

Southern Cross Early Childhood School



Southern Cross Early Childhood School is committed to the provision of a supportive and inclusive environment for all children, families, staff and community members.

We believe that:

All families want the best for their children

All families have the capacity to support their children's learning

Family and school are equal partners

Family and school work together to support children's learning

The school is a hub where families feel welcomed and have a sense of belonging

Families and schools have an impact on children's learning

Family and school can learn from each other as to how best support children and their learning

Family - School Partnerships Guidelines

At Southern Cross Early Childhood School, we create a positive, cooperative community based on the belief that all children have the right to grow, learn and live in a supportive and respectful learning environment.

Southern Cross Early Childhood School strives to build its capacity for strong family school partnerships to create a welcoming environment that supports student learning and community connections.

Context

These guidelines begin the process of identifying key aspects of how partnerships between home and school impacts on children's development and learning, family wellbeing and community connections.

It is documented in ACT Government's Educational Capital: Progressing Parental Engagement (det.act.gov.au, 2015) paper that strengthening family - school partnerships promotes the following

- Academic outcomes
- Engaging in learning
- Motivation to learn
- General behaviour and wellbeing
- Parents and teachers working together to deal with issues and concerns
- Developing strong effective partnerships where families and school work together to support learning outcomes

Family - School Partnership Goals: To strengthen family - school partnerships by:

- Supporting parent engagement in their children's learning
- Providing the opportunity for parents to be involved in the school community
- Sharing practical strategies to support children's learning and welfare
- Strengthening working partnerships with community to support children and families
- Maintaining flexible communication pathways to consolidate strong partnerships

(Education Capital: Progressing Parental Engagement, 2015)

Moving from an Open-Door School to a Partnership School

The school is working towards being a partnership school where all practices are linked to learning, relational, developmental, collaborative, interactive, embedded in all programs, and is sustained with resources and infrastructure, policy and programs. (Mapp, Carver and Lander, 2017)

Dimensions of a Partnership School

Guided by the Key Dimensions of Family - School Partnerships (Education.gov.au, 2017) and PACEF (Campbell, Dally-Trim and Cordukes, 2016), Southern Cross Early Childhood School recognises that communication, linking learning experiences between home and school, decision making, building school community and promoting social and emotional wellbeing are areas that can have significant impact on family - school partnerships.

Communication

Best practice involves establishing flexible communication channels between families and schools that allows the sharing of information to be established and maintained. This two-way exchange opens opportunities for better understanding of children's needs and interests as well as being informed of school, family and community events. Effective communication helps connect family and the school to work together to support children's learning and wellbeing. Individual staff require a range of strategies to build flexible communication channels, depending on family requirements.

Linking learning experiences between school and home

When working together, the school and families can establish a shared understanding of child development and learning. Through linking ideas and activities with educational programs, this helps families and the school to provide a consistent approach that supports learning outcomes for all children.

The following aspects of family - school engagement are identified by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY). They have been identified to matter most for children's outcomes in the ACT Government's report *Progressing Parental Engagement in the ACT: Our Evidence Base Survey Pilot and Recommendations* (2015) and involve a shared responsibility between school and families.

Family-led learning	Family - School partnership	Practical ideas to engage parents in family-led activities
Shared reading Family conversations Home learning practice Stimulating environment High expectations Social and wellbeing support	Communication about progress and wellbeing Information about learning and ways to help Opportunities to engage at school	Demonstrations to model interactions Parent learning demonstration workshops Interactive parent-child games Home learning kits

(Educational Capital: Progressing Parental Engagement, 2015)

Decision making

At Southern Cross Early Childhood School, we value working together with families on school operational matters. We set about providing an open invitation to all families to become involved with the school by providing comment about and attending committees which focus on school policies and practice, supporting children's learning and being involved in community building initiatives. We acknowledge and respect that all families will have different interest in, and capacity to, provide input in to the school's decision making.

Building school community

We strive to create strong connections with the families that attend Southern Cross Early Childhood School and support them to build those connections across the community.

Promoting social and emotional wellbeing

There is a strong emphasis on establishing a welcoming environment that supports the social and emotional wellbeing of the children, families and staff at Southern Cross Early Childhood School. Several social and emotional programs are used at school to help children and parents with issues related to mental health and support. As a

recognised KidsMatter and trauma informed school we implement programs and practices in the classroom, conduct parent workshops and organise events that promote social inclusion.

Appendix 1 identifies the existing practices and possible initiatives for development of Family - School Partnerships at Southern Cross Early Childhood School.

Considerations for strengthening parent involvement and engagement

Whilst the school acknowledges that family - school partnerships are an area of strength for the school, several points have been identified as key to developing a better understanding of how to continually improve parent involvement and engagement at Southern Cross Early Childhood School. These are

- Developing and defining the parent's role
- Self-efficacy: parents' confidence in their ability to make a difference
- Time, energy and resources that enable or inhibit engagement
- Expectations communicated by children, parents, teachers and the school

(Technical Report, Education Capital: Our Evidence Base Measuring Parental Engagement, 2015)

Appendix 2 provides a list of questions to assist the school to reflect on how we can continually improve family - school partnerships.

