

Leading Family School Partnerships



Catholic Education Office
Archdiocese of Melbourne

This document has been developed by the Catholic Education Office Melbourne Wellbeing & Community Partnerships Unit to assist school leaders to understand and strengthen the role of school leadership in facilitating effective family, school and community partnerships. In this context leadership can be displayed in three related but distinctly different ways – **in-school** leadership, **between school** (cluster) leadership and leadership **within the community**. This work has been informed by a substantial evidence base and learnings from the CEOM Family School Partnerships (FSP) initiative.

Family school partnerships, family engagement in learning, and strong school and system leadership support student learning and school improvement outcomes. This paper identifies evidence, theory and frameworks that have been shown to support and strengthen the leadership of family school partnerships in schools and clusters. It reflects on the range, impact and effectiveness of models of leadership introduced through the FSP initiative, identifies factors impacting effective leadership of family school partnerships, and provides practical guidance for school and system leadership.



Key terms used in this document

Family school partnerships

A multi-faceted approach used to build strong and effective relationships between schools, families and their communities to support learning. Through the CEOM's work in this area a number of dimensions of family school partnerships have been identified, including family engagement in learning; family involvement and connectedness; community partnerships and connectedness; and school culture.

Family School Partnerships (FSP) initiative

The CEOM, from 2010 to 2013, implemented the FSP initiative as part of the federal government's Smarter Schools National Partnerships reform agenda. The purpose of the initiative was to support 35 Catholic schools in low socio-economic communities to build effective partnerships with families and communities to improve student learning and life opportunities.

FSP schools

Schools involved in the CEOM FSP initiative.

Family School Partnerships Convenor (FSPC)

Family School Partnership Convenors (FSPCs) were employed by the CEOM to work with clusters of up to four FSP schools. Their role was to lead school change by working alongside leaders, staff, families and communities to strengthen family school partnerships to enhance student learning.

Parent

The primary caregiver/s in a child's life. While engagement of the broader family has a significant and positive impact on the development of children and young people, this term is used at times to recognise the fundamental role that parents or primary caregivers play in maximising learning outcomes.

Family

Parents as well as other significant people identified by children or young people as belonging to their family. This may include members of the household, siblings, grandparents, cousins and other relatives.

Family school partnerships

Family school partnerships are, and have for many years been, an integral and distinctive part of the ethos of Catholic education.

“This [engaging parents and families in school learning] is core work for the CEOM and for schools.”
Executive Director of Catholic Education, CEOM, 2013

The critical place and value of family school partnerships in Catholic education is described in the Catholic Education Office Melbourne’s (CEOM) formal education strategies and school improvement frameworks, including:

- *2011-2015 Directions for Catholic Education in the Archdiocese of Melbourne*
- *School Improvement Framework*
- *Learning Centred Schools: A Sacred Landscape: Teaching and Learning Framework Strategy*
- *2011 Charter for promoting Outward Facing School Communities.*

Family School Partnerships initiative

From 2010 to 2013, through the Smarter Schools National Partnerships for Low Socio-Economic Status School Communities, the CEOM developed and implemented the Family School Partnerships (FSP) initiative with the aim of strengthening partnerships between families, schools and communities to improve student engagement and learning outcomes.

The CEOM was well placed to explore the role of family school partnerships in improving learning outcomes for young people through its early work on Schools as Core Social Centres. This, alongside an extensive and growing body of national and international research on the rationale for and value of family engagement in learning, informed the initial development of the FSP initiative.

“The evidence is consistent, positive and convincing. When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more.” (Henderson & Mapp 2002, p.8)

“Given the clear benefits of positive parental engagement in student learning, by way of improved academic achievement, wellbeing and productivity... resourcing and effectively progressing parental engagement initiatives is warranted, if not essential to education reform and the future of Australia.” (Emerson et al 2012, p.50)

“The support for parents for learning and achievement is the single most important contributory factor to increased student achievement. In terms of raising school performance, parents matter significantly.” (Harris et al 2009, p.2)

The FSP initiative provided the CEOM and schools with an opportunity to examine from a practical perspective the power of family engagement in improving student learning, and how this can best be facilitated and enabled within school communities and by a supportive education system. It sought to strengthen school capacity for establishing and maintaining family school partnerships through an evolving model of in-school and system support. Central to the initiative was the CEOM’s employment of 13 Family School Partnership Convenors (FSPCs) to work with 35 school communities across the Archdiocese of Melbourne.

