



# Family-School Partnerships Framework—

A guide for schools and families

## Strategies

The Family-School Partnerships Framework identifies seven key dimensions for planning partnership activities:

- Communicate
- Connect learning at home and at school
- Build community and identity
- Recognise the role of the family
- Consult on decision making
- Collaborate beyond the school
- Participate

For each key dimension there is a set of suggested strategies that can be used to support school communities in building and improving family-school partnerships. These strategies aim to provide practical guidance and complement the work already being done in schools.

The *Family-School Partnerships Framework* was developed by The Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau with support from the Australian Government.

The Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau was a partnership between the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) and the Australian Parents Council (APC). For further information visit [www.education.gov.au/parent-information](http://www.education.gov.au/parent-information).



## Key dimension: Communicate

### Strategies for communication

'Communicate' is one of the seven key dimensions identified in the *Family-School Partnerships Framework* as guidelines for planning partnership activities. Strategies that utilise this dimension aim to support the development of constructive and sustainable relationships in the school community by building the capacity of school leaders and teachers, and actively encouraging parent and family engagement.

- Display 'welcome' signs and other relevant information around the school using inclusive and positive language.
- School administrative staff play a very important role in setting a welcoming and supportive culture within the school as the first point of contact. Consider how parents and families interact with the school's front office and administration processes.
- Provide learning opportunities for school leaders and teachers to help them communicate with families and respond effectively to the needs of their school community.
- Provide learning opportunities for teachers to build on verbal and written reporting skills. This supports teachers to report effectively, and hold constructive discussions with students and families about progress and planning for future learning goals.
- Use positive language that affirms the important role of parents and families as partners in learning. Think about how parents and families are invited to participate in school-based events and activities and are recognised for their input and their input is valued.
- Develop an understanding of family communication needs and preferences, as well as family interests and goals. This could be done through focus groups, conversations and surveys.
- Actively engage with parents and families about their child's learning. Utilise all communication methods and channels currently being used in school to communicate positive student progress and celebrate successes.
- Encourage involvement by seeking class-parent representatives to assist teachers in working with families. This will provide an informal support network and collaborative working group to support school-family. Be clear with the role, function and expectations for class-parent representatives and review what worked and what could work better at the end of each year.
- Review induction, orientation and transition processes to improve information sharing and ensure parents and families are included in the development of processes, practices and parent-support information.
- Review newsletters, parent information brochures and other regularly used methods of communication, and give parents and families an opportunity to provide feedback.
- Work with parents, carers, families and community members to produce a handbook on the school mission, values, goals, policies, curriculum standards, assessment procedures and school rules. Also include information about opportunities for parents and families to be involved in school-based activities.
- Communicate clearly with families about upcoming school events and activities, give plenty of notice and actively encourage their involvement.

- Put in place a variety of parent-teacher communication options including face-to-face, telephone, email and web-based contact.
- Involve students in interviews and other communications from the school.
- Appoint a school contact person, such as a community and family liaison officer to facilitate teacher and parent communication. The contact person can also provide information and workshops for school staff and parents to encourage and support family-school engagement.

### **Culturally and linguistically diverse families**

Consider the communication needs of culturally and linguistically diverse families and other groups in the school community.

- Use plain English, and other languages as needed. This will ensure all members of the school community have access to clear information about the school's operations and education practices.
- Employ bilingual office staff if needed and train staff in cultural awareness.
- Provide professional development for staff to learn about the history, culture and family practices of Indigenous Australians, culturally and linguistically diverse families and other groups in the community.
- Ensure cultural inclusiveness is reflected in teaching and classroom practices, and administrative and education support services in the school.

## **Key dimension: Connect learning at home and at school**

### **Strategies for connecting learning at home and at school**

'Connect learning at home and at school' is one of the seven key dimensions identified in the *Family-School Partnerships Framework* as guidelines for planning partnership activities. Strategies to help connect learning at home and at school recognise the importance of the valuable learning experiences that occur in the home and community, and link families to the learning that occurs at school.

- Identify how classroom practice recognises and incorporates the learning that occurs in the home and community. Look at areas of interest of students and families, such as recreational, sporting, creative and performing arts, and other activities outside the school that can support learning in the classroom.
- Provide videos, photos or web links with a short description of classroom learning activities to parents and families. This can assist parents and families to gain an understanding of these activities and to discuss and reinforce the learning at home.
- Provide information to parents and families to help them to encourage their child to use home-based learning as a way of reinforcing what they are learning at school.
- Involve families in learning activities, such as researching family and community history, understanding past communication modes or technology and transport.
- Ensure parents and families are well resourced to support the completion of homework, projects and assignments. Provide information in varying forms so parents understand what teachers are asking the child to do.
- Provide newsletters and opportunities for discussions and class meetings to let families know that the school values their partnership and input.

