much else on	1
It didn't interest me enough	2
I didn't feel I could offer much	3
I wasn't made to feel welcome by the school staff	4
I wasn't made to feel welcome by other parents	5
It was on at the wrong time for me	6
Other (please say what) .....	

**Question 8.** Is there anything you would like to add?

.....

.....

.....

.....

**The following information will be detached from your answers and no one will know what you have said.**

Your name (please print) .....

Today's date .....

Thank you for your assistance. It is greatly appreciated.

Saulwick Muller Social Research

## Saulwick Muller Social Research

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### **FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS RESEARCH RESEARCHERS' INTERVIEW OUTLINES – ROUND ONE**

#### **We should ask the Principal:**

What is the project?  
Why has it been chosen?  
How does it fit into the draft family-school partnership framework?  
What does he/she hope the parents and the school will get out of it?  
What was the process by which it was chosen?  
What arrangements have been made to facilitate it?  
What criteria are going to be used to assess it?  
What assessment processes are going to be used?  
What data will be collected?  
What help does he think the school will want, if any, in developing the criteria, in devising the assessment processes and in data analysis?  
What members of the teaching staff should you talk to?

#### **We should ask the person who has carriage of the project:**

How are the arrangements going?  
What data are to be collected to measure the effectiveness of the program?  
What help does he think the school will want, if any, in thinking about data-collecting and analysis?  
What communications arrangements between the school and the parents will be in place for the project?  
Any questions listed for the Principal for which answers were not obtained, especially about criteria, assessment processes and data-collection and analysis.

#### **With this person we should also:**

Discuss the need for a progress report in September and a final report in December. Identify who is going to write and sign off on those reports. Please note we want a staff member and a parent to do these reports jointly if possible.  
Say we will provide a template for the reports.  
Say you will be returning to conduct another round of interviews just before the final report is drafted, and try to make a date.

#### **We should ask the parents:**

Why has the project been chosen (from their point of view)?

What do they think of the process by which it was chosen?

What do they hope they and the school will get out of it?

What part, if any, will they play in the project?

How will they judge whether it has succeeded or not?

How do they plan to keep track of the project?

Please also tell them about the quant survey and enjoin them to participate.

**We should ask the teaching staff:**

What do they hope they and the school will get out of it?

What part, if any, will they play in the project?

How do they plan to keep track of the project?

Please use these only as starters. Explore anything raised in people's responses in ways that seem sensible and relevant.

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### FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS RESEARCH

### RESEARCHERS' INTERVIEW OUTLINES – ROUND TWO

#### **We should ask the Principal:**

From your point of view, how has the project gone? In particular:

In broad terms, what have been the outcomes:

For the school  
For families  
For students

To what extent did it fulfil the objectives you had for it? (Probe for what the objectives were.)

What did the school do to draw parents into the project, especially parents who don't usually participate in school activities? What, if anything, did you learn about what works and what does not work in this regard?

What role did the Draft Framework play in the way the project was conceived and carried out? Did it connect with the way the school went about the project? In other words, was it of practical use or just a lot of theoretical hot air? Do you have any ideas for how it could be made more effective in helping schools and parents to think about the partnership ideal?

Which Key Dimensions of the framework did the project fulfil or relate to? Which of those were the really important ones in each case?

What, if anything, has the project taught the parents and school about how parental involvement affects the outcomes for students?

What effect, if any, do you think it has had on the school culture?

How, if at all, does the school plan to embed the school-family partnerships concept? Is there pressure from parents to either have the present program embedded or to have some other initiative taken to build and sustain partnerships?

If another school asked for your advice about establishing a family-school partnership, what would be the main advice you would give?

**We should ask the person who has had carriage of the project:**

How did the whole thing go? Probe on logistics, timing, costs, day-to-day working with the parent representatives, communicating with parents.

If you were doing it again, what if anything would you do differently?

What lessons were learnt about how to make family-school partnerships work?

What feedback have you received from the Principal, other staff, the parents, the students?

What effect, if any, do you think it has had on the school culture?

What more, if anything, could we have done to help?

You could also ask this person that battery of questions about the Framework if you think you'll get more than you have got or are likely to get from the Principal.

**With this person we should also:**

Discuss the need for a final report in December, show them the pro-forma, and remind them we will provide a copy by email.

Identify who is going to write, and sign off on, that report. Please note we want a staff member and a parent to do these reports jointly if possible.

Collect the school-based headline data but impress on them the need to provide the full results in their report. Again we don't want them getting bogged down in this, but we need to know what they collected, what the data show and any conclusions they draw from this. Be in their report, not yours. From you we just want headlines as insurance.

**We should ask the parent representatives:**

How did the whole thing go? Probe on logistics, timing, costs, day-to-day working with the school leadership, communicating with other parents.

