Name of School:

St Brendan’s Primary School, Lake Munmorah, NSW

About St Brendan's:
St Brendan’s is located on the NSW Central Coast

Enrolment Profile (last census):
Enrolment: 392 and 6% Indigenous enrolments

An additional group of students attend the school but are enrolled in a satellite class run by ASPECT Australia (for children with autism).

It is a low SES school (School ICSEA value: 966 and SES: 88) in challenging circumstances.

St Brendan’s mission is to:
“support and supplement the efforts of parents in providing a total education for their children. Hence the Staff and the parents united together will encourage the children to live like Christ, to live Christian values on which their spiritual and intellectual life can be based”.

St Brendan’s 2010 Annual School Plan specifically acknowledges parents and identifies strategies to support parents as part of the learning community. In particular it identifies the need for the engagement of parent workshop facilitators to build on the capacity of parents in the school community and identifies the need to address parent and community learning foci as part of the school’s integrated professional learning plan.

St Brendan’s currently has a whole of school numeracy focus. As part of its numeracy plan it has identified the need to:

- Ensure parents are informed of student’s learning needs in Numeracy and engage parents in looking at ways of supporting this learning at home.
- Publish Numeracy Plans and ensure the community is well-informed about the progress of Numeracy at the school

There is a ‘personnel infrastructure’ to support parent and community engagement in this school. This case study looks at these roles.

Name of project/initiative

Parent Support Personnel:
- School-based Family Liaison Officer (FLO)
- Cluster-based Parent Educators
- School-based Pastoral Care Coordinator (Parents)
- School-based Class Parents
- Aboriginal Education Worker

All Personnel are supported by an Education Officer – Parent Liaison from Broken Bay Diocese Catholic Schools Office.
Which of the following best describes the aim of the project/initiative:

1. Supporting parental involvement in their child’s learning at home
2. Supporting parental involvement in the school and school activities
3. Supporting parental involvement in governance/decision making

(All three)

Short description of project/initiative including your aims, specific challenges the project intended to address, why you undertook the program, target groups if relevant eg Indigenous parents/caregivers, parents of children new to the school, disengaged parents, parents of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds etc.

St Brendan’s has a whole-school approach to pastoral care and learning which involves parents as key partners. The school also recognises that this community faces some challenging circumstances and families need to be supported in their important role as primary educators of their children. There is a strong commitment to building community and providing mutual support.

**Family Liaison Officer**

Since 2004/2005, the Broken Bay Catholic Schools Office (covering the Northern Suburbs of Sydney and Central Coast of NSW) has been funding the services of a Family Liaison Officer (FLO) at four systemic Catholic schools in the diocese including St Brendan’s. Decisions regarding the selection of schools required extensive consultation because it was recognised that, while many schools have hidden needs and diverse social issues to contend with and all would benefit from extra assistance, only a few were able to be funded under this initiative.

The decision to locate a FLO at St Brendan’s was based on the needs of the school’s parent community. Lake Munmorah has a low SES community. The parent community reside in up to five geographically isolated communities, resulting in difficulties with transport to the school and difficulties in developing a cohesive parent community due to disengagement. There is also a large and involved indigenous community of parents.

FLOs at the four schools are funded at clerical support staff rate to work one day a week (or its equivalent). St Brendan’s has been able to use other sources of funding to allow the FLO to work extra days a week which has provided for a broader role and more flexibility.

The FLOs in each of the schools bring a rich variety of professional backgrounds and employment skills to their positions including, Teacher Aide and Social Work qualifications, a background in PR and Graphic Design as well as counselling.
The Role:

1. The role of the Family Liaison Officer (FLO) is underpinned by a philosophy that recognises parents as first educators and aims to help them be more effective partners in their children’s learning and development.

Another key aspect of this role is that it helps to provide support for the Principals who find themselves in the front line of having to deal with the ever-increasing and extremely complex needs of the families whose children attend their schools.

2. The role descriptions and areas of activity vary considerably between schools but, in general, the role has focused very much on the following areas:

- building a sense of community, social cohesion and the school’s atmosphere of welcome, especially through involvement in kindergarten orientations
- providing support within the school for families in crisis /need and linking parents to Centacare, Government and local support agencies
- empowering parents in the parenting process by providing information and workshops that address particular needs identified by the community
- encouraging and supporting parent involvement in P&Fs and Class Parent structures, providing assistance and training workshops to develop skills and confidence.
- assisting parents to understand how children learn and to better assist that learning process

Some challenges for the role include:

- Access to networking with other family liaison
- Access to professional learning opportunities
- Boundaries around their role – need to be clear
- Time constraints due to being part-time
- Financial/funding constraints
- On-going challenges of engaging parents who aren’t (and who may not want to be) engaged.

