

FAMILIES MATTER – ROLLING OUT AND ROLLING ON:

**What have we achieved working together to
December 2005**

And where do we go forward together from here?

5 December 2005

*Families Matter – a resource for families and schools
working in partnership to support the well-being of
young people*

FAMILIES MATTER – ROLLING OUT AND ROLLING ON:

What have we achieved working together to December 2005

And where do we go forward together from here?

This discussion paper originated from a request by the funding Department of Health & Ageing to reflect upon the operation and direction of the Families Matter initiative and its synergies with other elements of the national MindMatters suite of activities, in terms of a sequence of focusing questions provided. Because this material provides a useful current perspective of Families Matter, it has been developed as a discussion paper.

(Other linked discussion papers under development will respectively revisit the original background community research carried out in 2002 to provide context for shaping Families Matter; and review the experiences of the original “roll-out” schools in 2004. These will be supplemented in 2006 by the Report of the independent Evaluation currently being conducted of Families Matter and all other component elements of the national MindMatters suite of initiatives).

Introduction

The “Families Matter” initiative has been researched and developed jointly by the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) and the Australian Parents Council (APC) under contract from the federal Department of Health and Ageing.

ACSSO is the national peak body representing the parents, families and school communities of the 2.2 million children who attend Australia’s public schools.

APC is the national peak body representing the parents, families and school communities of the 1.1 million children who attend non-government schools across Australia.

The purpose of Families Matter is to develop and sustain an effective and productive partnership between families and schools, with a shared understanding of the support needs of young people, to provide a joint focus on their well-being, resilience and their social and emotional development, fostering their sense of connectedness, belonging and purpose in life.

The design and operation of Families Matter is unique in that an operating model of parents working with parents as leaders and presenters of workshops and as peer mentors is a fundamental strategy. It equips and empowers parents as process leaders, to engage and involve other parents in a process to build equal and complementary partnerships with school leaders and teachers.

Families Matter contributes to an informed understanding of the issues around well-being and resilience as a positive reinforcement and support strategy that empowers parents and families as effective actors and leaders in the process, - rather than an old-style negative or deficit model of teachers and educators telling parents what they need to know and what they should do about it. Families Matter focuses on promoting and supporting the effective learning and development of young people, and a positive approach to building connectedness, belonging and a sense of purpose and direction in their lives – with a whole-community approach and a whole-community involvement.

The schooling environment provides an ideal entry point for government initiatives aimed at health promotion in young people and their families. In turn, the Families Matter initiative is providing a high performance vehicle to access and utilise that entry point.

Background

The initial Contract was executed in June 2002 between the Department of Health & Ageing and a partnership of ACSSO and APC. The subsequent process to develop, pilot and test the structure and processes of Families Matter in a progressively expanding range of schools with secondary enrolments has been undertaken in these stages:

2002-2003: focus group research of parents and school communities conducted by consultants Denis Muller and David Saulwick in all states and territories.

2003: The Australian Principals Association Professional Development Council (APAPDC) was sub-contracted by ACSSO/APC to develop learning materials under direction of a national steering group.

October 2003 – April 2004: Pilot testing of structure, materials and processes in 14 MindMatters Plus demonstration schools of which some 6 completed the pilot processes and reported, others were unable to complete because of other pressures and activities of the school year.

April – December 2004: Successive invitations based on school “clusters” in each State and Territory to provide opportunities for interested schools to undertake facilitation training and trial Families Matter in their school communities – while more than 300 expressed interest, because of the other pressures of the school year, only some 200 schools were able to participate in the training.

November-December 2004: survey of trained schools to provide quality assurance feedback and inform planning and support arrangements for 2005

2004-2005: ACSSO-APC accepted a proposal from APAPDC to undertake sub-contracted work to progress the requirements of the ACSSO-APC Contract from DoHA to explore opportunities for Families Matter to engage and involve indigenous communities. MindMatters project officers based with the Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education & Training took a leading role to, develop, pilot and test a slightly adapted version of the Families Matter materials and process with a range of indigenous communities, funded by the Families Matter contract and the ACSSO/APC partnership. They have consistently reported highly positive and promising responses from those communities, and further requests to participate from other communities and groups.

