



Family-School  
& Community  
Partnerships  
Bureau



# Family School Partners

February 2009

Newsletter of the Family-School & Community Partnerships Bureau

Welcome to the Bureau's third e-Newsletter

As I write this, I am acutely aware of the hellish experiences that have been visited upon many families as a result of bushfires, especially in Victoria. I know that many schools will have connections with the victims and their families, and that the care and consideration of school communities will be an important part of how people cope with their misfortune and grief.

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It looks like 2009 will be a big year in many ways. The Family School Partners newsletter will appear monthly from now on. I hope you will find its format attractive and its content engaging.

We will continue to bring you stories and advice about family-school-community connections, events and initiatives. We focus primarily on local and national matters, but there is much of interest happening elsewhere in the world, too, and you'll always find something of interest from beyond our shores.

In this edition, we're highlighting how digital technologies and social networking sites affect the way parents, schools and communities engage with one another.

We are also modifying our website <http://www.familyschool.org.au> to better serve parents and communities. It has two key roles, acting as both an information resource and as a place to connect for all who see schools as key contributors to the well-being of young people and their families.

Please forward this newsletter to friends and colleagues who might be interested, and tell them that they, too, can subscribe, quickly and at no cost, via our website.

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## First things

### Apology Anniversary Breakfasts, 13 February 2009

*Sharing stories, taking the next steps ...*

*"We can today resolve together that there be a new beginning for Australia. And it is to such a new beginning that I believe the nation is now calling us ... So let us seize the day. Let it not become a moment of mere sentimental reflection. Let us take it with both hands and allow this day, this day of national reconciliation, to*

*become one of those rare moments in which we might just be able to transform the way in which the nation thinks about itself, whereby the injustice administered to these Stolen Generations in the name of these, our parliaments, causes all of us to reappraise, at the deepest level of our beliefs, the real possibility of reconciliation writ large."*

**Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, 13 February 2008**

On 13 February 2009, the first anniversary of the apology, Australians are invited to come together again to remember where they were and how they felt one year ago, to reflect on what's changed and what hasn't, and to talk about what comes next. Organisations and community groups of all kinds are holding **Apology Anniversary Breakfasts**.

To help make the gatherings successful and meaningful, and help close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, **Reconciliation Australia** has produced a number of resources including the following:

- A 30 minute documentary film about the apology
- A poster featuring the wording of the national apology by the Prime Minister
- A simple fact sheet answering common questions about the Stolen Generations and the apology
- A collection of quotes about the impact of the apology from members of the Stolen Generations and other Australians
- An online database for you to register your breakfast.

To register your gathering or request resources go to <http://www.reconciliation.org.au>. Further resources are also available from the **National Sorry Day Committee** <http://www.nsd.org.au> and the **Stolen Generations Alliance** <http://www.sgalliance.org.au>.

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## This Digital Life

Communication technologies will increasingly determine how we go about our daily lives, and this newsletter will have a regular section devoted to those issues. In particular we will explore how schools, families and communities can use technology to enhance communication and engagement.

### Parents Can Protect Children from Cyberbullying

As kids discover new ways to share information they are also, unfortunately, finding more ways to harm each other. According to **Common Sense Media**, cyberbullying has affected 43% of kids between the ages of 13 and 17. But there are tips parents can use to prevent cyberbullying or limit its damage. See more at <http://www.common sense media.org/cyberbullying-tips>.

A major **report on the challenges of online safety for children** has just been released. The detailed 278-page report was commissioned by all the US State Attorneys General and overseen by Harvard University's Berkman Center for Internet & Society. Read the full report here: [http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files/ISTTF\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files/ISTTF_Final_Report.pdf)

If you don't know your Twitter from your blog, a useful Australian site is **Click**. This technology guide for parents, created by the **NSW Education Department**, can be found at <http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/news/technology/index.php> It covers cyberbullying and a host of other digital life issues.

The **Victorian Department of Education** is promoting **SuperClubsPLUS Australia**, a monitored, mediated social learning network for 6- to 12-year-olds, where children can chat to friends, start their own interest groups, or publish stories and pictures for thousands of other children to read and see.

What makes it different to other social networking sites? "We validate every child through their school, so we know every child is a real child," says the organisation's director, Martin Wild. "Then we actively monitor every interaction. Everything the children publish or say online passes through a highly trained mediator."

