

## **Strengthening Links between Schools and Communities**

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This program involves building the relationship between schools and local communities. Greater interaction between schools and communities can enhance educational outcomes. It also builds the role of schools as contributors to the vitality of their local community.

### ***Pedagogy outcomes***

A focus on school/community links does not mean that schools change their focus from education to community revitalisation. On the contrary, strengthening links between schools and communities can lead to clear educational outcomes. There is considerable evidence of improved student performance and competency levels from school-community interaction. Using “real world” examples drawn from the community can strengthen the school curriculum, and the involvement of students in the community can enhance their broader knowledge and confidence.

School/community linkages do not mean a “folk curriculum”. It involves integrated learning with the community where a community context adds to educational outcomes. The program involves selecting these opportunities rather than only a broader partnership with the community.

### ***Community outcomes***

Schools are key “hubs” for many communities and can play an important role in their community without stepping outside their core educational role. Vibrant communities depend on the next generation having the values and skills to be active citizens and schools benefit society as a whole fostering these values in students. Having experience with communities as part of their school curriculum can help students become more effective citizens as young people and as future contributors to society.

### ***School Outcomes***

While many schools decry the lack of parent and community involvement. Yet there are opportunities for schools to build community support by investing in community relationships and community links.

The Strengthening Links Between Schools and Communities Program builds on the experience of established programs of school/community linkage such as School at the Centre and Community Schools in North America, and the trial of School at the Centre in Queensland. It is also informed by many experiences of school and communities working together in Australia.

The program involves an appropriate level of school/community linkage for the mutual benefit of each. Linkages depend on a commitment from the school and the community

and a culture that supports that. However, the program aims to provide options in the curriculum with perhaps up to 20% of curriculum involving community contact. It is not for all schools or all students.

The program is not limited to enhanced connection to the local community. It also involves incorporating broader community issues into school life and the curriculum, such as understanding economic changes in rural areas, or appreciating multiculturalism.

While the principles are the same, school-community linkages for primary schools and for secondary schools differ. In primary schools the aim is to have appropriate interaction between the school and community to leave students with values of citizenship and more basic integration into the curriculum. In secondary schools, more direct community involvement and applied studies can be undertaken.

### **Activities**

The potential activities in school/community linkages fall into three main categories.

#### **1. Community as a Source of Student Curriculum Based Learning**

The community offers many opportunities to add value to curriculum based learning. There are many examples where community activities and issues have been incorporated into the school curriculums. For example, Community maths has allowed students to apply mathematics to situations in local businesses and the community generally. Students have developed linkages with local artists and contributed to community art projects as part of an art and music curriculum.

There are many examples where this community application has enhanced educational outcomes in core subjects such as Language, Reading and Literature; Social Studies and History; Art and Music; Science and Mathematics; Vocational Education; and Economics.

#### **2. Incorporating Learning into School Contribution to Communities**

Students contributing to their local community can foster learning. For example, a community volunteering program allows students to experience community service and gain skills. Schools could offer student skills to community members such as in computer training. Community events involving the school such as eisteddfods or festivals create a community profile for schools and build the experience of students.

Community involvement can also build student interaction with particular groups in the community such as senior citizens, indigenous people or people from a non English speaking background. It can build the involvement of students in young people's organisations.

This interaction not only enriches the educational experience of students but also redefines students and the school as key community assets – as young citizens, not just adults in the making.

### **3. Community Involvement in the School**

Community members can add to the life of the school and to educational outcomes. Several schools have established community mentors that participate in classroom interaction and school activities.

Schools have also been seen as centres for community learning where community members and organisations can assess school facilities for meetings and learning activities.

### **4. The Role of Teachers**

Community linkages can help orient new teachers. Community situations can also be used in the professional development of teachers. Teachers may also play a role in assisting community organisations or in helping the local community manage local issues.

### **Stages in the Process**

Strengthening linkages between schools and communities involves three stages of development.

#### **Stage 1. Introduction and Scoping**

This stage involves explanations of the issues in school/community linkages and background material and discussions about local opportunities to foster greater interaction between the school and the community. This includes:

- initial personal discussions with the Principal, key teachers, parents and students,
- identification of key local community members,
- one on one discussions with key community members,
- a scoping meeting between these key people to discuss the approach and plan activities to engage the wider community in the idea. This group is invited to become an informal management group for the process.
- information in the school newsletter and the media to inform people and invite their participation,

This stage may also involve:

- Discussions with teachers to discuss opportunities for improved teaching outcomes from community engagement and involvement.
- Personal discussions or meetings with community members to invite their ideas and participation.
- Social “warm-up” events to enhance initial contact between the school and community members.

## **Stage 2. Assessing the Current Situation and Potential Options**

The next suggested step would be a series of actions to identify opportunities for school/community links. The aim is to:

- Assess current linkages between schools and communities;
- Identifying how people would like to see the school linked with the community;
- Opportunities for greater engagement between schools and communities.