2005 to date: some 100 further schools across the country nominated for Families Matters training, plus some 100 deferring from 2004. Because of their other pressures, only some 130 schools were able to undertake the training and to trial Families Matter in their community this year.

Today – and tomorrow...

Positive response levels from participating schools continue high and demonstrate the value and relevance of Families Matter and several schools have advised their intention to make Families Matter an integral part of the annual “induction” program for new Year 7 parents and families. Although it is early days and no school has yet had much more than 12 months involvement as a participant in the initiative, it is evident that many schools in each State are achieving positive and sustainable results from Families Matter and are successfully embedding the process into their core operations.

The range of expressions of interest and active enquiries from secondary schools continues at a high level and is growing - a further 100 schools have expressed intention to have a team undertake training and to implement Families Matter in their school in 2006. Total number of interested schools well exceeds 500, from all parts of Australia including many in regional, remote and isolated areas who see a particular value in the purpose and processes of Families Matter. Similarly, Families Matter has demonstrated its effectiveness with indigenous communities in urban and regional areas, and has considerable potential for engagement of families from a wide range of multicultural and multi-linguistic backgrounds.

As highlighted by consistent feedback from school communities around the country, this necessarily requires a comprehensive review and revision of the resource materials. This review should seek to streamline and simplify the materials to ensure that all academic or narrowly specialist language is removed to enhance the immediacy of access and relevance to the widest possible range of contexts and audiences and their communication needs.

Expressions of interest and enquiries from *Primary schools* also continue at a very high level - as they have throughout the project - emphasising the finding from the 2002-2003 research that parents across the country strongly support the availability of Families Matter and its structured conversation processes in the latter years of Primary education, building high levels of informed involvement and strong partnerships between families, schools and communities that will continue into and through secondary schooling. This is reinforced by the success of Families Matter in participating schools which cover K-12 and thus have families with both primary and secondary year enrolments.

Responses to Survey Questions:

1. What are the core components of the universal MindMatters Program?

From our perspective, the two central interlinking and interactive elements of the universal MindMatters Program are:

- The whole-curriculum approach in schools of MindMatters to ensure that an effective focus on well-being, resilience and positive personal development is embedded in all aspects of teaching and learning and inform the whole school's operation in the interaction between teachers and students.
- The development of a structured "conversation" through the processes of Families Matter which builds a shared understanding between families and school of the ways in which the school supports well-being and resilience, and the ways in which the family context can support and enhance the work of the school, and how families can work together in effective partnership with the school to support the well-being and positive personal development of young people.

All other aspects, materials, processes and operations align around these joint and essentially complementary focus areas.

The core components which enable these joint focus areas to be achieved and sustained are, in practical terms, the ongoing resources, particularly funding and appropriately skilled and experienced personnel to support Australian schools, in every part of the country, to promote and enhance the social and emotional well-being of all members of the school community: staff, parents and students.

Schools have ongoing access to students, parents and the community throughout the years of schooling. If programs such as MindMatters can be embedded within schools and supported by school leadership, there is a significant multiplier effect and engagement of new students and families joining school communities.

The importance of the Families Matter element is supported and emphasised by – and reflects – the research about the need for whole school commitment to interdependence of school and families and the advantages of implementing shared responsibility among families and schools for the children’s learning and development in all aspects of school education and operation.

Relevant aspects of the underlying research have been explored in an expanding range of draft discussion papers on the Families Matter Website at: <http://www.familiesmatter.org.au/resources.htm>

The unique effectiveness of Families Matter lies in the way it recognises the role of parents as the first and continuing educators of their children and the significance of the family context in supporting and enhancing students’ learning and development. Families Matter trains, equips and empowers parents as leaders of discussion with other parents and emphasises their equal and complementary partnership role with schools.

