Inner Northern Local Learning and Employment Network Inc.

Inner Northern Parent and Family Engagement Project

PREFACE

Acknowledgements

Inner Northern Local Learning and Employment Network (INLLEN) works across the Darebin, Moreland and Yarra municipalities of Melbourne. INLLEN is committed to improving education, training and employment outcomes for young people 10-19 years of age. The INLLEN works in partnership with local Schools, Government Departments, Businesses and Community agencies to identify local issues and develop appropriate strategies to assist young people reach their full potential and to increase their life opportunities through education, employment or training initiatives.

INLLEN management would like to acknowledge the work of Hong Nguyen, INLLEN Partnership Broker who has been instrumental in developing and maintaining the momentum of the Parent and Family Engagement Project and coordinating the "From My School to Our School Forum".

Thank you to the Steering Committee members for supporting the Project and for sharing their expertise and knowledge. A list of Committee members and Forum delegates is attached. A special thank you to Helen Butler, Australian Catholic University for chairing the "*From My school to Our School*" Forum and to the Forum Working Party members who planned and assisted with this event.

Thank you to Amy Mulcahy from Pixel Pushers for designing the "From My School to Our School" logo which truly captures the essence of this work.

A big thank you to the following sponsors for the "From My School to Our School Forum"

Further information can be found on the INLLEN website: http://www.inllen.org.au/ about project initiatives, including the From My School to Our School Forum and full abstracts of the Table Presentations.

INLLEN Contact Details

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This report has been prepared in consultation with Hong Nguyen and David Kennedy, INLLEN by Rosemary Kennedy, Kangjaro Australia, November 2011

FORWARD

I take this opportunity to share an exciting new innovative initiative focusing on parent and family engagement in their children's learning in the Inner Northern region of Melbourne. This initiative began towards the end of 2010 and the first stage of the project has been in operation during 2011. A Project Steering Committee was developed by INLLEN to support and guide the parent and family initiative to explore parent engagement in their children's learning.

Anecdotal evidence gathered in Inner Northern region schools and community over the last three years has shown the important role parents and families have in their children's learning. This role has not always been acknowledged or acted upon. Research is demonstrating that parents and families can assist to create better life opportunities and choices for their children through being involved in their learning. Parents and families from low SES, Aboriginal and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds face particular barriers based on culture, language, access to resources, value differences, and limited opportunities to participate. These barriers impact on their children's educational outcomes and life choice's. In spite of such adversity, some young people will excel in their chosen pathway.

A high level of support has been gathering momentum from the Projects inception. A highlight of the Project to date has been the "*My School Our School Forum*" with key note speakers Dr George Otero (New Mexico) and Danielle Cronin (New South Wales). This event was warmly received in the region and also had delegates attend from outside of the region and State. The work of INLLEN and partners is generating considerable interest which we are keen to continue to advance through local partnerships.

There is increasing dialogue and policy initiatives to support the importance of strengthening learning relationships between school, family and community. What's uplifting about the Project is that we've heard from so many people who have and are doing some fantastic work in the area. We hope that these conversations and actions will continue beyond this Project and can be extended and supported through collaborative action and from strategic planning to overcome enhance and improve learning and life opportunities for young people.

I encourage you to become involved in the project to improve education and life outcomes for young people in our region.

Yours Sincerely

David Kennedy

David Kennedy
Executive Officer
Inner Northern Region Local Learning Network Inc

CONTENTS

PARENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS:

CREATING A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR CHANGE

Developing cross sectoral partnerships is an essential requirement for addressing unequal educational and life outcomes for students in the Inner Northern region of Melbourne. The Schools (Catholic, Independent and Government), Government departments and Community Service Agencies all have key roles in creating a supportive environment to address this situation. Parents and families play an important role in their children's learning and must be acknowledged and included as active and genuine partners in any process for improving their children's learning and life outcomes. The following recommendations are based on these understandings:

1. That the 3 schooling sectors, NMR DEECD, Catholic Education Office (CEO), and Independent Schools Victoria (ISV) and schools take a leadership role in the area of parent and family engagement in the Inner Northern region as a key strategy to create equal education outcomes for all students irrespective of their backgrounds;

2. That Schools, Community Agencies and INLLEN work together in partnership under the banner "*From My School to Our School"* as a key strategy to increase parent and family engagement in their children's learning in the Inner Northern region;

3. That all School Council's and Principals develop and implement a parent and family engagement strategy within their schools strategic plan to acknowledge the importance of parents as the first educators and continuing educators in children's learning and for the promotion and advancement of equal educational outcomes for all students;

4. That NMR DEECD, Schools, Community Agencies and INLLEN actively work together in genuine partnership to implement Koorie Parent and Community Engagement initiatives (PaCE-DEEWR), the Wannik Koorie Education Strategy (DEECD), and the Smarter Schools National Partnership (NP's) for Low Socio-economic Status School Communities (COAG) to create equal outcomes for all young people and families in the Inner Northern region.

THE WAY FORWARD 2012 - 2013

INLLENs role in parent and family engagement is as a Partnership Broker and in 2012 – 2013 INLLEN will work in partnerships with Departments, Community agencies and Schools to:

1. Encourage and support the development and implementation of three pilot models within three local secondary schools; with low SES, Koorie and CALD communities in the Inner Northern Region under the "*From My School to Our School*" banner;

2. Utilize the 2011 Parent and Family Steering Committee changing its name to become the "From *My School to Our School" Reference Group* with reviewed Terms of Reference;

3. Establish and support the "*From My School to Our School" Community of Interest'* utilizing the INLLEN website and social media platforms such as Yammer to share good practice;

4. Develop and promote "*From My School to Our School"* professional development opportunities via a calendar for educators and community practitioners to build their capacity around family and parent engagement and working with young people from CALD, low SES and Koorie communities in the Inner Northern region.

5. Continue to build the capacity of the INLLEN staff to broker and facilitate partnerships in relation to parent and family engagement;

6. Utilise the existing Inner Northern Youth Commitment Networks (Darebin, Moreland and Yarra) to have input and support the "From My School to Our School" parent and family engagement strategy;

7. Develop qualitative and quantitative evaluation tools for "*From My School to Our School"* initiatives to build an evidence base around the value and impact of parent and family engagement on their children's learning in the Inner Northern Region.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Over the last two decades, research from both from overseas and Australian confirms that where parents and families are engaged in their children's learning, children will experience better outcomes at school and beyond school (Epstein 2002, DEEWR, 2008).

Current State and Commonwealth education policy focuses on creating equal outcomes for all children in the education system irrespective of their backgrounds (See Section 3). Children from low socioeconomic, from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD), and Aboriginal children have been identified as being amongst the most educational vulnerable groups in Australia. This situation is evident within the inner northern region of Melbourne where this project is based.

Parent and family engagement is included within current Government policy and INLLEN strategic plan as a key strategy for addressing equal educational outcomes for all children and young people. In late 2010, INLLEN launched a new 'Parent and Family Engagement' initiative to advance this area of practice in the Inner Northern region of Melbourne. The Project purpose was defined as two-fold:

1) To understand the current local context of parent and family engagement in learning within the education and community sectors and
2) To determine and create the right environment that achieves effective parent and family engagement for communities/schools in the inner northern region of Melbourne

The Project is innovative in the area of parent and family engagement in Australia as it:

- has a regional focus (covering Darebin, Moreland and Yarra municipalities);
- has a cross sector focus with representatives from Government, Catholic and Independent Schools and community agencies engaged in the Steering group and project initiatives; and
- strategic, rather than project driven.

Principles

Principles and values underpinning this Project are embedded in current policy documents (see Section 3) around parent engagement and children's learning:
- all children and young people have the right to equal educational and life outcomes;
- parents, families, educators, children and young people have rights and responsibilities;
- all people should be treated with dignity and respect, irrespectively of their background;
- each person is unique and brings their own values, culture, skills; interests and experiences to share;
- cross sectoral action is necessary to establish agreed prioritises, maximize use of resources, reduce duplication and assist coordinate action by different sectors.

Project Outline

A Steering Committee was established to guide the project and an INLLEN Partnership Broker coordinated the Project. The Steering Committee has been made up of representatives from local schools, community agencies, the Northern Metropolitan Region Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (NMR DEECD) and Catholic Education Office of Melbourne (See Committee list Appendix 1).

A full outline of the scope of the Project has been included in Appendix 2. The Project to date has included a:

- Literature Review;
- Environmental and resource scan;
- Principal School survey;
- From My School to Our School Forum; and
- Focus group with students and parents and Teacher Survey.

A summary of each activity in the Project scope and outcomes have been outlined within this document to broaden our understanding of the context of parent and family engagement in the Inner Northern Region. Such information will be utilised to inform future action to advance this area of work in the Inner Northern region.

The INLLEN Parent and Family Engagement Project has been exploratory in nature to develop greater understanding of the current local context of parent and family engagement in learning within the education and community sectors; and to create the right environment that achieves effective parent and family engagement for communities and schools in the inner northern region of Melbourne. The Parent and Family Engagement Project initiatives are summarised below.

Literature Review

Parent engagement and parent involvement are often interchanged in literature and practice. Parent engagement has been defined as being about parents engagement in their children's learning and not necessarily school. The Project acknowledges parents as the first educators in their children's lives and as partners with schools bring their own perspective, knowledge and life experience to their role. Parents and families are also continuing educators (Macgregor, 2005). Often educators knowledge is acknowledged, but parent knowledge is not always valued or utilized (Pushor, 2008).

The work of Joyce Epstein and her colleagues (USA) has often underpinned policy and programs of parent and family engagement in Australia by Government Departments, schools and agencies. The Australian Family-School Partnership Project Framework is modeled on the work of Epstein and her colleagues. Seven dimensions of this framework are:

- Communicating;
- Connecting Learning at home and at school;
- Building Community and Identity;

- Recognising the roles of families;
- Consultative Decision making;
- Collaborating Beyond the School,
- & Participating.

Other models have been emerging such as the work of George Otero who was a keynote speaker at the "From My School to Our School Forum" held as part of this Project (See Appendix 5 for further information).

Parents may face barriers and challenges to actively participate in their children's learning to the level they may want to or educators may perceive they should. Some barriers and challenges may relate to:

- language and culture;
- the parents own experience of school in their country of origin or in Australia,
- work commitments;
- family composition &
- personal difficulties such as alcohol and drug and mental health issues.

Some key areas to consider in parent and family engagement is the distribution of power; roles, responsibilities and expectations of students, parents, families and educators. Creating educationally orientated ambiance and optimism contributes to a positive learning and life outcomes for children and young people. Positive relationships between parents and families and schools can assist children and young person develop a sense of support and belonging and this contributes to their resilience in times of adversity.

There is considerable work being undertaken in Australia in parent and family engagement and gradually more case studies are becoming publicly available as this field advances. There is however less literature available in Australia about parent engagement on a secondary school level. Data appears to be qualitative in nature and there is a need for a stronger evaluation methodology to focus on defining and measuring outcomes in relation to parent and family engagement in their children's learning.

Environmental Scan

The Environmental Scan has revealed that there are a number of Government policies and programs focusing on the area of parent and family engagement to enhance educational and life outcomes for children and young people. The Parent and Family Engagement Project is guided by the following documents identified in the Scan:

1. The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2008);
2. Victorian Government Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD, 2008);
3. National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Education Policy (DEEWR, 2009);
4. Wannik – Education Strategy, (DEECD, 2009);

5.   Parent and Community Engagement Program (PaCE), (DEEWR, 2009);
6.   Smarter Schools National Partnership (NP's) for Low Socio-economic Status School Communities; (DEECD, 2010);
7.   Effective Schools are Engaging Schools Student Engagement Policy Guidelines (DEECD 2009)
8.   Northern Metropolitan Region's (NMR) School Improvement Strategy, Powerful Learning-Taking Educational Reform to Scale (DEECD-NMR, 2009).

See further explanation of the Policies and Programs in Section 3.

There are a number of programs in the Inner Northern region and statewide agencies focusing on the needs of children and young people from low socioeconomic status, Koorie and from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD). There are significant number of agencies and diversity of programs in the Inner Northern region focused around working with parents and children. See INLLEN website for further examples of parent and family engagement projects.

Principals School Survey

The Principal School survey was completed by 10 secondary schools in the Inner Northern region. Three key barriers identified for the school staff were;

- language barriers;
- cultural challenges &
- parent/s and family members own school experience was not very positive.

Other challenges related to school and parent expectations, family dynamics, communication and engagement. School staff were able to identify an array of working strategies to engage parents and families in schools such as:

- Program Activities;
- Student – Parent School Liaison;
- Cultural Initiatives;
- School Committees and Groups &
- Engagement with External agencies.

Whilst the majority of school staff in the survey cited challenges around language, culture or low Socio-economic Status issues, only fifty per cent of these schools had specific strategies to engage families from CALD, Indigenous or low SES backgrounds. One school indicated that they had negotiated a formal partnership agreement with Koorie parents.

Part B of the Survey further explored parent-school engagement. The key areas of school engagement were identified to be in the areas of information provision, student welfare and pathway. The schools were able to provide examples of how they communicated with parents. Five schools were already assisting families with parenting skills and setting home conditions to support children as students. The use of volunteers in schools was limited to three schools. Seven schools involved parents in school decisions; and four schools identified they collaborated with the community.

From My School to Our School Forum

The Forum was an outstanding success bringing together educators and community practitioners to discuss the concept and practice of parent and family engagement. George Otero, keynote speaker addressed the Forum around educators developing a whole child approach and viewing the school as part of a community rather than as an institution. Additional reading had been provided in Appendix 5 by George Otero and his colleagues. Danielle Cronin, NSW Executive Director of the Council of Catholic School Parents is a strong advocate for parent and family engagement in schools and the formation of strong partnerships between parents, families and schools.

Twenty four different agencies and schools joined the Forum as Table Presenters and provided information to delegates around their projects, funding sources, highlights and challenges. There was also the presence of some Peak bodies and Government Departments with interest and responsibilities in the area of parent and family engagement. See INLLEN website for full Extracts written by Table Presenters.

The Forum evaluation provided insight into how the delegates were responding to the messages presented at the Forum by keynote speakers and table presenters. Delegates spent time deliberating how they could implement or change parent and family engagement at their school; build and strengthen relationships between schools and community agencies; and what additional resources they may need access to. Emerging themes from the forum were around:

- Defining Parent Engagement or Involvement;
- Overcoming challenges;
- Process of change;
- Partnerships;
- Evidence Based Practice/Best Practice;
- Young People as partners &
- Diversity.

Parent and Student Focus Groups and Teachers Survey

The Focus group and Survey explored parents, young people and educators experiences of parent and family engagement at a local secondary college. The participant's responses provide insight into challenges and barriers around the issue of parent engagement. Commonalities emerged in the three groups about why parents may have difficulty in engagement and these areas related to:

- language and cultural difficulties;
- parents own experience of education in Australia or overseas &
- time constraints;

All the students and parents supported parent engagement in their children's learning. Of the five parents in the Focus group, four parents identified they wanted their children to aspire to complete year 12 or beyond. One parent identified that she focused on instilling in her children the importance of doing what makes them happy. All of her children are very engaged in school and in learning. All parents identified the importance of showing an interest in their children's learning and overall wellbeing and it was their responsibility to be engaged in their children's learning.

School staff identified that parent and family engagement challenges related to time; parents own experience of school; different expectations and values around education; issues relating to the school system; and parents having own issues.

In Part B of the survey, School staff were provided with a list of value statements and were asked to respond to these statements. The majority of the staff agreed-strongly or agreed that family agreement was important in their children's achievement and success at school. Only one respondent disagreed. When asked about whether families at the school were interested in the their children's learning, the school staff identified interest varied between families; parent participation varied between events the school held; gaps were identified about how to engage parents or determine whether they are interested in being involved.

Teacher and parent expectations may be different about education and role of schools. A parent may see that students are responsible to achieve at school, while other parents may want school staff to "fix" their children. Six school staff agreed that the school sought, listened and acted upon parent views, two school staff strongly agreed and one staff member was not sure. School staff generally agreed that teachers are supportive in developing meaningful relationships with families. Staff members identified strategies to build on this area in the school and there was gap identified in having more Arabic speaking support workers and an Arabic parent support group for the school.

Letters and newsletters were key strategies identified by teachers used to communicate with parents by schools. Seven school staff identified that the Principal and teachers communicated personally with families on an ongoing basis. Two staff members were unsure whether this occurred and one staff member disagreed. The majority of school staff identified that the school had good connections with community agencies and businesses.

Conclusion

INLLEN staff have demonstrated that it is possible to activate a Parent and Family Engagement Project utilizing a cross sectoral approach across a regional area. The project has generated significant interest in schools, community agencies and Government departments and there has been a willingness of many people to join the projects Steering Group and participate in initiatives. The Steering Group have been willing to share their experience and expertise to inform the actions of the Project and assist support activities such as the Forum. A '*From My School to Our School Forum*" has brought together educators and community practitioners to explore parent and family engagement initiatives already on the ground and to look at ways to advance this area within their own school or agency. This event was very well supported and has generated much interest in the Project and local school initiatives. A 'From My School to Our School' Community of Interest has been initiated by INLLEN to continue to engage Forum delegates and other interested people and build capacity around parent and family engagement.

Different evaluation tools have been tested during the project, and in planning further data collection their usefulness should be reviewed to ascertain whether they can be improved or alternative methods used.

SECTION 1 - LITERARY REVIEW

Introduction

Over the past two decades, parent and family engagement in their children's learning has been evolving into a field of practice. The main premise underpinning parent and family engagement has been that if parents and families are engaged in their children's learning, then their education and life outcomes for their children will be more positive. This literature review will explore current themes around parent and family engagement to inform the project; identify a definition of what parent and family engagement is; and consider ideas which may guide the development of future strategies in the Inner Northern region in this area of practice.