This reform approach had a significant impact on the attitudes, knowledge, skills and understandings of school staff and families, and on whole school culture and approaches to family engagement – challenging some of the traditional thinking within schools and the CEOM about the role families can play in their child’s learning. The lessons learned are clear:

- A culture of partnerships for learning must be embedded in school culture, in the CEOM strategies and

frameworks, and in system and school leadership

- Schools need to listen to their community and understand its needs, strengths and aspirations
- Guiding voices and advocates for change are required within schools and the CEOM
- Schools and the CEOM must build the capacity of leaders, staff, families and communities in new and different ways
- Learning together in clusters and partnerships increases the pool of ideas, experiences and resources.

Leading the way

The guiding imperative that children deserve to learn and succeed at school is true for all children. It aligns with the CEOM's strategic directions and is an integral part of Catholic education.

The FSP initiative has shown stronger family school partnerships to be a vital investment in the future of all children. There is emerging evidence from among the FSP schools of changes flowing through to improved learning and wellbeing outcomes for students.

The CEOM is now internationally acknowledged as a leader in this work. There is an expectation that the momentum developed through the FSP initiative will be maintained.

Leadership – an essential element

Effective leadership

“What kind of leadership will be needed for schools to effectively serve society as we look further into the future? Whatever the answer, it will not be the superhero leadership of the past. The new century will not be kind to leaders who seek to change things by sheer force of their personality. Nor will it be kind to leaders who seek to change things by the sheer force of their bureaucratic authority. Instead, we will need leadership for schools themed to learning, to the development of civic virtue, and to the cultivation of self-management.” (Sergiovanni 2001, p. 38)

Effective leadership is essential for school improvement and improved student learning outcomes.

The CEOM's learning and teaching strategy, *Learning Centred Schools: A Sacred Landscape*, identifies leadership as being second only to teaching among the school-related factors that affect student learning. As one of the Strategy's four strategic directions it is noted that successful leaders manage strategies for continuous improvement of learning and teaching by setting the vision and direction of the school, developing capabilities of teachers and others, and ensuring the school's organisation facilitates rather than impedes learning and teaching.

In this context, effective leadership of family school partnerships is critical to enhanced student learning.

Children learn in a variety of ways across a variety of environments. The family, home, school and community all contribute significantly to children's readiness and capacity to learn. Connecting and enhancing these learning environments can make a substantial difference to children's learning and life outcomes. This means that just as improvements in pedagogy or curriculum require dedicated leadership, education leaders must develop ways to value, connect and support learning across all the places that children live and learn (see Davies, Elmore, Bryk et al).

Purposeful, collaborative and creative

In a Catholic school environment, where belief in children's learning is at the heart of everything we do, leadership must be both hope-filled and explicitly linked to learning. Bezzina describes the exercising of leadership in Catholic schools as 'hope in action', closely tied to meaning and purpose.

“To live by hope, is to believe that our actions, our families, our lives have meaning”. (Bezzina 2010, p.6)

There are many different approaches to leadership, but working collaboratively with leadership distributed across multiple leaders is most effective in supporting family school partnerships. This is evident in the research (Harris 2009), but also through the experience of the CEOM’s FSP initiative.

Family School Partnership Convenors applied Fullan’s (2010) *Motion Leadership* concept of ‘Ready - Fire - Aim’ to activate change and align strategies with school improvement goals and priorities. Schools were encouraged to be creative and try new ways of working with families and community, going ‘light on judgement’ and treating this time as a learning period.

In this environment, the FSPCs’ role was to work with school leaders to lead cultural change through engagement of families in exploring their contribution to their child’s learning. This approach focused on developing a shared understanding and fostering new experiences for teachers alongside families. This challenged perceptions and understandings of the role of families and their contribution to learning.

As illustrated in the following pages, there is no single model for effective leadership of family school partnerships (e.g. through a position of leadership or distributed leadership). What has been found is that school improvement and family engagement will not be sustained without leaders who are focused on building and maintaining momentum and embedding change in the way schools work.

System support

Just as a school is strengthened by its community, a school is strengthened by the purposeful support and encouragement of an effective education system. Schools are responsible for establishing, nurturing and sustaining family school partnerships.

The way in which schools lead family school partnerships has implications for the way in which the system can best support and enable the partnership work of schools and communities.

Building your school’s capacity to lead family school partnerships

Three distinctive types of leadership are instrumental in successfully creating and sustaining effective family school partnerships. That is, leadership:

- **IN** school
- **BETWEEN** schools
- **WITHIN** the community.

