



Family-School  
& Community  
Partnerships  
Bureau



# Family School Partners

April 2009

## Newsletter of the Family-School & Community Partnerships Bureau

### Welcome to the Bureau's fifth e-Newsletter

In this edition of the e-Newsletter, we're touching on a range of issues and topics that have emerged from responses to our last e-Newsletter, weblog feedback, or from the **Parent Focus Groups** that I've been involved with over the last several weeks.

It's been a pleasure to hear the views of parents, in person or online, and I try to respond individually by email to everyone who gets in touch. Keep your comments coming.

Please forward this newsletter to friends and colleagues who might be interested, and tell them that they can subscribe by going to our website <http://www.familyschool.org.au> and entering their email address.

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## First Things

### How can we make our schools better?

**Eidos Institute**, based in Queensland, focuses on large-scale and long term projects of policy importance based on good evidence. However, in recent months Eidos has been profiling interesting policy ideas from the broader public.

Eidos recently hosted a competition seeking ideas on how to improve our schools. Here's some popular ideas from educators that parents might be interested in, and you can post your thoughts below the video as it plays.

Read more: <http://www.familyschool.org.au/?p=625>

### Australian Awards for Teaching Excellence 2009

Nominations close 19 June for this opportunity to celebrate excellence in schools and recognise the achievements of teachers, principals, support staff and schools.

If there's someone you know who is going above and beyond and making a difference, or a school community that shines, help them get the recognition they deserve.

Go to <http://www.teachingaustralia.edu.au/ta/go/home/op/edit/pid/594>

The awards will be made in the following six categories, with more than \$1 million in prizes and an additional award for Excellence in ICT:

Read more: <http://www.familyschool.org.au/?p=621>

### Mixed response to foray into maths teaching by McDonald's

I reported around mid-March the kerfuffle generated when the fast-food chain **McDonald's** offered its online maths tutoring program free to students.

Is McDonald's simply being a good corporate citizen by supporting education, or is the company seeking to promote its products? Make up your own mind ...

Read more: <http://www.familyschool.org.au/?p=623>

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## Doing the Family-School Thing Well

### National Awards for Quality Schooling Winner



We constantly keep our eyes out for reports and articles about good ideas and best practice when it comes to schools engaging parents successfully in their children's learning. Given the Awards for Excellence mentioned earlier, I realised that I had not reported on the Queensland school that won last year's **Award for Excellence in Family School Partnerships**. So here's that story ...

Read more: <http://www.familyschool.org.au/?p=618>

### Tips for Building Family-School Partnerships

Whether it's from our own research into family-school partnerships, from the international research literature, or from the comments in **Parent Focus Groups**, we are constantly winnowing out tips for those parents, teachers and principals who are keen to promote families' engagement with schools. Here's our current 'top twenty' list of things to keep in mind ...

Read more: <http://www.familyschool.org.au/?p=615>

### New school networks for Australia

Partnerships of all kinds are a key to improving educational outcomes, writes **Rosalyn Black** in a recent Australian Policy Online article. Here's an extract:

If there is any one message that can be drawn from the vast body of research and commentary on school education in Australia, it is that tinkering around the edges of schooling will not solve the widening gaps in educational outcomes that limit opportunities for too many young people. While the current national discourses about teacher quality, funding and a national curriculum are important, these strategies will not succeed without a more collaborative approach ...

Read more: <http://www.familyschool.org.au/?p=630>

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## Helping your student at home

### Homework

We have talked quite a lot about homework and it's clearly something that impacts upon parents' relationships with their children. Since then, we've discovered that it's also a topic that has generated some heated debate in other parts of the world. Take a look at:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2009/apr/08/scrap-homework-say-primary-teachers> and  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/mortarboard/2009/apr/08/primary-schools-homework-abolition>

So that we can explore the homework issue more thoroughly, we're setting up an online **Forum** where you can share your ideas and queries with other people.

In the meantime, here's an extract from an article available at [www.highlightingwriting.com](http://www.highlightingwriting.com) ...

Read more: <http://www.familyschool.org.au/?p=611>

### Reading books

Reading books is potentially one of the richest ways in which parents can encourage their children's learning. It can also be a special way of communicating about a whole host of things that might not normally crop up in the daily chit-chat of a busy family.

