



Family-School
& Community
Partnerships
Bureau



Family School Partners

November 2009

Family School Partnerships 2.0

[Last issue](#), we profiled examples of using the web to strengthen family school relationships.

People for Education: a Canadian parent advocacy group

Web Child: the web version of an existing Australian print resource for parents

Parents as Partners: a blog by a Canadian parent and teacher

Classroom 2.0: an online meeting place for educators

What they have in common is that each of them exists outside the school environment. Sure, they are certainly all effective resources for parents and teachers who want to increase the engagement between families and schools, but they are not embedded in the school.

*What **is** becoming increasingly embedded in schools is technology. The same technology that enables and empowers parent advocacy groups, parent resources and discussion between like-minded people.*

This issue, we focus on a UK project using technology within school life to facilitate and enhance parent-school relationships

Becta

In the UK, Becta describes itself as "the government agency leading the national drive to ensure the effective and innovative use of technology throughout learning".

Some of you may have read a couple of articles in the last [Values Education News](#) about some of Becta's research.

A March 2009 Becta report based on a survey of 1,000 children aged between seven and 14 years and 1,000 parents revealed that

- Nearly a third of parents feel excluded by their children.
- Only 16% of children proactively talk about their school day.
- Children admit they want to keep 'hassling' parents away from school life.
- 82% of parents want schools to keep them better informed.

Read the whole story here: <http://news.becta.org.uk/display.cfm?resID=39820&page=1661>

Then this month a Becta report found that

- Over half (59%) of parents admit to little contact with their child's school
- 60% of school staff say parents feel their job stops at the school gates
- However, 43% of teachers admit parents might find them 'difficult to approach sometimes'

Read that whole story here: <http://news.becta.org.uk/display.cfm?resID=41240>

The Independent newspaper picked up on the story.

Parents urged to increase schools contact

Alison Kershaw, Press Association Education Correspondent, 5 November 2009

Parents are taking a back seat in their child's education, with almost two thirds saying they have little contact with their youngster's teacher, a survey found today.

Over one in five (22 per cent) of parents say they do not see the benefit in keeping in regular contact with their child's school, according to a poll by the government's technology agency Becta.

Two thirds of teachers (67 per cent) said these parents do not realise how important their support is in helping their child to succeed at school.

More than one in five teachers (22 per cent) feel they do not have enough contact with parents.

Becta is leading a campaign urging parents to talk to schools about using modern technology to keep in touch.

It says that communications between parents and schools can be improved by using email and text messaging, and enabling parents to follow their child's progress, including their achievements, homework assignments and attendance records online.

Their survey, of 2,000 parents and 1,000 teachers across England, shows that 59 per cent of parents contact their child's teacher just once a term or less.

More than one in five (22 per cent) say they don't want to add to the teacher's workload.

Two fifths (42 per cent) of teachers say that parents lack the confidence to approach the school to discuss their child, while a similar proportion (43 per cent) admit that parents might find them "difficult to approach".

One in 10 parents (11 per cent) say they think they will be dismissed by the teacher as a "worrier" while the same proportion say they feel they're "imposing on the teacher's time".

Becta executive director Niel McLean said: "Parental engagement is vital to a child's learning and known to help raise attainment. To do this effectively, there needs to be a meaningful dialogue between parent and school, keeping the parent informed and updated."

Read the rest of the article here: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/parents-urged-to-increase-schools-contact-1815234.html>

You can read the Report Introduction and Key Findings for free here:
<http://www.nextgenerationlearning.org.uk/AboutUs/Research/Schools-and-Parents/>

The Independent gave Niel McLean his own article.

Technology can bridge the gap between parents and schools

Parental engagement is vital to a child's learning and known to help raise attainment. Good communication with schools enables parents to learn more about their child's progress, lesson plans and grades whilst also helping to identify any development or performance issues early on.

But, despite the number of communication channels available - from parents evenings to emails, after-school meetings to online reporting - a new report from Becta, launched today, indicates that misunderstandings, a lack of confidence and unclear communication channels are putting this at risk, with many parents becoming virtually 'invisible' to schools.

A key finding was that over half of parents admit to little contact with their child's school, often once a year or less. This is a real issue for schools, with 60 per cent of school staff saying parents feel their job stops at the school gates and even more saying these parents simply do not realise how important their support is in their child's development.