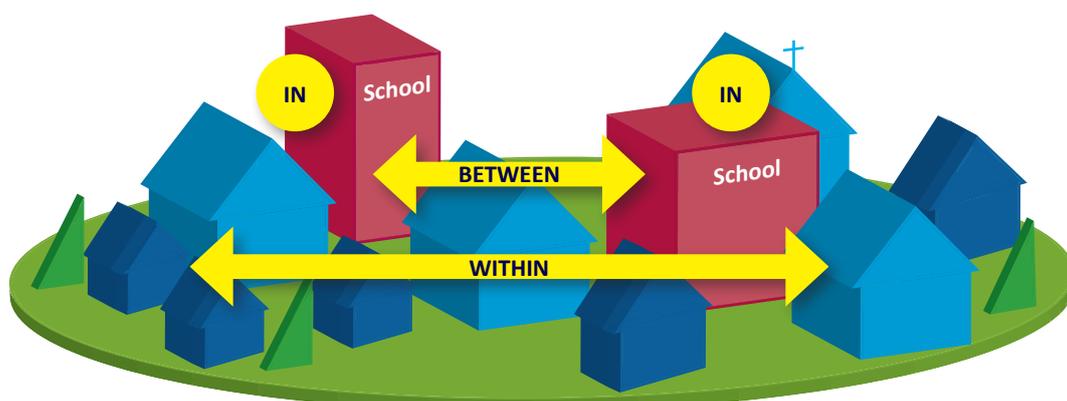


Figure 1 - Types of leadership in family school partnerships

In-school leadership is focused on partnerships that engage families and staff of the school in supporting student learning. **Between school** or cluster leadership is that which is required to build bridges between a school and one or more partner schools to enhance learning opportunities and outcomes and build school capacity. Leadership **within the community** is characterised by a capacity to connect the whole school with the wider community and a variety of external partner organisations. This type of leadership draws on the established principles of community development.

There are elements within each type of leadership that draw on the core leadership capacity that exists within a school through the Principal, other school leaders, parents and community stakeholders. However, there are also some complementary and different skills to those required for traditional school roles. Each type of leadership has its own characteristics, roles and skill requirements.

To optimise the potential of family school partnerships a school must develop capacity across all three types of leadership.

It should not be assumed that school leaders and teachers have all of the skills and knowledge required to lead family school partnerships, in-school, between schools and within the community. At the same time there are many people and organisations outside of schools that know, understand and care about children's learning and education. So as well as building school and teacher capacity to fulfil these 'in, between and within' leadership functions, schools should be encouraged to look beyond the school workforce to do this work.

Leadership of family school partnerships

The personal qualities of an effective leader of family school partnerships are, in the first instance, the same as those required for leadership in any setting, including school leadership.

For example, Fullan's Framework for Leadership (2001, p.4) identifies the qualities and tasks of an effective leader – driven by energy, enthusiasm and hope – in building commitment among partners and stakeholders and achieving an enterprise's intended results. They are:

- Moral purpose – a passion and an ability to inspire passion and action in others; courage to act
- Understanding of change – understanding of context; strategic thinking/intent; an ability to read and respond to the situation
- Knowledge – of frameworks/practice; a commitment to contemporary, innovative practice and being knowledgeable
- Relationship skills – an ability and commitment to planning together and working collaboratively; an ability to recognise and develop capacity in others; trust in others to get the job done, allowing this to be done in their own way; an ability to sustain and grow motivation
- Coherence making – professionalism; a priority on and capacity to reflect; a sense of humour; emotional intelligence; a deliberate practice of work-life balance and self-care.

The family school partnership leader combines these personal qualities and tasks aligned with theory and a partnership approach to learning and teaching.



Figure 2 - Framework for Leadership

Requirements for effective leadership

Effective family school partnership leadership requires the adoption of a flexible and responsive approach that is appropriate to school and community needs, embedded in school operations and subject to regular reflection and review to facilitate continuous improvement.

Whatever the school setting or focus of the partnership, some requirements have been found to be critical to effective family school partnership leadership.

Dedicated roles

While many people in a school community can contribute to more effective family school partnerships, it is important that there be someone working in and/or with the school who is dedicated to this approach. That is, someone whose job it is to facilitate, establish, nurture and support family engagement and family-school-community partnerships in the school. This involves tapping into the resources that exist within the wider school community and building the partnership capacity of staff and parents. This person may or may not be a member of the school leadership team, but should have direct access to the leadership team.

FSPCs worked with clusters of up to four schools, usually in a close geographic area, spreading their time across the different schools. The evaluation of the FSP initiative by the Australian Catholic University found that the FSPC was variously perceived by the community as “doer, organiser, advocate, listener, supporter, ideas person, inviter, facilitator...” (ACU, p.30). Some FSP schools have now established memorandums of understanding to collectively employ Cluster Engagement Leaders (CEL) to facilitate the work between schools.

Time and scope

Where there is a designated role for the leadership of family school partnerships, realistic time allocation is required. It should not be an unscoped additional function on top of a person’s existing work or teaching role. The time allotted will vary between schools to reflect school and community circumstances and aspirations. The role should be high status with autonomy to perform the job as required.