Engagement or Involvement

Overseas and Australian research around parent and family engagement defines what engagement is and how it can be used. The terms 'parent engagement' and 'parent involvement' have been interchanged over time, but have different meanings. Epstein (2002) identifies that the term parental involvement implies that parents are involved to serve the school agenda and do what educators ask of them. Parent engagement is perceived to be broader and is about what degree parents are involved in their children's education (Constantino, 2003).

Pushor (2008) defines parent engagement as being based on a partnership approach rather than teachers being positioned in the relationship as the being 'knowing professionals' and the parents are the 'unknowing or less knowing' about their children. Parent knowledge is often not clearly defined or acknowledged by educators and in the school context. Pushor is a strong advocate for a cultural shift where parents are repositioned alongside educators in their children's learning. Parent's experience is viewed by Pushor (2008) as having the potential to enrich and extend the perspective of educators.

Outcomes from Engagement

Various researchers have identified positive outcomes from partnerships between students, families and schools (Epstein, 2007, Pushor 2008, MacGregor, 2005b). The Australian Family-School Partnerships Project report identifies that parent involvement strategies impacts on the student, parent, school and community in varying ways as to:

- *"improve educational outcomes for students;*
- *contribute to the building of social capital in the community;*
- *positively alter school culture;*
- *stimulate self growth amongst parents, and*
- *enhance the professional rewards for principals and school staff."* (DEEWR, 2006, *p.14)*

Epstein (2002) also refers to children and families developing a greater sense of personal competence and a stronger belief in the role and importance of education through parent and family engagement. The Victorian Implementation Plan for National Smarter Schools Partnerships identifies that research shows: "*the greater parental involvement in education encourages more positive*

attitudes towards school, improves homework habits, reduces absenteeism and dropout, and enhances academic achievement (DEECD, 2010, p.16.)."

Family-School Partnerships

Epstein and her colleagues from the John Hopkins University (USA) has been very influential in policy and practice in parent and family engagement in their children's learning in the Australian context. A *Family-School Partnerships Framework: A Guide for Schools and Families (DEEWR, 2008)* was modelled on the work of Epstein and her colleagues. The seven dimensions in the Australian Family-School Partnership framework provide good guidance for any new parent – school partnerships:

1.   Communicating

Effective communication is identified as being active, personal, frequent, culturally appropriate and multidimensional (informal, formal, letter, phone, email). Communication between families and schools should be two way and provide opportunities to learn from each other. School staff should be welcoming and friendly to families for genuine partnerships to form. Efforts should be made by schools to overcome perceived barriers based on language and culture. Assumptions should not be made that all families communicate the same way and consideration should be given to cultural and linguistic diversity. Schools are required to invite parent involvement and be open to family needs, attitudes and their input.

2.   Connecting Learning at home and at school

There are overlaps between the home and school environment and children's learning and parents and schools can work together to create positive attitudes towards learning in each child. Parents need ongoing feedback and can work with teachers in an educational decision making process for their individual child. Families and schools need to value the contribution of skills and knowledge from both the home and school. Schools are seen as a "*venue and agent for parent self-growth, learning and the development of new skills*." (p.6)

3.   Building Community and Identity

Building activities which focus on improving the quality of life in a community have value as they are *"honouring the culture, traditions, values and relationships in that community. (p.6)"* Schools are seen as having a role in the development of aspects of the child's social emotional, moral and spiritual self which is related to individual and cultural identity. Schools can be a connection point for communities to gather together and build student, family, school and community capacity.

4.   Recognising the Role of Families

Parents and families are acknowledged as having a lasting influence on their child's attitudes and achievements at school. They are perceived as having the ability to encourage their child's learning inside and outside the school and also support the "*goals, directions and ethos (p.6)."* Schools are looked upon by parents as being secure and caring environments for their children. For effective partnerships schools and parents must develop a working understanding of each other's roles and prioritises.

5.   Consultative decision making

Parents are seen as being entitled to be consulted and have opportunities to participate in decisions about their children. It is acknowledged that parents can play meaningful roles in school decision making processes. Shared decision making and parental involvement creates a sense of shared responsibility.

6.   Collaborating Beyond the School

This dimension focuses on identifying, locating, and integrating community resources to strengthen and support students, parents and schools.

7.   Participating

The framework acknowledges that family "*time, energy and expertise can support learning and school programs in a number of ways*" (p.8). Parents participation is seen as invaluable in the school setting in classroom activities, outside of the classroom, and supporting and valuing teachers. This dimension does not clearly define parent and school partnership in relation to an individual child's learning, but tends to focus on what families can do to enhance the school environment. The framework creates clear linkage between the home and school environment and highlights the interrelationships between family school and community in the responsibility of raising a child.

There are other approaches being used in different schools such as Outward Facing Schools in the United Kingdom and in Australia. See the Additional Reading, Appendix 5 from George Otero and West-Burnham et al (2007) about their approach. West-Burnham et al (2007) identify that all children can become a successful student, person and citizen through partnerships developed between parents, schools, and community. The authors views education as broader than fostering only academic achievement, but also includes the promotion of physical and emotional health and preparing students for successful transition into work and further study. Parents, schools and community all have a role in this task.

Categories of Parent-School Engagement

The Australian Council of State School Organisation (ACSSO) and Australian Parents Council sponsored extensive qualitative and quantitative research around Family-School Partnerships in Australia conducted by Saulwick Muller Social Research (2005-2006).[1] Within 61 Australian schools from Catholic, Government and Independent schools researchers were able to define two different categories –traditional role types and social change types based on their progress towards the fulfillment of the ideal partnerships between parents and families and schools.

The traditional role types focused on traditional functions of schools and the social change types were responding to wider factors derived from community needs. Within the main groups, there were a number of sub-categories. Some schools did not neatly fit into one category, but the information provides a framework for schools to assess where they currently sit and where they may want to move to.

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[1] Funded by the then Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training

Role Type	Description	No of Schools
Traditional Role Types		
The Fully Fledged Partners	Schools with an embedded culture of accepting parents as full partners in their children's education.	4
The Culture Changes	Schools that accept in principle the idea that parents are full partners in their children's education, but are having to undergo major cultural change to allow this to happen	4
The Engagers	Schools that recognize the need to engage parents, where the partnership concept is still evolving, and where this work is generally a precursor to making it real. More or less entirely school driven	17
The Seekers	Schools that are finding out what the needs of their parents are with the view of improving communications. Fulfillment of the partnership ideas lies somewhere beyond this preliminary work.	10
The Governance-Orientated	Schools that recognize parents as partners, but give effect to it through changes to governance structures which give parents a broader role in school decision making	2
Social Change Types		
The Social Capital Builders	Schools that reach out to the parent body and beyond to provide resources for the building of social capital in the community.	19
The Resilience Builders	Schools that supply the main resources for parents in helping keep their children at school, avoid substance abuse and other dangers, so that they may have a better life chance	5

(Information from Saulwick Muller Social Research, 2006, p.15-16)

The Role Types table provides evidence that different schools play different roles in relation to parent and family engagement and that such roles vary and are socially constructed. Therefore schools can determine what role they want to play in Parent and Family Engagement and can change current practice to become more inclusive of parents and families.

Parents and Family Engagement

Rupert MacGregor's paper on Professional Development for Family School Partnerships identifies that research shows:

"C*hildren's learning outcomes, health and wellbeing are improved when parents, families and school work closely together (2005b, p.2)".*

MacGregor contended that this is a well known fact in education and by educators, but such a: "*desired condition does not happen of itself or without careful strategic planning and very hard, interactive work (2005, p.2).*" Some reasons identified by McConchie (2004, cited MacGregor, 2005b) as barriers to the progression of parent and family engagement related to:

- Principals beliefs that their power may be eroded with parenting with families around decision making;
- Teachers concerns about their levels of professionalism being threatened;
- Schools do not see that they necessarily have a role in assisting parents and families to see themselves as partners and co-educator in their children's education;
- A perception by educators that parents don't know how they should be involved; and
- Understanding of research and its application in the school setting.

The most significant challenge was the perceived lack of preparation of Principals and teachers to work with parents and families in their professional training. Additional training for school staff may be a consideration in any change process to increase parent and family involvement. Where parents and families and educators may have varying expectations, it may not be obvious how parties can or should work together. School practice can knowingly or unknowingly exclude parents from being involved in their children's learning and school processes. Parental hostility towards the school may be a response to having been excluded, intimidated, fobbed off or kept in the dark by the school (DEEWR, 2006). Parents may also have their own barriers why they may not want to engage with the school which should also be examined. Potentially partnerships between community agencies and schools can enhance opportunities for engagement with parents and families where schools may perceive they do not have the knowledge or experience to change how they currently work and overcome perceived barriers or challenges in this area of practice.

A Parents Perspective

There is significant information available about schools perspective on family-school partnerships, but very little written about the parent and families perspective in Australia. The work of Hoover-Dempsey and Sadler (1997) does however identify three factors influencing parent's involvement in their children's learning:

1. parent role construction (the belief they should be involved),
2. parents' sense of efficacy (the belief they are capable of helping), and
3. general invitations, demands and opportunities for involvement from the child and school.

Such research may assist community practitioners and educators gain insight into why some parents who have had their own poor experience of the education system may find it difficult to engage in their own children's education or school. The strength of the relationships between the parent and teacher-school is identified by Hoover-Dempsey and Sadler as very important to successful parent engagement.

Maggie Yu (2011) identifies that parent self efficacy also relates to the parents belief about their ability to provide the emotional, social and cultural support to their children. The author suggests that support interventions can assist parents develop new relationships and extend their networks, fostering self efficacy.

Jeynes (2005) identified that parental involvement in schools "*enjoys an influence that largely transcends differences in SES, race and other factors.*" The author argues that creating "*an educationally orientated ambiance* "produces the strongest results in children's academic

achievement. This factor may be defined as an attitude or an atmosphere which forms for a child a sense of standard and support.

Children and young people's attitudes, values and behaviours to a large extent are formed in the family context and through partnerships schools-families can reinforce positive attitudes, values and behaviours (Macgregor, 2005b). Hattie (2003) identifies that these three components are the most significant in students learning and development together with family encouragement and expectations. Such components contribute 60% to children's learning and development (MacGregor, 2005a). This percentage is a combination of the student and parent contribution added together.

There is a danger of oversimplifying complex interrelationships and further research is needed to understand and make explicit the impact of such factors on student outcomes in Australia.

Parent-Teacher Relationship

MacGregor (2005b) notes that research findings often show families are judged as having needs and not having positive attributes. Teachers and other professionals may then believe they have to compensate for these deficiencies and paternalistic practices can be perpetuated where the views of young people and parents may not be sought or given any value. Research by Porter (2008) provides a continuum of four different parent – teacher relationship styles which may develop and should be considered in this discussion. The author identifies that in a professionally driven relationship the parent is often seen as the source of the child's problems and the parent can be negatively labeled. Communication is likely to be one way. The family allied approach is where the parent carries out assigned tasks designed by the practitioner. The parent is an agent of the practitioner and communication is likely to be directive.

In the family centered approach, there is equal participation between school – parents and the sharing of skills, knowledge and expertise. In the Family Centered model, Porter however criticises the practicality of this model lays in the "*lack of resources (often time)*" that they would need to establish frequent contacts with parents. At a secondary school level, a parent would need to develop many relationships with a number of different teachers who may interact with their child on a daily basis. Teachers may not have the necessary training or experience to act as counsellors or support to the student and family.

A family driven relationship style is where the parent chooses to be actively involved in their child's education and the parent and students articulate their own goals. Parents are viewed as drivers of their children's education and having considerable knowledge about their children. Additional support may be required to support the child such as tutoring outside of the school and family. In this approach, parents and young people are perceived as experts in their own lives.

Young People – Parents and Families

Research has demonstrated that parents along with community, school and children and young people's individual factors play a major role in building resilience and promoting successful transition from childhood to adulthood. Significant work has been undertaken in Australian schools around resilience and good mental health practice and building healthy schools. Parent involvement in their children's education has been identified as an important protective factor in the area of

resilience (Department of Health and Ageing, 2010). While young people are moving through the adolescence period, it coincides with the move for students from primary to secondary school. Parent and family factors can make this transition more difficult for the young person. Some children and young people will fare well in the face of risk factors such as poverty; child abuse and neglect, parental mental illness, parent substance abuse and divorce (Toumbourou & Gregg, 2001).

Positive relationships between parent, families and young people are considered to have significant influence over the development of positive attitudes and behaviours (Hutchinson, 2003). Robinson et al (2010) identify that close relationships is a protective factor against poor life outcomes. Parents and families act as a 'secure base' for young people in their adolescent years, particularly mothers. In early childhood the secure base serves "*a physical and psychological role*", but in adolescence the "*emotional and psychological support offered via a warm and communicative child parent relationship plays an even more important role* (Robinson et al, 2010)." Parents and significant other adults play a 'scaffolding role' where support is given to the young person when needed and not provided when not perceived as being needed. The parent plays an adviser or support role and responds to the level of support required by a young person. This role is often underestimated and is highly valued by young people themselves. As young people develop into early adulthood, parents still provide an important presence in the lives of young people.

The role of parents and families may vary in a different cultural context. Some cultures emphases the importance of the individual, while others cultures tend to place greater emphasis on the role of the family. Young people from CALD and Indigenous communities experience growing up in two cultures and having strong cultural identify can promote resilience and enhance social and emotional wellbeing. Social exclusion has been identified as a factor which inhibits young people's chances of achievement, not just economic disadvantage. Social exclusion can impose social and cultural isolation on young people and "*schools often unintentionally entrench the isolation by failing to make themselves open to a wide range of support and influence in their communities.*" (Bentley 1998 in DE&T,NSW).

Conclusion

There is considerable depth of literature around parent and family engagement on an international level and an evolving field in Australia. The work of Epstein has been guiding much of the work in parent-family engagement in Australia, but there has been considerable work in Australia which could be drawn upon to guide future activities. The A *Family-School Partnerships Framework: A Guide for Schools and Families (DEEWR, 2008)* is a structured and evidence based program developed to be implemented in Australian Schools and may provide guidance for schools initiated parent-family-school engagement. Parent and Family engagement is not about developing one off programs within schools, but embracing the communities linked to the school and developing a whole school approach. The literature search has identified the need for parents, families, and schools to work together to create an environment which supports opportunities for young people to reach their full potential. When working with young people at a secondary level, consideration needs to be given to young people being the centre of their own learning and how young people-families, agencies and schools can all work together in partnerships.

SECTION 2 - ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

Introduction

An Environmental and Resource Scan was carried out in the beginning of the Project to expand knowledge about parent and family engagement in the INLLEN region (Darebin, Moreland and Yarra). The Scan focused predominantly on programs and resources for children in the 10 – 19 age group and secondary schools. Information was collected through an internet search; and through consultation with local agencies; and drawing on the professional experience and expertise of INLLEN staff members and Steering Committee members. Some areas identified in this scan have been expanded throughout this document to enhance understanding of programs, policies and networks in the INLLEN region.

Existing Programs

Within the Inner Northern region, a range of community organisations offer programs for children, parents, and families relevant to this project. These programs have been grouped under two main categories:

1. For Parents and Families

Some areas in this category are:
- general Parent,
- Family and children's services,
- Learning/Education;
- Migrant/Refugee community specific;
- Ethnic /Cultural specific;
- Koorie/Indigenous Australian specific, &
- Specific to parents and families of students with disabilities.

The programs hosted by the various agencies included: seminars, workshops, group work, case work, in-home support, support groups, training and employment.

2. For Practitioners who work with Parents and Families

These programs include training programs, Family Partnerships Convenors (specific role), and resource provision.

Networks and Associations

Networks and Associations were identified which currently provide linkages between community programs for parents and families and schools in relation to supporting either parents and/or practitioners around the theme of parent and family engagement. Many of these services were not located in the local area, but may have already had links in the region or have resources and expertise available which could be used in the region. Some of the groups identified were:

- Association for Children with a Disability (Disability)
- Australian Camp Connect Association
- Australian Council of State School Associations

- Australian Parents Council
- Council of Single Mothers and their Children
- Council of Catholic School Parents (CCSP) in NSW has a fairly in-depth website called, Partners 4 Learning, to support Catholic School communities however it can be used by schools across sectors
- Drummond Street Relationship Centre
- Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau
- Learning Beyond the Bell
- Northern Parent Educators' Network
- Northern Parent Support Program (Disability)
- Parent LD Education and Support Group (Disability)
- Parenting Research Centre
- ParentLine
- Parents Victoria
- Parentzone (Anglicare)
- The Victorian Council of School Organisations Inc (VICCSO)
- Victorian Catholic Schools Parent Body

See INLLEN website for further information about the organizations listed above. The Networks and Associations have a wide range of publications and other resources available on their websites. Other organisations such as the Department Employment Education and Childhood Development (DEECD), Catholic Education Office, and Independent Schools Victoria also have good information available on their websites. Resources are targeted towards parents; practitioners who work with parents and families and/or schools. Some of the resources were available in different community languages from the local area.

Case Studies

There appeared to be more case study examples of parent and family involvement/engagement available from Primary schools rather than Secondary schools in Australia. Several relevant case studies from Secondary schools in the outer suburbs of Melbourne and regional Victoria were from Yea High School, Eaglehawk, Cranbourne, Cleeland, and Maroondah Secondary College. A few secondary schools were acknowledged as 'best practice examples' in the field of parent and family engagement or family-school-community partnerships.

