Condell Park Public School

Providing opportunities for parents to have a genuine voice in their children’s learning

Context

Condell Park Public School is situated near Bankstown Airport in south western Sydney and is the largest public primary school in the area. Of the 560 students enrolled, 90 percent are from a language background other than English. The school has a Family Occupation and Education Index (FOEI) rating of 131 (2015/16 average).

Enhancing community consultation

Staff believed that it was important for parents to participate in discussions about the school priority of innovation in teaching and learning. A large group of parents gathered at the school during Monday morning assembly so in 2015, the Community Liaison Officer (CLO), who knew the community well, used this time to talk to parents about school related issues. The parental response to electronic surveys was poor so a paper survey was used. To canvass as many parents as possible, the CLO approached parents in the playground to complete the survey.

Workshops were designed to provide information and support for parents on a range of issues, including *Mathematics in the Classroom*. Parents were invited to observe maths lessons and were interested in the ability of students to articulate their learning and relate it to real life problems. The school employed a consultant with experience in working with the local community to engage parents in a values program. The program was simultaneously taught in classrooms and shared with all parents through the newsletter.

As a result of the survey feedback from parents, the school changed their reporting structure. For instance, parents said that they wanted to be able to talk to teachers in a meaningful way about their children’s progress. As a result, later in 2015 a trial group of four classes was set up to conduct three-way conversations between parents, students and the class teacher focusing on student learning goals.

Achievements

Reviewing research changed the school’s view of what parents bring to the discussion. It helped staff understand that they needed to think more innovatively to determine the priorities of the school and the role of the school community in achieving those priorities.

The information gathered by the CLO from parents directly influenced the implementation and content of the parent workshop program and was also the impetus for a new approach to the reporting structure. Parents began visiting classrooms in greater numbers with students responding well to their presence.

In Semester 2, 2015 the number of classes participating in the three-way conversation trial increased from four to eight with a buddy system supporting the mentoring of teachers new to the program. In Semester 1 2016, participation increased again with 15 classes out of 23 becoming involved. The three-way conversations allowed parents to know where their children were in their learning and enabled students to have a voice in that learning. It is anticipated that eventually all classes will be involved. In addition, the number of parents attending Parents and Citizens (P&C) meetings increased, as did the range of representation of parents supporting P&C activities.

Sustainability

The school leadership team believes it is important to ensure that parents know that their voices are being heard and listened to. The team wants parents to see the link between the information gathered through survey data and where the school is heading. In deciding which parent workshops were offered in 2016, the focus was on the selection of strategies that support the school’s vision, what the school community wanted for students and how community involvement can be increased at all levels in the school. Following current successes, the school is committed to continuing the outstanding work of the CLO. The use of social media, such as Facebook, will be explored as a means of reaching a range of parents.

For more information on Condell Park Public School visit their website.