

FAMILY– SCHOOL & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS BUREAU



October Newsletter, 2014

Message from the Bureau

It has been an extremely busy few months since our last newsletter.

The Bureau's projects are moving ahead at a fast pace and we recently held our **2014 National Symposium, Policy, Practice & Evaluation: *Improving learning & wellbeing.***

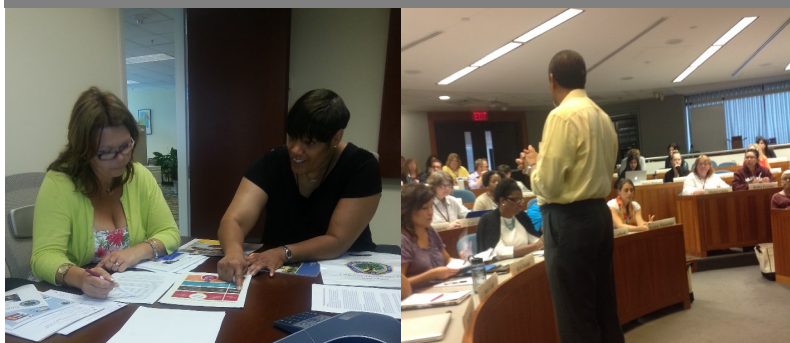
With more than 40 years of research showing that when families, schools and the community partner effectively, children and young people's life and learning outcomes improve and if systemic and systematic partnerships are to be built between families, schools and communities, what are the critical policy levers, how do these translate into practice and how is effectiveness measured?

These critical questions were explored throughout the National Symposium by accessing the wisdom and experience of a team of international and national experts in the field, with the purpose to move from rhetoric to action, from ad hoc to systemic, from measuring activities to impact, providing all children and young people with the best start in life....



Partnerships between family and school can only prosper if school staff and families have the required capacity to engage in partnerships

'Suppose you arrive at school tomorrow morning and every parent in the school is there to be engaged or involved. What would you have them do?'



In This Issue

- Overview of the 2014 National Symposium, Policy, Practice & Evaluation
- Project updates
- Linking family engagement to learning
- Learnings from Harvard
- And more.....



Associate Professor Joe Flessa presenting to over 120 Family– School & Community Partnerships Bureau National Symposium delegates on “What constitutes family engagement”

Symposium overview

The 2014 National Symposium, was held over 2 days in Melbourne, hosted over 120 delegates from across Australia and explored three key areas Policy, Practice and Evaluation.

Policy

The first session of the symposium focused on family engagement in policy. To achieve this we collected current perspectives of what family engagement in education is through interactive activities and presented a video vignette of Dr Karen Mapp Senior Lecturer on Education, Director, Education Policy & Management Program Harvard Graduate School of Education. discussing the importance of National policy infrastructure, essential elements of family engagement and the need to offer the how to engage through a framework with a focus on extending on the capacity to engage in the education of students of both schools, teachers and families. At the conclusion of the policy session Associate Professor Joe Flessa, Leadership, Adult and Higher Education Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto reflected on the activities conducted and Dr Mapps vignette to deliver his perspectives on the key take outs of the policy session.



Practice

In this session we explored family engagement in practice. Associate Professor Joe Flessa presented What constitutes family engagement: Implications for policy & evaluation? Professor Flessa examined the latest research literature on family/ school engagement policies. Policymakers, educators, and community members often describe the purposes of family engagement differently. Cont page 3.....

2014 National Symposium Speakers

Guest speakers for this years Symposium included

Associate Professor Joe Flessa, Leadership, Adult and Higher Education Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto.

Dr Karen Mapp, Senior Lecturer on Education, Director, Education Policy & Management Program Harvard Graduate School of Education. (Video vignette

Anne Henderson, Senior Consultant, Community Involvement Program Annenberg Institute for School Reform (video Vignette)

Dr Ben Jensen, CEO Learning First and Formerly Program Director, School Education, Grattan Institute

Panel members consisted of:

Dr Sara Glover Director, Education Policy, Mitchell Institute, Victoria University

Patrick Lyons, Partner, Synergistiq

Michael Bourne, Principal, St Mark's Primary School, Fawkner

Dr Michelle Anderson, Director Interface 2 Consulting, Former Principal Research Fellow and Project Director, ACER

Phil Billington, Director of Catholic Education, Sandhurst Victoria joined by Mr Michael Devlin & Ms Annette Jacob (parent reps)



Panel members Day 1: Stimulus sessions

National Symposium continued.... How do policies reflect these different purposes, and which purposes seem most valued? A critical examination of the latest policy trends can support efforts to build more effective links between home, community, and school.

