

# Supporting linguistically diverse families through English classes

The following case study has been created by [Schools Plus](#), with the support of [Darling Heights State School](#), as an example of engaging with families to support student learning in primary school.

## Summary

Family engagement is important for improving student outcomes. Darling Heights State School has implemented a literacy support program to help foster family engagement in their diverse school community. This program has been successful in not only helping parents support their children's literacy development, but also in developing their own confidence and culture knowledge. This has enabled parents to communicate more effectively with classroom teachers, engage in school life and, ultimately, support their children's learning.

## Australian Professional Standards for Teachers

Family engagement for learning is related to Focus Area 3.7 and Focus Area 7.3 from the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.

## Australian Professional Standards for Principals

Family engagement for learning is related to 'Professional Practice 5 Engaging and working with the community' in the Australian Professional Standards for Principals.

## Overview

Our school community continues to grow as numbers of families increase in the surrounding neighbourhood of our developing city. We have a huge increase in the proportion of families with a language background other than English registered at the school and the number of stay-at-home parents of primary school age children continues to increase. The gap in English language and cultural capital is widening between the children of stay-at-

home parents and children with working or studying parents. Many parents suffer the negative feelings of increased isolation without the empowerment that competence in English that an Australian education brings. Our school offers a number of ways to engage, however, parents' confidence and ability to initiate and maintain meaningful contact with their children's learning is significantly limited.

## Recognising and supporting family engagement in learning at home

Our school, in partnership with the University of South Queensland, developed twice-weekly (weekly, post COVID) literacy sessions. The literacy sessions assist parents in improving their English skills and their confidence with working alongside teachers and supporting their children.

The program consists of lesson plans and resources. The lessons relate to what the children are learning and the language of schooling. The program is delivered by volunteer tutors who differentiate the content to suit the literacy and socio-cultural needs of the parent/s across a wide range of English language proficiency. The program has been developed with a clear focus on school language, processes, and expectations. Our volunteers have been sourced from the local community and are supported in their role by a tutor guide developed by the University of Southern Queensland support staff.

The program has given parents an increased understanding and confidence using school-based programs including the teaching of phonemic and phonological awareness, decoding and encoding with their children. Parents have time to practise and understand the skills required of their children, increasing their confidence with supporting their children at home.

Childcare is provided for the children of our participating parents. This allows parents (generally mothers) to participate and focus on the learning at hand while their children socialise, play, and

learn with other young children. Students from the University of Southern Queensland Early Childhood course are working with the preschool age children (0 to 4 years) while their parents are attending English lessons.

## Supporting two-way, positive communication and providing light touch updates about learning

The adult English classes have had a significant impact on the parents' involvement at our school and on other adults within their non-English speaking community. The benefits have been varied and wide, and have included increased understanding and confidence in using the English language. Our parents have commented on their improved levels of confidence listening, speaking, reading and writing English. They have increased levels of confidence not just when communicating with their child(ren)'s classroom teacher(s) but also when participating in the local and wider community.

## Promoting a literacy-rich environment at home

Our students demonstrate a sense of confidence and pride in their parents for the efforts they are making in learning English. This has helped build relationships with teachers and members of staff that may not have been developed had adult English classes not existed. Our students practise their English with a variety of different adults across the school and take pride in sharing messages between school and home.



## Collaboratively planning and problem-solving with families

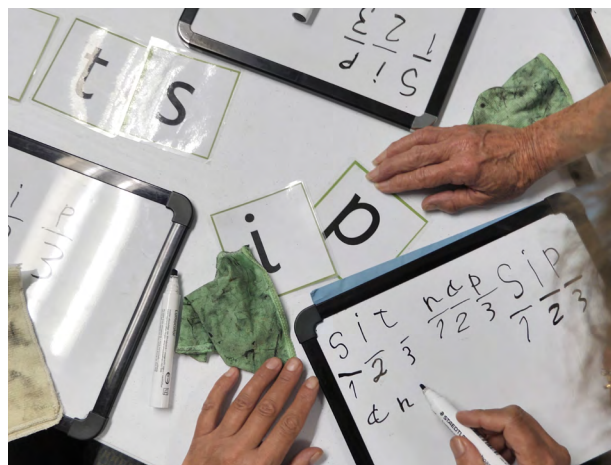
Parents and tutors have developed and built strong friendships, as have the parents with one another. There is a powerful sense of community and support within the group. There are many learning opportunities, and members of the adult English classes are often found supporting each other and learning together. During the lockdown in 2020 and 2021, the parent body their contact and time together through adult English classes.

Our staff have enjoyed the opportunity to meet students prior to their enrolment in Prep, through the childcare service offered while parents attend classes. This has assisted in the development of relationships and has also provided an insight to who the children are and how we can best cater for their needs. Parents have been provided support to access wrap around services providers.

### Where next?

The program has provided our school with a myriad of lessons along the way – we continue to learn, reflect, and aim to improve practice. Parents reflected on the impact of the program:

- 'I am learning new English words every day and I am now using English words every day.'
- 'I am learning to play with my daughter in English.'
- 'I can teach my daughter who is 3 years old about school values in advance.'
- 'I introduced theme and topic to my daughter and we are reading about that.'



We will continue to expand the program with a focus on developing a reading and writing program – complementary to the school program. Our school is now the hub for a Department of Education and Training community outreach program: Connect for Children Strategy.

### Our tips

- It is vital for all stakeholders to be 'on-the-same-page'. A very clear vision and purpose is paramount for success. Accompanying this is the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders – determining who is responsible for what, assists in ensuring the program is sustainable.
- An investment of time for reflection and communication is necessary. It is important for stakeholders to communicate and share their experiences to ensure they remain on the same page and are supportive of each other driving a program forward.

## Reflection questions

### Teachers

How do you build access to literacy rich environments with Culturally and Linguistically diverse families?

### Leaders

Does your school cater to differing levels of adult literacy, if so, what does it look like?

What supports are in place to help all families and staff communicate with each other?