

Case Study: Pimlico State High School

Family-School Partnerships Framework

A guide for schools and families

Pimlico State High School is a co-educational independent public school in Townsville, Queensland, with 1,745 students across Years 7 to 12.

The school's aim is to provide a supportive environment to enable all members of the school community to develop to their full potential.

Project snapshot

Pimlico State High School aimed to improve literacy outcomes for students from Year 8 to 9 attending the school's literacy programs, by providing opportunities for parents to support their child's learning at home.

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 project focused on two groups of Year 8 literacy students from 2014 as they moved into Year 9. Other literacy teachers and students were also keen to be part of the project.

Literacy classes

Pimlico State High School offers Support Literacy and Numeracy Classes for students in Years 7, 8 and 9 who do not meet National Minimum Standards (NMS) in one or more literacy components and are Language other than English exempt.

At the time of this project, more than 30 students attended these classes three times a week, with class sizes 10 or below. There was an additional Literacy Support class for students who were under NMS, but not significantly below. Close to 100 students attended these twice weekly classes, which had a maximum of five students.

Project focus and key steps

The project focused on increasing attendance and engagement of students by improving communication with parents, and using data to set goals and track improvements.

Linking goals to data

Literacy teachers received training in gathering and analysing literacy data to ensure individualised literacy programs were deployed for each student.

Students had regular discussions with literacy teachers about their NAPLAN and other test results, and used this data to make decisions about their literacy goals.

Teachers gathered pre and post-test data in six-week cycles to help measure the progress made in that period.

Each student had a different learning journey built on their individual goals.

By visually recording the literacy journey for students in their literacy learning journals, the school enhanced student-teacher conversations around progress, setting goals and celebrating successes.

Communication

Parents received letters at the start of each six-week cycle informing them of their child's literacy goals. Regular teacher contact informed parents of progress and offered practical strategies to reinforce literacy lessons during the six-week cycle.

Literacy was also included in the mid-semester and end-of-semester report cards to keep parents informed of progress.

Evidence base

Information and data gathered prior to this project helped the school to identify key focus areas and develop strategies to support the project.

Communication survey

Communication issues between the school and parents were identified in a Education Queensland Parent survey, which prompted the school to focus more on effective communication strategies.

Family-School Community Partnership workshop

In 2014, the Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau conducted a workshop involving parents, students and staff to help identify where the school was positioned across the seven key dimensions in the *Family-School Partnerships Framework*.

Results indicated that communication with parents needed improvement, specifically around the curriculum, as did recognising the role of the family in supporting their child's learning.

Attendance

Prior to starting this project, data on students attending Literacy Support classes showed a decline across all groups. Non-attendance was 34%, and this rate increased as students moved from Year 8 to Year 9.

There were approximately eight requests from parents per semester to have their

child withdraw from the Literacy Support program, with the majority of these requests from Year 9 parents.

Literacy results

Before the project started, the majority of students were not achieving the expected improved literacy outcomes (Progressive Achievement Tests Reading and NAPLAN testing), despite smaller student/teacher ratios and targeted goals.

Student focus groups

Two small focus groups of Year 9 Literacy Support students were established to identify the strengths and weaknesses.

Strengths included the small numbers of students in the group, liking the teacher, and the fact parents thought the classes would help.

Weaknesses included relevance to student needs, students thinking the classes were boring, and missing other classes to attend the literacy class.

Parent phone interviews

Phone interviews with parents provided further feedback about the literacy classes and how best to provide information to parents. Most indicated they had an understanding of why their child was undertaking the literacy classes, a desire to be kept informed of their child's progress, and an interest in supporting their child with literacy at home.

Project outcomes

The project saw a greater commitment from parents and students to the literacy classes, with a decrease in requests for students to be removed from these classes. Attendance increased to 90% across the Years 7, 8 and 9 Literacy Support classes, and 95% for students in the two Year 9 focus groups.

Almost all of the students in the two focus groups recorded improved literacy results

in their targeted literacy area in their 2013 (Year 7) and 2015 (Year 9) NAPLAN tests.

Student feedback about the program included:

'My spelling has got better. I even told my mum she had spelled something wrong and I was right.'

'I like how I get to say what we work on and that my teacher talks to me about how I am going all the time.'

Since the strategies were implemented, the school has also received positive feedback from parents about students' literacy improvements.

Project success factors

The challenge of several teachers leaving during the project presented an opportunity for new teachers to band together to make the program work, despite their limited literacy teaching experience. They embraced training and the philosophy of enabling students to manage their own literacy learning.

Individualised programs were built on each student's specific literacy needs and the six-week cycle enabled everyone to be focused on the goal.

Teachers recognised the benefits of timely and effective parent-school communication. Parents became more supportive of the program as they came to understand how the literacy classes operated and received updates about their child's literacy progress.

The school appointed a Head of Literacy and Numeracy, who supported teachers to develop teaching skills and resources. This resulted in the development of a user-friendly database for literacy teachers to record and track each student's literacy goals.

Challenges

The departure of several key personnel from the school during the project was the main challenge to overcome. As a result of staff shortages, literacy classes started later than planned.

Lessons learnt

- Engaging parents with their students' learning had a positive impact on literacy results.
- Parents who were regularly informed of their children's literacy improvements became more engaged and supportive of the program.
- Regular phone calls to parents from teachers to celebrate literacy achievements developed strong rapport between school and families.
- When students are given a voice in their learning, their commitment and engagement increases, with positive impacts on their achievements.

Future directions

Given the success of this project, the school is keen to introduce a school app with more accessible literacy resources and strategies for parents to use with students, to support their literacy goals.

The app/website technology will also facilitate faster and more convenient information sharing with parents about their children's six-week literacy goal setting journey.

The school will also implement the project more broadly to encompass all literacy groups from Year 7 through to Year 9.

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.