Relevant Projects

Some relevant Projects identified possibly relevant to the region were identified:

Victorian Arabic Social Services	We Are One	Parent Surveys – Summary of findings completed
Northern Metropolitan Region-Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD)	Primary Schools Project	National Partnerships funding, Training parents, local school action plan - 10 schools involved

DEECD	Strengthening Family Engagement in Schools	Website: Families as Partners in Learning
DEECD	Extended School Hub pilot	National Partnerships funding
The Victorian Council of School Organisations Inc (VICCSO)	Good Governance Practices of School Council	Identify use of Podcasts to promote
VICSSO	School Family Community Partnerships	Identify case studies, Promote good practices, Develop a mini e-documentary
Department of Education, Employment and Work Place Relations (DEEWR) (Federal)	Parental Engagement in Schooling and Low SES Communities	Developing case studies, building national toolkit for schools for school-family-community partnerships, liaising with the Australian Institute for Schools and Teaching Leadership to understand the standards for parental engagement for teachers

Current Policies and Funding

Section 3 provides further details of current policy and programs identified in the Environmental scan in the region.

SECTION 3 – SETTING THE POLICY AND PROGRAM CONTEXT

Increasingly Australian Educational policy is recognizing the importance of parent and family engagement in their children's learning within the context of improved school-family-community partnerships. Policies related to this area of work are becoming focused on strengthening and building the capacity of parents, schools and communities to play an active role in the education of children. Some policies and programs relevant to the INLLEN parent and family engagement project are:

1.   **The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals For Young Australians (Ministerial Council On Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2008)**

All State, Territory and Commonwealth Education Ministers made a national commitment to improve outcomes for all students and included targeted supports for disadvantaged students to achieve better and more equitable educational outcomes. Indigenous children and young people, students from low socio-economic backgrounds, those children and young people from remote areas, refugees, homeless young people and students with disabilities were identified as being at risk of experiencing educational disadvantage and requiring particular support. The Declaration focuses on providing students in Government, Catholic and Independent Schools with access to high-quality schooling free of discrimination based on gender, language, sexual orientation, pregnancy, culture, ethnicity, religion, health or disability, socioeconomic background or geographic location.

2.   **Victorian Government Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD, 2008)**

The Victorian Government Blueprint sets a vision that: *"every young Victorian thrives, learns and grows to enjoy a productive, rewarding and fulfilling life, while contributing to their local and global communities."*

Children and young people from low socio-economic families and Koorie were identified as being over presented in the area of underachievement and be under represented amongst high achievers. Education is perceived in the document as being the most effective pathway for children and young people out of disadvantage and social exclusion. The Blueprint sets down a framework to ensure all children and young people can achieve regardless of their cultural background and location. One of three key strategies to achieve address achievement is partnerships with parents and communities. Parents and communities are identified as *"the first and most enduring influences on children's development* (2008, p.12)" The Blueprint acknowledges that children will develop and learn best in environments where they are supported and safe.

3.   **National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Education Policy (DEEWR, 2009)**

There are four key goals to the Education Policy. They are:
- Involvement of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people in Educational decision making;
- Equity and Access to Education services;
- Equity to Education Participation;
- Equitable & Appropriate Educational Outcomes.

4.   Wannik – Learning Together – Journey to Our Future (DEECD, 2008).

The Wannik Education Strategy proposes to bring about significant changes at all levels within the education system to bridge the disparity in educational outcomes between Koorie and non-Koorie students. There will be reforms in the Victorian government school system's education of Koorie students to support greater student engagement; more literacy and numeracy support; support and encouragement for high-achieving students; expansion and development of the Koorie workforce; renewed focus on parental engagement; and sharing of responsibility across government.

5.   Parent and Community Engagement Program (PaCE), (DEEWR)

The PaCE program targets parents of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people (0-19 years) and Indigenous communities. The main objectives of the PaCE Program are to enhance the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to:

- engage with schools and education providers in order to support improved educational outcomes for their children
- build strong leadership that supports high expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' educational outcomes
- support the establishment, implementation and/or ongoing progress of community-school partnership agreements; and
- support and reinforce children's learning at home.

6.   Smarter Schools National Partnership (NP's) for Low Socio-economic Status School Communities (Council of Australian Government 2008, DEECD)

The Victorian Implementation Plan (2010) for the National Smarter School Partnerships program focuses around three areas: literacy and numeracy, improving teacher quality and low socio-economic status school communities. The Plan acknowledges the presence of a strong relationship between family and community socioeconomic status, educational disadvantage and geographical location. One of the key reform priorities within this National Partnership is: *School-community engagement and extended schools.* This includes a particular focus on engaging parents, community and business in schools and students' learning. The initiative also has a cross sectoral approach and promotes the sharing of knowledge and experience and working on common projects across clusters, areas and regions. There is a focus in Government schools on capacity building and Extended School Hub pilots; Independent schools will focus on student well being and community engagement mentors; and Catholic school will focus on Family School Partnership Convenors.

Identified Low SES Schools in Inner Northern region include**:**

- Australian International Academy of Education, North Coburg;
- Ballert Murrup Community College, Glenroy;
- Glenroy College, Glenroy
- Darul Ulum College of Victoria, Fawkner
- East Preston Islamic College; East Preston
- John Fawkner Secondary College; Moreland
- Lynall Hall Community School; Richmond
- William Ruthven Secondary College, Darebin
- Northland Secondary College; Preston East

- Pascoe Vale Girls Secondary College, Pascoe Vale;
- Preston Girls Secondary College, Preston;
- Reservoir District Secondary College, Reservoir (DEEWR).

7. Effective Schools are Engaging Schools - Student Engagement Policy Guidelines (DEECD, 2009)

Effective Schools are Engaging Schools - Student Engagement Policy Guidelines promote student engagement, attendance and positive behaviours in Victorian government schools. Within the Guidelines, the Department is perceived to have a responsibility to provide safe, secure and stimulating learning environments in all Victorian government schools. Within the Guidelines, Element 1: Creating positive and engaging school culture's, refers to proactively engaging with parents/carers (Item 1.6) in their children's learning and the school environment. For this to occur, schools are required to provide an environment which:

"Engages all families as equal partners in the education of children and young people. All school staff can contribute to the creation of a welcoming culture for parents/carers and families. In turn, schools should foster high parent/carer and family expectations for their school's performance and school completion for their children."(DEED, 2009)

8. Powerful Learning, Northern Metropolitan Regional, School Improvement Strategy (DEECD NMR)

The School Improvement Strategy focuses on improving the outcomes of all students, regardless of location or background and that student's postcode should not predict their destiny. The Strategy identifies that student ethnicity, gender and other factors are reasons why there are differences in educational outcomes, but:

"*They are not reasons why they do not learn. The teacher is the most significant factor in improving student achievement.*"(DEECD -NMR, 2009, p.9)

The Strategy identifies the importance of family and community partnerships and identifies that:
NMR will undertake the following activities:

- *"Provide guidance to schools and early childhood services about how to better engage parents and support vulnerable families through initiating a program that assists parents to further develop their homes as positive learning environments;*
- *Promote schools and children's centres as community hubs by establishing early childhood centres on school sites*
- *Pilot transition plans for children starting primary school*
- *Develop models of practice that strengthen school responsibility for monitoring young people's pathways (2009, p.20)."*

SECTION 4 – THE INNER NORTHERN REGION CONTEXT

The INLLEN Environmental Scan 2011 (Myconos and Slater) provides useful information to consider in the context of parent and family engagement in the Inner Northern Region. The INLLEN region has a population of approximately 366, 771 people. Almost 7% of the total population are children and young people between the ages of 10-17 years. Some challenges identified in the Scan for children and young people and families in the region are:

- *A large number of early school leavers in the 10-15 age group;*
- *high levels of disengagement of young people from education, employment and training;*
- *non-completion of Year 12 and Equivalent Certificate II;*
- *levels of high youth unemployment;*
- *many young people not job ready and lacking key foundation skills, literacy, numeracy, vocational qualifications and work experience required in the contemporary workforce;*
- *low levels of uptake in apprenticeships and traineeships;*
- *difficulty in reengaging young people back into education and training;*

In 2007, the Northern Metropolitan Region's (NMR) literacy and numeracy achievement levels were reported to be amongst the lowest in Victoria. The factors identified contributing to the poor levels of achievement are:

- *"the low socio-economic circumstances of many students in the region*
- *ineffective classroom management techniques*
- *outdated and ineffective teaching practice*
- *a lack of focused and strategic professional development programs for teachers and school leaders*
- *inconsistent whole school implementation of improvement initiatives*
- *the absence of a coherent, strategic approach to school improvement(DEECD-NMR)."*

Socio-economic Disadvantage

Within the Index of Socio-Economic Disadvantage in Victoria, Yarra, Darebin and Moreland municipalities are characterised by high levels of disadvantage (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).[2] Disadvantage is derived from attributes such as:

- low income,
- high unemployment,
- engagement of residents in relatively unskilled work,
- and low educational attainment.

The Inner Northern region faces additional challenges based on its diversity and low economic status. Some challenges are the presence of pockets of extreme disadvantage concentrated in the three public housing estate areas of Collingwood, Richmond and Fitzroy; CALD and newly arrived refugees; a shift in manufacturing businesses and industry profile to further north reducing the

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[2] Yarra, Moreland and Darebin are ranked 19th, 25th and 27th respectively with the 31st being the most disadvantaged.

availability of low skilled jobs; and pressures on low income families having to relocate further north for lower cost accommodation (Myconos and Slater, 2011).

Koorie Community

Over 1100 Koorie and Torres Strait Islander people currently reside in Darebin which is the largest Indigenous population in metropolitan Victoria (City of Darebin website). In the 2006 Census, there are approximately 626 Indigenous residents living in Moreland which has been increased from the previous census. There is a notable difference in *"educational levels, the age profile of the community, housing tenure and unemployment in the Indigenous community (p.11)."* The Indigenous community has a significantly higher proportion of children and young people than the non-Indigenous community. In Yarra, there is a relatively small Indigenous population of approximately 250 people. The Yarra area has been a critical service centre for Indigenous services and organisations. Over 200 Indigenous people work in Yarra and over 1000 Indigenous people visit Yarra each week to access services based there. There were approximately 290 Indigenous young people residing in the three municipals recorded in the 2006 Census. In 2008, there were 56 Koorie students enrolled in secondary schools in Yarra. (Myconos and Slater, 2011).

In the Inner Northern Region of Melbourne, there are approximately 600 Koorie young people enrolled in secondary schools. The largest populations are at Reservoir High School (70); Thornbury High School (50) and Northland Secondary College (40), with most schools in the region have a small number of Koorie students. In 2009, the Year 10-12 Koorie student enrolments for INLLEN indicates 50% of Koorie young people left school before commencing Year 10. The Koorie student enrolment 2009 included 42 students in Year 10; 34 students in Year 11 and 26 students in Year 12. Some issues identified to be addressed to improve outcomes for Koorie young people include:
- high levels of early school leavers Year 7 to 9;
- Literacy and numeracy issues;
- The school environment not being supportive of Koorie young people;
- Poor parental engagement with the schools;
- Better case management support for Koorie young people at risk of disengagement from education (INLLEN, 2010)

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)

Yarra, Darebin and Moreland municipalities are all culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. Approximately a third of the population were born overseas and speak another language apart from English. Residents have come from countries such as Italy, Greece, United Kingdom, India, New Zealand, Turkey, Lebanon, China, Vietnam and Malta. The area is also home to a large proportion of families from refugee and migrant backgrounds with almost 20% of the population coming from a non-English speaking background.

Challenges experienced by culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in Australia included discrimination and prejudice, social isolation and disenfranchisement, and difficulties in assimilating within the broader Australian culture; and maintaining a sense of identification with the culture of origin. In addition, refugees or people who have migrated to Australia may be suffering from undiagnosed or untreated trauma experienced before arriving in Australia.

Shifting demographics

Demographics in Australia have been shifting over the last ten years which have lead to the number of households headed by a sole parent to be continuing to increase. Sole parents are more likely to have increased levels of disadvantage in terms of employment, housing, income and social participation (Robinson, 2008). Where sole parents have greater control over the tenure of their housing, they are more likely to be able to focus on relationships and their child's education (Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, 2006, cited in Robinson, 2008).

SECTION 5 - SCHOOL PRINCIPAL'S SURVEY

Introduction

A School Survey targeting Principals in the region was developed around the theme of parent and family engagement. The survey was distributed to 36 secondary and specialist schools in the INLLEN area (Darebin, Moreland and Yarra). The aim of the survey was to collect base line data around the current activities each school undertakes in parent and family engagement across the region. Another aim was to get a better sense of how schools defined and put into practice the concepts of 'parent and family engagement'. Given the time constraints of Principals and competing demands, the survey was designed to be completed relatively easily.

Survey Distribution and Returns

The Survey was first distributed in November 2010 and a second round commenced in March 2011. Surveys were distributed by post during the first round and by email for both rounds. Of the thirty six schools, ten surveys were completed. Nine of the surveys were completed by the Principal (either on their own or with leading teachers) and one survey was completed by the Assistant Principal and Careers Coordinator. Survey responds were received from the following schools:

- Brunswick Secondary College;
- Fitzroy High School;
- Glenroy College;
- John Fawkner College;
- Mercy College;
- Northcote High School;
- Princes Hill Secondary College;
- Reservoir High School;
- Sydney Road Community School; &
- The Island.

The Committee acknowledges the contribution of the above schools for providing useful insight into parent and family engagement in their school. Catholic Schools and Independent schools are not represented in this sample. Additional information from school staff has been gathered in the '*From My School to Our School*' forum to further inform this Project. A summary of the school staff comments from the survey have been provided below.

Survey Responses

1. Issues and Challenges for parent and family engagement

School staff was asked to identify what the main issues/challenges were for parent and family engagement at their school. Three common responses were:

- language barriers;
- cultural challenges; &
- parents and family members own school experience was not very positive.

Additional comments related to school and parent expectations, family background and communication and engagement. Examples have been provided below for each of these categories:

a. School and Parent Expectations

School staff identified a perceived difference between school and parent expectations as a challenge or barrier. Some comments related to:

- *"Families not being committed to education. Lack of understanding of requirements of secondary school with regard to homework, commitment to standards and work ethic...."*
- *"Having parents actively support their children's learning"*
- *"Having all parents support legitimate discipline"*

b. Family Dynamics

Responses reflected family dynamics and relationships as barriers or challenges for parent and family engagement:

- *"Many parents are in full time employment or busy with a large number of younger children and are time poor"*
- *"Students come to the school with social emotional difficulties often associated with difficult family lives."*
- *"...Parenting and poor communication skills are an issue in some families."*

c. Communication and Engagement

Comments made by school staff included:

- *"Finding ways in which parents wish to be involved, particularly those from non English-speaking backgrounds"*
- *"Determining avenues for involvement and facilitating the involvement"*
- *"Establishing a culture where parents believe that their engagement with the school is important in their child's education"*

2. Working Strategies in School

School staff identified parent and family engagement strategies that have worked or are working really well in their school. There were five themes identified and some examples have been provided for each one:

a.   Program Activities

Some activities included:

- information nights;
- art show;
- learning expos;
- school performances;
- volunteering
- in specialty areas e.g. music, drama;
- guest speaking roles; and
- social barbeques.

b.   Student – Parent – School Liaison

- Parent-teacher interviews;
- Introduction to school supports;
- Home visits by the Welfare team to discuss issues of concern. Some areas identified included: attendance, illness, anxiety or gaining parent support;
- Three way interviews involving the parent(s), student and teacher;
- Parents involvement through the transition process of Grade 6 to Year 7 activities;
- Students at risk of not succeeding in Year 9, 10, and 11 meet to discuss possible future pathways;
- Stages of subject selection, pathway and career planning, Year 11 to 12 goal setting and expectations;
- Targeting of small groups, usually at a particular year level;
- Year 12 interviews- All year 12 students are interviewed with their parents and provided with information on how we could work together to improve outcomes; &
- Particular format for parent/teacher/student meetings in the first week of each term have significantly increased parent engagement at the school.
- *"Personal phone calls works best. Teachers and administrators are frequently calling parents on their mobiles and have formed positive relationships".*

c.   Cultural Initiatives

- Formation of parent groups;
- Community day targeting Pacific Island families involving three schools;
- Multicultural nights involving families sharing food and performances from their culture;
- Use of interpreters;
- Making information available in main community languages, and having interpreters available;
- Targeting particular ethnic groups and having translators available;
- Separate Arabic and Vietnamese meeting each month with interpreters ready;
- Koorie meetings supported by KESO and an Indigenous Worker.

d.   School Committees/Groups

Some areas of involvement of parents in school Committees/groups included: parent groups; School Council Committees; engagement forums around strategic review; determining purpose of

engagement and ways individuals can action involvement; working bees, buildings and grounds; & canteen duty

e.   External agencies
- Use of external agencies to assist the school to help raise parent awareness about certain issues (e.g. through workshops, events, parent groups);
- Parents groups in the past with assistance from external agencies eg. targeting Arabic parents;

3.   Engaging Families from CALD, Indigenous and SES backgrounds

Five schools *did not* have programs specifically aimed at engaging families from CALD, Indigenous and/or low SES backgrounds. One school did not have programs with specific target groups, but identified they needed to do this. Another respondent indicated that their school involved all parents in all events. Within five schools, they *did* have specific programs. Some programs identified by the school staff were:

- Arabic Women's Group;

- Interpreting important information into other languages;

- Interpreters available on parent teacher evenings;

- Active and diverse school council;

- Program for Arabic speaking families;

- Liturgies for Chaldean parents supported by the local Chaldean Church; &

- In the process of reaching a formal consultation agreement with our Koorie community

Part B: Checklist

In Part B of the survey, school staff identified if and how their school undertook six types of parent and family engagement. The survey questions were adapted from the work of Epstein et al (2002) and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) guideline from '*How Family Friendly Is your School'* (2007). The questions focused on gaining information about areas of parent and family engagement schools were active in; identification and collection of practical examples of engagement; and identification of areas where school staff perceived they required more assistance.