What did you do to draw parents into the project, especially parents who don't usually participate in school activities? What, if anything, did you learn about what works and what does not work in this regard?

What feedback have you received from the Principal, staff, other parents, the students?

What effect, if any, do you think it has had on the school culture?

If you were doing it again, what if anything would you do differently?

What lessons were learnt about how to make family-school partnerships work?

As far as you know, does the school plan to embed the school-family partnerships concept? Is there pressure from parents to either have the present program embedded or to have some other initiative taken to build and sustain partnerships?

Which Key Dimensions of the framework did the project fulfil or relate to? Which of those were the really important ones?

What, if anything, has the project taught the parents and school about how parental involvement affects the outcomes for students?

If another school asked for your advice about establishing a family-school partnership, what would be the main advice you would give?

**At the parent forum, ask:**

What is your general impression of the effect of the program on the school community?

What were the best things to come out of it?

What, if anything, would you have liked to see done differently?

As far as you can tell, has it had any effect on the:

- The way the school and the parents relate to one another
- School culture more generally
- The students
- Your own involvement in the school (if so, probe in what way)

Where would you like to see it go from here?

If parents at another school asked you about this whole matter of family-school partnerships, what would you say to them?

Please use these only as starters. Explore anything raised in people's responses in ways that seem sensible and relevant.

## Saulwick Muller Social Research

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### FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS RESEARCH

#### PRO-FORMA FOR RESEARCHER'S REPORTS

#### FIRST VISIT

Please:

- Be succinct.
- Send us a report after each visit.
- Replicate the contact names and details in the second report.

School	
Date of visit	

**What is the name of the project? If it doesn't have a name, give a headline description:**

**Briefly outline what the project consists of:**

**Background/brief history of/reasons for project:**

**What the Principal said about the project:**

**What the teaching staff said about the project:**

**What the parent representative said about the project:**

**What the parent forum said about the project:**

**Researcher's observations:**

**Point(s) of connection with Key Dimensions of the Draft Framework:**

Key Dimension	Project is clearly connected with this dimension	
	Yes	No
A: Understanding of roles		
B: Connecting home and school learning		
C: Communicating		
D: Participating		
E: Decision-making		
F: Collaborating beyond the school		
G: Building community and identity		

<b>Criteria for evaluation</b>	
<b>Assessment processes and data to be collected</b>	
<b>Contact names and details</b>	
<b>Principal</b>	
<b>Person with carriage of the project</b>	
<b>Key parent(s)</b>	
<b>Researcher's name</b>	

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### FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS RESEARCH

#### PRO-FORMA FOR RESEARCHER'S REPORTS

#### SECOND VISIT

Please:

- Be succinct.
- Send the report to us.
- Replicate the contact names and details from the first report.

School	
Date of visit	

**What is the name or description of the project? (Lift as necessary from first report)**

**Briefly outline what the project consists of: (Lift as necessary from first report.)**

**What the Principal said about the project:**

**What the person with carriage of the project said about it:**

**What other staff said about it:**

**What the parent representative said about it:**

**What the parent forum said about it:**

**Point(s) of connection with Key Dimensions of the Draft Framework as nominated by the school community**

Key Dimension	Project is clearly connected with this dimension	
	Yes	No
A: Understanding of roles		
B: Connecting home and school learning		
C: Communicating		
D: Participating		
E: Decision-making		
F: Collaborating beyond the school		
G: Building community and identity		

**Researcher’s observations:**

Please note any important issues arising, try to make some assessment about what this project tells us about these five big questions:

What did the school do about what works and what does not work in drawing in parents who do not usually participate in school activities?

Did the Draft Framework seem to connect with the way the school devised and implemented the project?

Which Key Dimensions of the framework were the really important ones?

What, if anything, has the project taught the parents and school about how parental involvement affects the outcomes for students?

What, if anything, does this project tell us about best practice in the development of parent-school partnerships?

**Summary of findings from data collected by the school:**

Please keep this very tight. Headlines only. We’ll rely on the school for a more detailed account of the data and results. Just give a very tight summary of the nature of the data and the headline results. Feel free to comment if you wish.

<b>Contact names and details</b>	
<b>Principal</b>	
<b>Person with carriage of the project</b>	
<b>Key parent(s)</b>	
<b>Researcher’s name</b>	

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### FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS RESEARCH

#### SCHOOL REPORTS PRO-FORMA

#### PROGRESS REPORT

Please use the accompanying pro-forma in preparing your progress report.

It should be sent in by **30 September 2005**. Please email it to [denismuller@bigpond.com](mailto:denismuller@bigpond.com)

If you have any questions at all about it, please don't hesitate to contact Denis Muller or your researcher. We are here to help you.

Ideally the report should be done jointly by a member of the staff and a member of the parent community.

