

“Successful strategies that the schools are using to engage parents and families in their child’s education.”

Principal’s Sabbatical Report

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Sabbatical Report

“Responsive curriculum effectively incorporates connections to students’ lives, prior understanding and experiences, out-of-school, drawing on and adding to the funds of knowledge and practices of parents, families and the community.” (*E.R.O School Evaluation Indicators 2015*)

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Executive Summary:

This report is a study of initiatives used by schools to raise the educational outcomes for their priority learners.

The priority learners as identified by MOE are students from Maori and Pasifika background, low SES families and students with specific learning needs.

The study involved visiting schools in New Zealand, speaking with key staff from the schools and In-school and Across-school teachers from the South Auckland Catholic Schools Kahui Ako.

The second objective of the study was to examine successful strategies that schools in New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Ireland use to engage parents and families in their child's education.

The engagement of parents and families in their child's education has been a focus in New Zealand and particularly in schools overseas that have high percentages of immigrant families from non-English speaking backgrounds. The study aimed to look at strategies that the school leaders were using to move away from previous ways of simply informing parents of their child's progress to a more collaborative, partnership model to engage the parents in their child's learning.

Purpose:

The purpose of my study was to examine strategies used to strengthen partnerships between families and schools for raising educational outcomes for their learners.

Background and Rationale:

As a College three years ago, we decided to review our current programmes of engaging with our families particularly in regards to the sharing of academic performance of their son and strengthening the families collaboration with the College.

The De La Salle College Strategic Goal Pastoral Care 4.5 states that, *“We will provide opportunities for Parents and families to engage with the College in their son’s education.”*

The Pasifika families of our young men have an enormously “high trust”, model of our College leaders in fact all teaching staff. This was identified as being a barrier to them contributing and collaborating with the College on all aspects relating to their son’s education. The common answer that was given by the parents was, *“You teachers are the experts, why do you want to hear what we have to say about this?”*

The majority of our parents are NZ born and educated and we believe have much to contribute to their son’s education and programmes that we offer at the College.

Our goal was to make it more comfortable for our parents to engage with their son, his teachers and the College so as to improve student achievement. *“The purpose of these relationships was to extend learning across home and school. Students then experience multiple and aligned opportunities to learn and practice”*. (ERO Educationally Powerful Connections with Parents and Whanau 2015).

South Auckland Catholic Schools – Kahui Ako.

Our Community of Learning has set as one of its Strategic Goals – Engagement: *“By December 2020 we will have gauged, can measure and track engagement through the Community to deliver best practices across all schools.”*

The study aligns with and aims to examine local and overseas practices focused on the engagement of parents and families in their child’s education.

Methodology:

The study involved visiting schools in the COL who had made specific goals of raising the engagement with their students' families.

- Interviews with Principals, staff and students
- Interviews with In-School and Across-School COL teachers
- Visiting London Central Foundation School, 80% of students from minority ethnic groups, 66% with English as a second language

Interviews were based on the following questions:

- What specific initiatives is your school using to raise the educational outcomes for your priority learners?
- In what ways do you collaborate with parents to engage them with the school in their son's education?
- What ways have been the most successful? How do you evaluate your initiatives?
- What initiatives were used to specifically help parents at home to raise the educational outcomes for their son?

Findings:

It was clearly evident from my study that all schools visited had made an emphasis and priority on creating greater parent engagement in their children's learning.

The schools and the COL that I visited used a range of targeted initiatives and events to increase engagement with parents, examples are listed.

- Academic Counselling meetings three times a year involving the student, parent and Home Room teacher. The student's learning goals, progress and how the parents could support these at home were discussed, recorded and reviewed. The success of Academic Counselling was significant as reported by all schools implementing this engagement strategy.
- Parents were invited personally by letter to attend the Academic Counselling interview, the specific time for their appointment was included.
- Communication was repeated and conducted through several different mediums in order to ensure that the expectation of attendance at Academic Counselling was clear.
- Schools held meetings – hui – fono – for the different ethnic groups, conducted in the various languages with the focus on giving parents practical strategies for helping to raise their child's academic progress.
- Parent Partnership meetings held to target specific learning areas, Reading – Maths – Science and ways that Parents could assist their children at home in these subjects.
- Parents taught through Year level meetings of how to access the common digital mediums available for tracking their child's progress at school e.g Website, School App, Parent Portal, NZQA, Weekly Note
- The message given clearly to parents at Enrolment Interviews that the school has a very strong stance of, "Enrolling the Family" and that parents are expected to partner with the school in their child's education. Parent – School events are not optional, parent attendance is "expected."
- New entrant Parent meetings and Orientation days for new students
- Open Days for Parents and their children
- Parent and Child Sports and Cultural events
- Grandparents Day
- NCEA & NZQA evenings for Parents run by presenters in various first languages

- Phone surveys to Parents to gauge effectiveness of school programmes and Parent satisfaction with their son's learning and progress.
- Home Room teachers retaining the same class from Year 9 through to 13, to build a strong knowledge of the student, strengthen the relationship with the parents and learn each student's "story".
- Personal invitations to parents to participate in Assemblies highlighting achievements, Cultural events, Language Weeks, Sports, Music and Religious events
- Running school led "Computers in Homes", tutorials for Parents to teach computer skills and show parents how to access various digital information on school SMS relating to their child's progress.
- A "24 hour", time limit for Staff to reply to any parents request for clarification of their child's progress.
- A commitment from the school that Parent-School Partnership meetings were no longer than 1 hour in length.

Implications – Benefits – Conclusions:

- Schools at all levels and contexts have made a strong commitment to build initiatives for engagement with parents and are using a range of strategies for this.
- There is strong evidence that the engagement of parents with their child's school has the most benefit when specific learning skills are the focus of the engagement (Reading and Writing skills).
- Academic Counselling has resulted in a Parent Attendance rate of over 90% across the school compared to the previous single subject Parent – Teacher Interview model which had a 47% attendance.
- School Leaders must foster and trial appropriate contexts for the school and parents that focus on strengthening educational connections with raising achievement always the priority.
- Using local community resource people to assist in communication with parents (Local Body Representatives, Priests, Kaumata, Elders, MOE, NZQA, MP's)
- Adapt school practices and times to provide flexibility in engaging with parents
- Providing teaching Staff with targeted PD on Cultural Responsiveness practices in teaching and engaging with parents.

- Parent surveys to inform schools what they see as effective ways to strengthen engagement.
- The communication to parents that the school has a strong philosophy of, “Enrolling the family”, and that the expectation is that a family is to be at every school event that they are invited to regarding their child’s education.
- E.R.O (Insights September 2019) What are these kura and state-integrated schools doing that allows them to beat the odds for NCEA achievement?
 Firstly evidence suggests that they appear to better cater for Māori and Pacific students, have strong links to the community and provide for greater opportunities for parents and teachers to meet regularly. School leaders also appear to know their students’ families better and vice versa, which appears to strengthen the relationships between the school and the community. In the case of Whare Kura it may also reflect that these learning environments enable Māori learners to enjoy teaching which strongly affirms language, culture and identity.

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