Similar techniques as described in the “Building a Stronger School Community” Program could also be used to assess how the community may wish to be involved with the school. Some methods for assessing potential options are:

- Photo exercise: Asking people to take photographs that illustrate ideas for links between the school and community. Alternatively, they could photograph what they like and dislike about the community (six photos of each). These would form the basis of discussion at future workshops.
- Community Appraisal: Local “sub communities” are identified and discussions are held with people and arrange discussions and feedback. Segment key elements of the community and work out what is the best way to contact them.
- Community “conversations” – informal facilitated small group discussions.
- Prompt Questions: People discuss options for school/community links with 2-3 of their acquaintances using some common “prompt” questions. The ideal outcome would be parents talking with students, students talking with teachers etc.
- Contact with key focuses for the community e.g. service clubs, sporting organisations,
- Taskforce: A specific group interview people and report back.

- Community mapping – a workshop exercise that identifies the various components of the school and the community and how they participate with each other,
- Asset mapping – a workshop exercise that identifies and categorises the assets of the school and the community,
- Diagnostic survey

The actions to assess opportunities would ideally be fun and social with information and ideas from this stage fed back to the school and the community as the basis for actions.

### **Stage 3. Planning and Action**

Feedback from stage 2 would be the basis of a workshop between school and community representatives to identify specific opportunities for linkages and plan achievable actions to pursue them.

Some actions that other schools have done are:

- “Personalities in the park” – telling and discussing the life story of local volunteers in class,
- Involvement in existing community activities,
- Inviting community organisations to be involved in school activities,
- Have community involvement as part of the curriculum,
- Develop a project that the community may support e.g. economic students studying the local economy for the council,
- Community champions mentoring a class or project,
- “Guest teaching” by local people,
- Access to school (e.g. hosting sport or other activities at the school)

If there is motivation for particular activities a small working group will be invited to pursue that action. Ideally activities would be conducted by small work teams of parents, teachers and students coordinated by a motivated person and resourced. This stage would also involve ongoing support during the implementation of actions.

### **Support for the Process**

The process involves school and community members conducting the three stages of development as well as ongoing activities. Jim Cavaye from Cavaye Community Development can facilitate the process and provide ongoing support. The process involves a minimum of two visits to the school by the facilitator together with ongoing contact. The timeframe for the process is as follows:

| Activity  | Month 1              | Month 2 | Month 3              | Month 4 | Month 5 | Month 6 |
|---|----------------------|---------|----------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| <b>Stage 1. Introduction and Scoping</b>                              |                      |         |                      |         |         |         |
| Initial personal discussions with the school                          | Visit by Facilitator |         |                      |         |         |         |
| Identification of key local community members                         |                      |         |                      |         |         |         |
| One on one discussions with key community members                     |                      |         |                      |         |         |         |
| Scoping/planning meeting  |                      |         |                      |         |         |         |
| <b>Stage 2. Assessing the Current Situation and Potential Options</b> |                      |         |                      |         |         |         |
| Community Engagement Activities                                       |                      |         |                      |         |         |         |
| Collation of Feedback   |                      |         |                      |         |         |         |
| <b>Stage 3. Planning and Action</b>                                   |                      |         |                      |         |         |         |
| Planning Workshop - school and community representatives              |                      |         | Visit by Facilitator |         |         |         |
| Formation of working groups   |                      |         |                      |         |         |         |
| Specific Actions  |                      |         |                      |         |         |         |
| <b>Stage 4. Evaluation</b>  |                      |         |                      |         |         |         |

### ***Facilitator Visits***

An initial visit to the school would involve a day and evening and would cover an orientation workshop with teachers, discussions with local community members, and a planning workshop with teachers, parents and students. The aim is to explain the idea, gain people's suggestions, foster ownership and develop some actions to make progress particularly with self examination.

The orientation workshop would involve a brief discussion with teachers (for about two hours) explaining the reasons for linkages with the community, gaining their ideas, and discussing the possible process.

A series of one to one discussions with a range of community people would take up the bulk of the day. This would include the key elements of the community such as businesses, local government, service clubs etc.

This would be followed by a broader workshop (perhaps with an evening BBQ at the school) for teachers, students, parents and community members. This would provide some background information and develop plans for community engagement and self examination actions. Ideally, this would also lead to the establishment of a small group to manage the process.

### ***Planning***

A second visit would involve a school/community forum where the results of the self examination phase are fed back. This would also incorporate an action planning workshop where school and community members identify and address key areas for action. Ideally a "who, what, where, by when" action would be developed and people with passion and enthusiasm for community building would emerge.

## Facilitation Costs

The following is a break down of the facilitation costs for the program.

\$ (including GST)

### Stage 1: Introduction and Scoping

|  |          |                               |
|--|----------|-------------------------------|
| School Visit   | 1.5 days | 1250 plus actual travel costs |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial liaison with the school</li> <li>• Prepare introductory information</li> <li>• Conduct initial discussions</li> <li>• Facilitate Scoping/ Planning Meeting</li> </ul> |          |                               |

### Stage 2. Assessing the Current Situation and Potential Options

|   |         |      |
|---|---------|------|
| Providing phone and e mail support with engagement activities | 8 hours | 1250 |
|---|---------|------|

### Stage 3. Planning and Action

|  |          |                               |
|--|----------|-------------------------------|
| School Visit   | 1.5 days | 1250 plus actual travel costs |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate planning workshop</li> <li>• Facilitate formation of working groups</li> </ul> |          |                               |

|   |          |      |
|---|----------|------|
| Providing phone and e mail support with specific activities | 10 hours | 1250 |
|---|----------|------|

### Stage 4. Evaluation

|       |  |         |
|-------|--|---------|
| Total |  | \$ 5000 |
|-------|--|---------|