Extending on Professor Flessa presentation Dr Ben Jensen CEO Learning First and Formerly Program Director School Education Grattan Institute delivered a presentation on integrating family-school partnerships into the school improvement agenda and found through his research that family—school partnerships was a critical factor for the success of many schools. This is particularly so for turnaround schools. Dr Jensen's presentation discussed why this is so and the key steps schools, families, stakeholders and system leaders can take to make these partnership fruitful and highlighted key examples of effective practices both within Australia and in successful high-performing systems around the world.

The practice session concluded with a panel providing stimulus presentations designed to provoke thought and discussion and a key practice takeout session was conducted by Adam Smith Education Analyst, Director, ACER and Public Education Foundation and Chairperson Family—School & Community Partnerships Bureau who provided an excellent reflection of the session.

Evaluation

Moving into day 2 of the Symposium we explored evaluation of family engagement, once again Professor Flessa presented an excellent and stimulating presentation Family Engagement: What counts, who counts it & who does it help? Professor Flessa discussed policy assessments, and the incentives they create, matter. How are schools' efforts to engage families and communities typically evaluated, by whom, and with what impact? Attendance numbers at school-convened meetings or the size of the bottom line after a fundraiser are frequently used, but they're probably better understood as proxies for a school's socioeconomic location than for its efforts to thoughtfully engage parents. In this talk Professor Flessa will describe the complexities of doing useful assessment of parental engagement efforts, and will suggest alternatives in an educational policy environment that emphasizes data-driven accountability, what data do principals have to assess the effectiveness of their work with families and communities? What data should they have? This presentation was then complimented by a video vignette of Anne Henderson, Senior Consultant, Community Involvement Program Annenberg Institute for School Reform. Anne presented on Building evaluation in Logic model and Theories of change into data.

Anne unpacked evaluation using her experience working with a school or a system and drew on examples to tease out the following: Why evaluate? Principles of good evaluation/ what to be wary of, Analysing your data, Using data to inform action. This session was concluded and was reinforced with a panel consisting of Associate Professor Joseph Flessa, Dr Sara Glover Director, Education Policy Mitchell Institute Victoria University and Patrick Lyons, Synergistiq.

Again, Adam Smith, Education Analyst, Director, ACER and Public Education Foundation and Chairperson Family—School & Community Partnerships Bureau provided an excellent reflection of the session and key evaluation takeout's.

Recommendations

Our final session for the symposium looked at recommendations for enabling policy, delegates participated in an activity designed to gather their thoughts after hearing all the presentations over the two days and making recommendations that can be presented to the government which can embed family and community engagement into national policy.

Feedback from delegates who described their attendance at the symposium as a valuable experience and positively contributed to their work within the family and community engagement arena. Key words taken from delegates included; challenging of assumptions, moving family engagement beyond random acts, roles of policy makers, reinvigorating, family engagement needs to be a whole school approach, challenging barriers and thought provoking, just to name a few.

For your convenience all the symposium presentations were recorded and are housed on the Bureau's website along with, presenters powerpoints and resources including day one twitter feed and a template of a Logic model which Anne Henderson described in her presentation is available at <http://www.familyschool.org.au/what-we-do/events/current-events/2014-national-symposium/555/>

Bureau meets with United States Department of Education

During a recent study trip to the United States, Framework project officer Donna Sirmais met with Jonava Johnson, Parent Liaison in Region 4, Atlanta, GA.

Donna and Ms. Johnson discussed the United States newly implemented Dual Capacity Framework designed by Kuttner & Mapp, 2014.

The meeting proved invaluable and assisted with the review and refinement of the Australian Family– School Partnerships Framework and built networks across the two nations in the area of Family-School Partnerships.



Dr Karen Mapp presenting on Linking family engagement to learning

Linking family engagement to learning

Dr Karen Mapp Senior Lecturer on Education, Director, Education Policy & Management Program Harvard Graduate School of Education describes the conditions which are key to the design of effective initiatives for enriching the capacity of families and school staff to partner in ways that support student achievement and school improvement. Initiatives must be; Linked to learning; relational; developmental; collaborative and interactive.