Parents sometimes feel that they can do little more than either read to a child, or listen to the child read to them. But a deeper engagement with the activity of reading will deliver benefits all round. We've been winking out some ideas from our international networks, and we'll include the best of them here and on our website.

One of the delights of reading fiction is to engage with the characters that are involved. One way you can help your child think reflectively about character traits is to Throw a **Post-It Party**.

Read more: <http://www.familyschool.org.au/?p=609>

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## This Digital Life

This Digital Life is proving a popular part of the e-Newsletter, and it seems that there is always more to say about it than we have space for. But here's a few things that we think you'll find interesting.

### The digital divide holding back disadvantaged kids

**Patricia and Don Edgar** have deep experience with research on families:

The digital divide is exacerbating inequalities in access to good schooling and other children's services. Many parents are pulled in two ways by the new technology – they fear its negative impacts: passivity, physical inactivity, pornography and cyber-bullying. But they sense that without adequate exposure and skill acquisition their children will be disadvantaged.

This is the modern version of educational inequality, which has always reflected both parental income and their perceptions of the value of education ...

Read more: <http://www.familyschool.org.au/?p=607>

### Are you a partnerships 'digital pathfinder'?

**Mal Lee** and **Glenn Finger** with a group of writers from across the world are currently working on a 2010 publication for ACER Press on *Creating a Home-School Nexus – and The Development of Networked School Communities*. It will present a vision of formal schooling that is networked and collaborative and removes the 'walls' of the traditional stand-alone school. It is a vision many are already – often unwittingly – working upon.

The aim is to prepare a highly practical publication for those wanting to use the digital and network technology to create genuinely collaborative networked school communities, which do prepare the young for a digital future ...

Read more: <http://www.familyschool.org.au/?p=605>

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## National Family-School Partnerships Framework

Many people have contacted me asking for hard copies of the **Guide to the National Family-School Partnerships Framework**.

Requests have come from people from across the education spectrum – bureaucrats, counsellors, parents, principals, kindergarten teachers – and people attending the Bureau's Focus Groups are eager to grab the copies I have on hand.

You can download a copy from our website at <http://www.familyschool.org.au/pdf/framework.pdf> or I can send you out a hard copy if you email me with your postal address at [info@familyschool.org.au](mailto:info@familyschool.org.au).

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## Wellbeing

### Student wellbeing remains at the core of parents' concerns

Whenever I conduct a Focus Group, I ask parents to list the things that are most important to them in terms of their children's schooling. Invariably, the parents rate highly the wellbeing of their child – his or her happiness, confidence, openness, a sense of flourishing. This alone seems like an excellent reason to include wellbeing as a regular topic in the Bureau's e-Newsletters.

I happened across the following information from the **South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services**...

Read more: <http://www.familyschool.org.au/?p=596>

### Wellbeing, resilience and building community

These are the main themes of the forthcoming **National Conference** being hosted jointly by the Bureau's governing group, the two peak parent bodies for government and non-government schools (Australian Council of State School Organisations and the Australian Parents Council)

For full details of the conference (12-13 October 2009) go to [www.acsso.org.au/natconf09/](http://www.acsso.org.au/natconf09/) ...

Read more: <http://www.familyschool.org.au/?p=594>

### Wellbeing requires strategies for Social and Emotional Learning

The peak US parent body (PTA) has been strengthening its advocacy for a focus on student wellbeing, and has been highlighting the work of the **Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning** (CASEL). See <http://www.pta.org/2820.htm>

CASEL promotes the idea that students perform better when academics are combined with social and emotional learning (SEL). According to CASEL, children can learn how to deal with their emotions and relationships with others in healthy ways just as they can learn language or mathematics skills ...

Read more: <http://www.familyschool.org.au/?p=592>

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## Bits 'n' Pieces

### Youth, brains and body image

Parents try very hard to help their teenagers deal with questions of body image. It's one of those issues that can cause enormous turmoil in a young person's life.

I came across the following article on **OnLine Opinion**. As is usual with such articles, the purpose is to encourage debate and discussion, not to be the definitive statement on the issue ...

Read more: <http://www.familyschool.org.au/?p=590>



### Tell us your 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 one worth telling, contact me at [brenton.holmes@familyschool.org.au](mailto:brenton.holmes@familyschool.org.au).

Regards

*Brenton Holmes*

**Brenton Holmes**

Research and Communications  
Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau  
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