For more information go to <http://www.superclubsplus.com.au>

### Face to face with Facebook

Social networking sites like **Facebook** are an increasingly popular way for people to stay in touch, and schools and parents are seizing the possibilities they present.

The **NSW Education Department**, for example, has a Facebook group for parents and carers at <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=26898771271&ref=mf%22>. It's described as a place to find "useful information to help you through school life".

You'll find more about how Facebook is **being used by some schools** by clicking here ...

<http://www.ourschool.ca/connecting-with-parents-using-facebook-what-does-it-mean-to-be-a-digital-parent.html>

And if you want an example of how parents are using communication technologies to make themselves heard and lobby for change, take a deep breath and read a *Washington Post* story that says in part,

*"For a new generation of well-wired activists in the Washington region, it's not enough to speak at Parent-Teacher Association or late-night school board meetings. They are going head-to-head with superintendents through e-mail blitzes, social networking Web sites, online petitions, partnerships with business and student groups, and research that mines a mountain of electronic data on school performance ..."*

Read more at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/01/29/AR2009012904176.html?wpisrc=newsletter&wpisrc=newsletter&wpisrc=newsletter>

### Teachers TV arrives in Australia — and parents can use it!



If you're curious about good teaching, and what happens — or could and should happen — in the classroom, take a look at **Teachers TV Australia** at <http://www.teacherstv.com.au>

This is the Australian equivalent of the successful UK initiative - a web and 24-hour cable TV platform providing teachers and school administrators with engaging, relevant professional development resources.

It features great teachers and teaching in action, and uses classroom and school observation to illustrate different challenges, ideas, problems, innovation and systems.

It has been brought to Australia by **Peter Sjoquist AM**, the driving force behind the drug and alcohol-prevention youth event Rock Eisteddfod Challenge.

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## Doing the family-school thing well

We keep our eyes open for good ideas and best practice, and from time to time I want to share with you stories from schools that are deepening the connections between schools and families in ways that go beyond the usual 'cake stall and canteen' model.

This week there are stories from two Victorian schools where great things are happening. First, an email from **Joanne Wheaton**, a parent involved with **Kaniva College**:

*"I know you probably hear this from every school but, I believe our school is well on the way down the path you are hoping to create.*

*We are a small rural P-12 school. Our enrolments stand at about 230. We are the only school in town and our enrolments come from one kinder. I believe our parents' group is unique in Victoria. When all of the local 'feeder' schools closed about 40 years ago to make the Kaniva Consolidated School, each of the local communities retained their own Parents Clubs (known here as Welfare Groups) which then had representatives come together during the year to meet. This still continues today. This combined group fills one of the co-opted positions on our school council, the other co-opted position is shared by two students.*

*The Kaniva Combined Parents Association (KCPA) school council representative, Kaye Bothe, and myself attended the Parents Victoria conference in Melbourne earlier this year. At this we heard [about the Bureau] and we went home even more inspired about our school — both what it already is and what it could be!*

*Since this trip Kaye has spoken to individual groups and is trying to increase participation. These groups have been running for a long time and it has been assumed that people know how they run and what they are there for. Unfortunately, over time, they have become viewed largely as fundraising groups and people are put off by the thought of just being involved to cater.*

*That is all changing! A new generation of parents are becoming involved as they find that these individual groups and the KCPA are like peak bodies for the parents. Kaye and I spoke at the kindergarten's AGM last week, informing parents they can be involved in the school through the Welfare Groups, School Council and less formal ways. It's all about demystifying the system and making parents feel like a part of their children's education even after they have started school.*

*We are fortunate to have a new, young principal, Tiffany Holt. Together we share the vision of Kaniva College being the best P-12 school in Victoria, and beyond!*

*We are also at Stage 4 of Building Futures and are busily working with architects to form a master plan which will see our primary section refurbished and new buildings built to fit our p-4, 5-8 & 9-12 sub-school structure. I would love it if you could suggest ways of obtaining extra funding to have a parents' space included in our new school. If the Government is serious about the family/school partnership they need to fund the infrastructure to make it happen.*

*What is happening at Kaniva is exciting, and with the possibility of the new school coming closer to being a reality it is the perfect time to physically build from the ground up what we already have established in the people."*

For more information about the school, see the website <http://www.kanivacollege.vic.edu.au/>