As a former teacher, I know that poor communication channels can be a real issue – parents who are not engaged are unable to support their child effectively and more burden is put on the teacher to support their learning. In addition, uninformed parents often take up more teacher time by asking questions about basic information, such as grades, attendance or performance which could be shared in a more convenient and timely way.

On the other side of the fence, as a parent, I know how easy it is to feel isolated from your child's education and have a real thirst for updates on how they are getting on. However, our research shows many parents lack the confidence or know the best way to approach teachers, with some teachers - 43 per cent- admitting parents may find them 'difficult to approach' sometimes.

Clearly, parents are crying out for sound advice on ways to simply – and quickly – get information from schools.

Read the rest of that article here: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/schools/niel-mclean-technology-can-bridge-the-gap-between-parents-and-schools-1815238.html>

Becta established a web page for teachers.

Parental engagement using online reporting in primary schools

This web page focuses on helping teachers to engage with parents, with the motivating trigger for teachers in the UK being the legislated requirement that all primary schools provide parents with online reports by September 2012.

Here we have some practical advice, resources and tools for schools using technology to engage with parents.

Applying technology

This is the type of information your school can share with parents and how technology can help support the communication process:

- **School life and events**
 - Information such as school terms, holidays, training days and parent events can be made publicly accessible through your school website, email newsletters and subscription text message services.
- **Learning and achievement**
 - Academic, social and behavioural achievements, learning progressions, assessments and educational needs can be made available by parents logging into a secure system, such as a learning platform, personal device or email account.
- **Urgent and sensitive information**
 - Attendance, sickness, transport arrangements and sensitive information can be communicated using email or text message alerts to keep parents informed.

It's definitely worth a look: http://schools.becta.org.uk/index.php?section=oe&catcode=ss_es_fam_02&rid=16430

Some examples

An email school newsletter for parents: Taroona Views - <http://www.familyschool.org.au/pdf/tv091005.pdf>

A website for a Parent Council: Merrylee Primary School - <http://merryleeprimarypc.org/>

An online learning project for parents: Digital Parent - <http://www.digitalparent.net/>

A text messaging system: MGM Wireless - <http://www.mgmwireless.com/oceania/index.html>

Research

An analysis of parental engagement in contemporary Queensland schooling

Macfarlane, Kym Majella (2006) [QUT Thesis]

This thesis examines an instance of the failure of a parent-led bid for a new local school in Queensland at the end of the last millennium.

This parent-led and school-endorsed initiative failed despite a policy climate that appeared actively to encourage such initiatives from government funded school communities.

The work shows that the parents of Sunnyvale College, (a pseudonym), were both encouraged by the policy environment and discouraged by the response given to their new schooling initiative, from being full educational partners in the process of the schooling of their children.

The unanticipated failure is investigated as a case study of parent engagement set against a background of relationships between government and particular educational stakeholders in that time and place.

It examines how these relationships are played out in this context and what the implications of this are for contemporary relationships of this type.

Download the thesis at http://eprints.qut.edu.au/16322/1/Kym_Macfarlane_Thesis.pdf

Doing the FamilySchool Thing Well

Tom Ffrench Family- School Partnership Awards

The Federation of Catholic School Parent Communities is calling for nominations for the third annual Tom Ffrench Family School Partnership Awards to be awarded at the Annual General Meeting of the Federation in May, 2010.

Named in honour of Tom Ffrench, one of the founding members of the Federation, these awards are dedicated to showcasing and celebrating examples of leading practice in Family/School Partnerships in Catholic schools in South Australia.

Award winners will receive \$500 to support future initiatives that build parental engagement, a framed award and be showcased in the Federation's quarterly publication, "Federation News", and the national newsletter of the Family-School and Community Partnership Bureau.

Nominations close Friday 27 November 2009.

Download more information and nomination form at <http://online.cesamet.adl.catholic.edu.au/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-13049/CESA+Online+-+Information+and+template.pdf>

Please note: Only schools that have affiliated with the Federation in 2009 are eligible to apply for the 2010 awards.



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. Contact us at info@familyschool.org.au.

Please send your comments and suggestions to <mailto:info@familyschool.org.au>

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