Parenting

The school staff identified and listed examples of what was currently happening at their school under two main categories.
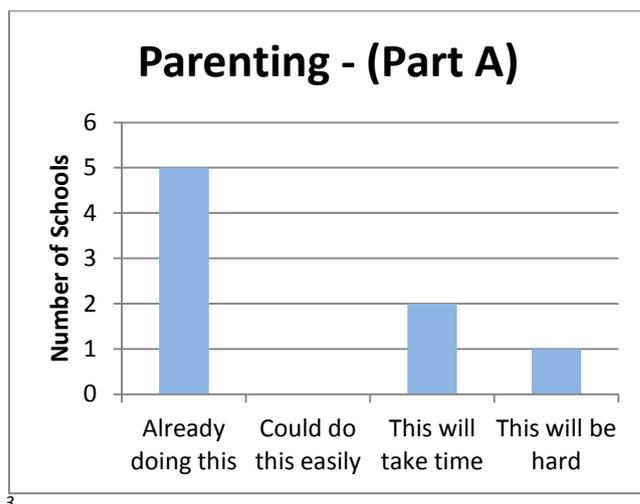
Parenting - (Part A)

Number of Schools (y-axis: 0 to 6)

- Already doing this: 5
- Could do this easily: 0
- This will take time: 2
- This will be hard: 1

Assist families with parenting skills and setting home conditions to support children as students

[3]

Develop the school's capacity to better understand students families

All the schools identified they were engaged with parent engagement in some capacity. A large number of examples were provided by school staff demonstrating how they have implemented parental engagement in their school. The examples provided by the school staff for school engagement with parents have been categorised in three key areas

Information

- Information evenings on specific topics;
- Holding a range of forums for parents: Cyber use, Parenting, Surviving VCE, information nights regarding programs at each year level
- Information to parents disseminated via the school nurse and through the school diary
- Regular advice and guidance in the newsletter
- We do this in a minimal way by advising parents about homework

Student Welfare

- Contact with parents following Teaching Team meetings
- Use of an effective Welfare team
- Each teacher is assigned to a small group of Year 7 students and liaises with families before enrolment and during their time at school. This involves home visits and other informal regular contact.

Pathways

- Meetings between teachers and all Year 7 parents at the beginning of the school year
- Meetings between the careers/pathways teacher, student and parent to discuss and devise the student's career pathway plan and course options
- Interviews with every Year 12 student and their parent to discuss how the student, school and family can work together to ensure success

One staff member held a perception that their school "*has a strong reputation for building strong supportive relationships with parents.*" The respondent identified that this was achieved through:

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[3] The number of school staff does not necessarily add to 10 in the tables, but reflects the number of responses received for the question.

"regular communication between coordinators etc and parents, with parents frequently invited into the college to discuss matters of concern (both at school and home) and to collaboratively work on strategies to address the concerns for the young person."

Communicating

Number of Schools

Already doing this: 7
Could do this easily: 2
This will take time: 0
This will be hard: 0
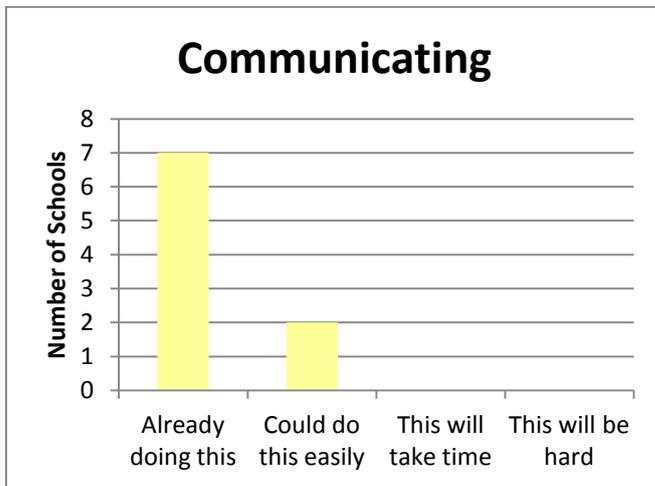
Conducting effective communications from school-to-home and from home-to-school about school programs and student progress.

School staff gave the following examples of communication methods used at their school. The school newsletter as a key method of communication to parents; and other methods were use of student journal/diaries, the school website, letters, emails, individual meetings, student reports, parent teacher interviews, information evenings, notices sent home, postcards celebrating student success, interviews with Year 11 and 12 parents, student led conferences, use of Ultranet; Cityscape, study tours overseas, the music Program, and family picnics. Having a friendly and accessible school environment was also identified as an important strategy for parent and family engagement:

- *"An open and welcoming school environment where parents are encouraged to communicate with the staff."*
- "*Having identified contact people for parents in the college*."

Several responses also indicated a perception that there was a need to improve in communication:

- *"Some great but inconsistent. Lots of ongoing communication, consistent parent updates by email"* &
- *"Provide a weekly newsletter covering school events but need to improve information about curriculum"*

Volunteering

Providing opportunities and organising volunteers to support the school, families and students

There were only two examples provided for this type of engagement at their school. This included reading programs, and library assistance and one respondent identified that while: *"parents do participate on School Council however this is an area that needs further consideration".*

Learning at Home
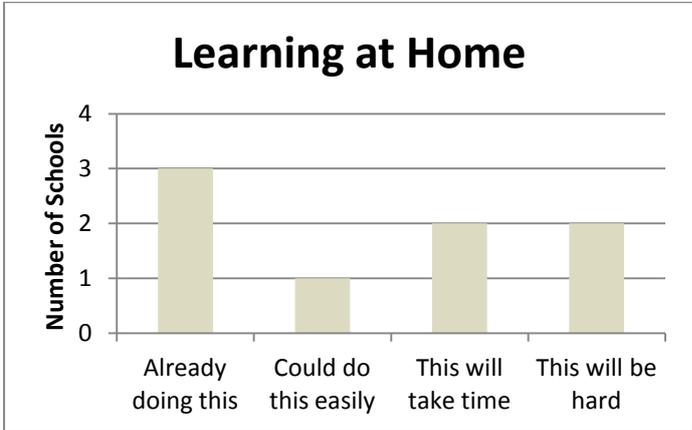
Involving families with their children on homework and other curriculum-related activities and decisions.

Examples of this type of engagement provided by the school staff were: the student diary; notices sent home to inform parents; Information evenings; parents are involved in subject selection at Years 10, 11 and 12; parent involvement in Homework Club and homework is available on the school intranet and via email, and updates on homework timetables are communicated through the school newsletter, and emails to parents.
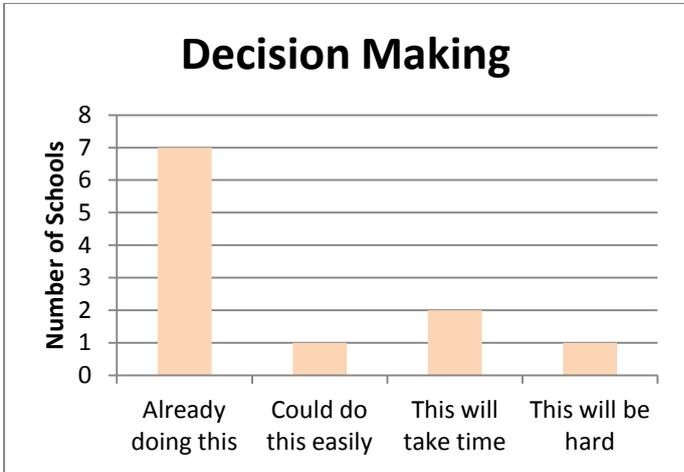
Decision Making

Including families as participants in school decisions, and developing parent leaders and representatives.

In regards to decision making seven of the ten school staff identified that their school was already including parents in school decisions and developing parent leaders and representatives. Some examples provided indicated that School Councils were commonly the main application of 'decision making' in schools where parents were involved. Other examples included: focus groups, parent forums, and parent surveys. A respondent indicated that their school uses a variety of methods for parents and families to engage in decision making using a more inclusive approach. The respondent identified that this occurred:

"somewhat through an agreed protocol re: decisions making that involves consultation and collaboration with teachers, students and community – face to face, focus groups, blogs, online surveys etc…".

Collaborating with the Community
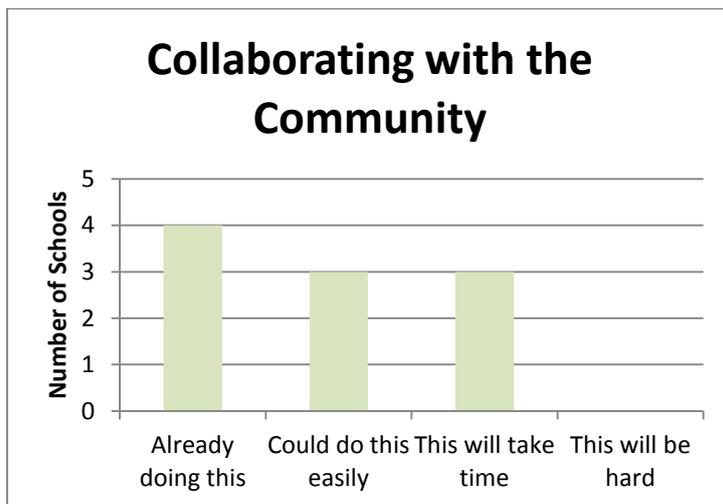
Coordinating resources and services from the community for families, students and the school, and providing services to the community.

A range of examples were given by school staff in relation to how they have used '*collaborating with the community'* in their schools. Some responses showed the partnerships and linkage schools have developed with external agencies to enhance their student's health and wellbeing such as pathways programs; counselling services; sports groups; business groups; Youth Connections, visiting supports services to the school, and theatre groups. Some comments were:

- *"The Student Wellbeing Dept. has extensive links to community organizations and regularly refers students/families to services e.g. counselling, youth services, financial services, family and adolescent support."*
- *"Many agencies make connections with young people and/or families on school premises for meetings etc. Another example is community based students support and homework groups who use school premises during and after school."*
- *"Providing welfare support by embedding Odyssey House counsellor, 2 days per week at school, psychiatrist from Headspace also embedded in school, ½ day per fortnight. Partnership with La Mama Theatre Co….."*

Conclusion

Each school identified areas where they were engaged with parents and families to varying levels. Schools interaction with parents and families were often around the provision of information;

student welfare and pathways. The key areas related to the provision of information; student welfare and pathways. The main challenges and barriers for parent-family engagement were language barriers; cultural challenges; and parents own experience of education was not very positive. Additional challenges were varying school and parents expectations; family dynamics; communication and engagement. Five schools were able to identify a range of specific programs targeting CALD, Indigenous and SES parents and families while five schools did not have any specific strategies. Four schools were already engaged with the wider community.

SECTION 6 - FROM MY SCHOOL TO OUR SCHOOL FORUM

Strengthening Learning Relationships between School, Family and Community

Introduction

The My School to Our School Forum was organised as part of the Parent and Family Engagement Project and was held at Moonee Valley Racecourse, Committee Room, Moonee Valley, Wednesday 17 August 2011, 8:30am – 3:30pm. The Forum was an innovative and action packed initiative bringing together educators and community practitioners interested in strengthening learning relationships between school, family and community. Delegates gathered together to share their ideas and experience with each other and listen to alternative or new ideas relating to parent and family engagement. See the Appendix 1 for a full list of Forum participants and Table delegates and organizations they were representing. The following information summarises the key components, and feedback from delegates at the forum.

Program Outline

Time	Activity	Details
8:30 – 9:00	**Registration**	Register, Select Table Presentations Tea and coffee available
9:00	**Welcome** **Welcome to Country**	**Helen Butler, MC** Australian Catholic University **Bill Nicholson** Wurundjeri Council
9:10	**Setting the Scene**	**David Kennedy** Executive Officer, INLLEN
9:20	**Keynote Address 1**	**Dr George Otero** Centre for RelationaLearning, USA
10:15	**Morning Tea**	
10:35	**Table Presentations : Morning Session** Three x 20 minute rounds Combination of Presentation and Interactive Discussion Different Presentations to	12 topics over 12 tables Delegates will have selected **three different** Table Presentations for the Morning Session (one per round) Delegates will be alerted at the end of each 20 minute round to move to next selected Table

	Afternoon Session	Presentation
11:50	**Temperature Reading 1: Reflections**	Facilitated by Dr George Otero and Helen Butler Appreciations, Puzzlements, Concerns and Hopes
12:10	**Lunch**	
12:50	**Keynote Address 2**	**Danielle Cronin** Council of Catholic School Parents, NSW
13:35	**Table Presentations : Afternoon Session** Two x 20 minute rounds Combination of Presentation and Interactive Discussion Different Presentations to Morning Session	12 topics over 12 tables Delegates will have selected **two different** Table Presentations for the Afternoon Session (one per round) Delegates will be alerted at the end of each 20 minute round to move to next selected Table Presentation
14:25	**Temperature Reading 2: Reflections**	Facilitated Temperature Reading Discussion: What question(s) would you like to ask the Panel to help you in taking action?
14:50	**Panel Discussion**	Q & A with Dr Otero and Danielle Cronin
15:15	**Where to from here?**	Complete evaluation forms Access INLLEN website for further details
15:30	**Thank you and Close**	

Keynote Speakers

Two respected keynote speakers leaded a thought-provoking conversation around the value and practice of building and strengthening learning relationships between school, family and community.

Keynote speaker 1. –Dr George Otero

George Otero is an educational consultant who has worked as a teacher, educator, social entrepreneur, and author. He is Co-Director of the Center for RelationaLearning in Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA, whose mission is to develop interdependent relationships within schools and between communities to enable quality learning and teaching in a 21st century global society. Dr Otero has worked for many years as a Consultant in Australia, the United Kingdom and Canada. Over the years his work has transpired new ways for schools and communities to achieve equity, inclusion, and social justice. Dr Otero's transformational work with schools and community leaders has spawned out of his background as Director of Las Palomas, a non-profit Multicultural Learning Centre in Taos and Santa Fe, New Mexico which he founded in 1977. Through a combination of dance, play, dreaming, games, storytelling and an open inquiry process, he builds community by stimulating learning and leadership. Dr Otero's approach to transforming schools is to clarify the issues and problems within the context of their unique communities. Recently, he has co authored a book with local Victorian school leaders that shows a simple framework for bringing schools, families and communities together. See Appendix 5 for further insight into George Otero's ideas.

Keynote Speaker 2- Danielle Cronin

Danielle Cronin is an Australian Churchill Fellow who, in 2009, undertook a wide-ranging study of strategies, including public policies, to support parent and community engagement in schooling in the United States and the United Kingdom. In 2011 she undertook a follow up research project in Italy, the United States and Canada looking at current research and practice. Danielle's interest and passion for improving the availability and accessibility of parent and family engagement tools to assist schools and communities is evident in the range of positions she holds.

In addition to being the Executive Director of the Council of Catholic School Parents, Danielle is a Commissioner on the NSW and National Catholic Education Commissions (NCEC) and Chair of the NCEC Parent Committee. She is also a member of the national Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) Taskforce on Parent Engagement in Low SES Communities. Danielle also participated at the Forum as a Table Presenter and spoke about the Partners 4 Learning Program. See. http://www.partners4learning.edu.au/See for further information about Danielle's area of work or INLLEN website for her Forum powerpoint presentation.

Table Presentations

Delegates were given opportunities to gain further information and insight into parent and family engagement initiatives through participating in 24 different Table Presentations held in the morning and afternoon. These Table Presentations were designed to be 'tasters', with a combination of information sharing by presenters as well as lively discussion with and between presenters and delegates. Popular Table presentations at the Forum were from the Arabic Welfare; Brotherhood of St Laurence; Anglicare (Connected Families, Strong Communities); Carlton Primary; Royal Children's Hospital; Centre for Multicultural Youth, Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre, Victorian Arabic Social Services, and Partners 4 Learning presentations by Danielle Cronin.