Glossary

Parent: The prime carer(s) of the child

Family School Partnership: When families and schools work together to support children's learning and wellbeing

Open Door School: A school that makes a targeted effort to engage families at school to support their children's learning. (Mapp et al 2017, p. 40)

Partnership School: Families are partners in the teaching and learning process and are valued as knowledgeable and important contributors to school and school improvement. (Mapp et al 2017, p. 41)

Self-efficacy: Beliefs about our own capabilities

Documents & References

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Kraft, M. (2017). Engaging Parents Through Better Communication Systems. *Educational Leadership*, (September).

Mapp, K., Carver, I. and Lander, J. (2017). *Powerful Partnerships: A Teacher's Guide to Engaging Families for Student Success*. USA: Scholastic.

Pusher, D. (2015). *Living as Mapmakers: Chartering a Course with Children Guided by Parent Knowledge*. Canada: University of Saskatchewan.

Appendix 1

Dimensions at Southern Cross Early Childhood School: Existing practices and possible initiatives

The following table highlights existing practices at Southern Cross Early Childhood School as at the start of 2018 and proposed initiatives for ongoing improvement in family school partnerships.

Dimension	Existing practices	Possible Initiatives
Communication	Teacher family daily interactions Teacher emails Personal (face to face) Family teacher child progress interviews School newsletters Facebook Website Posters Noticeboards Family handbook Phone calls School calendar Preschool orientation Learning journey Blogs School reports	Openness to communicate Up to date pictures and information on website Easy to access contact information Increase the frequency and quality of parent-teacher communication Send parents frequent individualised information about child's performance What to ask: Parental preferences about the time, format and language they prefer for communications Family history around schools Family expectations about school Family issues and support– Community Coordinator referrals Family makeup and support
Linking learning experiences	Teacher emails Class bogs School reports Family teacher child progress interviews Face to face discussions about ways both school and home can support the child Home reading program School reading program – including parents in the classroom Literacy and numeracy workshops Sections in newsletter about learning 'Getting to Know You' meetings Personalised home learning program Identified through ILPs	Linking Learning Workshops Home visits Home learning kits Family Engagement Coordinators connect with teacher and families Frequent interactions with families – phone calls/emails/face to face Train the Volunteer sessions Home Learning Workshops: Information provided about ways to support your child's reading at home Regular reading information in newsletters and sent out by teachers
Consultative decision making	School Board P&C KidsMatter Action Group Class Social Coordinators Face to face meetings Parent action groups. E.g. Green Team Getting to Know You interviews Email correspondence Surveys – School Satisfaction and Kids Matter	Small group advisory or action groups Families sharing skills with staff and children

<p>Engaging community support and connections</p>	<p>Role of school staff Role of community coordinator and school psychologist Parent information flyers Noticeboards</p>	<p>Home Learning Workshops</p> <p>Provide parents with guidance about how to support children in school</p> <p>Provide families with information on how to enhance learning opportunities at home</p> <p>Establish regular support through NGO's</p> <p>Linking parents to other parents Supporting parent/ child relationships across cultural/class divides.</p>
<p>Inclusive school community</p>	<p>Invite families to share their skills in child's class or school Major school events – Family Picnic, Camp Out Weekly events E.g. Read with Me Cafe</p>	<p>Focus on cultural and other family influences Personal invitations to events to vulnerable or disengaged families Visible parent rosters Parent groups - Tuesdays</p>
<p>Promoting social and emotional wellbeing</p>	<p>Kids Matter Framework SEL program – Friendly Schools Plus Mindfulness Emotional Check In charts - class sets – Mindful boxes Class Social Coordinator program Family events TRUST initiative</p>	<p>Family Engagement Coordinators – role includes social events plus providing information to teachers and executive about what families' expectations and needs are to support children</p>

Appendix 2

Reflection questions to improve family - school partnerships

As the school community (families and staff) changes from year to year, it is essential to continually ask a range of questions to determine the effectiveness of our family - school partnerships at any given time. This list formulated from the documents and references listed, provides a platform on which the school can grow and better understand the needs and challenges of strengthening partnerships between families and school.

Family Perspective

- What is the home perception around school and a child's learning?
- Are parents actively involved in their children's learning?
- What barriers are there which restrict parents engaging with their child's learning?
- What relationship does the family expect to have with the school?
- Do families feel they have the capacity and /or the opportunity to engage in school activities and decision making?
- Do families feel they are listened to and valued at school?
- What are some of the ways parents currently engage with the school?
- What values do parents have around school and children's learning?
- Are families' school experiences consistent across the school?
- Are family cultures and values represented at the school?

School Perspective

- How does school executive set the framework that family school partnerships are a schoolwide priority?
- Does the school staff understand and see the value of family school partnerships?
- How often should teachers reach out to parents?
- What time is needed for teachers to engage with parents?
- Do teachers have clear conversation, email and text protocols to build on?
- What digital technology is needed to ensure it is an integral part of school's communication process?
- How do we invite and engage parents who may have difficulty engaging with the school, working parents, time-poor parents, multicultural parents, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents to take an active part in this family - school partnership?
- How do teachers seek to understand and learn about children, including their home life and culture?

Family - School Perspective

- Does the school environment promote family - school partnerships?
- What are some of the secure, reliable and flexible formats for parents and teachers to communicate with each other?
- How can the school develop school practices, so they are more user friendly?
- How can teachers and parents work together to help children learn?
- How can parents and teachers best support each other?
- Are community organisations involved in the school and what is the purpose of their engagement?
- What are the connections between the school and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and individuals?
- What common events are celebrated and do they reflect members of the school community?