The Families Matter initiative, its processes and unique mode of delivery, focus on fostering the broader engagement of parents and families in their children’s personal development and well-being within schools, underpinned by an informed understanding of the concept of education as a partnership between families and schools for maximising the school outcomes for every student.

2. Are there components of the MindMatters Program that could be less important in the future?

It will only be possible to make that judgement or any useful comments when the full range of information, data and findings from the external evaluations of all aspects of the suite of MindMatters initiatives is made available in 2006.

All elements in the total range of MindMatters initiatives and the detail of their operation will necessarily be measured in terms of the extent to which they effectively contribute to a shared understanding of student development needs, the factors affecting student well-being, the ways in which schools can actively promote these factors across the curriculum and across the school; and the ways in which families and schools can work in partnership to support and sustain student well-being.

Because of its direct impact on key focus areas, the Families Matter element of the MindMatters program is a crucially important component for the informed engagement of parents and families in supporting well-being and positive development of young people. This resource aims to build family-school partnerships through the informed engagement of parents in school processes and an understanding of their leading and complementary role in resilience building in ways that support the work of schools.

To ensure that these outcomes are achieved and sustained, the established context- and receiver-based purpose and integrity of the training and presentation processes underpinning the resource needs to be continued. The Families Matter resource is structured around the training and equipping of parents as presenters of the resource to their parent peers, in ways that interact effectively with the purpose and operation of the school. This has been a centrally successful and effective aspect.

The findings of the original background research and positive feedback from participating schools, supports this as the uniquely effective and successful feature of the Families Matter initiative. In contrast,

it is clear that its relative usefulness, should it simply be used by teachers to “talk at” parents, is questionable. The live element of the concept is the freedom parents feel to draw upon and share their own experiences of resilience and coping strategies with their parent peers. Choice of parent presenters from within the school community is most likely to ensure that the context is appropriate and the presenters able to reach and effectively interact with the range of families in their school community.

3. *What would you say are the key achievements of the MindMatters Program to date? (Include reference to demonstration projects as appropriate)*

From our perspective, the key achievement of the MindMatters suite of projects, and the wide-ranging promotion and access to the MindMatters materials through professional development training, is a raised awareness of the importance of resilience and well-being, and the ways in which this can be recognised, supported and developed through the curriculum and school operations. Reflecting the extensive range of background research, this has informed and emphasised the joint need for parents and families to be informed and engaged, and involved actively as partners with the school in supporting and sustaining the resilience, well-being and the social and emotional development of young people.

The MindMatters suite of projects effectively articulates and promotes the benefits of a “whole of community” approach to well-being and the factors affecting the development of young people.

In relation to Families Matter, the first point to be made is that the first stages of the national “roll-out” commenced little more than 12 months ago, and relatively few schools have been involved in the operation of Families Matter in their community for even a full school year. That some 500 schools have already shown strong interest and some 330 school communities are already active participants, is a considerable achievement – and demonstrates the potential of such a community-based process for all schools and their communities across the country.

The capacity of schools to implement such a “volunteer” program is limited by the busy-ness of schools, the range of things happening in the school year, the tyranny of the school term structure, and the overwhelming necessity for schools to comply with and be accountable for the curriculum and other priorities of their own state jurisdictions. Schools wishing to participate have also necessarily had to free up and commit resources “in kind” including welfare, support and teaching staff time and commitment to work with parents to plan and support the establishment and operation of the initiative in their school.

The politics of Federal funding and operation of projects for schools which are constitutionally the province of the States and Territories also has a significant impact on acceptance, timing and introduction of such initiatives. This was evident at the initial discussions of the MindMatters Education Committee; and although the Committee members themselves were supportive of the introduction and development of Families Matter, the ways in which and pace at which schools have been able to take up the initiative has been affected by these and the other limiting factors indicated above.

