

# Case Study: Coodanup College

## Family-School Partnerships Framework

A guide for schools and families

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

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

### Project snapshot

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

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

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

### Project overview

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

While there were some excellent practices at the school, there was no systemic approach to parent engagement and only

limited guidance for teachers and staff at a whole school level.

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

### CLAN students

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

### Parents

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

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

### Project focus and key steps

The project involved:

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

- parent capacity building, with teachers continually modelling and reinforcing parent skills and behaviour
- communication between the school and parents using a variety of methods including online, phone calls, text messages, letters and in person.

### **Evidence base**

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

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

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

### **Project outcomes**

#### **Literacy improvement**

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

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

#### **Behaviour improvement**

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

#### **Parent views**

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

#### **Teacher views**

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

#### **Student views**

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

#### **Additional outcomes**

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

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

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

## Challenges

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

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

### Project success factors

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

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

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

## Lessons learnt

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

This research project highlighted that:

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

## Future directions

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

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

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

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