Attached is the role description and a summary of the types of activities the FLOs (across all school) undertake under each of the National Family School Partnership Framework dimensions.

Parent Educators

The FLO is assisted by a Parent Educator team (a group of trained parents that work across schools) who deliver parent programs to support children’s learning (eg The Parent Factor – Literacy and Numeracy).

In 2001, Broken Bay Catholic Schools Office (CSO) approved a proposal from the diocesan office-based Parent Liaison Officer for an innovative project to
train and mentor a small group of parents to become “Parent Educators” (PEs) who would be available to primary schools interested in having programs and workshops facilitated for their parents.

In 2002, Broken Bay CSO allocated initial funds for a group skills facilitation and training program and a core group of PEs started working with Central Coast schools like St Brendan’s with an acknowledged low SES and high needs focus. In 2009 5 PEs were operating across the Central Coast supporting schools.

Parent workshops are provided at no cost to schools or parents. Most programs are co-facilitated by two PEs with the Broken Bay CSO providing a sessional remuneration as an acknowledgement of their commitment and the value of their role.

The initial program run by the PEs was “The Parent Factor - Literacy”, targeted at parents with children in the early years of schooling. The three session program highlights the powerful influence of the family on children’s learning and reinforces the importance of the partnership between the home and the school in developing literacy skills.

The initiative has since expanded to encompass “The Parent Factor – Numeracy” as well as other topics such as Ages and Stages of Development, Sibling Rivalry and Anxiety and Perfectionism as well as 123 Magic, a two / three session Parenting program that helps parents K-6 with behaviour management skills. For Literacy and Numeracy programs a teacher is requested to attend one of the sessions to speak about how literacy and numeracy are taught in the classroom.

The Role:

The role of the Parent Educator is to facilitate programs and workshops in schools - particularly targeting parents with children in the early years of schooling. The aim is help build relationships between parents within school communities and develop strong links between the home and school to assist children’s learning.

Some challenges for the role include:
- A need to broaden the focus from early years to K-6 (and beyond)
- Need to recognise that the role is not just running courses but supporting school-based parent engagement
- Need strong clarity around the role
- Night work
- Preparation time
- Professional development
- Getting fathers involved as PEs

Value of the role:
Like the FLO role, the PE role has also been externally evaluated. This evaluation found that Principal’s highly valued this work. One comment was that:
“Parent education is a huge challenge for schools. The assistance and support of the PE Team is wonderful and seems to have the right balance of professional and parent-friendly approach. Please keep expanding this role”.

**School-based Pastoral Care Coordinator (Parents)**
St Brendan’s also has a dedicated Pastoral Care Coordinator attached to the P&F Association. This is a voluntary P&F role undertaken by a parent.

The Pastoral Care Co-ordinator supports, communicates and coordinates Class Parents.

**School-based Class Parents**
Class parent's main role is to assist class teachers with parent volunteer involvement, eg. reading, journal writing, sport, craft, excursions etc. They also welcome new families, acknowledge births, sickness and deaths etc. within our school community. Activities are also organized that try to meet the individual needs of the different class groups.

The Pastoral Care Coordinator and Class Parents have been carefully chosen for their confidentiality, school familiarity, knowledge of P & F, accessibility to teacher and other parents, openness and understanding. The FLO supports these parents in their roles.

**Aboriginal Education Assistant**
The primary focus of the Aboriginal Education Assistant's work is to support Aboriginal students to improve their educational outcomes, to monitor the progress of these students and to work in partnership with parents to ensure they achieve their full potential and aspirations.