Secondly, following the initial piloting in a number of the MindMatters Plus demonstration schools, participation in the Families Matter element was generated by the self-nomination of schools across Australia on receipt of a letter and information materials explaining the program. Letters were sent to schools within a radius of accessible location. Decisions to participate required a level of consultation between all key elements of the school community (principal, executive, welfare staff, parent organisations, school board etc) and a commitment of time and support resources. No direct financial or other support was able to be offered to the schools to assist their participation – always a significant incentive to enable participation in additional activities.

Families Matter has been actively marketed to all secondary schools through letters of invitation, email information releases and updates, and four issues of the Families Matter Newsletter.

Contacts were made with the 188 schools trained in 2004 to explore their experiences and plans for continuation of Families Matter in 2005; and their input informed planning for training and support services and follow-up facilities to be put in place for 2005.

Follow-up indicates there are at least 50 schools that have made significant and effective use of the Families Matter resource within their schools on a continuing basis; and many other schools have processes under active and promising development. More information of both a quantitative and qualitative nature is expected from the Families Matter Evaluation which is currently in progress.

Detailed feedback has also been received in respect of each of the pilot applications of slightly modified processes and materials in a range of Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. Through the outstanding work of presenters with extensive credibility in working with indigenous communities, this pilot program has been successful in each of the schools and their communities where it has been trialled, and further requests are being received from other school communities seeking to participate in the processes of Families Matter.

A series of draft Discussion Papers has been prepared to meet requests or questions raised by various forums with a keen interest in the project and its intended purposes; and further papers will be developed as other issues arise for attention.

A draft Facilitators Handbook is under development, and this will be further refined and completed drawing on experiences gained this year.

Extensive synergies have been achieved between Families Matter and the Family-School Partnerships project which ACSSO and APC are managing for the federal Department of Education, Science and Training. A significant number of the 61 “action research” schools of the Family-School Partnerships project have decided to use the Families Matter resource and processes and the catalyst for the broader engagement of parents and families with the school across the whole range of school activities and the ways in which they can support their children’s learning and development.

Catholic system schools affiliated with APC in both SA and Tasmania have conducted independent trials of the Families Matter resource in schools in their jurisdictions.

All State and Territory Ministers of Education have confirmed their support for Families Matter, and all Heads of Education Departments have encouraged its being made available to their school communities. A number of Regional Directors of Education in some States have actively assisted in publicising Families Matter to their “clusters” of schools and facilitating their involvement in training day preparation.

4. Is there sufficient evidence that these components improve the health and well-being of young people? What evidence is still lacking?

As far as we are aware, no base line data has been assembled that would provide a firm starting point for such an assessment.

In respect of Families Matter, the background research required under the Contract was essentially qualitative and impressionistic in its nature, being based on facilitated focus group discussions of parents drawn from self-selecting volunteer participant school communities across the country.

There was no requirement nor funding support provided under the Contract to undertake base-line research in any participant schools: participation has been designed throughout to be wholly based upon interest and readiness to participate rather than any demonstrable need, as the concept which informs the design and operation of Families Matter is one that can be of significant generic benefit in any school community.

Sufficient evidence can only be collected in respect of longer term trends and impacts over an appropriate period e.g. 3-5 years and may still not be a specific or quantifiable indicator of the effect on students unless significant resources are provided and dedicated to conducting extensive base-line analyses, and also to long term data collection and follow up.

In the case of Families Matter, the process has not run for a sufficiently long period to provide such evidence, even if such data-collection mechanisms had been funded and put in place. The pilot study was completed only in April 2004, and schools seeking to participate in the wider roll-out undertook their training in Term 2 of 2004. There would be few schools which at this point have more than 12 months experience of participation in Families Matter; or where it has been in operation for a full continuous school year. No real or meaningful attempt to judge improvements in the health and well-being of young people could be undertaken in this brief period of activity with any useful results or demonstrated outcomes. Data collection would necessarily be more about performance accountabilities than about evidence of the impact of the program on individual students or families.