ORGANISATION	TABLE PRESENTATION ABSTRACTS
INLLEN Area	Project Name:
1. Arabic Welfare	**Arabic Speaking Families Learning Together Program (ASFTL)** This presentation primarily focused on the ASFTL Model of Practice, providing an overview of the program and how the program has improved parenting skills, family relationships, school and social connectedness within the Arabic speaking community.
2. Brotherhood of St. Laurence	**School-Parent Education Engagement Project (SPEEP)** Three parents of primary school aged children from the Somali, Sudanese and Vietnamese communities in Atherton Gardens, Fitzroy, were employed as community-based School-Parent Engagement Facilitators. Key learning's from the research and this pilot project were discussed.
3. Catholic Education Office Melbourne (CEOM)	**Family School Partnerships Initiative** A system wide response to the implementation of the Commonwealth Government's Reform Agenda. This presentation shared case studies of

	successful strategies CEOM schools have employed to foster family, school and community partnerships for better learning outcomes of all students.
4. Catholic Education Office Melbourne (CEOM)	**Koorie Family Partnerships** This presentation emphasised the importance of acknowledging, embracing and celebrating the rich and diverse cultural heritage of Indigenous students, and valuing family and community.
5. East Preston Islamic College	**Out of School Hours Learning Support Program (OSHLSP)** The College shared its experience in developing an OSHLSP, including its benefits to students, families and the community. Challenges, ways of involving parents, successful strategies and approaches, support services and partnerships will be shared to assist others who have similar plans.
6. Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY)	**Opening the School Gate** Ideas, insights and practical strategies for engaging Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) families in their children's education experience at school. Information will be based on the Opening the School Gate Resource Kit for teachers and other school staff.
7. Foundation House (Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture)	**Supporting Transitions for Refugee Families** This presentation demonstrated strategies schools can undertake to support all kinds of transitions, e.g. from English Language School to school; from Primary school to Secondary school; and from classroom to playground. Featuring case studies, resources from the School Support team, and tips to engage refugee background families, and the whole school community were given.
8. Inner Northern LLEN in partnership with DHS	**Local Area Transition Plan Project** A pilot project in partnership with Futures for Young Adults, Department of Human Services North West and Metro Region, to look at whole of life planning for young people with a disability and their families, with a focus on local area planning and employment. This has been achieved through forming partnerships with the families, community and other agencies. Useful learning's and approaches were shared.
9. Kildonan Uniting Care	**Pacific Pathways** Examples of local partnerships between community /school/agencies were explored with an emphasis on community development models in working with Pacific Islander communities, identifying best practice strategies, engagement tools and common myths.
10. Northcote High School Community Engagement Committee	**Strengthening Community Engagement** This presentation outlined the process by which parents at NHS initiated a process to engage the broader school community with the school's planning and practices. From a series of Community Forums organised by the Parent Engagement Working Group in 2010, the School now has a dedicated Community Engagement Committee.
11. Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre	**Parenting in a New Culture** This project aims to increase the parenting skills of migrant community groups whose cultural and social values regarding parenting and families

	are quite different from mainstream Australian cultural and social values and norms. From the presentation practitioners develop a broader understanding of some of the issues faced by migrant/newly arrived parents, gain information about accessing a community worker from one of many newly arrived backgrounds who can be a support to schools and families, as well as access to resources in multiple languages, such as fact sheets, and parenting guides.
12. Victorian Arabic Social Services (VASS)	**Parent and School Engagement for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Communities** This presentation highlighted a range of effective strategies to work with parents and young people from CALD backgrounds. Case studies and school/community partnerships were shared.
	Other Organisations
1. Anglicare Victoria	**Connected Families Strong Communities Project** A partnership initiated in 2005 between South East LLEN and Cranbourne Secondary College aimed to create stronger networks between the school, families and community organisations to build a stronger, sustainable and connected community. The ultimate aim was to improve opportunities and outcomes for young people and their families. Project outcomes and current activities were discussed.
2. Anglicare Victoria	**Parentzone** This presentation described the overall purpose of Parentzone and its role in supporting parents and professionals who work with parents and/or children. It highlighted "Tuning into *Kids*", an evidence based program that teaches parents how to "emotion coach" their children, which has been used by schools. Due to its success, "Tuning into *Teens*" will now be delivered in early 2012 for parents of teenagers and teachers.
3. Carlton Primary School	**Parent and Community Engagement** The student demographic at Carlton Primary School is largely comprised of students from refugee backgrounds. The school discussed learning's from its successful engagement strategy using a community development position, in partnership with the City of Melbourne.
4. Council of Catholic School Parents (NSW)	**Partners 4 Learning** Danielle Cronin (one of the Forum's keynote speakers) lead practitioners through a practical resource to implement family school partnerships. Time poor schools will be able to use and adapt strategies from this 'how to guide' to suit their own needs.
5. Gallery Sunshine Everywhere (GSE)	**Engagement through the Arts** The development and innovative work of Gallery Sunshine Everywhere in extending the involvement of families, schools and the broader community with youth oriented arts based activities was explored. As well as maintaining an on line gallery, GSE celebrates the talents of young people through art exhibitions of pre-primary, primary and secondary school students in a local café in the western suburbs of Melbourne.
6. Royal Children's Hospital	**Integrated Mental Health Program** The voices of three families participating in a mental health promotion

	strategy in their children's schools were depicted in a DVD presentation. This was followed by a facilitated discussion around the value of embracing parent participation.
Peak Bodies	
1. Association for Children with a Disability (ACD)	**What Inclusion Means** Sophie Carasso is a Community Education Speaker, and Parent Support Worker for the ACD and offered many insights based on her personal and professional experiences. Sophie is the mother of 3 children, one of whom has a disability. She provided a very real picture of what inclusion can mean to families of children with a disability, and how professionals can impact on this. Useful resources were also shared.
2. Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO)	**Policy for Partnerships** This presentation outlined the role of the national organisation particularly in the area of government policy development regarding home school community partnerships, parent engagement and the importance of engagement at the local level. Case studies and research findings of both ACSSO and the Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau were discussed, and publications and websites will be shared.
3. Victorian Council of School Organisations Inc. (VICCSO)	**The Power of Personalised Learning: Building Stronger School-Family-Community Partnerships** The challenge of building education systems and schools around personalised learning through better partnerships and community governance were explored. Practical insights and tools to help build 'next practice' school community conversations and planning were also shared.
Government Departments	
1. Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD)	**Extended School Hubs** The Extended School Hubs trial has been taking place in four locations across Victoria. They provide activities and services through partnerships with non-school organisations, before, during and after school hours, both on school sites and in community sites. Activities and programs include extended hours learning support, homework clubs, sport, music, and other extracurricular activities and programs designed to remove the barriers to learning that students may be experiencing. Progress and insights from this initiative were shared.
2. Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD)	**Families as Partners in Learning** – This presentation focused on the variety of tools and strategies available for schools to strengthen family engagement within their school community. Resources include the Families as Partners in Learning resource, as well as resources developed by the National Parental Engagement Task Force.
3. Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations (DEEWR)	**Parental and Community Engagement (PaCE)** The aim of PaCE is to support parents and caregivers of Indigenous children to participate in educational decision making for their children and form partnerships with educational providers to improve educational

	outcomes for Indigenous students. The presentation provided an overview of the PaCE program and its application in Victoria, including examples of successful projects and how communities can access funding for activities such as school community partnership agreements.

SEE INLLEN Website for a full extract about each project completed by each Table Presenter.

Delegates Views

Delegates were invited to complete evaluation forms and participate in a Temperature reading activity in the morning and afternoon sessions. The information gathered from the evaluation forms and temperature readings have provided considerable insight into delegate's perception; current involvement in parent and family engagement; and how parent family engagement works at their school or agency. Both sets of data are consistent and have been collated below.

1.   Emerging Themes

Defining Parent Engagement or Involvement

In the morning session, delegates were exploring parent engagement as a concept and comments reiterated some of the key messages delivered in the keynote addresses. Some comments included:

- *"Family engagement is crucial to student wellbeing and education."*
- *"The whole person counts and must be central to all aspects of education."*
- *"Importance of every student, teacher and FAMILY feeling included and integral."*

In the afternoon session, the terms parental engagement and involvement were being further explored by delegates. Parent engagement was seen by one delegate as *"a process"* where parents were engaged and not just involved. A school delegate reflected that:

- *"We need to distinguish between involvement and engagement; Think of engagement as a problem solving tool; Communication is the hinge point- ask how the community what's to be communicated with and what about."*

Overcoming Challenges

Parent engagement practice was perceived by some delegates as having challenges such as:

- *"difficulties constantly faced by educators and parents working together at secondary schools,"*
- *"engaging parents is hard work and requires a lot of resources and support."*

A clear and strong message was expressed by delegates that schools should look at new and different ways to engage parents and to continue with the work to overcome barriers and challenges. Delegates identified the need to engage parents who may be struggling with their role as parents or parents who are not often seen or heard or engaged in the education system.

A theme of "*community conversations*" was reported by delegates, reflecting on George Otero's keynote address. A delegated identified that there was a need for schools to "*build relations with families **before** implementing processes.*" Parents were perceived as partners in the process of engagement, rather than passive recipients of the service. One comment highlighted this point:

- *"Parents have the power to form work groups without the assistance (and prompt) of agencies and have the capacity to promote change in bigger ways than we think. Schools truly belong to children and parents."*

A delegate identified a need to look at parent engagement through the eyes of the parent, rather than the schools lenses and understanding each other's viewpoints. Some ideas identified by delegates to build and strengthen school parent relationships included improving communication; inviting parents to the school; organizing events; helping parents navigate the school system; and involving parents in mental health practices within the school.

Process of Change

In the afternoon sessions, educators began to reflect on the level and types of change needed within their schools in regards to parent and family engagement. Some comments included:

- *"Creating the school as a 'social network' hit the nail on the head."*
- *"We recognise the incredible social capital within our parent group. We would have no issues/fears for our teachers to further engage with families, we just need to take the leap."*
- *"Willingness of Principals in secondary schools to recognise the valuable resources ready at the doorstep and to make commitment to work "outside" their school and embrace the broader community."*
- *"Willingness of teachers to be open to change."*
- *"The new agenda – school and communities must be able to work together."*

Some strategies to increase parent and family engagement identified by teachers included ringing parents on the first day of school; meeting with parents, and changing or improving the language used with parents. Some general comments from both educators and community practitioners relating to change were:

- *"It's time to review some of the good things we do and make them better."*
- *"There is no one road to implementation – every school has a different context."*
- *"We have challenge to bring together our diverse family community."*
- *"What is the value of mind shifting?"*
- *"Focusing on relationships and not programs."*
- *"Where do we start- how do we evaluate successes accurately."*
- *"How to determine what type of communication will work best for our parents."*
- *"How can we build programs/activities that will foster continuous long term engagement."*
- *"Do our parents feel welcomed?"*
- *"There needs to a growth in understanding; a willingness to explore how new directions can be moved in; an action plan developed."*
- *"A clear plan with a person designated to drive and implement ways that will strengthen relationships."*

Support from the Principal of schools was perceived as vital for success of parent engagement and whole school change.

To progress parent and family engagement further in schools, several delegates identified the need for schools to either employ or bring in expertise; or build teacher knowledge to assist develop an action plan and attract appropriate resources and personnel.

Some delegates indicated that the way they currently work had been challenged; identified that they were able to identify the challenges that had not been resolved; or had been inspired to think of things in a different way. Other comments from delegates 'hoped' that parents would also embrace change; that secondary schools would engage parents at a deeper level; and in a more meaningful way. One school delegate hoped that education in general can shift to being about grades to being more about students.

Several comments from delegates related to exploring ways to make programs sustainable and resourcing requires ongoing financial commitment from decision makers and may not be readily available for some initiatives. There were general comments made about the change process such as:

- *"Cultural change rather than structural- it will take and be the ACTIONS that make the difference."*

Partnerships

School delegates perceived community agencies had access to significant resources (human, social and financial) that they could bring into partnership arrangements with schools. Comments were made by school delegates over the day about:

- sometimes not knowing what agencies exist
- how to access agency services;
- how to determine what agencies best suited their school;
- how to access additional resources from agencies;
- what support agencies may be able to offer schools.

Community practitioners identified that considerable partnerships already existing between several agencies and schools. There was a perceived level of goodwill already existing between various agencies and schools, but community practitioners identified the need to strengthen existing networks and build new networks with agencies and schools to enhance existing programs. There was a level of acknowledgement from community practitioners about the value in learning from other agencies and schools and accessing additional training around partnerships with schools.

Throughout the day, educators identified that they were particularly pleased to have opportunities to speak to people from outside the school and learn about different programs, resources, and funding. Table presentations provided opportunities for educators to do this at the Forum. There was also the building of networks at the Forum between educators – community practitioners and within their own sectors. There was an appreciation by educators and community practitioners of what others are achieving in their schools and agencies around parent and family engagement. The importance of working other agencies; schools and in cross sector partnerships was reinforced in comments by many delegates over the day. There were comments about developing effective relationships; the need to develop action plans; and a more coordinated approach.

Evidence Based Practice/Best Practice

There were comments at the Forum from educators about how to determine whether existing programs or new programs would be successful; ways to evaluate programs and learning from best practice examples. Some comments were:

> - *"How can the programs architecture focus on effective, evidence practice to engage a diverse range of community groups?"*
> - *"Why are best practice programs/processes still on periphery of our work and not in our policy as much as they should be."*
> - *"Primary Secondary Transition Research with specific focus on needs of parents and students."*
> - *"Get an assessment of where schools are in relation to these issues- what is already working and what they need help with."*

Young People as Partners

Different perspectives were given by delegates about young people's involvement in parent and family engagement. Some comments related to how secondary school students would respond to having their parents engaged in the school, and the value of this engagement. Another comment focused on the school valuing young people's views about their own learning:

> - *"young people need to be heard and be included in their own learning. Young people need to have a say; there is a serious lack of system respect for students."*

Diversity

Throughout the Forum, there was some acknowledgement of the diversity of the local community and opportunities to learn from each other. Two emerging issues identified in the areas of diversity was for schools to understand the different experience of parents and families in schools in their country of origin and their own experience in the Australian education system. Some comments related to working with diverse communities and particular cultural groups were:

"We can all work together even though our community is very diverse."
"Cultural awareness is so important when working with newly arrived communities."
"Keep in mind that CALD communities might have limited access to certain resources."
"Greater knowledge of the cultural beliefs surrounding the different cultures at the school."
"Interpreters to explain what is 'wanted."
"To look at Aboriginal community spirit for inspiration."
"Need for both parties to understand the culture and education system in countries that you are working with."

Conclusion

The Forum was very well attended and the energy and enthusiasm levels were high throughout the day. There was a positive response to the speakers and a generosity of spirit amongst the delegates listening to other delegates and interchange of ideas and experiences about parent and family engagement. There was a high level of interaction between the educators and the community workers, and building of relationships for possible future partnerships. The Table presentations were a great informal way for delegates to hear what other delegates were already engaged in within their school or in a community setting. The involvement of local Table presenters showed the enthusiasm and commitment of delegates from the local area to respond to particular areas of perceived disadvantage. The comments made by the delegates over the day showed a genuine interest in parent and family engagement and delegates were keen to reflect on their own environment and discuss ideas to improve existing projects or to enhance the engagement of

parents and students in their children's learning. Many of the delegates were keen to join the projects 'community of interest' to receive further information about the Project.

SECTION 7 - SCHOOL FOCUS GROUPS & SURVEY

Introduction

Within a Secondary College in the Inner Northern region, a Focus group was conducted with nine students and another group involving five parents. A survey was also completed involving ten school staff around parent and family engagement. The INLLEN would like to acknowledge the active involvement of the Principal, school staff, students and parents who contributed their time and ideas to this process within the school environment. The process has allowed an opportunity for INLLEN to begin a dialogue with this school about parent and family engagement. At this time, the results have limitations of application due the size of the samples and should be seen as a snapshot.

1.   Student Focus Group

There were nine students who participated in the Student Focus group at the school on August 3rd, 2011. The students were from year 7s (2), year 9s (4) and year 11s (2) and the student were from the main cultural groups attending the school: Lebanese, Australian, Turkish and Pacific Islander. The students were invited to participate by the school Principal. A limitation of the research may be the presence of school staff during the interview process.

In the Focus group, the students were asked what they believed *'parent engagement in learning'* means and the student responses were covers areas such as:

- their parents "*helping with homework and stuff*";
- giving encouragement;
- getting involved with the school;
- following up with the teachers about their progress; and

Several students commented that they felt their parents were interested in their education because they always asked them questions about how they were doing at school. Students were asked how their parents were engaged or involved in their learning. The responses ranged from:

- being on School Council;
- speaking directly to teachers, and coordinators;
- helping with homework;
- going to parent teacher interviews;
- being encouraging in general;
- One student mentioned that his father directs him to seek help from teachers or the internet because he feels that he's unable to help him much.

All students commented that they wanted their parents to be engaged/involved in their learning. The reasons students identified why they wanted their parents to be involved related to feeling supported (not neglected) and for the encouragement.

Students were asked to identify reasons why parents found it difficult to be engaged in their child's learning. Responses from students included:

- language difficulties (English as a second language);
- time constraints (working parents, home duties); and
- different cultural experiences of growing up.

An example provided by one student relates to parents experience impact on possible parent engagement:

- *"So if their parents didn't really help them, they probably wouldn't know how to, or they wouldn't probably think that their children would need it."*

Most students identified differences in roles and the level of engagement for their mother and father. In most cases, where there were two parents in the family, the mother appeared to maintain a supportive role with school work throughout the school year whilst the father may be more involved during end of term/year report times.

When students were asked how schools could assist parents to be engaged in their child's learning, students felt that the school was doing enough (e.g. interpreters, translation of letters) and it depended on the parents to want to be involved. Students identified that overall their parents were engaged in their learning, and there were different and varying levels of support provided. All of the students valued their parents support. Students were asked how their parents support and involvement in their learning has helped them. Two students commented on the importance of their parents providing all round support for their emotional wellbeing, not just in school but out of school as well:

- *"even if they can't with my school work, they still help me a lot sort of mentally....But they say like, 'we'll support you no matter what decision you make.'"*

- *"my parents are supporting me to actually come out of my shell....and with my maths and all that.....and like, say if I come home sad or something they will ask me what's wrong, they they'll follow it up the next day with the teacher..."*

Parent feedback on progress and support was important to one student:

- *"I feel proud showing him my work...with their support it shows that they want me to get somewhere. So they give me something to aim for..."*

Students commented on the support they receive from their parents in different areas:

- *"without my parent's support, I would have been maybe out of school now"*
- *"They used to tell me that they never continued school, like they never finished their education….they don't want me to end up how they were."*

> - *"when I was in grade 5 or 6 my maths grades went down, like really down...but then like my mum started helping me, and like we did it together, so now I'm like better."*
> - *"last year I was having trouble at my old school and they asked me if I want to move schools, get a new environment, meet new people...and my parents actually supported me, like helping me look for a new school."*

Two students discussed how their parents compared them to a high achieving sibling motivating them to do better and aim higher. Another student highlighted that their parent treated them as an individual and didn't draw comparisons between their siblings:

> - *"my parents don't really compare me to my brothers…..they know that we're three individual people…I know that my parents have always got my back, and they're really supportive of my decisions...I don't' ever think that if my parents don't know English or maybe if they know maths or something. Because in a way I think it's sort of making me a bit stronger, and more sort of independent."*

One student's parents were identified as not being very helpful in his learning and so he has had to be independent and not rely on them for assistance with his school work.