- Identify the links between home-based learning activities and learning in the classroom, and implement these into classroom practices.
- Provide opportunities for family involvement in the classroom and school activities to extend their knowledge of how and what their children learn. An example is family members attending excursions and school camps.
- Provide an explanation of the language, terminology and learning tools used in the classroom.
- Involve families in setting and reviewing student goals throughout the year.
- Provide continual opportunities for discussions about student progress between home and school, including information to support student career planning.
- Provide relevant information for families on the skills required for students in all subjects at each year level.
- Provide information and referral services for families, to support learning and wellbeing.
- Provide opportunities for families, schools and students to work together on learning activities that reflect the diversity of the school community. These could include families teaching students and school staff about cultural dance, cooking and celebrations.

## Key dimension: Build community and identity

### Strategies for building community and identity

'Build community and identity' is one of the seven key dimensions identified in the *Family-School Partnerships Framework* as guidelines for planning partnership activities. Strategies to build community and identity recognise the culture, traditions, values and relationships in the community. Using these strategies, schools can help to shape students' sense of identity and culture, and value their place within their broader community.

- Appoint a designated staff member, such as a Community/Family Liaison Officer, to facilitate family engagement strategies.
- Encourage students to identify, organise, participate and take lead roles in events that showcase their interests or talents.
- Encourage families to collaboratively develop and participate in community driven programs and events that are relevant to them, such as community choirs, sewing groups, festivals or cultural performances.
- Provide both formal and informal opportunities for families to meet school staff, build their understanding of schools and celebrate children's learning. This could include school staff members being present and available at school events where family and community are involved.
- Create a culture that recognises and values diversity within the community, and seek opportunities to celebrate the community's cultural backgrounds. Examples may include NAIDOC, Multicultural Days and International Day of people with Disability.
- Establish cultural awareness workshops for staff and families and employ culturally diverse teaching and non-teaching staff.
- Provide opportunities to introduce families to school life, such as playgroups and early literacy programs.
- Implement ways that the school can become a community resource, such as adult learning programs and community meetings. This can be achieved through an interagency approach.

- Provide a place for families to meet and participate in programs and activities, such as literacy learning, health care or TAFE outreach.
- Welcome and support new families into the school community through a designated staff member or Community/Family Liaison Officer. This could include holding one-on-one meetings with families to gain an understanding of their needs.
- Assist the resettlement of new migrants through the work of teachers of English as a second language, Community/Family Liaison Officers and other families in the school community. Invite people in the broader community to attend school functions, such as morning teas and Senior Citizens Day, where they can learn more about the school community and opportunities to participate.
- Invite Elders of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to become involved in developing inclusive curriculums, mentoring and speaking to students.
- Invite significant community members and groups, such as local civic and service groups, to become involved in the school in a variety of ways. For example, mentoring and speaking to students.
- Create connections with local health and welfare services to facilitate access to support for members of the school community.

## Key dimension: Recognise the role of the family

### Strategies for recognising the role of the family

'Recognise the role of the family' is one of the seven key dimensions identified in the *Family-School Partnerships Framework* as guidelines for planning partnership activities. As the primary educators of their children, parents and families have a lasting influence on their children's attitudes and achievements at school. They can encourage learning in and out of school and can support school goals, directions and values. These strategies can help schools and families use their collective skills and knowledge to improve student learning.

- Assess whether current school practices are effective in supporting family and community engagement.
- Encourage a culture of family engagement, which includes a broad range of activities from involvement in school activities to supporting learning at home.
- Establish family and community engagement as a key focus area and ensure it is integrated into the school strategic plan. Recognise the needs of parents, families, students, teachers, and community members when developing family and community engagement practices.
- Recognise the value of combining formal learning at school with the knowledge families have of their child, to support and benefit student learning and wellbeing.
- Foster practices that build the confidence, connections, capabilities and cognition of both teachers and families.
- Develop and implement programs and practices to build relationships that link to student learning, are hands-on and encourage collaboration, and enable everyone to learn and contribute something.
- Promote a culture within the school where families are viewed as authentic partners. This should be reflected across the school community. Involve families in decision making processes for developing school plans, policies and practices.

- Evaluate reporting and goal setting practices and processes to ensure they are meeting the desired outcomes. For example, consider the needs of students, families and teachers in reporting processes or parent/teacher interviews.
- Create an environment where students, families and teachers are able to set learning goals together, which can be informed by student data as well as interests and aspirations.
- Establish an environment where school leaders are visible and accessible.
- Offer strategies for family support and encouragement of children's learning at school, for example by organising workshops, discussions, meetings and demonstrations of the school's strategic directions as identified in the school plan, such as in literacy, numeracy or social and emotional learning initiatives.