Describe the roles of members of your school community (where applicable) in the planning, promotion, implementation and evaluation of the project/initiative:

The roles and areas of focus for the FLO, P&F Pastoral Care Coordinator and Class Parents are largely determined by

- the needs identified by the Principal
- the identified needs of the school community through consultation
- the particular skills the FLO is able to bring to the role.
- Consultation with Educational Services Team at Broken Bay Catholic Schools Office
- Support from Education Officer – Parent Liaison Broken Bay Catholic School Office

**School Principal:**
Provides leadership and support and identifies key areas of need. The Principal's leadership at St Brendan's has been critical to the success and the depth of the FLO role at the school. His personal commitment to parent engagement and community building has been very important.
Parents/caregivers/families:
Through the P&F parents provide mutual support to the FLO. While the parent association sees itself as having a role in developing the partnership between families and the school by bringing together the St Brendan’s community through barbeques on special days, Kindergarten Welcome Barbeque, Mother’s Day and Father’s Day Breakasts, morning teas and other events and supporting families in their everyday lives, the FLO does more of the outreach to families not involved in formal school activities. Outreach is through personal contact and communication that targets parents who may be geographically and educationally isolated.

There is a strong pastoral focus at the school. The school community, for example, offers support to families through the provision of such things as meals during times of crisis.

Other ways parents are involved in the school:
- Parent representatives assist on the Enrolment, Uniform and Finance Committees and Tuckshop.
- Parent volunteerism across a number of other school areas such as sporting events, reading groups and the like is also very high.
- Attendance at parent education sessions in numeracy, literacy and parenting skills courses
- School representatives on the Diocesan Parent Council

Parent Satisfaction feedback gleaned from parent/teacher meetings, parent forums and P&F meetings shows that most parents in the community feel well informed about what is happening in the school and feel comfortable to access the most appropriate staff member for guidance or assistance.

As parents have become more comfortable in being included in more areas of school governance, the groundwork for other forms of involvement in governance have been laid e.g. the formation of a school board structure.

Teachers:
Teachers work with the FLO and Parent Education Team to provide opportunities for parents to work in partnership with teachers in the students learning. Recently a “Numeracy Alive” morning was organised, Kindergarten parents were individually invited to an interactive numeracy morning with their children. Evaluations showed that parents developed a strong understanding on how numeracy is taught, how their child understands numeracy and the parents role at home. Similar mornings will be run across all stages. These mornings will be followed by Parent Factor Numeracy workshops to further consolidate the parents knowledge and skills and involvement at home.

The teachers see the FLO as a resource and she is highly regarded by the teaching staff.

Other school staff
A family counsellor, employed by the Catholic Schools Office, works in the school approximately one day per week.
Describe the outcomes of the project/initiative. How well did it achieve your intended aims? What elements of the project/initiative do you think contributed to its success in engaging parents who have normally been disengaged and what were the barriers to successful engagement?

The Family Liaison Officer role (across all four schools) and the Parent Educator roles were externally evaluated in 2009. The evaluation in relation to the FLO showed that:

1. Strong evidence for the effectiveness of the role of the FLO is reflected in Principals' enthusiasm about the value the FLO had added to the school community.

2. Further evidence is available in personal appraisals that have been carried out at contract renewal time. Individual FLOs have consistently received very high ratings from their respective Principals and co-workers. Anecdotal evidence of parents’ satisfaction and appreciation have also been noted.

3. In one school a survey of parents (done in 2005) identified that parents at the school:
   *felt more connected and more engaged with the life of the school and experienced more of a sense of community than ever before.*

4. In Term 3 2009 the Principal of St Brendan’s school did a follow-up survey of all parents. The collated results show that, on a ten point scale, there was:
   - 9.6 agreement that parents were aware the school had an FLO
   - 8.7 agreement that the role is effective
   - 8.5 agreement that parents now have a strong partnership with the school compared with 4.9 for before the school had an FLO
   - 8.1 that families in crisis now receive very good support from the
school compared with 5.8 for *before* the school had an FLO

- 7.8 that parents are now better connected with each other and the school compared with 4.6 for *before* the school had an FLO

5. Parent attendance at parent information sessions and activities has increased. The FLO has been able to contact parents on an individual basis, explaining what parent education sessions involve and encouraging parents to attend. Individual invitations were used to invite parents to the recently held “numeracy alive” interactive workshop which resulted in an 80% attendance. Parents have an increased understanding of the benefit of their involvement in workshops and activities.

Can you estimate the time commitment of the school principal, teachers, other school staff and/or parents e.g. school principal – 1 day initially then 3 hrs/wk for 10 wks, teacher 1 – 2 hrs/wk ongoing, teacher 2 – 3 hrs/mth. etc?

**The FLO works 2 days per week.**

**Principal approximately 2 hours a week**

**Teachers 1 to 2 hours a week depending on what is happening that week**

**Parent Liaison Officer 5 hours per school term**

**Future Plans**

The current program has been refunded for another two years at which time it will be reassessed. Funding is through Broken Bay’s Education Officer – parent Liaison Budget.

