

Your school as community

NICOLE NYHOUSE

It would be easy for me to start this article with a list of ways parents can engage in school communities that I have seen work in my own school over the past 16 years, but before I start writing any lists I would like to talk about what has motivated me—firstly as a parent, and then as a staff member—to engage in and contribute to my school community. I mean, we are all busy and sometimes over committed aren't we?! In our churches, home groups, with our family and extended family, friends, sporting groups, and the list goes on of all the things that might need our attention and support. There are a few key things that inspire me to remember the importance of being engaged in community.

One of my favorite verses is Romans 12:5-10

So in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.... Love must be sincere.... Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.

Then there is a quote in the "Relational Community" chapter from the *Transformational Education* book that is widely used in our schools that also inspires me:

Effective Learning happens best in a community where there are relationships of trust and mutual service, where people exercise their particular calling before God.

So why is our school community so important?

Research shows us that we change jobs, churches, homes, states, and even countries at a much faster rate than our parents and grandparents. This means that a school may be the most significant (and long-lasting) community our families will belong to. For many families, especially those living away from extended family, the school community is their village. It's the place where they grow friendships, organise playdates, and find that friend that can pick up their children from school if they are sick. Even if we are fortunate enough to not need or rely on the practical help of our school community, we might find that person or family that we connect with on a deep level and end up doing life with; bike rides, BBQs, holidays, maybe attend church together, and home groups. They may become the type of friends who are like family: providing the village for you and your children. Then there is the wider school community, the teachers who care for your children, the leaders who prayerfully lead your school, the board members (such hard-working volunteers!), and our associations.

The school community is a rich and diverse place, where we can draw upon support when we need it and we can contribute and

use our gifts to make a difference.

Some practical ways to partner with your school –

- Prayerfully support your children's teachers, the leaders, and board of your school. Read your school's newsletter to gain a deeper understanding of the heart and 'why' of your school (and keep up-to-date with the busy school calendar!).
- Support families in your school who need help—prayer and/or practical support.
- Volunteer in the classroom, on an excursion, or camp.
- Attend your school's social activities.
- When things go wrong, be willing to partner with the appropriate staff member and work through the school's procedures to work towards a resolution together. Pray for the situation and all those involved.
- Follow and interact with your school's social media accounts.
- Find out more about joining your school's association and prayerfully consider doing this.

This last one is an important one. Our schools were started by parents committed to Christian education, have been kept going by parents committed to Christian education, and they need committed parents to keep our schools on track and to remain true to the paths set by our founders. Our schools need parents to use our God-given gifts to engage and contribute.

Can I encourage you to try one or more of the above things? It may not be clear to you where you can contribute or use your gifts, but the body needs all its parts, and your place will be made clear to you as you prayerfully embark on this journey.

The reasons to partner and engage are many! It is biblical, it will enrich your own family's community/village, it will help your school deliver effective learning in a community that has mutual trust and service, and it will strengthen our schools for future generations: for our children and grandchildren.

References

H. Burggraaf (Ed.), C. Semmens (Curator), A. Schmidt, D. Emery, P. Oldman, J. Miller, C. Brid, & M. Hanscamp. (2014) *Transformational education: A framework for Christian teaching*. Mount Evelyn Christian School.

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