The Tom Ffrench Family School Partnership Awards were established in 2008 to showcase and celebrate examples of innovative initiatives in South Australian Catholic schools that build and nurture family/school partnerships.

The awards are named in honour of Tom Ffrench who worked tirelessly for the Catholic Church and Catholic Education in South Australia for 50 years until his death in August 2007. Tom was a founding member of the Federation of Parents and Friends Associations of South Australian Catholic Schools formed in 1967. This group of determined people together fought successfully for funding for Catholic Schools from the State and Federal Governments. For this exceptional service to the objectives of the Federation, Tom was elected to Life Membership in the early 1990’s.

In 2014 we presented four awards during our 2014 Annual Parent and School Leader Conference which honoured work in strengthening family engagement in children’s learning and schooling.

Awards were presented to:

**St Columba’s Memorial School, Yorketown for its Sustainability for the Future Program**

This award recognises an initiative engaging teachers, students, parents, grandparents and the broader community in a ‘complete sustainable educational experience’ involving the planting, nurturing, harvesting, cooking and selling of produce from the school community’s market garden. This collaboration extends to the children, families and the school working together to continually review and improve the program. It recognises the shared responsibility of school and family for children’s learning. All this has led to a stronger sense of community, and ultimately significant learning outcomes for the young people involved.

**St Joseph’s School, Hectorville for its commitment to Increasing Parent Engagement in Learning and Decision Making**

This award recognises a principal-led, systematic, whole of school collaborative approach to strengthening the engagement of families in learning, decision making and the life of the school community. The formation of a Parent Engagement Group providing a forum for parents who were not members of the Board or the P&F is the key element of this work. The group meets regularly and works with leadership to evaluate the family school partnership and strengthen current practice.

Recognising the need to involve the whole school community in the work, the school engaged the Federation to work with leadership, parents and staff to identify ways to strengthen family engagement in learning. Key outcomes have included whole school strategies to strengthen the partnership between teachers and families in supporting children’s learning such as personalised letters of introduction from teachers to parents, a ‘Meet the Teacher’ day prior to the beginning of the school year class meetings to discuss the learning programs, expectations and routines and community building activities such as a school BBQ.
St Francis de Sales College, Mt Barker for its
Strengthening Community – Family, Student and School working Together

This award recognises that family/school partnerships are about people and relationships. With a focus on wellbeing, this work acknowledges the essential partnership between the parent, the child and the school to enable the whole school community to FLOURISH.

Overseen by a Wellbeing committee including representatives of staff, parents and students, this evidence based approach to improving wellbeing involved using data from student, parent and staff surveys to develop a wellbeing strategic plan aimed at preparing students for a happy, engaged and meaningful life. Workshops for parents and co-facilitated by parents were held on ‘Building Family Resilience’, working together as partners in children’s learning and assessing community engagement using the Strengthening Family and Community Engagement in Student Learning resource.

Outcomes of the program included increased attendance and student engagement, improved teacher/student relationships, improved grades, increased access of counselling and increased parent participation in the life of the college – all signs of a Flourishing community.

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College, Enfield for its Commitment to
Parent engagement in learning and the life of the College community

This award recognises a College committed to building strong, respectful, collaborative relationships with its diverse parent community underpinned by a sincere acknowledgement of parents as partners in how children learn best. Led with passion and commitment, this community has systematically built and sustained a culture that welcomes and enables the engagement of parents in all the various dimensions of College life – as partners in learning, as career partners, as contributors, as decision makers, participants in liturgy, community creators, artistic collaborators, as supporters and motivators. This culture of genuine partnership with families is captured in its Parent Engagement booklet – designed to both capture and celebrate parent engagement in this community but to inspire its new families by showcasing the many ways they too can be actively engaged.

Congratulations to those school communities acknowledged in 2014 for their commitment to working in genuine partnership with families.

Pictured (L-R) Vanessa Grave, St Francis de Sales College Mt Barker; Emma Ernst, St Francis de Sales College Mt Barker; Kristy Howe, St Francis de Sales College Mt Barker; Leanne Carr, St Joseph’s School Hectorville; Karen Seaton, representing the Ffrench family; Maria Sauchelli, St Joseph’s School Hectorville; Emma Doley, representing the Ffrench family and Joy Bedford, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College, Enfield. (St Columba’s School Yorketown was absent).