

Case Study: Killester College

Family-School Partnerships Framework

A guide for schools and families

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

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

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

Project purpose

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

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

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

Project overview

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

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

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

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

Project focus and steps

Events

Three events were organised:

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

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

Communication

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

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

Monitoring numeracy results

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

Background and data

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

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

Semester 1 reporting

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

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

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

On Demand testing results

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

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

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

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

NAPLAN

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

Journals

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

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

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

Student reflections

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

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

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

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

Parent feedback

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

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

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

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

Maths staff

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

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

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

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

Challenges

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

Project success factors

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

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

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

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

Lessons learnt

The project has shown the importance of:

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

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.