

Parents and community connecting with learning ^[1]



How does a school create a community of learners? How does a school engage parents so that they can support each child's learning? Hilltop Road Primary School, an innovative school in NSW, has embraced its parent community, recognising that a community of learners is a powerful ingredient in student success.

Video of Creating a learning community

Hilltop Road Primary School wanted to engage the whole school in community learning and build strong learning partnerships between the school, families and the wider community, after finding that many students were not connecting with their learning. The school had also been running programs for parents, but they found that there was low attendance and not much engagement with what they were offering.

Keen to build a community of learners, who could be role models for learning, the school built a program of community learning based on the RICE model (Relationships: Interests: Connecting: Engagement). These programs include TAFE outreach programs, computer courses for parents, bicycle courses and gardening programs. The program brings members of the wider community in to the school.

Parents participate in workshops about Hilltop Road's teaching practices, building their knowledge of the theory, as well as hands-on experience of learning. This helps to build their understanding of what and how their children are learning.

Each year, Hilltop Road Public School personalises the courses, workshops and events offered in the school community. The school works closely with families to identify their needs, which change regularly. The school works with local community agencies to collaborate and

combine resources to effectively offer more learning opportunities and increase the number of clients accessing services. For example, a high demand for structured English classes for parents at Hilltop Road Public School has been identified. Each Wednesday, the school bus is used to take the participants to the community centre in Pendle Hill for a two-hour class. The connections and friendships that are created in that weekly, two-hour session have been life changing for the participants. This school initiative has enabled the breaking down of cultural and religious barriers and the building of education, resilience and reality.

Hilltop Road Public School is situated in Merrylands in Western Sydney. Current enrolment is approximately 730, with about 60% of the school population from culturally and linguistic diverse backgrounds. The school is part of the Holroyd local government area, which is one of the most diverse in Sydney. Holroyd has a low socio-economic profile and is home to people from over 122 cultural backgrounds.

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Links

[1] <https://www.all-learning.org.au/blog/parents-and-community-connecting-learning>

[2] <https://www.all-learning.org.au/content-type/blog-post>

[3] <https://www.all-learning.org.au/tags/parents>

[4] <https://www.all-learning.org.au/tags/teachers>

[5] <https://www.all-learning.org.au/content-highlights/none>

[6] <https://www.all-learning.org.au/display-author-details/no>

[7] <https://www.all-learning.org.au/lecture-theme/lecture-2017>

[8] <https://www.all-learning.org.au/program-type/inspired-discussion>