> - *"I've learnt to just do the work by myself. And if I need help, since they don't know all the work, like if I need help in maths and English, I wouldn't go to them because they wouldn't know. I just go to my teacher."*

2.   Parent Focus Group

A Parent Focus Group involving five parents was held on the 26th of August, 2011 at the school. Table 1 shows a profile on the parents engaged in the focus group and their children year level at the school.

Table 1: PROFILE OF PARENTS ENGAGED IN THE FOCUS GROUP			
Parent No.	Cultural Background	Highest level of educational attainment of parent (e.g. Year 10)	Year Level of Child/Children
1.	Lebanese	Year 11	Yr 8, Yr 9
2.	Australian	Year 10	9, Yr 11
3.	Australian	Year 9	Yr 12
4.	Samoan	Year 12	Yr 9, Yr 11
5.	Australian	Year 10	Yr 11

Parents were invited to participate in the Focus Group by the School Principal. Questions were asked by the Executive Principal, College Principal and an INLLEN Partnership Broker. A limitation of the research may have been the involvement of school staff in the interview process and the sample may not have been representative of the parents at the school. All of the parents were able to communicate in English.

Parents Responses

Four of the five parents identified they wanted their children to aspire to complete year 12 or beyond. One parent identified that she focused on instilling in her children the importance of doing what makes them happy (rather than focusing on the importance of finishing school). All of her children are very engaged in school and in learning

When asked what *'parent engagement in learning'* means, all parents identified the importance of showing an interest in their children's learning and overall wellbeing and it was their responsibility to be engaged in their children's learning. All of the parents were engaged/involved in their child's learning in different ways:

- asking questions;
- digging below the surface;
- helping them with homework;
- making sure that they get the required support;
- reiterating the message that education is important; and
- offering emotional support and guidance.

All of the parents viewed that they were doing the best/most that they could given the time that they had. The main barrier cited by the parents around why they found it difficult to be engaged in their child's learning was around a lack of time. When the parents were asked why they thought some parents find it difficult to be engaged in their child's learning, they identified:

- *financial difficulties;*
- *family structure, different roles of mothers and fathers these days;*
- *no time, pre occupied with work and other responsibilities;*
- *single parents may find it especially difficult;*
- *language/communication barriers;*
- *drug/alcohol addiction;*
- *the parents' previous educational experience; and*
- *some parents may not feel that they can reach out/access support.*

The parents viewed that schools can help educate other parents around knowing how to be engaged in their children's learning. They identified that many parents wanted to be engaged but didn't know how they could be. The parents all agreed that educating parents needed to start in primary school and continue in secondary school. The type of parent involvement is different in secondary school but it is very important and parents needed to be prepared for this change.

All parents in the Focus group perceived the school valued their opinion and that the Principal was very approachable (two out of the five parents are on the School Council)

All parents in the Focus group felt that their involvement/engagement in their children's learning has helped their children. Indicators of this listed were their children enjoying school, progressing well and they were engaged in their own learning.

3.   School Staff Survey

Leading teachers, Coordinators and Pastoral care teachers at the school were asked to complete the School Staff Survey which was distributed by the College Principal. Ten completed surveys were received and Teacher responses have been compiled below.

Part A: Survey Question

School staff were asked their opinion on what the main issues/challenges for parent and family engagement were at the school. Some responses were:

Time
- *"Parents have work situations that make involvement difficult (shift work, shop hours etc.)."*

Parents Own Experience
- *"Parents have poor understanding of the goals of education and the importance of education – perhaps they experienced very little success in the course of their own education, so that they continue to find the school environment threatening."*
- *"Parents' own negative view of school."*
- *"Parents' lack of schooling themselves."*

The School system
- *"Not feeling comfortable due to not knowing how the school works, understanding of the education system etc. (some feel intimidated)."*
- *"Being fully aware of processes so that channels of communication are open",*
- *"Positive events to connect and feel part of the school community."*

Barriers
- *"Parents have poor English skills and low engagement in the community outside of their own cultural and language group, so they find the school milieu very alienating."*
- *"Confidence with language – many migrant families, not familiar with education processes."*
- *"The language barrier in the case of a large number of the families who speak a language other than English as their first language is a reasonably large issue. The language barrier means there is a hesitation on both sides to communicate because of the potential for misunderstanding and simply because it is a larger effort."*

Different Expectations/Values
- *"..I think there is also a difference in priorities in some families in terms of how important education is, or they don't understand how much time and effort successful schooling requires."*
- *"Parents don't value the opportunity to become involved with the College. Poor attendance at events like Discovery Nights, VCE seminars etc."*
- *"Lack of belief that education can change life circumstances; lack of belief that effort can bring rewards;*
- *"Impulsivity as a way of being in families: do not make sacrifices for later gain."*

Parent issues
- *"parents' lack of confidence";*
- *"Apathy";*

- *"Lack of skills for some of our parents, unable to offer support our students need;"*
- *"Struggling families in general, many parents dealing with issues";*
- *"Knowing how they can support their child at home."*
- *"Students not wanting their involvement."*

Part B: Survey Checklist

School staff were given a list questions and they had to determine how much they agreed or disagreed with a set of statements. Responses are listed below for each statement as well as some individual comments.

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. Family engagement in their children's learning is important to their children's achievement and success at school	6	2		1	
2. Every family has some strengths that can be utilised to increase student success in school	3	6	1		
3. Families of children at this school are interested in their children's learning		6	3	2	
4. This school regularly updates families and the community on what is happening in the school	4	5			
5. The views of families are sought, listened to and acted upon on a regular basis	2	6	1		
6. Families are involved in key decision making processes about the school and their children		6	3		
7. A consultative approach is taken with families about the school's direction		3	6	1	
8. Teachers are supported in developing meaningful relationships with families	1	8	1	1	
9. The student's needs are managed collaboratively between teachers, students and their families	1	4	3	2	
10. The principal and teachers communicate personally with all families on an ongoing basis		7	2	1	
11. The benefits of family engagement in learning are made explicit to staff in the school		5	5		
12. This school goes out of its way to make all families feel welcomed and valued	1	6	2	1	
13. This school has good connections with the local community (e.g. community agencies, clubs and associations, businesses, Council)	3	5	1	1	

Some Comments:

- *"Level of engagement is an issue, they are interested and will attend if there is a focus."*
- *"Family support will increase student success at school."*
- *"Low attendance at parent-teacher interviews, Student Led Conferences etc."*
- *"Some are, but many seem disinterested and want us to just "fix" their child."*
- *"All opportunities for family involvement are advertised in the school newsletter and specialized programs have individual notes sent to families."*
- *"Many letters and newsletters are sent home."*
- *"I am sure views are sought, but I don't know how thorough-going the canvassing is, or the degree of considered parental response achieved."*
- *"Parent Opinion Survey data is used in the formation and implementation of strategies to improve student outcomes."*
- *"They are listened to but not necessarily sought after."*
- *"I suspect that many families of pupils at the school have very little input into the school's decision making processes, but this may have nothing to do with the effort to reach out to families made by staff at the school: it may be far more to do with a profound lack of interest on behalf of parents."*
- *"The school invites participation but few commit."*
- *"Some families are involved."*
- *"There seems to be very little time allocated to pastoral care duties, and given the size of the Arabic speaking population at the school there seems to be a very surprising lack of Arabic speaking support workers and Arabic language parent support groups."*
- *"With the change in structure of Student Management, this has given the opportunity of developing more meaningful relationships with students."*
- *"To some extent this is true, however there is also sometimes the attitude that it is very hard to reach these families, so if you make some effort and it is not received, there is no need to keep trying.*
- *"Welfare/MIPs/Pastoral care are strong and getting stronger."*
- *"Level of management dependent on effectiveness of teachers."*
- *"Many parents are very hard to contact and/or quite surly when the question of their children's education and classroom behaviour is raised with them."*
- *"All staff are aware that the family is a major contributor to student success."*
- *"Numerous programs are run at all Year Levels with external agencies, community groups etc."*
- *"Needs to be a focus. There has been some development in this area."*

Conclusion

The Focus groups involved a small group of parents and student from one school. Additional focus groups in this school may be useful to create further insight into the experiences of young people and families at the school or disengaged students and parents from the school. The parental role may be significant in keeping young people engaged in their learning and young people identified that their parents were supportive in most cases and promoted their learning. Student's parents and families supported where they could or encouraged the student to seek assistance if they are unable to help them. Parents were asked about the importance of education and four parents wanted their children to go onto Year 12 or further. One parent placed greater importance on her children's happiness. All parents identified they saw that parents have a role in showing their children they had

an interest in their learning. Lack of time was the main reason parents could not become more involved in their children's learning. The school Principal was viewed as approachable by the parents in the focus group.

In the School staff survey time, parent's experience of school, parents own education level and understanding of the education system were identified as barriers to why parents did not engage in their children's learning. When the school staff were asked whether the benefits of family engagement are made explicit to staff at the school five staff members agreed, but five people indicated they weren't sure. Another question focused on whether a consultative approach is taken with families about the school's direction. Three school staff agreed, six didn't know and one disagreed. In other questions, a majority of staff identified that the school is supportive to parents and families. The survey did not focus on how parent and family engagement could be improved or changed to improve access and participation within the school.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

PART 1: Project Steering Committee Members

1. Hong Nguyen — INLLEN – Partnership Broker (CHAIR)
2. Zita Pinda — Seven Ways Consultancy
3. Sally Mitchell — North Yarra Community Health
4. Glenn White — Glenroy College and John Fawkner College
5. Emily Duizend — Brotherhood of St. Laurence
6. Jemma Mead — Merri Community Health Service
7. Sue Silk — East Reservoir Neighbourhood Renewal
8. Jarara McIntyre / Sean O'Meara — VAEAI
9. Helen Butler — Australia Catholic University School of Education
10. Zina Miceli — NMR - DEECD
11. Simone Ballard — Lynall Hall Community School - Parent
12. Michele Sampson, — Catholic Education Office
13. Paul Kenna, — Belle Vue Park Primary School
14. Ty Newton, — Kildonan Uniting care
15. Max Caruso — Independent Schools Victoria (ISV)

Part 2: From My School to Our School Forum Participants

	Name	Title	Organisation
1	Hong Nuygen	Partnership Broker	INLLEN
2	David Kennedy	Executive Officer	INLLEN
3	George Otero	Consultant/Keynote Speaker	New Mexico
4	Danielle Cronin	Keynote Speaker	NSW
5	Helen Butler	Senior Lecturer – Education	Australia Catholic University School of Education
6	Jacqueline Webb	Director of Student Engagement	Mercy College
7	Lidia Tizian	Student Engagement and Wellbeing Leader	Glenroy College
8	Glenn White	Excecutive Principal	John Fawkner College
9	Jennifer Molan	Team Leader	Kangan Institute
10	Clorinda Siemienowicz	Partnership Broker	South East LLEN
11	Jo Money	Principal	Glenroy Central Primary School
12	Nadia Venditti	Literacy Coordinator	Glenroy Central Primary School
13	Karen Wileman	Personalised Learning	Westbreen Primary
14	Laura Lacovangelo	Student Wellbeing Coordinator	St Anthony's Primary School
15	Michelle Thompson	Team Leader Children Youth and Families	North Yarra Community Health
16	Paul Daly	Futures Club Coordinator	Brotherhood of St Laurence
17	Irene Paulsen	Lecturer	Victoria University
18	Michael Pollock	Community Worker	Merri Community Health Service (MCHS)
19	Nicole Findlay	Community Liaison Officer	Wise Employment
20	Marjorie Casey	Transition Support Project	Disability Partnership and Service

		Officer	Planning (DHS)
21	Kate Saunders	Facilitator, Family Engagement Project	Disability Partnership and Service Planning (DHS)
22	Fran Mullins	Assistant Principal	Fitzroy High School
23	Sandra Dickins	Careers Counsellor & Transition	Fitzroy High School
24	Karen Wileman	Personal Learning Coordinator	Westbreen Primary
25	Georgie Thorneycroft	Primary Welfare Officer	Westbreen Primary School
26	Michelle Sheppard	Family Engagement Program	Westbreen Primary School
27	Judith Poole	Assistant Principal	John Fawkner College
28	Lisa Smith	Koorie Educator	Ballerrt Mooroop College
29	Kate Fennessy	Industry Liaison Officer	Inner Eastern LLEN
30	Jane Thomson	Senior Communication Officer	DEECD
31	Amy Hunter	Youth Settlement & Projects Team Leader	Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre
32	Maria Marchionna	Assistant Principal	Belle Vue Park Primary School
33	Kathryn Bruty	Wellbeing Leader, c/r Teacher	St Gabriel's Primary
34	Marion Bosnjakovic		WynBay LLEN
35	Ian Palmer	Chief Executive Officer	School Industry Partnership
36	Jimmy West	Youth Connections	Crossroads Salvation Army
37	Jola Rosinska-Caban	Youth and Family Worker	Crossroads
38	Cemile Yuksel	Partnership Broker	HWLLEN
39	Kim Stadtmiller	Partnership Broker	HWLLEN
40	Dallian D'Cruz	CEO	WynBay LLEN
41	Nicky Leitch	Partnership Broker	HWLLEN
42	Leanne Lewis	Assistant Principal	Bethal PS
43	Kimberley Ann Pangilinan	Partnership Coordinator	South West Connect
44	Snjezana Matijek	Partnership Coordinator	South West Connect
45	Jo Howard	Assistant Principal	Campbellfield Heights Primary School
46	John Watters	Manager	AUSSIP
47	Jane Kearney	Coordinator	Lynall Hall Community School
48	Mary Barclay	Assistant Principal	Lynall Hall Community School
49	Donnacha Rogers	Coordinator	VUSC
50	Leanne Peros	Youth worker	Northland Secondary College
51	Pam Anderson	Partnership Broker	Highlands LLEN
52	Nathaniel John Proctor	Youth Development Officer - Schools	City of Yarra Council
53	Jane McNally	Youth Connections Contract Manager	NMIT
54	Deborah Ryan	Integration Coordinator	Sunbury Downs College
55	Angela Neophytou	Integration Coordinator	Reservoir High School
56	Teresa Cusack	VCAL Coordinator	NMIT
57	Jenny Snelling	School Partnership Coordinator (Metro)	La Trobe University
58	Jemima Mead	Youth Health Team Leader	Merri Community Health Service (MCHS)
59	Carolyn Brand	CHN	ISIS Primary Care-Wyndham
60	Nadine Zeine	Learning for Life Worker	The Smith Family
61	Jill Anwyl	Secretary - Board Member	INLLEN
62	Amanda Olle	Manager	Good Shepherd Youth and Family

			Services
63	M Varkopoulos		Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services
64	Caroline Van Den Heuvel	Campus Principal	Mill Park Secondary College
65	Adrian Rhodes	Partnership Development Manager	Sydney Business Education Partnership
66	Cathie Valentine	Program Manager	Anglicare Victoria
67	Jeanette Pritchard	Acting manager - Inspire	Stride Foundation
68	Barb Ashworth	Partnership Broker	Central Ranges LLEN
69	Paul O'Donoghue	Grade 6 Teacher	St Mark's School Fawkner
70	Maria Makris-Asmanis	Parent Leader	St Mark's School Fawkner
71	Suzanne Hughes	Assistant Principal	Gladstone Park Primary School
72	Sharon Kerlin	Work and Learning Broker	DHS
73	Anita Lijovic	Work and Learning Broker	DHS
74	Stephen Frost	Managing Director	BREED School Industry Partnership
75	Zita Pinda	Consultant (Education)	Seven Ways Consultancy
76	Nathan Heard	Program Manager	Kildonan
77	Vivienne Levy	Youth Officer	Moreland City Council Youth Services
78	Emma Nyhof	Employment Co-ordinator	APlus Apprentice & Trainee Services
79	Rachel Saliba	Parent Leader	St Mark's School Fawkner
80	Alan Ross	General Manager National Partnerships	Independent Schools Victoria
81	Kerri Simpson	Network Leader	NMR DEECD
82	Peter Enright	Network Leader	NMR DEECD
83	Rochelle Darby	Partnership Broker	INLLEN
84	Silvana De Pretto	Partnership Broker	INLLEN
85	Andrew Horgan	Partnership Broker	INLLEN
86	Susie Takitaki	Executive Assistant	INLLEN
87	Meri Ivanovska	Mentoring Coordinator	Moreland L2P Program

Part 3: TABLE Presenters

	Name	Title / Position	Organisation
1	Cathie Valentine	Manger	Anglicare Victoria
2	Amal El-Koury	Senior Social Worker / Coordinator	Arabic Welfare
3	Sharon Bond	Brotherhood of St Laurence	Senior Research Officer
4	David Vincent	Brotherhood of St Laurence	Community Liaison Officer – SPEEP Project
5	Achol Aluier	Brotherhood of St Laurence	Former School Parent Engagement Facilitator
6	Jo McFarlane	Brotherhood of St Laurence	Outreach Settlement Worker
7	Rebecca Harris	Carlton Primary School	Coordinator Community Learning
8	Michele Sampson	Catholic Education Office Melbourne	Family School Partnership Convenor
9	John Stafford	Catholic Education Office Melbourne	Family School Partnerships - Project Coordinator

10	Danielle Cronin	Executive Director	Council of Catholic School Parents
11	Brian Hyde	Team Leader Indigenous Education Team	DEEWR
12	Julie Christopoulos	Senior Advisor National Partnerships	Independent Schools Victoria
13	Shanti Antony	Teaching and Learning Coordinator	East Preston Islamic College
14	Maureen Ryan	Director	Gallery Sunshine
15	Sarah Every	Disability Transition Coordinator	INLLEN
16	Harry Gelber	Manager Community Development	RCH Integrated Mental Health Programme
17	Olivia Williams	Spectrum MRC	African Parenting Educator
18	Gianna Mazzone	Anglicare Victoria	Parent Resource Worker
19	Janice Chan	Association for Children with a Disability	Manager Projects and Community Education
20	Dianne Giblin	Chief Executive Officer	Australian Council of State School Organisation
21	Peter Garrigan	President	Australian Council of State School Organisation
22	Nathan Leitch	Catholic Education Office	Koori Education Officer
23	Mandy Ellis	Centre for Multicultural Youth	Learning Beyond the Bell Coordinator
24	Marg Orme	DEECD	Senior Policy Officer
25	Lisa Mori	DEECD	Senior Policy Officer
26	Sharrin Murphy	Foundation House	School Support Worker East
27	Erin Hughes	Foundation House	School Support Worker North
28	Temukisa Vaeluaga	Kildonan Unity Care	Manager Counselling Services
29	Ivy Eramiha	Kildonan Unity Care	Project Officer
30	Sue Helme	Northcote High School	Parent Representative
31	Rob Ryan	Northcote High School	Chairperson
32	Lisa Trizubuzio	Victorian Arabic Social Services	Coordinator
33	Reta Ando	Victorian Arabic Social Services	Project Officer
34	Nicholas Abbey	The Victorian Council of School Organisations Inc	President

APPENDIX 2: INNER NORTHERN PARENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT STEERING COMMITTEE

Terms of Reference

1. **The role of the Steering Committee is:**
   a. To support the development, implementation and evaluation of the project;
   b. To champion and implement a partnership approach between the education, community, and government sector to a parent and family engagement strategy;
   c. To strengthen existing expertise and practice around parent and family engagement

2. **Responsibilities of members:**
   a. Provide input into the scope of the project;
   b. Provide input and advice on the implementation of the various project phases;
   c. Identify and recommend sources of information and contacts that may be of value and benefit to the project;
   d. Provide insight, analysis, advice and recommendations to sub-groups/working parties;
   e. Contribute resources to develop, implement and evaluate engagement solutions to local issues and problems;
   f. Attend a minimum of four meetings in 2011 (once per school term)

3. Inner Northern Local Learning and Employment Network (INLLEN), as the management organisation, will be the final decision maker in matters relating to the project.

