

# School Stories

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## School-family-community partnerships - Example 1

### Brief background to school initiative

This school made changes to encourage parents to think in positive ways about the school. Often these parents had experienced bad schooling themselves. The school attempted to enable parents to be a proactive influence in their child's education.

### School profile

- Metropolitan government school
- 1020 students
- Years: F - 7
- A multicultural school with a small percentage of Aboriginal students and a transient community. The school felt there was only a limited amount of parental support.

### Action

The school believed parents were becoming alienated and wanted to engage parents more fully. The school staff established programs and strategies to involve parents including the four week "Parents as Partners" program, a course which taught parents how to help with reading, writing and language activities in class. The school attempted to minimise the number of students per parent and increase the one-on-one interaction during the scheduled activity. This program was offered to Year 1–3 parents. The student services manager made himself available for daily contact. The school held "Captain's Table" meetings fortnightly between parents and the principal to discuss important issues.

Conference sessions were conducted with students being bullied, the students engaging in bullying behaviour, and their families. The tone of these sessions was informal with refreshments provided. They were designed to facilitate discussion of bullying issues and potential solutions. Strategies that could be used at home were made available to parents by the student services manager, school psychologist, teachers and school nurse. Year 12 students were externally examined on their teaching skills, with some attaining qualifications as swimming instructors for children at primary and secondary level. The Year 1 boys enhanced their swimming skills and made some 'big friends'.

## What we learnt

### Difficulties encountered

Initially, parents did not want to talk about personal problems that may have affected their child's behaviour. Many were, therefore, unwilling to come to meetings to discuss their child's behaviour and possible solutions. From a logistics point of view there were also problems with finding a conference time to suit the part-time school psychologist or nurse, as well as fitting in with teacher's non-teaching time and parents' schedules.

### Overcoming difficulties

The conferences were set in an environment conducive to discussion. Armchairs are provided as well as tea, coffee and biscuits. As few participants as possible are involved in the conference to ensure parents weren't embarrassed to talk about sensitive issues. Early morning or late afternoon meetings are scheduled where appropriate, to ensure all parties can attend with particular emphasis on participation from fathers where possible.