Knowledge and skills

Family school partnership leaders require a mix of knowledge, skills, beliefs and personal attributes. That is:

- experience in and an ability to link and connect people, groups and organisations by building capacity through collaboration and experiential learning
- theoretical knowledge of family school partnership frameworks and an ability to ground the research in practical school approaches
- a disposition for sharing, leading and working collaboratively, building a learning community by modelling and supporting changes in practice, systems and roles
- high level communication and personal engagement skills
- courage, integrity and a preparedness to take risks in order to change a school culture
- knowledge and understanding of the school and local community and capacity to work in a school setting

Teaching qualifications and experience working in a school are not prerequisites for success in the leadership of family school partnerships. Although some of the FSPCs had teaching and principalship backgrounds, not all did. Some principals indicated that having a fresh pair of eyes with a different outward facing perspective and preparedness to question established practices was a useful prompt for critical reflection.

Supportive structures

Leaders of family school partnerships need access to a range of support structures within the school. These include the support of other school leaders, access to professional learning, access to staff and the community, and appropriate recognition in school policies and plans.

The FSPCs were provided with regular access to high quality professional learning support. This meant that they were able to keep their schools at the leading edge of contemporary thinking on partnerships and relational learning. Through regular meetings of the FSPCs and shared activities they had access to a supportive professional network.

Alignment and integration

The importance of family school partnerships within the school and its community should be evident in the organisational vision, priorities, plans and goals.

Building capacity

It cannot be assumed that existing school leaders have all of the qualities needed to effectively lead family school partnerships as this requires leadership **in-school, between schools** and **within the community**. Therefore, whatever model of leadership schools adopt, they and the system will need to consider how they build, nurture and sustain the capacity of leaders for family school partnerships.

Research and practical experience indicate that professional learning for family school partnerships is more effective when it:

- is multi-faceted
- is personalised and connected (e.g. mentoring or coaching, collaborative learning)
- encourages and enables regular reflective practice
- provides access to high-level expert input
- is supported by school and system policies and standards that facilitate and drive change
- recognises and celebrates achievement.

The ACU evaluation of the FSP initiative found that the FSPCs had a clear focus on building capacity for partnerships.

“(The role of the FSPC) in most schools, was valuable in enabling schools to build their capacity to engage and empower parents.” (Chapman 2013)

For example, in the FSP initiative clusters of small groups of FSP leaders and teachers across several schools provided effective forums and structures for building teacher capacity and sharing best practice in community engagement.

In-school leadership

The FSP initiative identified and created many examples where schools have been able to develop family school partnerships and increase family engagement in learning to enhance student learning outcomes. The approaches used and the outcomes observed may have varied from school to school, but they all reflect an underlying commitment to provide students with more engaging, enriching and effective learning opportunities by tapping into the enthusiasm, commitment and capacity of families.

In-school leadership creates a culture that nurtures and supports partnerships where families and staff work together to support student learning.

The CEOM employed FSPCs to work in schools and clusters of schools in low SES communities. The learning from the initiative has helped to shape new and dedicated leadership roles in schools that are essential to building and sustaining effective partnerships. Ideally, as family school partnerships are embraced by the school community, all members of the community can contribute to and lead family school partnerships.

Functions, knowledge and skills

In-school leadership typically involves performance of a range of functions requiring a specific set of knowledge and skills.

IN-School Leadership	
Key functions and tasks	Requisite knowledge and skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop opportunities to engage families in children’s learning, the school curriculum and learning priorities • Build teacher, staff and school capacity to engage families in learning and work in partnership with families to support learning • Develop partnerships with families and the community to enhance opportunities for learning • Build capacity of the school and its leaders to lead family school partnerships • Document school family school partnership policy and practices • Contribute to or drive school planning, monitoring and evaluation of effective family school partnership practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of family school partnership theory, approaches and frameworks • Philosophical alignment with family school partnership theory, approaches and frameworks • Knowledge of local community • Ability to compile and analyse community data and feedback • Ability to lead, develop and support teachers and school staff in family school partnership approaches • Ability to design, implement and lead local family school partnership strategies to support student learning • Ability to be outward facing

For example, the FSPCs led the development of family school partnerships by:

- facilitating access to the latest research and evidence base and professional learning for school leadership teams, parents and community networks
- guiding strategic conversations with leadership teams in clusters of FSP schools, neighbouring schools and representatives of community organisations
- conducting conversations with parent leaders and established community networks to scope and foster potential partnership opportunities
- attending curriculum planning sessions with learning and teaching leaders and classroom teachers to broaden their understanding of the benefits of parent and community engagement in learning within school, home and community
- assessing community needs and opportunities.

In this role, the importance of understanding the characteristics, experiences, needs, capabilities and expectations of families and the school community cannot be underestimated. This understanding defines the focus of family school partnerships. It is imperative that the needs of the community are determined in consultation with the community using an affirmative strength-based approach (not a deficit model).