4. The Project Coordinator is employed by INLLEN.

5. The Project Coordinator will undertake the role of chair and administration of the Steering Committee.

6. Membership of the Steering Committee is to comprise of representatives from:
   a. Local schools (1 x primary, 1 x secondary) (2)
   b. Northern Metropolitan Region – Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (NMR-DEECD) (1)
   c. Catholic Education Office/Independent Schools sector (1)
   d. Community organisations (5)
   e. Parents**
   f. *Other as deemed appropriate (1-4)*

   *** Parents will be invited to attend and participate in Steering Committee meetings that align with relevant project deliverables (to be decided by other members).*

7. Community of Interest (COI): INLLEN to communicate meeting Minutes to all interested organisations who can be involved in various phases of the project. COI members agree to be part of the email distribution list for the project.

APPENDIX 3 - A PROJECT OUTLINE

Project Purpose

The Project purpose was defined as two-fold:

1) To understand the current local context of parent and family engagement in learning within the education and community sectors and
2) To determine and create the right environment that achieves effective parent and family engagement for communities/schools in the inner northern region of Melbourne

The Steering Committee

A Project Steering Committee was established to support the process, with representatives from:

- local Secondary schools;
- community agencies;
- the Northern Metropolitan Region Department of Education;
- Early Childhood Development (NMR DEECD) and
- Catholic Education Office of Melbourne.

Significance of Project

There have been numerous studies in Australia and overseas around the importance of parent and family engagement in their children's learning. This project focused on understanding the challenges that many secondary schools face in implementing parent and family engagement strategies and aims to bridge the gap between policy rhetoric and on-the-ground reality. The emphasis of this project will be on improved engagement in learning with and from parents and families from low socio economic, Indigenous and CALD backgrounds.

The perceived benefits of the Project were identified as:

- A better understanding of what parent and family engagement strategies are employed by local and surrounding schools
- A better understanding of what parent and family engagement initiatives, programs and resources exist in the community for the INLLEN area
- A better understanding of the challenges faced by local parents and families to engage in their children's learning
- A better understanding of the challenges faced by local schools to engage with their parents and families, and
- Development of a strategic plan to assist in the implementation of parent and family engagement strategies in targeted schools/communities

Research Questions

- What are the barriers preventing schools in the inner northern area of Melbourne to better engage with parents and families (especially from low SES, CALD and Indigenous backgrounds)?
- What are the barriers preventing parents and families from low SES, CALD and Indigenous backgrounds in the inner northern area of Melbourne to be engaged in their children's learning?
- What supports are available in the community for parents and families to engage with their children's learning?
- What strategies have schools/community organisations found effective to engage with parents and families?

- What critical success factors are necessary to implement effective and sustainable parent and family engagement strategies within a school?

Overarching Question

How can we bridge the gap between the theory and the practice of effective parent and family engagement within the context of secondary school education?

Operational Definitions
Parents: *all types of parental figures, including carers*
Parent 'engagement': *Enabling parents to take their place alongside educators in the schooling of their children, fitting together their knowledge of children, teaching and learning, with teachers' knowledge (Pushor, 2007).*

The term **'Parents and Families'** will be used throughout this document interchangeably with **'parents'** to recognise that other family members often take on the role of being involved in the learning of the child in addition to, or in place of their parents (e.g. aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters).

The term **'Parent and Family Engagement'** will be used throughout this document to mean the engagement of parents and families in their children's learning.

Methodology
The project methodology is divided into three main phases:
- Data gathering and consultation
- Data evaluation
- Data implementation

There will be a Steering Committee involved in all three phases of the project. Whilst each phase leads onto the other, activities within each phase can also overlap. A description of what may be involved in each phase is included in the descriptions below.

STEERING COMMITTEE
Establish a ***steering committee*** of key stakeholders to inform the development of a parent and family engagement strategy in the inner northern area.
- Seek representation from schools, community organisations, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Catholic Education Office, VAEAI and other 'experts' in the field.
- Develop a Terms of Reference
  - Name, Purpose, Objectives, Structure, Membership, Administration, Responsibilities, Sub-committees, Meeting Dates
  - Ratify the Terms of Reference

DATA GATHERING AND CONSULTATION
Conduct an ***environmental scan*** of organisations/services/programs that work with parents and families to improve learning outcomes for their children.

Conduct a ***resource scan*** on resources and literature (e.g. articles, research reports, and publications) related to the subject of 'parent and family engagement'.

- Undertake a desktop mapping exercise and list findings in a spreadsheet in separate tabs
  - Programs/Networks & Associations/ Case Studies/Projects/ Resources/ Literature

- Phone/visit organisations to establish contact and find out more information
- Identify listings that are focused on the theme 'parent and family engagement in children's learning' (as opposed to general/other aspects of parenting)
- Identify listings that are specifically directed at outcomes for children in the age range 10 – 19
- Seek further input from Steering Committee – missing listings?
- Investigate funding sources for project/development work
- Explore areas of collaboration with potential project partners
- Use environmental and resource scan to inform further work on the project (below)

Survey schools in the region to identify current/proposed parent and family engagement strategies
- Seek advice from Steering Committee
- Develop survey – Use/Adapt existing resources identified in environmental scan, e.g.
  http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/directions/familiesaspartners/default.htm
  http://www.familyschool.org.au/pdf/framework.pdf
- Email survey to INLLEN's 32 secondary schools
- Work with partner organisations and steering committee members to help distribute the survey and obtain completed forms
- Follow up with phone calls and/or visits to selected schools (e.g. focus on low SES schools)
- Collate results from survey to illustrate what is happening in secondary schools, highlight the strengths and weaknesses/gaps

Collate an *evidence base* of working models and strategies for parent and family engagement.
- Identify examples of working models and strategies through data gathering – local and international (i.e. environmental scan, steering committee, schools survey)
- Further explore the examples to build up an 'evidence base' or tool kit of strategies (e.g. visit and speak to key people involved)

Negotiate a series of *consultations* with two schools in the INLLEN region.
- Work with two schools whose student population is largely from low SES, CALD and Indigenous backgrounds
- Conduct interviews with the Principal, key staff, School Council president/parent member, Parent Club president/member
- Utilise relevant resources identified through the environmental scan

Organise a *forum (or relevant activity) for practitioners -* present examples of strategies, utilise the opportunity to consult with practitioners on key issues for the region (e.g. through discussion groups, workshops, surveys).
- Consult with Steering Committee
- Identify specific theme of forum – target audience: schools teachers, practitioners who work with schools/parents and families/young people
- What do we want to achieve/find out? How do we do it?
- Determine date and budget
- Develop a format for the forum
- Coordinate guest speakers, presenters, facilitator(s), workshops
- Organise venue, resources, catering
- Include appropriate mechanisms to gather and collate data from forum

Conduct relevant *consultations with parents and young people.*
- Identify parents and young people to target through schools and community organisations – How many? Who?

- Determine appropriate consultation process (e.g. focus groups, interviews)
- Determine leading questions
- Determine appropriate venue

DATA EVALUATION

Identify *key issues and gaps* impacting on parent and family engagement for the inner northern region

- Extract findings from data gathering exercises and consultations
- Sort findings into common issues and gaps (needs analysis)
- Consult with Steering Committee –
  - Identify priority areas/issues
  - Approaches to tackling priority areas/issues
- Write up a Recommendations report

DATA IMPLEMENTATION

Develop a two-three year strategic plan, which is based on recommendations from the data gathering and evaluation phase that informs the implementation phase. The Steering Committee will contribute to the development of this strategic plan. At this early stage, we do not want to predict what the plan would entail, however it is envisaged that the plan will outline practical strategies for implementation that will result in meaningful outcomes for the young people, families and schools involved. The focus will be on improving and practicing school-family-community partnerships.

Examples of potential deliverables that could be implemented *are:*
- Coordination of services
- Development of resources
- Organisation of professional development activities
- Formation of ongoing network
- Development of local area plans involving school, family and community partnerships
- Pilot projects with key schools

- ➢ *Implement* strategies outlined in the strategic plan
- ➢ *Monitor and evaluate* the implementation of the strategic plan – It is critical that processes for evaluation and review are followed during the implementation of strategies.

Scope and Limitations

Due to resource and time constraints, we acknowledge the scope and limitations of the project as follows:
- The focus of the project will be on families with children aged 10-19 who live and/or study in the cities of Darebin, Moreland and Yarra
- The distribution of the School survey will be limited to secondary schools in all sectors – total survey population will be 37 secondary and specialist schools in the cities of Darebin, Moreland and Yarra
- Environmental scan –
  - Scope to be services/programs that operate or service the inner northern region of Melbourne (Darebin, Moreland and Yarra)
  - Mapping of services/programs for parents with children aged 10 – 19 even though we realise that parent and family engagement in learning should begin from birth
- During the 'Data Gathering' phase, in-depth consultations with schools will be limited to two schools
- The scope of the project at each phase can grow if additional funding is acquired

APPENDIX 4: PRINCIPAL SURVEY TOOL

Parent and Family Engagement – School Survey

Parent and Family Engagement: the engagement of parents and families in their children's learning.

"Engagement implies parents taking their place alongside teachers in the schooling of their children, fitting together their knowledge of children, teaching and learning, with teachers' knowledge about the child and teaching and learning." (Pushor, 2007)

It has long been understood that if parents and families are engaged in their children's learning and development, these children will experience better outcomes at school and beyond school. Despite this understanding, we recognise that 'parent and family engagement' continues to be beset with challenges. INLLEN is undertaking a Parent and Family Engagement project that will involve gaining a better understanding of the local context for schools and communities in our region to inform a strategic plan for implementation.

Your contribution through this School Survey is extremely valuable.

PART A: SURVEY

SCHOOL NAME:	
YOUR NAME:	
YOUR POSITION:	

1. **What are the main issues/challenges for parent and family engagement at your school?**

2. **Do you have examples of parent and family engagement strategies that have worked/are working really well for your school? If yes, please describe.**

3. **Do you have any programs specifically aimed at engaging families from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD), Indigenous and/or low Socio-economic Status backgrounds? If yes, please describe.**

PART B: CHECKLIST

Please identify if and how your school undertakes the following types of parent and family engagement* *(tick the box that applies for each engagement type)*

Type of Parent and Family Engagement	Already doing this	Could do this easily	This will take time	This will be hard
1. PARENTING - *Assist families with parenting skills and setting home conditions to support children as students* - *Develop the school's capacity to better understand students' families*				
Examples in your school:				
2. COMMUNICATING *Conduct effective communications from school-to-home and from home-to-school about school programs and student progress*				
Examples in your school:				
3. VOLUNTEERING *Provide opportunities and organise volunteers to support the school, families and students*				
Examples in your school:				
4. LEARNING AT HOME *Involve families with their children on homework and other curriculum-related activities and decisions*				
Examples in your school:				
5. DECISION MAKING *Include families as delegates in school decisions, and develop parent leaders and representatives*				
Examples in your school:				
6. COLLABORATING WITH THE COMMUNITY *Coordinate resources and services from the community for families, students and the school, and provide services to the community*				
Examples in your school:				

APPENDIX 5 - ADDITIONAL READING

SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES WORKING TOGETHER: BEST PRACTICE AND INTERNATIONAL TRENDS

Reprinted with permission from George Otero. *This document has been taken from: Schools and Communities: Working Together to Transform Children's Lives, John West-Burnham, Maggie Farrar, George Otero, Continuum Press, 2007.*

Dr. George Otero, AUGUST 2011

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"If we eliminate the social factor from the child we are left only with an abstraction; if we eliminate the individual factor from society we are left only with an inert and lifeless mass. Education therefore must begin with a psychological insight into the child's capacities, interests and habits."

John Dewey 1897

The evidence base is growing. schools and communities that work together can indeed enhance a child's life chances, wellbeing and school outcomes. Effective schools have always been reflections of effective families and communities not the other way round.

This paper attempts to establish a strong argument for seeing schools as community organizations, not as government or private providers of educational services. When schools are seen as community structures to support education across the community working together is a matter of necessity. On the other hand, when schools are seen as service agencies offering a product, working together is seen as improving economic and organizational efficiencies.   Reclaiming a time tested and social understanding of the relationship between communities and their schools will help promote the development of shared ownership, commitment and leadership across schools, families and communities. When schools operate as partners with parents and the local community they are more likely to ensure that every child regardless of wealth, talent, gender, or social circumstance is a successful student, person, and citizen.

As a community organization the school will need to consider some key propositions about education in the 21st Century.

These six core beliefs are:

- Education is not synonymous with schooling and deals with an area much broader than academic training, vocational preparation and college readiness.

- Education is a lifetime process and is provided by the entire community, especially parents.

- There are many groups and individuals involved in the education process and every community has an abundance of untapped educational resources.

- Education is a community's most valuable resource.

- Involvement of the community is a community right that results in better decisions and better community support.

- Services should be delivered as close as possible to where people live.

Yet, recently, a belief in the power of schooling to single handedly change a child's life chances has gained currency world-wide. This belief gained support from the school improvement movement that captured the hearts and minds of educational institutions beginning in the early 70's and can be found in the current policy structures of most Western educational systems. The recent report by McKinsey & Company titled, How the World's Best-Performing School Systems Come Out On Top asserts that regardless of history, culture, or community context applying a set of universal improvement strategies can make any school a success. Schools are now seen as malleable to organizational change. Key school effectiveness factors are identified and applied.

The good school was now the school that produced effective students. As a result, the traditional role of the school in educating the young changed. Therefore the nature of the relationship between school and community changed. Effective students had the best chance to continue through the education pipeline and therefore these students had the best chance of doing well in society. Whereas in the past the school was an instrument of the community, the modern school, whether public or private, had emerged as a service providing academic success and a ticket to higher education and the good life.

Schools and Communities Together: An Education for the Whole Child

Educators, policy makers and the wider community are beginning to recognize that increasing a child's life chances depend upon the action of the community and the school in concert. Citizens in most countries are being called on to broaden their understanding of what schools and society need to do to support the development of well-rounded students ready to thrive in the modern world. Educating the whole child includes not only fostering academic achievement, but also promoting physical and emotional health, offering a personalized education by qualified adults, strengthening students' engagement with school and the wider community, and preparing them for success in postsecondary study and work.

