Awards celebrate Family-School Partnerships

The 2013 “Tom Ffrench Family School Partnership Awards” were announced at the Federation of Catholic School Parent Communities Conference Dinner on Saturday, 25th May.

These annual awards were established by the Federation in 2008 to showcase and celebrate examples of innovative initiatives in Catholic schools in South Australia that build and nurture the essential partnership between families and our schools.

The awards are named in honour of the late Tom Ffrench, one of the founding members of the Federation who worked tirelessly for the Catholic Church and Catholic Education in South Australia and was awarded Life Membership of the Federation in the early 1990’s.

Tom’s daughter Annemarie and granddaughter Emma attended the presentations.

This year, awards were presented in three categories:

The Building Community/Celebrating Diversity award category recognises inclusive practices and programs that build a culture of welcome, inclusion and belonging for all families that reflects and respects diversity within the school’s community and promotes the partnership between home and school to support learning.

Two schools received awards in this category this year.

The first award recognised the commitment of St Joseph’s School, Murray Bridge for its ‘Wrap Around Approach’ project aimed to develop and strengthen the partnership between home and school to seek better learning outcomes for all their students.

All members of the school community - school leadership, Board, P&F, staff and students – are committed to working collaboratively in this ‘Wrap Around Approach’ to ensure that all children in the school are given the support they need to reach their full potential. Strategies include mentoring, networking with community services, parent education, community events and cultural activities, setting up a parent room, meet and greet sessions, 3 way learning conversations, student-led social justice initiatives and so much more.

The second award in this category recognised Our Lady of Grace school, Glengowrie for its ‘Buddy up with a Family’ project - a parent initiated approach to building community and the partnership between home and school through the creation of a buddy program for parents new to the school community.

Recognising that the school community could be more supportive of new families and understanding that when families feel a sense of belonging to the school community, the partnership between home and schools can be fostered, a program to ‘buddy’ existing families to parents and children joining the school community was formed. Initiated by parents, promoted by school leaders and teachers, supported by current parents and students and embraced by new families, the program has been a success in making that transition to school a less daunting experience for children and their families.

The Faith Formation and Ministry award category recognises initiatives that bring schools and families together in this core area of work that makes our Catholic schools unique.

One school received an award in this category this year. This award recognised Our Lady Queen of Peace School, Albert Park for its Pastoral Care Project - a whole-of school initiative that calls members of this school community to support each other in times of need. Their Pastoral Care Program was set up by the school Chaplain and calls on all members of the community – students, parents and staff - to respond to our calling to serve by preparing meals to be frozen and provided to others when they are affected by grief, hardship or a challenge.
The third award category **Engaging Families in Student Learning and the Curriculum** recognises connections between families and school that promote student learning and high expectations from both teachers and family to contribute to students’ success at school. It acknowledges parents as the first and continuing educators and as partners in their children’s education.

One school received an award in this category this year. This award recognised **St Joseph’s Memorial School, Norwood for its ‘Project Forward’** - a whole of school approach to ‘advance the school forward’ by building on and communicating the unique strengths that exist within the school community. The project incorporates a range of innovative strategies across areas including student learning and wellbeing, parent education, curriculum, school promotion, school leadership and school pride with each encompassing the engagement of parents and families as integral members of the school community.

Congratulations to those school communities acknowledged in 2013 for their commitment to working in genuine partnership with families.

The Federation invites schools to consider nominating for the 2014 Tom Ffrench Family-School Partnership Awards. Nomination will be called later this year.