

Support Sheet #3

Priority Schools Funding Program

NEW SOUTH WALES
DEPARTMENT
OF EDUCATION
AND TRAINING



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The Priority Schools Funding Program (PSFP) works in three integrated action areas. These areas are:

- quality teaching and learning
- classroom and school organisation and school culture
- home, school and community partnerships.

This support document describes the home, school and community partnerships action area.

Home, School and Community Partnerships

Effective home, school and community partnerships in low socio-economic status (SES) communities

Principals, teachers, other staff, parents, other community members and students working together in strong partnerships leads to:

- improved educational experiences and learning outcomes for students
- the acknowledging and valuing of all roles in contributing to students' success
- the development of a learning community with respect for others and freedom to express opinions and beliefs
- learning from each other and sharing in the celebration of achievements
- raised expectations, increased mutual trust, understanding and the development of common goals and actions.

Research evidence

There are two areas of research evidence over the last 20 years that show students benefit from family-school collaborations that provide parents with opportunities to shape their children's learning (Weiss 2000):

- parent's engagement with schooling generally enhances educational outcomes (Epstein 1995)
- specific school-related programs for parents result in improvements in learning outcomes of students (eg. Cairney & Munsey 1992; Morrow & Paratore 1993).

The report of the Vinson Inquiry into Provision of Public Education emphasises the importance of school community partnerships and refers to the research underpinning them (Vinson 2002).

Elements of partnerships

Knowing your community is about identifying the various individuals, groups, their characteristics, their needs and strengths. It is about understanding local issues and impacts on the community and the resources that are available in the community.

Using your community is about sharing community resources to support the school. It helps to develop a culture of collaboration and respect. It is based on an in-depth knowledge of the community.

Building your community is about developing community based initiatives that provide a two-way, reciprocal flow of benefits to school and community. Such initiatives enable the school to help to build community capacity.

Some strategies to support the development of home, school and community partnerships

Seven strands are identified in supporting school community partnerships. They are based on Epstein's framework for parental engagement (Epstein 1995).

Communication among home, school and community

Effective two-way communication among home, school and community contributes to improved student achievement.

School communities use community radio, television and newspapers to communicate with families, especially in areas where a large proportion of parents speak a language other than English.

Teachers and parents both contribute to the school newsletters.

Schools experiment with using videos as well as print.

School communities hold regular meetings to discuss issues that are important to all members. Some may be held outside the school where parents may feel more comfortable. They can be facilitated by an interagency partner to enable everyone to express their views and expectations. Interpreters and translators may be included.

School and classroom practices

School and classroom practices impact significantly on students' experiences of, and engagement with, schooling. These practices affect the quality of the interrelationships between people, policies and learning programs.

Parents work with teachers in classroom and school programs in a context of mutual respect and valued contributions.

Teachers and parents have regular opportunities to discuss teaching strategies and ideas that work about curriculum and learning.

Parents and teachers collaborate to develop meaningful, planned homework practices for students that build on home literacy practices and involve parents.

Parents helping their children to learn

Parents are their child's first teacher (Dancy 1989). Families support children's learning at home, at school, at language classes, in social situations, within family activities and at sporting and creative events.

Parents are trained in how to help their children at home with school work.

School communities involve community agencies in workshops for parents related to child development, parenting and learning. Workshops build on parents' skills and knowledge and assist with new ideas about helping their child at home and in the classroom.

Schools open the library or computer room for afternoon or evening homework sessions where parents can assist their children and gain support from teachers if necessary.

The role of students in linking home and school

Students are the reason for the interaction among the home, school and community. They are the carriers and interpreters of attitudes and expectations between home, school and community.

Parents, teachers, students and community members plan performances and exhibitions to showcase or celebrate school, home and community literacies and cultural practices.

Schools provide space and opportunities for displays and information to showcase students' and parents' involvement in community events.

Teachers, students and parents engage in three-way conferencing on samples of students' own work.

Parents as volunteers

The contribution of parents through fundraising and practical support in the school and classroom has traditionally supported the activities of schools. It continues to be vitally important.

Schools develop opportunities for volunteering based on information gained from surveying parents and community members about their interests, talents and availability for volunteering in the school.

Teachers enlist the support of community members in volunteer and mentor programs to enhance students' learning.

Schools provide opportunities for parents to move from basic volunteer roles into higher levels of responsibility and even employment.

Parents learning about children's learning

Information and education programs that assist families to learn about students' learning can help them to support their child's learning at home and at school.

Parents, schools and other community agencies collaborate to develop a series of parent information and education strategies for the year. These may include workshops, presentations, discussion groups, information fairs, videos and pamphlets. They could cover a range of issues that parents identify as important for helping students to learn.

Teachers and parents review available parent information and education packages to select and adapt suitable programs. Schools promote the NSW Board of Studies range of parent information pamphlets. PSFP community development officers and community organisations can advise on appropriate programs developed for socio-economically disadvantaged communities.

School communities develop activities to build on their specific strengths. A skilled facilitator could assist groups to identify their strengths and the best ways these could be used to improve student outcomes. A successful program could be written up as a resource for other school communities.

Working with the community

The impacts of social and economic challenges facing many communities make it increasingly important that schools play a part as essential community resources. They need to work with other agencies such as health, community services, housing and youth services and charities that have responsibility for supporting the same people as the school within the community.

Schools work with parents, other local school communities and district office to develop a comprehensive school community profile that maps and creates a register of the groups and the services available in the community.

Schools collaborate with other agencies to offer literacy programs for students, parents and community members such as TAFE NSW and Adult and Community Education Colleges.

Schools set up a community mentoring program for students of any age at risk of disengaging from education and training.

Schools help other agencies to build strong networks in the community.

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Conclusion

Research clearly demonstrates that developing effective partnerships will assist school communities to improve the learning outcomes of their students.

Mutual trust, shared goals and genuine, regular dialogue are at the heart of effective partnerships. Family, school and community contexts overlap and interact with one another on many levels.

The experiences that influence students in one aspect of their lives also influence the students in their other contexts. There is a greater likelihood of successful student educational outcomes when the values and expectations are understood and reflected in each context.

The challenge for Priority Schools Funding Program school communities is to make partnerships between the home, school and community a key strategy in improving the educational outcomes of socio-economically disadvantaged students and their communities.

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