Warilla North Public School

Rebuilding school culture: developing a genuine partnership

Context

Warilla North Public School is located 16 kilometres south of Wollongong. In 2015, the school population included 160 students with over 30 per cent of students identifying as Aboriginal. The school has a Family Occupation and Education Index (FOEI) rating of 184 (2014/15 average).

The school leadership team wanted to reconnect with their community after students and staff had been relocated to other schools during a lengthy period in which the school buildings were refurbished. The staff identified the need to strengthen relationships with the local Aboriginal community and develop more effective teaching and learning programs for Aboriginal students.

Enhancing community consultation

School leaders used Tell Them From Me, an online survey to capture the views of the whole school community. A consultant, employed to analyse the data, conducted focus group interviews with parents, staff and students and followed up with additional phone interviews with parents. The results became the basis of a cohesive school vision and school plan.

The launch of the school’s own Acknowledgement of Country effectively signaled the school’s commitment to engaging members of the local Aboriginal community in a meaningful and significant way. It was written collectively by students in consultation with the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG).

External partnerships with outside agencies, including Barnardos Australia and Family School Connect, provided support for students and parents and encouraged them to participate in school activities. The school’s instructional leader ran a Parents as Teachers and Classroom Helpers (PaTCH) course for parents to assist their children with reading. Completion of the course provides participants with evidence of prior learning for a TAFE course, or in some cases, a credit towards a TAFE accreditation.

Achievements

The rich collection of data gathered over the last four years provided a deep understanding of community aspirations for students and clear directions for the school with the development of the school plan.

The development of the Acknowledgement of Country was the first important step in building effective relationships with the local Aboriginal community. The school has now formed a partnership with the Shellharbour Aboriginal Community Youth Association (SACYA) to assist students requiring additional support.

The school’s leadership team has embraced and cooperated with community support groups, especially the coordinators. The coordinators work directly with their community, increasing the efficacy of the programs and raising the status of the school in the broader community. The parents who participated in these activities formed the group that contributed to the school plan.

Sustainability

The school leadership team intends to continue to collect feedback from students, staff and parents on the school plan prior to making annual adjustments. They remain committed to ensuring all stakeholders have a voice in the planning process.

The project officer from Family School Connect has been employed by the school as a community liaison officer to link families to the school and support the parent consultation group.

The school’s partnership with SACYA will allow more Aboriginal students to access support. Included in the project is a cultural officer, a social worker, a teacher, the establishment of a learning circle and a bush tucker garden. SAYCA supports the learning of Aboriginal students, connects families with the school and support students at risk, including those involved with the breakfast and attendance programs.

For more information on Warilla North Public School visit their website.