Commitment of various school members will remain as identified above. Lake St. Brendan’s is currently very active in parent engagement strategies across its learning environment with many staff members involved.

St Brendan’s currently has funding for parent engagement in Numeracy under National Partnerships funding and is also involved in the Broken Bay’s RAIN (raising achievement in numeracy) program which has funding for parent engagement/partnerships. The FLO is involved in these projects.
FLO Role Description and Essential Criteria:

Role Description:
The Family Liaison officer will work in a part-time capacity within selected primary schools ...and provide proactive support to family issues according to the needs of each local community.

Principal Accountabilities:
Contributes to the effectiveness and mission of local school communities by:

- developing and fostering the vision of Catholic parents in a faith community;
- working with school Principals to build positive relationships with parents across the school-parish community;
- working in close liaison with Principals to provide support networks for family issues;
- providing support to family problems and referral to appropriate services;
- providing assistance to families in need of individual parenting support – at home or at school;
- running workshops and parenting support programs on a needs basis;
- assisting schools in nurturing parent involvement in school based programs;
- providing information to parents on services, agencies and support networks within the local community;
- working with Principals to plan initiatives that support parents/carers in taking an active role in their child’s learning;
- working in close liaison with Principals to plan processes to assist transition to primary and secondary school life.

Contributes to the Diocesan Mission of outreach and service to the needs of local communities by:

- forging close links with the parish and school community to develop structures that empower parents to reach out to others in need;
- welcoming parents from State schools into parent programs and community (parish) activities;
- developing leadership support for parents in local school/parish programs;
- providing a holistic “model of service” that further nurtures school-parish-community relationships.

(Broken Bay CSO Role Description for Family Liaison Officers, 2002)
Family Liaison Officer Activities:

National Family-School Partnership Framework

Principals and FLOs were asked which dimensions of the National Family-School Partnerships Framework had been the focus of their FLO activities and the sorts of strategies that FLOs had utilised for each.

Principals and FLOs agreed that the Framework provides a useful base for clarifying the various dimensions of the FLO’s work. Out of the seven dimensions, two FLOs identified five dimensions within which they had been active, one identified six dimensions and one all seven.

It was suggested that a compilation of the list would be a useful tool for schools looking for ideas in the area of Parent Engagement and Partnership.

Building Community and Identity

- Activities that improve the quality of life in a community while honouring the culture, traditions values and relationships in that community
- Activities that promote aspects of the social, emotional, moral and spiritual development of young people and the building of a sense of community in each student

Only one school does not have any FLO involvement in this dimension. For three schools, Building Community was very high on the FLO’s list, including encouraging parents to see themselves as part of the local faith community. For one Principal, the FLO assists with the school’s aim of having “Clearer focus on our call as disciples to build a faith community which not only cares for its own members but appreciates its responsibility to care for others.”

Some FLO activities were:
- Organising creative display of School Prayer in Office foyer drawing attention to praying for “families we belong to” and being involved with school Masses as well as Parish/school Masses with BBQ.
- Working with individual families identified by the Principal as needing support.
- Organising “Crunch and Munch” activities as a community builder as well as a fund raiser for Meals Committee which provides meals to families in crisis.
- Gathering support and information and advertising local services.
- Meeting parents assisting them to build networks with each other.
- Working with staff and children, continually making links amongst the community.
- Providing playground activities to build social cohesion of students generally and social support for particular students.
Being an approachable, parent-friendly face that adds to the welcoming atmosphere of the school and the sense of belonging.

Providing personal welcome by phone to new families.

Organising Welcome Morning Teas, After Assembly Coffee Catch Ups, Open Days, Grandparents Days, Mother’s Day nights out, Father’s Day Breakfast, Father-Child Movie nights.

Encouraging Class Parents to organise social activities.

**Recognising the Role of the Family**

- *Activities that recognise that parents and families have a lasting influence on their children’s attitudes and achievements at school*
- *Activities that help build mutual understanding of each other’s roles and priorities in partnerships and the building of relationships*
- *Activities that encourage families to support school goals, directions and ethos and schools to understand family priorities and offer workshops / discussions / meetings / demonstrations for parents*

Organising Parent Education Workshops run by CSO Parent Education Team (Parent Factor Literacy and Numeracy, Ages and Stages, Anxiety and Perfectionism, 123 Magic Parenting, Sibling Rivalry, Ages and Stages).