5. Governance Arrangements: Have the governance arrangements been appropriate? Has the committee structure been appropriate? Has representation been appropriate? Can the governance arrangements be streamlined?

The Project Advisory Committee arrangements for Families Matter have worked effectively: through each phase of the project its membership has included representatives who provide extensive perspectives across the whole range of MindMatters initiatives and other programs operating in school communities, in addition to the immediate “stakeholder” groups representing the interests, needs and expectations of parents and families in all sectors of education.

6. Partnerships: What is the nature of the partnerships that have evolved as a result of the MindMatters Program?

The essential partnerships which are built and sustained by Families Matter are those which strengthen the links between families and build effective partnerships between these families and the teachers; between home and school, and with the wider community.

Extensive research of recent years around the world clearly demonstrates that where families engage in and support their children’s education, the children’s learning outcomes and personal development are improved. A range of discussion papers referring to the findings of this research have been developed in response to enquiries and requests for information, and can be accessed via the Families Matter website (<http://www.familiesmatter.org.au/resources.htm>).

The other “partnership” linkage that has been developed, is the potential for synergy between the Families Matter initiative and the federal Department of Education, Science and Training’s Family-School Partnerships action research program – where a significant number of these 61 “demonstration” schools

have adopted Families Matter as the enabling “vehicle” to build partnerships around a central focus on student well-being, resilience and effective personal development.

In a broader sense, Families Matter has further enhanced the effective partnership linkages between ACSSO and APC and their national networks, and enhanced the effective relationships with APAPDC and other stakeholders.

The synergies between Families Matter and other elements of MindMatters are demonstrated by the ways in which schools actively involved with MindMatters have sought to link with Families Matter; and a number of schools taking on Families Matter have used this as a platform to initiate, revitalise or extend their active involvement in other aspects of MindMatters.

7. How can these partnerships be sustained?

Sustaining partnerships in schools requires the embedding in the day to day processes of the school of a mindset and operating context which sees parents and teachers as natural partners in the learning and development processes of their children, and considers that part of the ordinary work of the school, across all aspects of its operation and interaction with its community, is to bring this about and maintain it.

The sustaining of partnership also requires clearly defined rationale for each partnership – i.e., the partnership between the health and education sectors enables health authorities to target health promotion strategies to a key audience, being young people and their families.

This calls for school leadership to recognise and foster the interdependent and partnership-for-learning model of schooling. Not all schools or school leaders or teachers necessarily accept this. For many schools, this is a long term cultural change issue.

To support, embed and sustain such cultural change to become an integral part of school operations and interactions, requires continued resourcing of the Families Matter (and other core aspects of the MindMatters program) to support and encourage the development of these approaches in the schools that have taken on the program and others interested in participation. This is particularly the case not only because of the need for extended implementation and operation, but also because in all schools there is a percentage annual turnover of parents, families, students, teachers, welfare staff and leaders. The availability of our training, mentoring and support facilities will be an essential element to ensure the active continuation and development of Families Matter in each participating school community.

Similarly, it is evident to us from the range of enquiries and feedback we have received, that awareness of and interest in the Families Matter initiative, is very much a matter of word of mouth, as other schools hear about the positive experiences through contacts with their principal or welfare staff colleagues and become interested in finding out more and trying out the program. These increasing levels of interest indicate that Families Matter participation has the capacity to expand rapidly in and from 2006: and to continue actively and positively in each of the schools that have so far taken it on.

These school communities will require a continuing level of mentoring, information sharing and advice over the indicated 3-5 year establishment and development phase to support the development and embedding of inclusive and interactive Families Matter partnerships that will progressively link their whole community and form an integral element of how they operate.

8. *What opportunities exist to include other partners?*

Because of the flexibility and open-ended nature of the partnership “conversation” which Families Matter seeks to establish and progress, there are extensive opportunities to link as partners with other entities and initiatives.

Self-evidently, the partnership should include MindMatters activities across the curriculum and aspects of school operation.