Making it work

Examples of different leadership roles evolved in some of the FSP schools over the course of the initiative. Selection of any approach will be dependent on school, student and community priorities and commitment of resources and/or access to funding to support implementation and enable professional development, networking, collaboration and reflective practice.

As is the case for all types of leadership, these roles are more efficiently and effectively executed where there is a complementary suite of supports including access to quality professional learning, access to flexible resources, and capacity to broker partnerships.

School leaders

Principals who practice distributed leadership are modelling to the school community a diversified

approach to in-school leadership. These principals have trust in staff and community members and share power, roles and responsibilities. This leads to a non-judgemental climate that allows for sharing of knowledge, respect and reciprocity to others' points of view and acknowledgment of diverse views and perspectives. This enables the development of trusting relationships among staff, students, parents and community that promote risk taking and provision of constructive feedback. Principals may use this approach to form a core team with responsibility for leading partnership approaches that improve wellbeing and academic outcomes for children in the community.

Leadership teams can influence behaviours by setting expectations that all staff will connect with families. This may be through modelling advocacy for partnerships across the school and wider community, constant conversations with staff asking them what they are doing to build connections, or requiring staff to include a family engagement goal in their Personal Improvement Plan.

In the same context, the evaluation of the FSP initiative found that the work of the FSPCs was empowering in that it worked alongside other leaders in a negotiated rather than a prescribed way to develop their capacity to lead family school partnerships.

Student Wellbeing Leaders

Student Wellbeing Leaders already exist in Catholic primary school communities, and Community Development Workers are attached to community hubs. In recent years these roles have changed to become more relational, collaborative and inclusive. As this has occurred schools (and other partner organisations) have seen and felt the positive impact this can have on the school and wider community.

Family Engagement in Learning Leaders

Family Engagement in Learning Leaders (FELL) have been appointed in positions of leadership across a number of FSP schools to support staff to develop and embed integrated family engagement practices that support school priorities and are explicitly linked to student learning. FELLs are released to plan and implement strategies to improve family engagement in learning – with the amount of time dedicated to the role varying depending on school size and budget. FELLs are aligned with curriculum leaders and have similar duties, including running Professional Learning Teams (PLT) and staff meetings, and supporting staff to offer relevant curriculum activities (such as family engagement nights and open classrooms).

Day to day tasks vary but FELL responsibilities include:

- embedding family engagement practices through development of policy and integration of family engagement approaches into curriculum planning processes
- leading professional learning through staff meetings and PLTs
- leading school planning through dedicated and integrated PLTs.

Case Study – FELL at St Clare's, Thomastown West

School improvement planning at St Clare's Primary School in 2012 identified that strong leadership was need to ensure that family school partnerships remained a focus for the school. In particular the school wanted to increase family engagement in learning, provide more opportunities to facilitate learning at home, and to support parents to understand the importance of their role as educators.

St Clare's developed a FELL (Family Engagement in Learning Leader) position of leadership within the Learning and Teaching Leadership Team. The FELL works with the principal, curriculum and level leaders with an explicit focus on student learning. The FELL's primary purpose is to build staff capacity through facilitation of professional learning, assisting staff to identify family engagement in learning goals in their Personal Improvement Plans, and improving understandings of contemporary learning across home and school.

The FELL has strong and explicit principal backing, and has been mentored and supported both formally and informally by the FSPC. Apart from the enthusiasm of the FELL, the success of the role has been further influenced by access to time release (4 hours per week), timetabling of meetings, embedding of the work in key school documents (e.g. family engagement in learning is evident and named in all spheres) and peer support.

Schools that have adopted the FELL approach report that FELLs have had the most impact where there have been supportive structures in place (e.g. a specific position description including understanding of the theory and approaches of family school partnerships, appropriate recognition of the FELL role in school policies, plans and improvement frameworks).

Parent and student support roles

Prior to the FSP initiative some schools already had people in dedicated roles as Parent Leaders, Parent Liaison and Multicultural Aides. The work of the FSPC has highlighted the importance of family engagement in learning, and as a result these roles are now seen as core work and have a higher status in the school community. Schools are now more likely to deliberately tap into the expertise and connections of family and community leaders. In some cases additional training may be required to build the capacity of these people to lead family school partnerships. In particular, additional skills may be required on the principles of relational learning, valuing the benefits of school, community, family partnering in, through and about learning.