Gender, disability,
ethnicity

Family

Resilience

Social

Social Capital

Readiness

Personal

Social Class

Motivation

Poverty

Ability

School
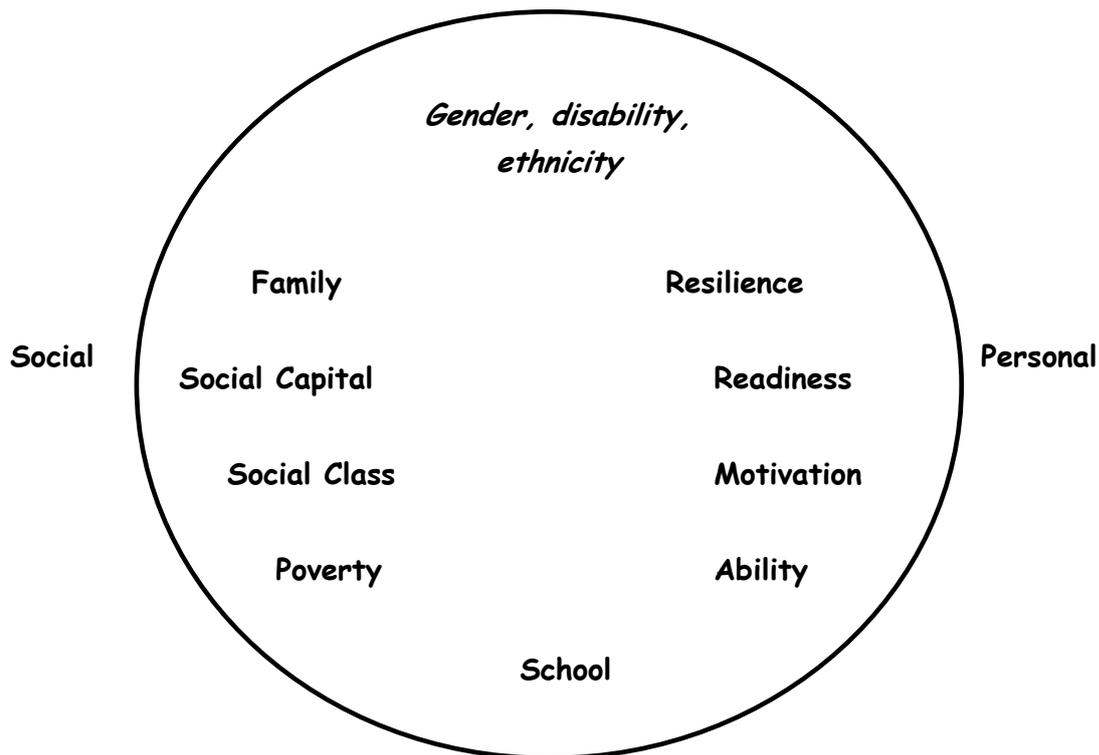
Figure 1

The variables influencing a child's life chances and well-being

The three factors at the top of the diagram, which are italicised, are in a different category to the rest as they are essentially inherited; in the normal course of events there is nothing that can be done to change them – assuming that change was necessary or desirable. What is very clear is that in certain circumstances gender, ethnicity and disability can have significant negative implications in terms of life chances. In other circumstances they can have highly beneficial implications – it seems to depend on context. The other three variables are not fixed in the way of the first three factors i.e. they can be influenced, changed and mitigated.

The social variables are essentially contextual; they describe the social situation of every child and young person. The personal variables are the factors that explain the distinctive identity of every person – what makes us who we are. The school as a variable is significant in that it is probably the one common factor in every person's life and in some respects is the most controllable of all.

Taken from: Schools and Communities: Working Together to Transform Children's Lives, John West-Burnham, Maggie Farrar, George Otero, Continuum Press, 2007.

The Outward Facing School – From My School To Our School Forum– George Otero, 2011

Current efforts to improve schools mostly miss the point. First, they fail to understand what John Goodlad and his researchers documented years ago in A Place Called School, 'a school is not a school is not a school'. Every school is a dynamic and integral part of a local community. He promoted a

context-based assessment to individualize reform efforts. A school is more like a community structure than a business.

Second, the school does not adequately control the factors that make a difference in what schools do. Only when schools, students, families and communities share the responsibility for educating the young, can schools be said to be performing well. The variety and structure of "charter" and "community schools" in the United States attest to the fact that effective schools take many diverse forms.

This single minded focus on improving the school as the key to educating all children regardless of social and community contexts is based on the notion that the school is a closed system. But, in order to continue to raise standards and ensure that all children have the opportunity and support they need to achieve, schools must begin to act much more as open systems. They must embrace the families and community of which they are an integral part.

When schools claim sole responsibility for educational provision, they often find themselves at odds and often out of touch with the educational needs and aspirations of the local community of which they are a part. Schools then often find themselves operating as silos: out of touch and no longer an integral part of the community. Given the interdependence between family, school and local community, schools cannot only be about the business of improving themselves: they also need to address this isolation and alienation. Schools must transform their relationship with the community. This involves changing attitudes, relationships and the deployment of resources. (West-Burnham, Farrar, Otero, 2007).

Recent research in Chicago (Bryk and Schneider) 2002, confirms once again that schools are indeed reflections of each local community and that schools improve as communities improve. Over the course of three years, Bryk and Schneider, together with a diverse team of other researchers and school practitioners, studied reform in twelve Chicago elementary schools. Each school was undergoing extensive reorganization in response to the Chicago School Reform Act of 1988, which called for greater involvement of parents and local community leaders in their neighborhood schools. They found that the personal dynamics among teachers, students, and their parents, for example, influence whether students regularly attend school and sustain their efforts in the difficult task of learning. They demonstrate how effective social relationships across the school and community-which they term relational trust-can serve as a prime resource for school improvement.

Schools and Communities are interdependent. Due to the recent emphasis on school improvement, many educators have come to believe that school has more effect on the community than vice versa. Research like that of John Hattie (2009) which states that children do better as students in school if the parents understand the language of schooling is interpreted as evidence that the school can neutralize the influence of minority, ethnic or poor parents by teaching them the language of schooling. Really, this research only indicates that the influence of parents and families is so great that if they don't understand and support the school, success for their children, even as good students, is severely limited. The power of parents who understand how to effectively partner with the school in the educational process is the critical factor in school success.

More recent research (Bryk, Easton and Luppescu) 2006, found that indeed a school's capacity for improvement is heavily influenced by its community context. In a document reporting research

underpinning the reforms outlined in the National Parnership on Low SES School Communities it is stated that "there is overwhelming agreement in the research that when schools address identified needs and engage with the broader community, student achievement improves (Henderson and Mapp, 2002, Berthelsen and Walker, 2009)." Schools in this National Partnership are encouraged to draw on Turners (2001) research in low SES school communities in which schools moved beyond collaboration to a point where they are working in partnership to bring about systemic change in education and community.

In fact, out of school factors still have a larger effect on young people's educational and social futures than the school. They always have and they always will. "Inputs to schools matter, " writes Henry C. Berliner, a professor of educational leadership and policy studies at Arizona State University. (2009). "As wonderful as some teachers and schools are, most cannot eliminate inequalities that have their roots outside their doors." What we need to do in schools is quickly reclaim the proven partnership with parents and communities in order to assure a fair, equitable, and socially just education for everyone in every community.

For example, in their study of 51 schools in the United States, Henderson and Mapp (2002) investigated the kinds of parent and community engagement that impact on student achievement and recommended that schools can best sustain parental engagement by personalizing the support to parents, by listening to parents and responding to the real need rather than perceived needs of families and local communities.

This was demonstrated in a practical way when OMD Insights, a marketing firm in Australia, got 125 families around the nation with children aged five to twelve to play board games at least once a week for a month. They found that playing board games together just once a week improved the children's social, educational and life skills in dramatic ways. As a result, time poor parents whose kids usually spent too much time on computer and console games vowed to continue the ritual and noticed themselves becoming more patient and organized. (Harold Sun, Wednesday, August 19, 2009, page 2.)

The Outward Facing 21st Century School: Mindset Challenges

21st Century Schools will be no different than 20th Century Schools unless the leaders of such schools change their minds about the function of schools in this century. Understanding what it means to be "outward facing" invites such an examination.

Mindset Challenge # 1   Give up being all things to all people! Move to a right here right now approach.

A quick look at the brief for a 21st Century School seems to encourage schools to be all things to all people. It is clear from collective experience, systems analysis and the power of social and economic forces that schools cannot hope to organize their resources to address effectively all the factors that affect educational success. So why try! Better to work with the entire community, especially families, to personalize the school program for each and every student by addressing the social, personal and psychological factors that dominate the learners world in the present. To educate in partnership with the student, his or her family and the immediate community requires the school to

face the student, family and community as the key resources required for the school to provide educational success.

Mindset Challenge # 2 Move from a "find and fix" instructional approach to a "predict and prevent" curricular approach.

Mindset Challenge # 3 Understand the deep structure of schooling

Schools are best understood as learning communities not as institutions or organizations. That means the structure of the school is reflected best in the day to day relationships that occur. School leaders need new lenses in examining their school's effectiveness. Relational frameworks that address learning, networking, wellness and communication will be critical tools in developing the 21st Century School.

Mindset Challenge # 4 See the purpose of the 21st Century School as helping a family raise a child rather than the multitude of purposes that have dominated 20th Century Schooling.

Rudy Crew provides this metaphor.

"Schools must be the common garden where we (school, family and community) grow our future. Let's begin by seeing our schools as places of connection. We must put schools squarely in the center of all the things that make up our communities---families, teachers, businesses, government, the arts, and faith and service organizations. Once we have done that, schools will no longer be perceived as a social program or form of charity. Rather the relationship between schools and various community entities will be transformed into an agreement to produce children who can compete anywhere in the world."

Mindset Challenge # 5 Understand that the most important resources needed to educate children and youth are located outside the school and not within the school.

This understanding requires that school leaders adopt processes of community engagement and relationship building if they want to move forward with the partnerships that help achieve the 21st Century School. Using tools of relationship building and community engagement schools can create the opportunity for the community as a whole to develop educational and change processes tailored to the needs and resources of the community

COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS: THE KEY TO BUILDING THE SCHOOL OF THE 21ST CENTURY.

- Fostering community conversations
- See, Feel, Change vs. Analyze, Think, Change
- Dialogical approach vs. program approach
- Turning policy and good thinking into changed relationships

Community Conversations Questionnaire:

1. What do you love about this community? What makes it unique?

2. What are the challenges this school and community face?

3. How do schools contribute to economic, social and environmental revitalization?

4. What is the present economic base of this community? What are the economic opportunities that the school and community, working together, could develop?

5. What aspects of this school and community need to be protected and retained?

6. When, where and how do school and community members share resources and diverse perspectives with each other? When do people get together to share their ideas? Who participates in these discussions? How are young people involved?

7. What risks, barriers or obstacles need to be considered?

8. What and who is in your community that could contribute to a real and positive change in the way things are done around here to help create a worthwhile future for people?

Taken from the School-Led Community Revitalization Project, Center for RelationaLearning

(Visit www.relationalearning.com for a full description).

Communities and schools working together: A True Partnership

Working together, parents, teachers and community members can focus their time and resources on making sure that social and personal factors are positively applied to student learning before during and after school. (West Burnham, Farrar and Otero, 2007). The potential for successful partnering is great within Australian communities. The NAB Schools First program is an excellent example of the quality of partnerships within Australian school communities.

Effective strategies for working together can be found in many initiatives. Two that have a strong evidence base that demonstrates their positive effect on student achievement are the asset approach developed by the Search Institute and the extended learning approach developed by Citizen Schools. These initiatives depend upon the community for their success. In rural communities the Center for Relationalearning established a capacity building approach where the community and school through a discovery conversation process created educational opportunities that addressed the communities needs and aspirations.

For over 75 years, the Mott Foundation, based in Flint, Michigan, has sought to develop principles and practices that provide local residents and community agencies (including schools) to become active partners in addressing community needs. The basic need of any community is educating the young. The following principals are applied to any and all educational activities:

Self-Determination
Self-Help
Leadership Development
Localization
Integrated Delivery of Services
Maximum Use of Resources
Inclusiveness
Responsiveness
Lifelong Learning

CREATING POWERFUL LEARNING RELATIONSHIPS: A WHOLE SCHOOL COMMUNITY APPROACH

The author, in partnership with two principals in Melbourne has developed a unique partnership model of education to support school and community working together as partners. Following this model (Csoti, Otero, Rothstad 2011) shows any school how to partner education by focusing all conversations, planning, activities and relationships on four basic domains; (1) parent and family as primary partners (2) Community engagement (3) a personalized Curriculum and (4) extended learning for all. The model is specifically designed to maximize the application of basic beliefs that undergird school and community partnerships.
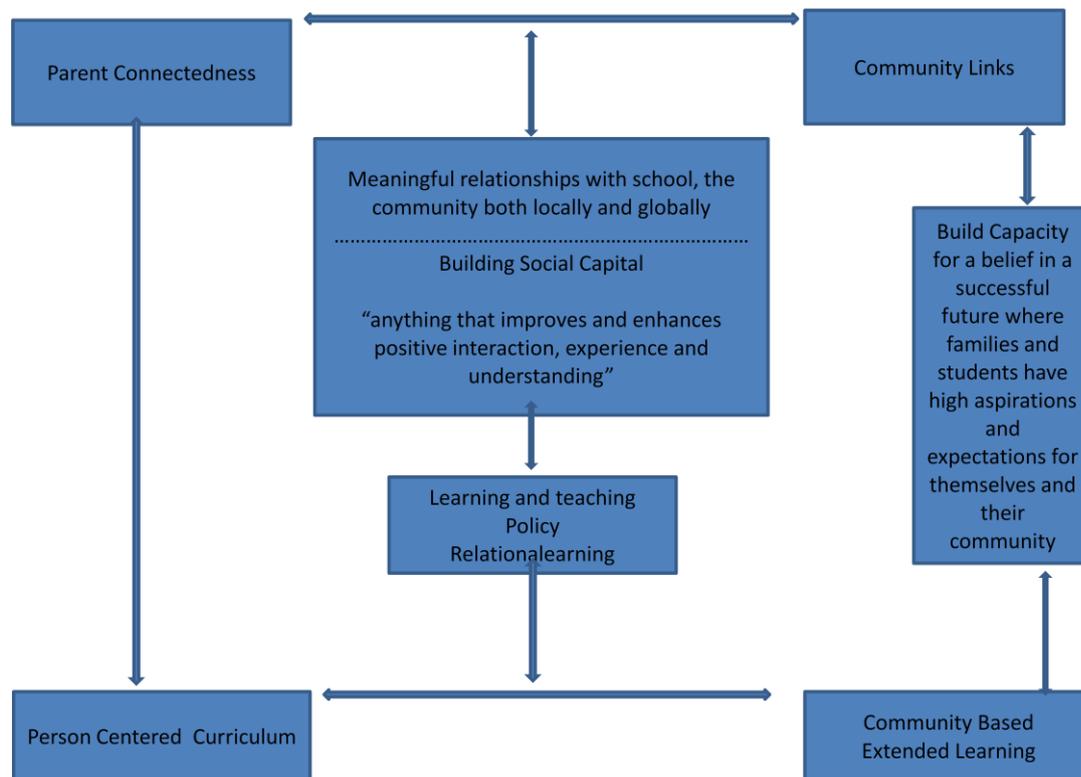
Partnership Model of Education

Current efforts to improve schools mostly miss the point. First, they fail to understand what John Goodlad and his researchers documented years ago. A school is not a school is not a school. Every school is a dynamic and integral part of a local community. He promoted a context-based assessment to individualize reform efforts. Second, the school does not adequately control the factors that make a difference in what schools do. Only when schools, students, families and communities share the burden equally do schools "perform" well. The variety and structure of charters and community schools attest to this fact. Third, school success is always more a function of the quality of relationships than the number or effectiveness of specific programs or curriculum. Michael Fullan, clearly one of the most highly regarded educational consultants in the world today, puts it this way, "any educational reform strategy that improves relationships has a chance of succeeding; any strategy that does not is doomed to fail". Until these three truths come together in an integrated strategy, schools will basically remain the same.

This model brings together relationship building, local context, and significant educational factors so that each and every school can maximize learning, wellbeing and life chances.

This model changes the culture of a school. Everyone knows that positive relationships make a difference but few understand how relationships determine the quality of everything we do in a school. If relationship-building is central to success, why is this basic principal of educational change violated and ignored so often? Once again, Michael Fullan hits the nail on the head. "Because it is easier to pass legislation, announce a policy, prescribe new standards, and reorganize. Those who imagine strategies of legislation and prescription will really work are treading a fine line between ignorance and arrogance. It is much harder to work through complex problems with diverse personalities and competing groups. Yet altering relationships for the better is *absolutely necessary* (italics mine) for successful reform".

This model forces educators to plan and deliver to the parents, families and children as they come to school each day. Such a responsive and personalized approach cannot be accomplished unless everyone concerned is working closely together as partners.

Some operating principles in schools using the whole school community model

- High expectations for all, adults and students, who participate in the work of the school.
- The practice of building on the students, parents and community's strengths.
- A priority on creating and fostering partnerships, public and private, from many parts of the community they serve.
- Recognition and acceptance of the responsibility for shared accountability in the results, with schools, families and community as partners.
- The will to embrace diversity, recognizing the strength that diversity brings to the community and respecting the many opportunities for growth that such diversity provides.
- Processes that involve creating and recreating themselves with the participation of the many stakeholder groups to respond to the needs and assets of their community.

Indicators of these principles and examples of the principles in action usually include:
1. Shared leadership structures and activities
2. Quality education available to all groups in the community and at many times of the day or evening.
3. Emphasis on asset development for children, youth and families in all areas, cognitive, social, psychological, and physical.
4. A broad array of family supports
5. Community engagement and development opportunities for the stakeholders.

After nearly 40 years of school improvement from inside the system it is time to renew the basic partnership between school, family and community that makes education a success for everyone.
The evidence is clear. If you find an effective school in today's terms, one that has most students doing well on literacy and numeracy tests, you can be sure this is due to an effective community and not the other way round.

WHAT IS OUR SCHOOL DOING TO BUILD OUR COMMUNITY'S WELL-BEING?

	YES/NO	HOW
Our school buildings and grounds are used by the local community.		
We provide co-ordinated services for families by co-operating with other agencies.		
We have extensive participation by students and their families in decision making.		
We provide a community resource directory for families		
We provide education for the community		
We work with local businesses and community organizations		
We have after-school and holiday programs for children and/or families		
Our students do service in and for the community		
We take part in community planning		
We are contributing to local community building		
We routinely use community resources in the curriculum meeting local and cultural needs		
We have positive relationships with families and with the community		
We know what's going on in our community		

THE MOST IMPORTANT TWO THINGS WE COULD DO TO IMPROVE OUR SCHOOL"S FAMILY-SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONS ARE:

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