Families Matter encourages schools to undertake skills and resources audits in their community, and to establish and develop partnership linkages with appropriate service, support or information providing individuals and organisations in their community.

Families Matter has already demonstrated its capacity to form synergies with other programs, in particular the Family-School Partnerships initiative of the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST). Potential synergies have been identified with the DEST National Drug Education Strategy Parent Initiative, which is under development. The structure and processes of this Initiative are consistent and complementary with those of Families Matter.

Families Matter clearly has extensive potential to work effectively with and to pick up other initiatives and resources which assist in informing and equipping the parents, families and staff of the school to work effectively on issues of importance in the learning and development of young people.

9. *Resources. What are the key resources that have been developed? Indicate: availability; number hard copy resources produced/distributed; rate and method of distribution; effectiveness.*

In respect of Families Matter, the resources are:

- **Folder of Resource Materials** (Handbook, Resources, Powerpoint Slides on disk). Three thousand were printed based on expressions of interest received; materials are given at Training Days to each member of the school’s team and additional copies can be provided on request. Training Day sessions provide team members with an understanding of the materials and the ways in which the information can be presented to other members of the school community at workshops in their school. Most of these have been distributed through the Training Day program. Feedback from participants, and the results of the Northern Territory pilot using a simplified version, consistently indicates the need for a comprehensive review and revision of the materials to ensure they meet the communication needs: which should be undertaken shortly and a revised version produced for 2006. This material is also produced in electronic format, and can be accessed through the Families Matter Website.
- **Information Leaflet and Display Poster.** Some 100,000 leaflets and 20,000 posters produced, used in marketing and promoting the Families Matter initiative to schools invited to participate. Supply provided to School Teams on training days for use in their school community: and distributed to schools on request to assist them in their efforts and raising awareness and interest in their own community. About 80,000 leaflets and 15,000 posters have been distributed. These are also available in electronic format via the Families Matter Website.

- **Families Matter Website.** Developed as a means of providing a source of information and to respond to questions and requests in the early stages of the national roll-out, the site has been progressively developed to meet expanding range of requests for information and questions from schools. Statistics indicate that over 100 identifiable visitors a day access the site. Further expansion of information resources is planned, again to meet requests, particularly in terms of information links to other related sites and resources. <http://www.familiesmatter.org.au>
- **Families Matter Newsletter.** Four national electronic Newsletters have been issued, some also in paper format, to provide periodic updates and information about the development of the initiative. These are published on the Website and distributed to schools with secondary enrolments.
- **Electronic Newsflash Bulletins.** Such bulletins have been issued on an “ad hoc” basis as information on issues such as changes to the Training Day program has needed to be communicated quickly to participating schools and others potentially interested. This vehicle has also been used to advise all schools in an area or region of events happening in their locality, encouraging their participation on a “cluster” basis.
- **Draft Research and Discussion Papers.** A series of these draft papers has been developed, in response to requests for information about the research background and other wider issues relevant to the purpose and operation of Families Matter. Designed to provide a range of relevant information in a format that is widely accessible, these have been greeted with positive responses from those who have raised the issue or sought the information covered – they address the point raised in DEST research that neither parents nor teachers have an extensive awareness or understanding of the findings of research in relation to family-school partnerships and the nature of their beneficial role in promoting learning, development and well-being in young people. They can be accessed on the Families Matter website; and also produced in hard copy available on request.

10. Should any of these resources be revisited? Is a major redevelopment required; in what time frame?

As indicated above, the Families Matter resource “kit” needs to be updated, simplified and written in a more parent-friendly and less academic style which will more inclusively accessible to school communities in a wide range of contexts across the country. Experience and feedback received from across the country indicates that while the processes and messages of Families Matter are powerful and effective, there is a risk of their being blurred by overly formal and technical language and academic approach. All elements including the handbook, resource papers and the overhead slides need to be reviewed and revised in the light of the experience and input from trainers and parent presenters.

