

Newmarket Primary School, Auckland 2016



Engaging the school community with strategic plan

Newmarket Primary School has experienced significant change in demographics over the last ten years. The school is now connected with over 20 different languages and 85% of students come from homes where another language is spoken.

In September 2015, Wendy Kofoed, Principal and her leadership team identified the critical need to improve parent, whānau and teacher engagement with the school's Charter/strategic plan. This included, the vision, values and goals to further support student achievement.

"We know that strong home school partnerships play an important role in supporting student's learning. If parents do not engage with and support the work of the school, then students' learning might be compromised" explains Wendy.

"With our rich diversity we needed to reflect on how we communicate with our stakeholders. We needed to revise the effectiveness of our current systems for consultation," says Wendy Kofoed, Principal.

Debbie Herlihy from Springboard Trust took on the role of Engagement Manager. She worked alongside the Newmarket school leadership team to develop a project based approach to enhance understanding of engagement with the school's strategic plan inside and outside the school gate.

Baseline measure

In August 2015 a survey of parents and staff was undertaken by Virginia Kung, Deputy Principal. Results showed low levels of awareness for both staff and parents around the school's vision and goals.

Complexity of language was identified as one of the main barriers for parents. Wendy explains that “While work had been done to develop a relevant and useful school Charter and strategic plan it was still couched in the language of school (edu-speak).”

Workshopping

In September 2015, Debbie facilitated a project team workshop on increasing community engagement with the vision and values.

Debbie guided the team in prioritising their ideas to assess the level of importance. This was followed by a list of prioritised solutions ensuring the team focused on those that had the biggest impact.

The team found this process immensely useful and emphasised the difference it made having a facilitator there right from the start, “Debbie helped us clarify the problem, supported us to develop strategies and worked alongside us to develop robust solutions,” says Wendy.

Delivering the project plan

1. Engagement with the plan on a page

The first focus was simplifying the Charter to the format of a “plan on a page”. The one-page document was revised to clearly communicate the school’s vision, values, principles and goals using jargon-free, easy to understand language.

Workshops were held with the Board and teachers to establish a clear understanding of the content of the plan on a page and how it related to people’s roles and the curriculum.

The plan on a page was communicated school-wide and the vision, values and goals included in all school newsletters.

2. A refined parent survey

In June 2016, a new targeted face-to-face parent survey was developed to increase response rates with the support of Springboard Trust’s Elaine More.

The normally complex and wordy bi-annual survey was re-shaped using simple language with a series of prompts.

Virginia valued the opportunity to work alongside Elaine for this process. “I have learnt that there is an art to forming questions to elicit the relevant insights and data” she says.

Impact and key learnings

As a result of this project, the Newmarket team say parental understanding of the plan increased by 85% and teacher understanding of goals increased 90%. Moving forward the team plans to continue momentum in inducting new parents, whānau and teachers and board members with the plan on a page. They will also include it in enrolment packs and place the goals in the newsletter.

Wendy says the project has been significant for the school “It has been useful for student learning to develop closer links between the plan and the curriculum. Teachers have greater ownership and because of this the learning outcomes are richer.”

Wendy and Virginia say the professional development opportunities received as a result of the coaching has been extremely valuable.

“Working with a cross-sector coach gave me a different perspective and took me out of my comfort zone. As a result, I have been able to transfer the knowledge and templates to other aspects within the school,” comments Virginia.

“The relationship and trust we developed with our Springboard Trust Engagement Manager ensured everyone’s skills and talents were acknowledged. Our capability to support all learners has been enhanced,” says Wendy.

Principals can now access a set of services that connect them with best practice in change leadership and strategy implementation.

These services can help to accelerate implementation and continue the professional development of school leaders.

To register your interest in Alumni Services please contact Judy Newcombe at judy@springboardtrust.org.nz



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