Case Study – Parent leadership at St. Stephen’s, Reservoir East

In 2012 St Stephen’s Primary School established a parent liaison role to encourage all families at the school to be engaged in their children’s learning. The paid 12 hour per week role is shared by three parents who build relationships with every family and facilitate connections between the school and local community through a variety of in-school and outward facing activities:

- *giving families information on how to engage with teachers to understand the learning process*
- *representing the school at kindergartens, childcare centres and Best Start networks*
- *consulting with families to identify their needs and priorities*
- *hosting the ‘Gathering Space’ as an area for families to drop in, socialise and collect information*
- *contributing to school planning for family engagement and attending professional learning days.*

When approached by some parents with the idea for the role, the principal responded by initiating conversations with families and staff across the school to identify priorities. The principal has placed her trust in the liaison team and given them explicit support, offering up further informal support through the FELL and the FSPC. The team meet weekly to plan and negotiate their activities, drawing on their complementary skills and experience, most importantly a collective ability to connect with others – an authentic and inclusive focus on bridging, not just bonding.

The team’s continued success will be underpinned by developing its sustainability through succession planning and strengthening collaboration with staff on planning for family engagement.

Between school (cluster) leadership

Collaboration between schools is a key component of school improvement. School clusters and partnerships have been used to build capacity in education across many aspects of school life, including principal development, learning and teaching, and student wellbeing. Clusters and networks commonly facilitate the implementation of new approaches or shared practices in schools, support leaders in dedicated roles (e.g. Student Wellbeing or Literacy Networks) or create informative and supportive professional relationships between school leaders (e.g. principal networks). Clusters and networks are also extensively used beyond the education sector to provide more efficient resource allocation and support (e.g. early childhood networks, School Focused Youth Service regions, Primary Care Partnerships).

This collaboration has not always meant that participating schools do the same things. Partner schools have shared ideas and encouraged one another, but ultimately developed, adapted and implemented

approaches that meet their local needs and priorities. The benefits have been efficiencies in research, planning and development leading to quicker adoption of innovative practice.

Between school or cluster leadership creates purposeful connections between partner schools to enhance student learning opportunities and outcomes and build school capacity.

Functions, knowledge and skills

Between school leadership involves performance of some different functions to in-school leadership. The knowledge and skills required for in-school leadership typically apply to between school leadership with some alternative application and/or additional requirements.

BETWEEN School (Cluster) Leadership	
Key functions and tasks	Requisite knowledge and skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish and support partnerships between schools which work collaboratively to develop and implement effective family school partnership practices • Develop strategic/community relationships to connect and enhance cluster opportunities • Provide professional learning and mentoring to support in-school and cluster leaders to build school and cluster capacity to engage families in learning and embed family school partnership practices in schools • Develop and source resources to support cluster initiatives and priorities • Source grants to support cluster initiatives and priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership facilitation • Cluster development, coordination and resourcing • Ability to support multiple forms of professional learning • Social, emotional and relational intelligence and interpersonal skills • Good written and verbal communication skills • Capacity to lead and support change • Community development and community capacity building • Project coordination and management skills • Passion, energy, optimism and courage • Negotiation skills • Motivational ability • Ability to creatively seek and recognise partnership and resourcing opportunities

The FSP initiative deliberately adopted a cluster model to encourage and facilitate collaboration between schools. The role of the FSPC was critical to how effectively clusters were able to work with one another to achieve their goals. While the approach taken by each FSPC varied according to local needs and cluster priorities, some common elements inform discussion on ‘between school’ leadership of family school partnerships.

- FSPCs were employed by the CEOM to work across school clusters. This enabled FSPCs to act as a critical friend to all of the schools in the cluster, respecting but also challenging traditional approaches to inter-school collaboration.
- Some FSPCs were employed from outside the education system, bringing with them new skill sets, new insights and a different perspective on education, families and community. This ‘disruptive innovation’ heralded the CEOM’s desire for schools to do things differently, creating both an expectation of collective responsibility and a structure for collaboration, encouraging school leaders to work together to negotiate roles and share resources across their clusters.

Case Study – Kinda Kinder

Kinda Kinder is a partnership between eight western region FSP schools and Victoria University (VU). The program brings four to six VU pre-service teachers into a school where they facilitate a playgroup for 0-5 year olds. Parents are encouraged to participate in play with their children and attend educational sessions with school leaders and the FSPC, focusing on literacy, numeracy and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) for early learners. The partnership has been facilitated by the FSPCs working in schools where the need for pre-school transition and early childhood focused interventions have been identified as a priority.

The partnership between VU and Catholic schools was brokered and managed by FSPC convenors. The FSPCs had initial responsibility for building the understanding of the need or harnessing the potential of this within schools. FSPCs have led the relationship forming with VU and its students, as well as managing the operational aspects of the program. Having run for three years in some schools, ownership of the program has increased and some school now lead and manage the partnership.

The coordinated targeting of the initiative across schools has enabled more schools to efficiently access the program. It has also allowed a strategic partnership to develop, in which the schools can contribute to the development of the overall program to ensure its sustainability and capacity to meet school/family needs across a variety of settings.