Establishing support networks as a result of Parenting programs.

Establishing and promoting Parent Library (books, information and DVDs).

Working with P&F so parents understand its collaborative purpose and role.

Organising Information nights for P&F.

Distributing useful parent information / advertising events and programs via newsletters and flyers.

Building rapport with teachers, distributing useful information and ideas about working with parents and raising teacher awareness about needs of families.

Running Transition to high school workshops for Year 6.

Being involved in and offering support during school enrolment process.

Co-ordinating Transition to Kindy sessions.

Co-ordinating Open Days and “Taste of Learning School Days” and 4 week transition to school program for enrolling families.

Developing supportive relationships through regular visits to pre-schools.

**Communicating**

- *Communication that is active, personal, frequent, culturally-appropriate, formal and informal, multi-dimensional and two-way so families and schools learn about each other*
- Activities that empower and encourage families to communicate effectively with schools
- Activities that recognise that families are genuine partners and can help solve big problems

Being another parent - a friendly face - especially for parents who might feel intimidated / nervous about interacting with schools and teachers.

Being available to talk to parents in the mornings and afternoons and phone individuals to invite them to participate in specific activities.

Designing parent-friendly messages and flyers.

Distributing useful parent information / advertising events and programs via newsletters and flyers and school website.

Designing and updating Community News Notice Board.

Designing Parent Information Booklet for Kindie parents.

Distributing useful information to and building rapport with teachers.

Creating “Children See Think Do” posters around school to catch parents’ eyes as well as teachers and students.

Making referrals to school Counsellor.

**Connecting Learning at Home and School**

- Activities that encourage understanding about the connection between successful partnerships and children’s learning and working together to create positive attitudes to learning
- Activities that help Families to be informed about and understand their child’s progress and feel confident to work with teachers in the educational decision-making process for their child
- Activities for parental self-growth, learning and development of new skills

Organising Parent Education Workshops run by CSO Parent Education Team (Parent Factor Literacy and Numeracy, Ages and Stages, Anxiety and Perfectionism).

Co-ordinating / running Transition to Kindie sessions for enrolling families.

Running Transition to high school workshops for Year 6.

Being involved in and offering support during school enrolment process.

Identifying school-home strategies for particular students with relevant teachers and establishing regular follow-up.

Working with school Pastoral Care / Student Welfare staff.

Taking advantage of formal and informal opportunities to emphasise to parents how important their role is in their children’s learning.

Providing information on “Parent Involvement” and “Supporting Your Child’s Learning at Home” in Parent Information Booklets for Kindie parents.
Participating

- Activities that recognise that families' time, energy and expertise can support learning and school programs in many ways and that all contributions are valuable
  - working with students in classrooms
  - participating in other school activities
  - participating in activities outside school
  - supporting and valuing teachers

- Activities not always being education-related but something that interests parents

Supporting, encouraging and assisting Class Parents and P&F so there is broader involvement and good leadership.

Supporting P&F Pastoral Care Co-ordinator.

Providing training workshops and encouragement for parents to be actively involved and confident to take on roles.

Helping co-ordinate volunteers for LAP program, school tuckshop, and other school activities including overseeing two playground activities per week.

Organising thank-you celebrations for volunteers.

Consultative Decision-making

- Activities that recognition that parents are entitled to: be consulted and participate in decisions concerning their own children and play meaningful roles in the school decision-making process as well

- Activities that provide training and information to support parents

Supporting, encouraging and assisting Class Parents and P&F.

Designing Class Parent Information Handbook, including essential criteria - confidentiality, privacy, financial responsibility.

Advertising and attending meetings, offering training workshops, acting as Executive Officer for committees, helping parents to be clear about the collaborative purpose and role of the P&F.

Providing training workshops and encouragement for parents to be actively involved and confident to take on roles.

Collaborating Beyond the School

- Identification and integration of the wider resources and services which can strengthen and support schools, students and families

Linking parishioners with school LAP program.

Referring parents to Centacare, government and local agencies.

Liaising / working closely with Centacare’s support workers, DOCS workers.

meeting with Women’s Hostel staff.

Gathering support and information for families in need.
Sharing invitations and resources with other schools.

Presenting Readiness for School workshop in pre-schools.

Including Parish and local pre-schools in invitations to parenting sessions at school.