



Family-School  
& Community  
Partnerships  
Bureau



# Family School Partners

May 2009

Newsletter of the Family-School & Community Partnerships Bureau

Welcome to the Bureau's sixth e-Newsletter

It's been a busy couple of months at the Bureau, with Focus Groups in various states and meetings with organisations and individuals whose work has a lot of synergy with what the Bureau is trying to achieve. The Focus Groups have been gathering views from parents about the quality of their children's educational experiences in schools, and the information is informing the questions to be posed in a telephone-based national survey of parents to be conducted by the Australian government in a few months time.

Across the country both NGOs and education authorities are doing some good work to build and strengthen family-school partnerships. But there is so much more that needs to be done, and the Bureau will continue to do whatever it can to persuade decision-makers to invest more in partnership activities. Whenever we see a school that engages its parents well, the pay-offs for schools, students and communities are enormous.

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.

## First Things

### National Online Conference for Parents

Parents Victoria, whose members are parents of students in Victorian government schools, have arranged a National Online Conference on the topic:

**“What support do parents need to be active participants in their children's learning and development?”**

Parents of primary and secondary students, in all locations, are invited to take part. It runs from *6am Monday 18 May to midnight Sunday 24 May*. No special software is needed, other than an internet-connected computer and a browser.

Read more: <http://www.familyschool.org.au/?p=633>



### SCHOOLS FIRST – rewarding successful partnerships - \$5million per year available



In each Newsletter we have reminded people about the NAB Schools First initiative that offers awards for successful partnerships between schools, families and communities. The latest advice is that application packages will be available on the Schools First website sometime between now and July 1. Keep an eye out, and we'll let you know as soon as we see them online.

There are two categories of award: **IMPACT AWARDS** for partnerships that are up and running, and **SEED FUNDING** for schools that want to get a partnership off the ground.

Click here to get the basic guidelines on what your application will need to consider: <http://www.schoolsfirst.edu.au/sf-winning-awards/index.phps>

### Australian Awards for Teaching Excellence 2009

**Reminder:** 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 six categories, with more than \$1million in prizes ...

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



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## Doing the Family-School Thing Well

We constantly keep our eyes out for reports and articles about good ideas and successful examples of schools engaging parents and communities effectively. Our research is showing that a great way for schools to engage with their students' families is to connect with and support those families *even before they officially enrol their children in the school*.

There are some great things happening all around the country. Here's a few stories from Victoria:

### Meadows Primary School Early Learning Centre

The Bureau visited Meadows Primary School in 2008 as part of its research into family school partnerships. You can read a [brief but inspiring account](#) taken from our research about how principal Rob Greenacre faced some tough challenges when he started at the school, but made the right decisions in favour of parents being an active presence. The decisions have paid off handsomely.

Needless to say we were delighted when we came across this latest report about the [Meadows Early Learning Centre](#), and how it is going from strength to strength.

Read more: <http://www.familyschool.org.au/?p=643>

### Humming Hubs connect parents to school

It took 18 years for Michelle Chapman to become involved in her local school community. Although all of her seven children had attended Dallas Primary School and Kindergarten, she had never really interacted with other parents or formed social networks. As Michelle recalls: "I felt really isolated as a mother, but I didn't know how to connect, and get out there and do things for myself."

That all changed in late 2007 when the Dallas Primary School and Kindergarten set up its Community Hub.

Read more: <http://www.familyschool.org.au/?p=645>

### Tasmania enters its third year of *Launching into Learning*

*Launching into Learning* is an early years program which aims to give Tasmania's youngest children the best possible start in life. It supports families with young children from birth to four years by providing regular opportunities to have fun playing and learning together alongside the teacher.

The focus is on early language, literacy and numeracy as well as social skills to help children make a successful transition to school.

Read more: <http://www.familyschool.org.au/?p=648>

### Family-school-community partnerships help Indigenous students to flourish

In our last e-Newsletter we reported on the success of the Kuranda District State College's Families as First Teachers program, which has had a profound impact on engaging Indigenous families in their children's early learning and preparation for school. I hope to include a report on Indigenous partnerships as a regular feature of our future newsletters.

In the meantime, have a look at this story **Lights of hope flicker bravely amid indigenous gloom** by Mike Steketee in *The Australian*, April 30, 2009:

"There are lights of inspiration all around the country," Australian of the Year and Aboriginal academic Mick Dodson says.

Read more: <http://www.familyschool.org.au/?p=651>

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## Helping your student at home

Through our networks, both Australian and overseas, we pick up hundreds of tips from education journals and magazines about what parents can do to help with their children's learning at home. We include a sample in every Newsletter, and it seems that they're pretty popular ... so we'll keep doing it as long as we reckon the ideas are worth passing on.

Last e-newsletter we offered some tips on discussing 'character' in literature. Because the new National Curriculum for English has just been published (see below), and because it stresses both oral and written communication, we thought we'd mention the following:

### You're on the Air! Write a Commercial

Upper primary students have had lots of practice reading aloud, but at this age, they can be reluctant to practice this skill. Giving your child the task of writing to convey an emotion and then asking them to read his writing aloud gives them the opportunity to become a better reader and speaker.