Making it work

Effective cluster arrangements already exist across a number of different school contexts. Family school partnerships are another area where cross-school collaboration has the capacity to improve school capability and opportunities for students.

Between school roles

Dedicated between school roles are needed to coordinate strategies, facilitate collaboration and build whole system capacity through schools supporting and learning from and with each other. During the FSP initiative this role was fulfilled by the FSPCs. Schools are now developing new roles to coordinate this work.

The CEOM supports FSP schools to continue and expand clusters through provision of seed funding. Schools employ a Cluster Engagement Leader whose role is to improve student outcomes by building and strengthening links between parent, schools and the local community. They do this by:

- championing FSPs at school, community and cluster levels
- building capacity of school leaders and personnel to promote partnerships and learning communities
- connecting schools to community and community to schools
- leading a culture of change and innovation
- measuring and evaluating the impact of family engagement on student learning.

Purposeful commitment to collaboration

In order for between school roles to function effectively, schools must be committed to working collaboratively. The particular functions of between school roles will differ depending on:

- the size and structure of clusters and networks
- what in-school and system roles exist to support family school partnerships
- the shared goals and priorities of cluster schools
- the organisational and industrial support structures developed to support family school partnership leadership roles
- the skills and experiences of people appointed to family school partnership leadership roles.

Case Study – Community Classrooms

The FSP Epping cluster adopted an action-oriented Community Classrooms approach to facilitating professional learning and reflective practice among classroom teachers. Beginning with eight teachers in four schools, in 2013 the program has grown to include teachers from 15 schools working together in professional learning clusters. The aim is to improve children’s learning opportunities and outcomes through the active engagement of families within and beyond the classroom.

Community Classrooms teachers work in school teams and multi-school clusters to deepen their skills, knowledge and confidence for building family engagement in learning, pilot strategies in classroom settings, share good practice and motivate one another. Activities include collaborative professional learning (via exposure to latest research, theory and frameworks delivered by experts in the field), cluster meetings to share and plan, ‘buddy’ planning and action learning. The approach has been the catalyst for a range of new practices across participating schools, offering insights into engaging families in learning within local contexts.

Cluster leadership has been evident in:

- endorsing facilitated collaboration between schools, acknowledging the potential for peer-led innovative professional learning to expose classroom teachers to new perspectives, experiences, practices and beliefs – creating ‘new’ knowledge through sharing*
- targeting classroom teachers as the in-school pivot point between students, parents and leaders*
- realising efficiencies in shared resources, professional learning and trialling of new approaches*
- cascading leadership through team members to motivate buy-in from other teachers*
- adoption of a new language for learning (e.g. homework => learning at home, parent involvement => family engagement).*

Case Study – Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Initiative

The SEL initiative brought all FSP schools together to work in small clusters focused on improving family engagement and community partnerships to support social and emotional learning (via a 9-step process that actively engages and develops parent leaders). Over three years each school participated for a 12 month period, attending professional learning and cluster planning days delivered by the CEOM in partnership with Edith Cowan University.

The SEL initiative used clusters to encourage inter-school collaboration, peer support and sharing of good practice that could be applied to each school’s own context. Professional learning, planning and access to resources were efficiently facilitated through a central point at the CEOM. Transfer of learning was supported by development of SEL teams at each school. Each team of three school leaders (usually the principal, wellbeing leader and one other) was supported by the FSPC who helped them to plan and make connections through family and community partnerships to support cluster and school objectives. Clustering schools with ones they had not previously worked with fostered new professional relationships which continued beyond the life of the initiative.

Leadership within the community

The school community is generally considered to include students, families, school staff, other professionals, other support staff and volunteers. The school community sits within a wider community in which there are many individuals and organisations who have an interest in and support the operation of the school (e.g. churches, community organisations, sporting clubs, businesses and employers).

Leadership within the community strategically connects schools, the wider community and partner organisations to enrich learning opportunities and strengthen communities.

West-Burnham, Farrar and Otero (2007) argue for a new perspective on the nature of school leadership in which leadership in education encompasses a broader perspective where the role of the leader moves from 'bonding' (leadership focused in-school) to 'bridging' (the school engaging with the wider community).

We need to move AWAY from...

- Focus on the school
- Accountability for academic attainment
 - Leadership of professional staff
- Leadership limited by time and place
 - Working in professional silos
 - Leadership as hierarchy
- Leadership related to professional status
 - Institutional improvement

We need to move TO...

- Focus on the community
- Accountability for educational outcomes
 - Leadership across the community
- No boundaries of time and place
 - Working across agencies
 - Leadership widely distributed
- Leadership related to need and context
 - Community development



(West-Burnham et al 2007, p.124)

Acceptance of this type of leadership has significant implications for those who hold traditional leadership roles as the boundaries of their roles will be extended and they will have to work with increasingly wide horizons.