Dr Mapp's presentation on linking family engagement to learning is available on the Bureau's video of month section of our website. At just a little over 7 minutes this is a great video to watch to consolidate how to link family engagement to learning <http://www.familyschool.org.au/resources/videos-month/>

Learnings from Harvard

Representatives from the Family-School & Community Partnerships Bureau attended the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Programs in Professional Education course Closing the Achievement Gap held on 29 June to 3 July 2014. The course brought together 99 participants over the five days with representatives from school communities, educational services, universities and family organisations throughout America, Australia and Canada.

The primary goal for participating in the course was to improve and build on our current understanding of how to raise achievement levels for all students while narrowing the gaps between groups and increasing teacher, student and family engagement. Each day had a theme:

- Framing the work
- Parent, family and community engagement
- Instructional leadership and teacher engagement
- Student engagement
- Taking action.

The full report can be found on our research page at <http://www.familyschool.org.au/what-we-do/>



Bureaus' project updates

Family– School Partnerships Framework

Initial consultation sessions have been completed and a draft version of the framework has been developed. Whilst we have attempted to implement all recommendations gathered throughout the consultation period, there are limitations due to the scope of the current project. These limitations will be put forward as recommendations for action.

The draft version will soon be available for community consultation, keep updated through our facebook, twitter and website pages.

2 Year Longitudinal Study on the impact of parental engagement on improved student learning outcomes

Through ongoing discussions with the study schools they now have a better understanding of the difference between involving parents in schooling and engaging parents in their children's learning and the greater impact the latter has on student learning. Also, parents don't have to be physically in the school to be supporting their children's learning.

There is now a link between student learning outcomes and the data that is being collected throughout the study, is mostly qualitative. Some quantitative data is being collected and this will also inform the study.

The schools have changed once again with Jabiru Area School, Northern Territory replacing Maningrida College, Northern Territory.

The study schools are now as follows:

- Coodanup Community College, Western Australia
- Glenroy College, Victoria
- Holy Cross College, New South Wales
- Jabiru Area School, Northern Territory
- Killester College, Victoria
- Longford Primary School, Tasmania
- Pimlico State High School, Queensland
- Sackville Street Public School, New South Wales

We look forward to keeping you updated on our projects

Are you currently considering improving student learning through family-school partnerships in 2015

Here's a few ideas to place in your toolbox

One on one's

At the beginning of the year instead of a mass open night, maybe try one on one chats, below are a few questions teachers may like to ask families attending to help build partnerships.

1. What do you feel is your child's greatest strengths or skills?
2. At the end of the year what do you hope your child says about his/her experiences at school this? What do you think they will say?
3. What were your experiences like at this age in school?
4. Do you have fears or concerns about your child this year at school?
5. How & when would you like me to be in touch with you? What is the best way to communicate with you?

You may also like to look at the students results from the year before, show the parent what skills and levels the student finished the prior year with and set goals for the coming year. This also provides a platform for conversations at the mid year parent- teacher chats.

Family-School & Community Partnerships Framework guiding dimensions within this activity: Communication, Connecting learning at home and at school, Consultative decision making, participating, building community & identity, Recognising the role of the family.

Back to school night:

If you decide that a back to school night is for your school then here are 4 tips to get the most out of the evening.

1. Ensure the classroom is clean and visually appealing and welcoming.
2. Handouts: Print handouts of key points of your presentation so families don't need to take notes.
3. About me: Families want to know you the person, it's relational, offering a little information about yourself and why you are a teacher goes a long way in building relationships.
4. Provide a copy of the Charter of Expectations for both the classroom and school and not only include what teachers and school can expect from students and families in the classroom and school but what students and families should expect from teachers and the school. To ensure the charters relevance ensure students, families & teachers have had input into the development of the charters.

Family-School & Community Partnerships Framework guiding dimensions within this activity: Communication, Connecting learning at home and at school, building community & identity, Recognising the role of the family.

Would you like to know more about what parents say about teachers schools & family school partnerships?

In 2009, the Bureau conducted a series of focus groups with parents of school-aged children. The purpose of these was to gain some insights into how parents viewed the quality of teachers and teaching, the effectiveness of schools and the education system, and the nature of the relationships between schools and parents. To read the full report go to <http://familyschool.org.au/index.php/what-we-do/research/original-bureau-research/what-parents-say/>

The team at the Family-School & Community Partnerships Bureau would like to wish you a successful and happy term 4 and if you have any questions or comments please contact us at contact@familyschool.org.au please also take a look at the draft framework and provide feedback