The answers do not need to be long, but please be sure to give us enough information to get a clear picture of:

- what your project is;
- how you intend to judge its success;
- how it is progressing;
- any barriers or problems you have faced and,
- **very importantly** – if you have overcome them, how you did so.

These reports come to Denis Muller. He will go through them and once he is satisfied that progress is being made, he will pay the school its second instalment of grant money. If he has any questions he will contact the school and speak to the Principal.

**FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS RESEARCH****SCHOOL PROGRESS REPORT**

School name		
Names of people making report	Staff	Parent
Title of Project		
Main activities of project		
Anticipated outcomes		
Criteria for assessing outcomes		
Type of school-based data to be used in assessing outcomes		
Progress so far (1) Please summarise what you have done and what remains to be done.		
Progress so far (2) Give a mark out of 10 for how you think the project is going, where 0 is very poorly and 10 is very well.		
Please tell us about any particular problems, if any, you have had. If you have solved them please tell us how.		
Assistance required (Please say what assistance, if any, you feel you are likely to need, for example, in collecting and analysing your data.)		
Is there anything more you would like to tell us?		

Date of completion . . . . .

## Saulwick Muller Social Research

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### FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS RESEARCH

#### SCHOOL REPORTS PRO-FORMA

#### FINAL REPORT

Please use the accompanying pro-forma in preparing your final report.

It should be sent in **by the end of the school year**. Please email it to [denismuller@bigpond.com](mailto:denismuller@bigpond.com)

If you have any questions at all about it, please don't hesitate to contact Denis Muller or your researcher. We are here to help you.

Ideally the report should be done jointly by a member of the staff and a member of the parent community.

The answers do not need to be long, but please be sure to give us enough information to get a clear picture of:

- what your project is;
- how successful it was, and the main reasons why.
- any barriers or problems you have faced and,
- **very importantly** – if you have overcome them, how you did so.
- any observations you would like to make about the idea of family-school partnerships and how they can best be developed and sustained.
- what, if anything, the project taught the school community about making family-school partnerships work.

Your telling us about your experiences, and the judgments you have made about partnerships, is a cornerstone of this whole project. We're not asking you to write a big report, but please be sure to share your wisdom with us.

Once the final report has been received by Denis Muller, he will pay the school the final amount of the grant. If he has any questions he will contact the school and speak to the Principal.

If you have any queries at all, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Thank you very much for all your efforts with this project. We do hope the school has benefited from it.

**FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS RESEARCH**

**SCHOOL FINAL REPORT**

School name		
Names of people making report	Staff	Parent
Title of Project		
Main activities of project		
Anticipated outcomes		
Criteria for assessing outcomes		
Type of school-based data used in assessing outcomes		
Results from data		
What these tell you about the actual outcomes of the project.		
Please tell us about any particular problems, if any, you have had. If you have solved them please tell us how.		
What, if anything, did the project teach you about what really work in developing and sustaining family-school partnerships?		
Is there anything more you would like to tell us?		

Date of completion . . . . .

**APPENDIX III****Schools Participating in Family-School Partnerships Trial**

<b>State/Territory</b>	<b>Government</b>	<b>Non-Government</b>
<b>Australian Territory</b> <b>Capital</b>	Amaroo School  Evatt Primary Stromlo High School Kaleen High School Melba High School	Sacred Heart Primary School
<b>Northern Territory</b>	Taminmin High School Anula Primary School Anzac Hill High School Tennant Creek High School Howard Springs Primary School	
<b>New South Wales</b>	Bankstown West Public School Bathurst High School James Busby High School Liverpool Girls High School	St Brendan's Primary School St Michael's School St Joseph's School St John' Primary School Good Shepherd School
<b>Queensland</b>	Atherton State High School Robina State High School Craigslea State High School Toolooa State High School Chinchilla State School Mourilyan State School Kirwan State High School Gateway Learning Community Network* (consortium of seven schools) Palmwoods State School	Corpus Christi College St Therese's School Our Lady Of the Sacred Heart School
<b>South Australia</b>	Magill Primary School Unley High School Indulkana Anangu School Melaleuca Park K-7 Primary School	St Columba College Mary McKillop College St Gabriel's School
<b>Tasmania</b>	King Island District High School Penguin Primary School Abbotsfield Primary School	St Patrick's College Marist Regional College St Finn Barr's School
<b>Victoria</b>	Moonee Ponds Central School Maldon Primary School Irymple Primary School Spensley Street Primary School Korumburra Secondary College Chatham Primary School	Sacred Heart School St Anne's School Ballarat and Clarendon College
<b>Western Australia</b>	Currambine Primary School West Leeming Primary School Hedland Senior High School Girrawheen Senior High School Applecross Senior High School	St Peter's Primary School Swan Christian College

\* Balmoral State High School, Bulima State School, Cannon Hill State School, Morningside State School, Murarrie State School, Norman Park State School and Seven Hills State School