This process should also draw on this feedback and experience to provide clearer guidance for parent presenters to assist them in more effectively structuring their workshops in their own school communities.

This process should be undertaken by ACSSO and APC once the current round of training day events is completed: with the objective of having the revised resource available to support training of school teams from Term 1 of 2006. Revised materials should also be provided to all parent presenters in schools which have participated in Families Matter in 2004 and 2005.

11. What is the evidence and learnings arising from the MindMatters Demonstration Project and Families Matter?

Families Matter learnings will be better articulated through the process of Evaluation which is currently under way, and which is scheduled to provide a report closer to the end of the year.

Some observational comments meanwhile are:

- Sufficient time for the introduction and establishment of a program into schools must be allowed
- Appropriate lead times must necessarily recognise and take account of the limitations imposed by the term structure, and the range of other activities and commitments of the school, particularly at the beginning and end of the school year
- Resources at the school level are required to support the program
- Schools need to have a proactive approach from leadership to recognise and promote the central importance of family engagement
- The existence of a school team of parents and staff dedicated to the support of parent engagement appropriate to the school context and sanctioned and led by school leadership underpins the effective operation and development of family-school partnership approaches.
- Research about the benefits and barriers to family engagement needs to be widely disseminated in ways that build informed understanding in parents, families and teachers
- The variety of schools and school communities means that some schools expressing interest in the project will not proceed for a variety of reasons.
- The initial roll-out of the program since March 2004 has only tapped a proportion of secondary schools: it has considerably wider potential across the country
- There is considerable interest in a range of rural, regional and remote schools in the benefits of such a program for their community: where providing opportunity for access requires exploring technology applications and distance education strategies
- Families Matter would fit well into the upper primary school context – demonstrated by the ways in which it has been taken up by a variety of schools with both primary and secondary enrolments, and the enthusiastic involvement of parents with students at both schooling levels.

12. How can these learnings be embedded sustainably in the universal MindMatters program?

Sustainability of the Families Matter program basically depends on funding and resourcing allocation for a further period of at least three (3) years to be able to assess possible impacts on students. This would necessarily include resourcing at the school level to ensure that the program can be run appropriately in the local school context. Funding should include additional personnel for the roll-out of the program, adequate professional training and support for parent presenters and a whole school commitment to the broader engagement of families with schools to support their children's learning and development.

13. What have we learned in terms of sustaining ways to support:

- a. an added emphasis to the whole school approach;**
- b. targeted interventions for high risk students.**
- c. Increased focus on work being driven by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities, particularly in remote and isolated communities etc**
- d. Focus on culturally and linguistically diverse communities.**

The successful results of pilot work done with the adapted Families Matter materials with indigenous communities in urban and rural locations in the Northern Territory demonstrates the potential effectiveness of the resource in such communities throughout the Territory and in other parts of the country. These pilot applications, which are still continuing in response to requests from further communities for the opportunity to participate, indicate that their need for resourcing and time for preparation are probably greater than in other communities: including the need for presenters to have a high level of demonstrated credibility with indigenous communities, and the need to establish and build on a strong preparatory working relationship and confidence level in the community.

Feedback provided also by Vietnamese communities in NSW and Muslim communities in Victoria focus on the capacity of Families Matter to provide a vehicle to enable families from these and other multicultural and multilinguistic backgrounds to participate as equal partners whose views, needs and expectations can be recognised and contribution valued. Their access will be enhanced by the review and revision of the materials to simplify the language in ways that emphasize the essential messages and processes of Families Matter – some resourcing would be required in terms of responding to requests from those community groups for providing translations of key documents from the resource in those languages.

14. Other comments

The Families Matter project is consistent with the Commonwealth's priorities in relation to the engagement of parents with schools and their role in their children's learning and development, to address such identified priority areas as: education and prevention, promotion of healthy lifestyle; mental health; suicide prevention; prevention of drug use and harm; and rural health initiatives to assist young people and their families.