By strengthening their oral communication skills, students become confident speakers, whether they are speaking one-on-one or to an audience. Here's an activity that tries to bring out the performer in the child!

[http://www.education.com/activity/article/On\\_Air\\_fifth/](http://www.education.com/activity/article/On_Air_fifth/)

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## Social and emotional considerations – for students and parents

We don't often stop to conscientiously reflect on the social and emotional aspects of our lives as parents or those of our children as students. And yet this is the domain which has a considerable impact on our happiness. I noticed a couple of items in a recent issue of the PTA Magazine that addressed these matters, so I'm passing them on in case they're of interest.

### Mindful Parenting Reduces Stress, Aids Communication

Helping your child at home is just one, albeit important, job for parents who are mindful of their role as their child's 'first and ongoing educators'. But like many aspects of being a parent it takes time, skill and empathy to do the job well ... and it's not always plain sailing.

I came across this article by Alyssa Martina that reflects on how we might maximise the pleasure and minimise the stress of the parenting adventure, especially in those early stages when parenting is a very full-on job.

Read more: <http://www.familyschool.org.au/?p=656>

### Strategies for Social and Emotional Learning

An organisation that calls itself The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (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=658>

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## Collecting and reporting data on school performance

There has been an ongoing debate about how the performance of schools should be reported to parents. In particular, there has been heated disagreement about whether making such data available will lead to the development of 'school league tables'.

According to the following paper, prepared by prominent Australian researchers for the Australian education ministers, nationally comparable data about school performances should be reported to the public, but should not be used to create league tables.

Read more: <http://www.familyschool.org.au/?p=660>

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## National curriculum for schools powers ahead

The proposed new national English curriculum won headlines recently on the grounds that it was to include a systematic approach to grammar. In the light of that publicity, I thought parents might want to have a look at what's proposed.

Read more: <http://www.familyschool.org.au/?p=662>

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## This Digital Life

This is a section in our e-Newsletter dedicated to engaging parents with an area of education that is becoming increasingly significant – ICT, cyberspace and the rest. During the recent Focus Group discussions with parents, some people were surprised to learn of the kinds of online initiatives that are being developed by education authorities, so I thought we should start drawing some of them to parents' attention.

Here's an initiative of the Tasmanian Education Department that seeks to use online education to both support existing school curricula, and to extend and challenge students who are highly able and gifted.

### Online Learning Network

Online Learning Network (OLN) is the unit within the Tasmanian Department of Education which manages the delivery of a range of online programs to students throughout Tasmania and provides support for Learning Services, schools, teachers and students working online.

The eCentre for teachers and the Student Freeway ([www.student.education.tas.gov.au](http://www.student.education.tas.gov.au)) are secure websites that bring together quality digital resources, tools and curriculum materials to support learning and teaching for the Tasmanian Curriculum.

Read more: <http://www.familyschool.org.au/?p=664>

### Embracing or stymying the educational use of the internet?

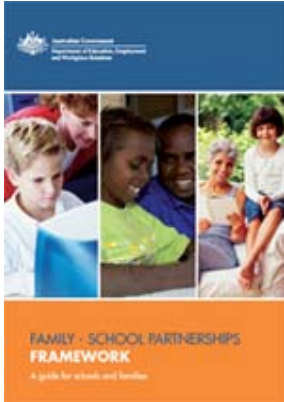
Mal Lee is a keen observer of how schools utilise technology, and has co-authored several important books about schooling in the digital age. He poses the above question, and gives the following answer:

It is timely at the start of 2009 to ask if your school and/or education authority is embracing or stymying the educational use of the online and networked world. Are you actively educating your students for a digital future or are you assuming the best way forward is to protect them, in an artificial world called the school?

Read more: <http://www.familyschool.org.au/?p=666>

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## National Family-School Partnerships Framework



I'm receiving a constant stream of requests for copies of the **Guide to the National Family-School Partnerships Framework**.

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).

Read more: <http://www.familyschool.org.au/?p=506>

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## Bits 'n' Pieces

### YourKidsEd

There are many individuals and organisations around the country offering support to parents of school-age children, and the Bureau is keen to support and complement those efforts.

Sophia Dimitropoulos runs a website [www.YourKidsEd.com.au](http://www.YourKidsEd.com.au) that seems to be striking a chord with some parent organisations. I think she's doing a great job. Definitely worth checking out. There are many individuals and organisations around the country offering support to parents of school-age children, and the Bureau is keen to support and complement those efforts.

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### What is the NEXT BIG QUESTION?

Australia21 is an independent, non-profit organisation whose core work is multidisciplinary research and inquiry on issues of strategic importance for Australia in the 21st century.

Australia21 has launched a project which aims to spark people's thinking on what they want for the nation's future, and wants to hear your thoughts on all matters social, environmental, economic, cultural.



Read more: <http://www.familyschool.org.au/?p=672>

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## 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

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