Awards Celebrate Family-School Partnerships

The 2012 “Tom Ffrench Family School Partnership Awards” were announced at the 45th Annual General Meeting of the Federation of Catholic School Parent Communities on Monday, 28th 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 daughters Annemarie and Karen attended the presentation and his grand-daughter, Emma presented the awards.

This year, awards were presented in two categories:

Building Community
This 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.

There were two award winners in this category this year:

**St Gabriel’s School, Enfield**

*Sacred Heart Community Room Project*

This award recognises the commitment of the St Gabriel’s school community to develop and strengthen the partnership between home and school to seek better learning outcomes for all their students.

Led by a Community Team made up of school leadership, Board, P&F, staff and student representatives, the focus of this approach has been to create a welcoming ‘space’ for families that meets the community’s expressed wish for the opportunity to come together as a community in an informal way.

The Sacred Heart Community Room has become a place of meeting, gathering, community building and learning for all members of the school community.

It provides an opportunity for informal collaborative learning about the school’s learning programs and how to support children’s learning at home.

The school is utilising the School Assessment Tool within the *Strengthening Family and Community Engagement in Student Learning* resource to guide this work.
Loreto College, Marryatville
Community Garden Project

This award recognises an innovative approach to building community and connecting the learning at home and school through the creation of a Community Garden for children in Reception through to Year 5.

Children, staff and parents have collaborated in the development of the garden and work together to maintain it and enjoy its produce.

The project has proven to be a successful opportunity for increasing parent involvement in the school, tapping into parent experience and skills to give the students advice and guidance, enabling parents to be actively involved in their children’s learning at school about sustainability and environment, maintaining a garden and cooking. The project has also created new opportunities for engaging parents in the assessment of their daughters’ progress in these learning areas and in bringing families together for social interaction.

Engaging Families in Student Learning and the Curriculum

This award category 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 recognises parents as the first and continuing educators and as partners in their children’s education.

There was one award winner in this category this year:

Dominican School, Semaphore
Beyond the Classroom Project

The project involves the provision of four whole school and community activities per year to engage students, teachers, parents, grandparents, visitors and the broader community in a process of authentic learning.

The focus of the activities is to connect the learning at school so that it is meaningful and relevant to learning beyond the classroom.

Activities are diverse and hands-on and enable families to experience contemporary education first hand building a culture of mutual understanding and respect that is essential for authentic partnership.

Outcomes identified have been a stronger interest and engagement of students in their learning, involvement of a broader group of parents not normally seen at school community events, an acknowledgement of the skills and experience within the parent community and stronger relationships and connectedness between students, parents and staff.
Congratulations to those school communities acknowledged in 2012 for their commitment to working in genuine partnership with families.

The Federation invites schools to consider nominating for the 2013 Tom Ffrench Family-School Partnership Awards. Nomination will be called later this year.