The second story, from Debbie Nobbs at **Cranbourne West Primary**, highlights the benefits of a dedicated Parent and Community Liaison Officer:

*"I thought you might be interested in our school in the South East Region of Melbourne. I believe that we may be unique, in that the principal has allocated funding for a full-time Parent and Community Liaison Officer.*

*I have been in this role for almost 2 years and we have demonstrated that allocating resources to improving partnerships between school, family and community pays high dividends.*

*My job is to build upon our community initiatives, develop value-added programs for our students and their families, and work with our broader community utilising a community development framework to support*

*individuals, families and our broader community. As well as allocating a worker to develop these programs, the school has also allocated space to develop a Parents and Volunteers Room*

*We have significantly increased the percentage of parents and community members who volunteer in programs within the school and the broader community. We have initiated and/or enhanced a broad range of programs that improve student health and well-being, such as Breakfast Club, Brunch Club, Emergency Lunches, Lunchtime Activities and Mentoring programs, just to name a few.*

*We have received significant financial support for the development of our programs through government funding, and support from local businesses and services. We have developed strong partnerships with a number of local organisations including WillowWood Aged Care Facility, Anglicare, CHIPS, Salvation Army, City of Casey, Youth Services, Cranbourne Community Plan, Turning Point Family Church, Cranbourne Police, YMCA etc. These partnerships benefit both our school community and the organisations we partner with."*

For more information, go to <http://www.cranbournestps.vic.edu.au/>.

As well, the monthly newsletter **Briefings** from **Independent Schools Queensland** recently ran a feature on the importance of parent involvement, including a case study of how **Hillbrook Anglican School** does it.

Find it at

[http://www.aisq.qld.edu.au/files/files/Communications/briefings/Nov-DecBriefings\\_08\\_A4.pdf](http://www.aisq.qld.edu.au/files/files/Communications/briefings/Nov-DecBriefings_08_A4.pdf)

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## Tips for parents

We're always coming across tips which which parents can help their children get the most out of their education, and we continue to pass the best of them on in this newsletter.

### Helping children with reading



Becoming a good reader is essential to success at school, and the groundwork is well and truly laid in the home.

I stumbled across this **video podcast** from Canada where a couple of parents talk about how they make reading a special family experience ...

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/abc123/eng/podcast/bedtimePod.html>

### Helping children get organised

Parents often lament their children's disorganisation when it comes to school matters.

[http://www.education.com/reference/article/Ref\\_Ten\\_Ways\\_Help\\_Your/](http://www.education.com/reference/article/Ref_Ten_Ways_Help_Your/) has **10 tips** that may help (as you'd hope, it's a well-organised list!) Why is it so important? As the site explains,

*"Developing good organizational skills is a key ingredient for success in school and in life. Although some people are by nature more organized than others, anyone can put routines and systems in place to help a child 'get it together' "*

What follows is the overview. Go to the site itself for explanations of specifically how and why these tips work.

1. Use checklists.
2. Organize homework assignments.
3. Designate a study space.
4. Set a designated study time.
5. Keep organized notebooks.

6. Conduct a weekly cleanup.
7. Create a household schedule.
8. Keep a master calendar.
9. Prepare for the day ahead.
10. Provide needed support while your child is learning to become more organized.

And speaking of being organised, you may recall that last newsletter I mentioned the work of **Angie Wilcock**. She's a parent-educator-consultant who runs workshops helping parents with things like transition to school, organisational and time management skills, essay and assignment writing and so on. She was recently invited to appear on the TV show *Mornings with Kerri-Anne* to talk about her work and she was quite a hit.

Angie's website is <http://www.highhopes.com.au>

### Helping children develop responsibility

Advice on how to make your child more responsible can come across as a bit patronising. I felt so, anyway, when reading a piece by **Terri Khonsari**, an educator and author who writes books with dramatic titles like *Raising a Superstar*. But what do *you* think? Decide for yourself whether the four steps Terri proposes ring true for you:

Four steps for raising a child who understands responsibility:

1. Start giving your children small tasks and **chores** when they are young. Add to their responsibilities as they get older. Ask them to take care of certain duties and hold them accountable. Chores can start with very simple things like having them put their own plate away, and later on they can graduate to washing the dishes or making the salad for dinner.
2. **Model** the responsible behaviour you want your child to emulate. Children can see right through hypocrisy. If there is a discrepancy between your behaviour and your teachings, they will copy your actions rather than follow your words.
3. **Communicate** with your children about responsible behaviour. Let them know when you see them being responsible. Point to specific behaviours that you notice them excelling in.
4. **Believe** in your children and show them that you believe they can be responsible. They will pick up on your belief and tend to fulfill expectations. Encourage your kids to do new things for themselves and for the family, and help them achieve their goals in the right way.