## Key dimension: Consult on decision making

### Strategies for consultative decision making

'Consult on decision making' is one of the seven key dimensions identified in the *Family-School Partnerships Framework* as guidelines for planning partnership activities. These strategies can assist in the development, building and sustaining of relationships and partnerships. Schools, teachers, parents, students and their families are encouraged to work together to collaborate on decisions that may benefit the individual student, or inform activities and approaches for the whole school community.

- Create opportunities for families, students and teachers to build relationships and work together to set goals for individual student outcomes through learning more about one another, the child and learning. This is achieved through combining and valuing the teacher's knowledge of content and formal learning with the family's knowledge of the child.
- Examples of consultative decision making to support individual students include Personal Learning Plans, parent-teacher meetings, informal and formal conversations between the school and family, and creating an Academic Parent Teacher Team.
- Arrange for the school community, including parents, family members and students, to be meaningfully consulted on new school policies, strategic directions and planning. This could include consultation through:
  - formal parent organisations
  - school boards
  - consultative groups
  - focus groups
  - surveys
  - one-on-one meetings.
- Ensure participants on these groups represent the diversity of the school community, including representatives across all demographics.
- Offer training and support on decision making practices to staff, parents, students and family members to enable them to actively engage in decision making in relation to the individual student and/or the whole school community.

## Key dimension: Collaborate beyond the school

### Strategies for collaborating beyond the school

'Collaborate beyond the school' is one of the seven key dimensions identified in the *Family-School Partnerships Framework* as guidelines for planning partnership activities. Many organisations and resources that exist just outside the school gates have similar goals to schools. These partnerships can assist schools to develop relationships to collaborate beyond the school and support the learning and wellbeing of their students.

- Identify organisations or individuals within the community who can assist the school to:
  - provide support or information for students, for example university students visiting the school, or speech and social learning programs
  - conduct early childhood learning and wellbeing programs such as playgroups and transition to school programs
  - develop the cultural responsiveness of the school community and promote understanding of, and participation in, community services and activities such as Adult Migrant Services and Aboriginal Culture Education Services
  - provide access to university and TAFE outreach programs that provide information about pathways to further learning, such as STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) programs
  - provide information on community activities that link to the skills and talents of students, including summer programs on science, or creative and performing arts
  - provide support for 'Breakfast Club' programs and school events, for example parent groups, food banks or other community organisations
  - implement after-school care and activities such as community groups or service providers
  - gather and provide information and access for students and families on community health, cultural, recreational, social support and other programs or services, such as a local neighbourhood group or local council activities
  - provide work experience and structured work placements for students
  - provide tutoring and education support programs, for example a homework club.
- Invite past students to participate in school programs for students, talking to them about their school and post-school experiences.
- Conduct a skills audit to tap into the talents within the families, school and wider community, which can support learning opportunities.
- Enable organisations to use school facilities, which may provide additional opportunities to support student learning or extra funds for the school. For example students may be involved in helping with events at the school.
- Encourage school staff membership on local community groups which provide vital links to resources that support student learning.

## Key dimension: Participate

### Strategies for participating

'Participate' is one of the seven key dimensions identified in the *Family-School Partnerships Framework* as guidelines for planning partnership activities. Strategies that utilise this dimension can encourage active participation in developing, building and sustaining partnerships to support engagement in student learning and school activities.

- Provide opportunities for families to extend their knowledge and understanding of the language of learning, assessment, reporting and curriculum. This can be delivered in a

face-to-face or online format, such as workshops or information for parents and families, that focus on specific school programs or current assessment practices.

- Recognise the value of family and extended family in a child's education with activities, such as inviting families to a 'Family Day' or 'Grandparents Day'.
- Invite families to attend or assist with school events within the classroom or other learning activities in the school, such as sports carnivals and celebration days.
- Conduct an audit, survey, consultations, focus groups, or family morning or afternoon teas to ask families how they would like to participate at school.
- Be mindful of parent commitments to work, pre-schoolers/siblings or other activities to ensure there are various ways for them to participate and contribute. Consider providing childcare to enable participation in activities at school.
- Encourage parents to join and participate in a parents' association, school council or school board, and organise induction and ongoing training and support to sustain efforts.
- Provide opportunities for parent members of the school board or parent association to be a representative on school committees, such as student safety or strategic planning.
- Encourage family participation to represent the diversity of the school community and actively encourage participation in available opportunities.
- Collaboratively develop within the school community a policy for recruitment, training, goal setting and recognition for volunteers. Implement flexible schedules for volunteers and regularly review effectiveness.
- Identify all possible ways to involve parents and families. This could include inviting parents and families to participate in the classroom or on excursions, talk to students about their jobs/career opportunities or topics of interest, tutor or mentor students, coach sports teams or help in the canteen.
- Explore options for enabling all families to participate in assemblies and events. For example, conduct assemblies and events at varying times.
- Establish networks to link families with formal parent representatives.