Functions, knowledge and skills

Leadership within the community draws on established principles of community development, including:

- building of social inclusion
- building of community capacity
- generating social capital
- promoting personalised approaches to service provision
- enabling user voice in decision-making
- improving service quality.

Therefore, leadership of family school partnerships within the community is outward facing, strengthening the community and thereby improving educational opportunities and outcomes for children as part of a more cohesive, connected and productive community.

Leadership WITHIN the Community	
Key functions and tasks	Requisite knowledge and skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Profile and promote understanding of the characteristics of the local community • Lead and facilitate agreement on commitment to work together to improve student learning and wellbeing • Connect community stakeholders in exploring opportunities to realise mutually shared goals • Align school-community partnerships with other community development initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community development and community capacity building • Partnership facilitation • Capacity to lead and support change • Good written and verbal communication skills • Negotiation skills • Enthusiasm and patience

Making it work

School leaders play a significant leadership role within every community. They can connect with other community leaders through the active participation of the school in the community. Schools can also be instrumental in identifying and enhancing community leadership through the provision of opportunities that build skills and connect leaders. Effective leadership within the community requires school leaders to:

- Be present, active and known. School leaders should be known within the community. Active participation in community networks and events can help facilitate this.
- Identify and connect with existing community leaders. These leaders undertake a variety of paid and un-paid work through local government, community clubs, service organisations, businesses, parishes and faith communities. They can provide invaluable advice and support for schools in connecting with families and others in the community.
- Find ways for the school to contribute to the community. Ask not what the community can do for the school, but what the school can do for the community.

Within community roles

The contribution school leaders can make within the community will vary depending on the local context. During the FSP initiative a number of school based positions emerged in response to local opportunities, needs and resources. These included:

- Community hub coordinators
- Community liaison officers
- Multi-cultural education support officers
- Employment of parent and other community leaders for projects or liaison work
- School leaders’ participation in community activities such as Early Childhood Partnerships, LLEN groups, festival committees and Neighbourhood Renewal working groups.

In order for school leaders to be effective within the community they need to:

- **identify and document priority actions**
- **assign responsibility for these through dedicated roles or enhanced position descriptions (such as those described above)**
- **allocate appropriate time and resources**

Case Study – Killester College Family Learning Centre

In 2010, the leadership of Killester College identified a need to engage with the most recently arrived community at Killester – families with an African background. Following research into engaging Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities, investigation of resources developed by Foundation House for families from refugee backgrounds, and development of a community profile, Killester College initiated a series of Community Conversations. The aim of these conversations was to engage the community in thinking about what they could do together to support children’s learning (especially the learning of girls from the African community) and to build community capacity for learning.

The Community Conversations led to development of a Family Learning Centre at the College. Within a community development framework the Centre promotes the development and management of strategic partnerships between the school and parents, the community, other education providers, local business, and government agencies and departments. This includes engaging with stakeholders to establish sustainable parent education, engagement and support programs. The school employs a part time coordinator who is responsible for coordinating and supporting community groups’ access to and use of the Family Learning Centre. The coordinator works in partnership with the school leadership to develop and maintain a sustainable and positive service to the school and wider community. A three year Strategic Plan has been developed to guide the Centre’s operations.

Case Study – Working Better Together Community Celebration

In early 2012 St Thomas Aquinas and St Francis Xavier Primary Schools convened a community forum to explore the belief that all community members are responsible for the education of all children in the community. This forum was facilitated by Dr George Otero from the Centre for Relational Learning. Seventy people attended the forum, representing 28 different schools and organisations across Geelong. After the forum 17 people chose to maintain their connections by joining a planning group to organise a Better Together Conference (which became the Working Better Together Community Celebration). The group included many members of the Corio-Norlane Best Start Partnership (St Thomas Aquinas, St Francis Xavier, Northern Bay College, local government, Barwon Health, neighbourhood and family centres, community service agencies, youth and kindergarten associations). Since then the Working Better Together group has met once or twice a term to develop ideas that value and celebrate parents and to honour, respect and acknowledge that children and families come first in everything they do. It was understood that the voice of families is often missing in planning for community activities designed to support families.

With the support of George Otero and by asking families at local playgroups what support would help them to prepare their children for school, the group hosted a Community Celebration to explore and acknowledge the role of parents as first educators and leaders. Seven families from the Northern Bay Family Centre brought the voice of local families. Having all of these people in one place was a powerful realisation of the schools’ intent to work in real partnership with families.

The Community Celebration day was inviting, active and energetic as parents and team members shared their thoughts with confidence and courage. Parents are now part of the planning group and future meetings will be held at the Northern Bay Family Centre playgroup to allow the shared conversations to continue.

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