## The National Family-School Partnerships Framework



Has your school, or your P&C, received its copy of the **National Family-School Partnerships Framework**? Check with your school principal. Copies were posted to all schools late in 2008.

The Framework sets out the principles of effective partnerships and highlights strategies that schools and parents can use to guide and develop partnerships.

An electronic version is available at <http://www.familyschool.org.au/pdf/framework.pdf>

or at <http://www.deewr.gov.au/familyschoolpartnerships>.

In her Media Release accompanying the Guide, the Minister for Education, the Hon. **Julia Gillard**, noted that families have a major influence on their children's achievement in school and through life. She added that the

evidence shows that when schools, parents and communities work in partnership, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer and enjoy school more.

COAG has identified boosting parental engagement as a key policy direction to improve school participation and achievement, reduce educational disadvantage and promote social inclusion.

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## Bits 'n Pieces

### US teachers seeking Australian involvement

I received this email from a teacher, **Annie Farris**, hoping to visit Australia. If you're interested, email her direct.

*I am a 4th grade teacher from Oklahoma, USA. My teaching partner and I are writing a grant to enable us to come to Australia and experience the country and all its cultures, geography, wildlife etc. We want to, in return, teach about the USA, Oklahoma and our cultures etc. We want to go to the school/schools and help tutor/read/mentor or whatever we could do to be involved with people from your country, so that we can return to Oklahoma and teach our students about what we learned first hand in Australia. Our grant will cover our expenses of getting there, lodging, food, etc. We just need help setting all the arrangements with a willing school and maybe a guide to help us see what your fascinating country has to offer. We would also like to arrange with the school to set up e-pals or regular pen pals and maybe even an interactive website that both schools' students could learn from. We would like to come in the (northern) summer — our school is out for break on May 22, 2009. If you can give me any information or contacts to begin setting up this journey I would really appreciate it. Email me at [Annie.Farris@piedmontschools.org](mailto:Annie.Farris@piedmontschools.org).*

### Standardised testing

Regular, standardised testing has been hailed by some as the answer to school performance woes, and condemned by others as the very cause of them. In our last issue we covered what various Australian teacher/principal associations and parent organisations had to say about it.

Here is a link to an article on the **Education.com** website that explores the broader issues of how we define what it means to learn something, and how can we test for it:

[http://www.education.com/magazine/article/Standardized\\_Testing/](http://www.education.com/magazine/article/Standardized_Testing/)

The site also reports that US President **Barack Obama** has entered the debate by articulating his own views on what education will look like under his administration ... "*Creativity has been drained from classrooms, as too many teachers are forced to teach to fill-in-the-bubble tests,*" Obama says.

He doesn't go so far as to say he'll drop testing completely; it should be one of the "*tools that we use to make sure our children are learning. It just can't dominate the curriculum to an extent where we are pushing aside those things that will actually allow children to improve and accurately assess the quality of the teaching that is taking place in the classroom*" .

See more at [http://www.education.com/magazine/article/Barack\\_Obama/](http://www.education.com/magazine/article/Barack_Obama/)

### Don't forget the Schools First initiative.

With a prize pool of \$5 million every year for three years, thanks to sponsor the **National Australia Bank**, **Schools First** is a significant national awards program.

It recognises success in establishing effective school-community partnerships and provides financial support for those partnerships. It's open to all Australian primary and secondary schools, whether public or private, special needs, religious or independent.



The program commences soon with a series of 80 Schools First **workshops** held in major cities and regional centres. The workshops are designed to enable schools and communities to work together on specific issues that address student learning needs, and to guide a project at the local level. Schools can then enter the national awards program.

Visit <http://www.schoolsfirst.edu.au>

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## Tell us your own story

The Bureau wants to build up a collection of video stories about schools that we can use to inspire other schools and their communities.

If you've got a story worth telling, contact me at [brenton.holmes@familyschool.org.au](mailto:brenton.holmes@familyschool.org.au).

Regards

*Brenton Holmes*

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