

Case Study: Longford Primary School

Family-School Partnerships Framework

A guide for schools and families

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

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

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

Project snapshot

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

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

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

Project overview

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

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

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

Project focus and key activities

'Treasure chest' reading rewards

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

Come in from the cold/parents reading with children

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

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

Outreach for parents

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

A parent room was set up at the school became increasingly popular, with many

parents stopping by for coffee and a chat after dropping their children at school.

Kitchen Capers

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

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

Home Reading Social Story

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

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

Parent education

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

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

Evidence base

Recognising the need for parent engagement

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

Project outcomes

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

- Parents established a 'Food Bank' that involved cooking and freezing a variety of meals to be provided to families in times of need.

Challenges

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

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

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

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

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

Lessons learnt

The project demonstrated the:

- vital role of successful home-school relationships in educating children
- valuable role of an outreach/liaison facilitator in fostering effective home-school relationships
- need for professional learning to ensure school staff understand the needs and challenges of families and communities
- need to promote avenues for parents to access training
- importance of accessing relevant information and materials such as the *Family-School Partnerships Framework* to support these projects

- need to ensure students do not 'slip under the radar' as families become increasingly transient.

Project success factors

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

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

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

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

Future directions

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

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

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

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

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