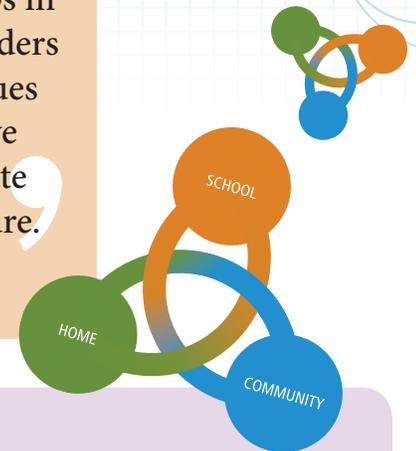


HOME & COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Home and community involvement forms a foundation where learning takes place not only at school but also in the home, in businesses, at post-secondary institutions and among other community facilities. Community representatives are involved in learning opportunities side-by-side with high school students. Home and community involvement is more about partnerships between people than about the place they come from. The school community feels like a family, with members coming from within the school's walls, as well as from home and community.

“Positive partnerships, meaningful learning outside the classroom, and involvement in focus groups in which parents and stakeholders have a voice to discuss issues and solutions and how we can work together to create positive change in the future.”

Norbert Baharally, Principal, Wm E Hay



What is the impact on students?

The current education system,” says Norbert Baharally, “assumes that learning happens within a classroom. In the twenty-first century, this could not be further from the truth. It is vital that we continue to push education beyond the walls of the classroom and engage the community in teaching students the skills they need to be successful.”

We’ve established partnerships with four community businesses, as well as work experience and registered apprenticeship programs. Portfolios are an exit requirement for Grade 12 students. “Students present their portfolios to a panel of community members who are in the [student’s] ‘career cluster’ ... They provide meaningful and authentic feedback to [help] our students to ... prepare for post-secondary interviews or career interviews in the future.”

When the lines of communication between teachers and parents are opened, meaningful, relevant relationships are formed. And, when relationships are developed that expand and open the school’s interconnections with community, students benefit. Students have support for and opportunities to develop their talents and skills in the home, school and community. There is less of a division between these environments.

Tom Christensen explains some of the benefits his rural school experiences by building relationships with the town. “One of our goals in partnering with the Olds College has been rural development,” says Christensen. “Our students would go through school and move away for college and

sometimes never come back ... A lot of what we’re doing is going to keep more human capital in our community.”

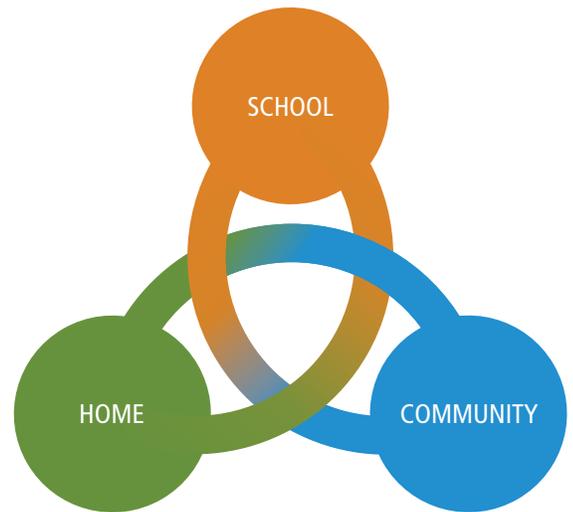
“Olds is a community-learning campus. It’s a public facility. There’s school during the day, but also seniors using the fitness centre so ‘students can see Gramma and Grampa walking the indoor track while they’re in a PE class. They can see that learning is a lifelong thing.’ This is a public building and we have other government agencies, like Alberta Works, and Child and Family Services. It exposes our students to life in our community a bit more.”

At Norbert Baharally’s school, parental involvement can bring meaningful changes. He says, “Parents are becoming more engaged as the relationships between teachers and students change and parents are brought into the conversations more. Our traditional parent-teacher interviews resulted in a 12 percent turnout rate. [By comparison], the parent participation rate in student learning conferences [which involve teachers, teaching assistants, parent and students] this year was 87 percent.”

Just as community and home members can come to the school, so too can students take their learning experience outside of the school. As Baharally explains, it’s possible “to foster an understanding that meaningful learning can occur anywhere.” At his school, students have “extended learning opportunities (ELOs). Students create their own curricular objectives in an area of interest outside of school and work with a community member who is an expert in that field. Then, they showcase their learning in a large scale, final presentation.”

“Get an audit of community resources and figure out how to bring them into the students’ world. Get the students out into the community to do a service project. Make your facility more accessible to the public – it’s not just about getting out into the community, but inviting the community in.”

Tom Christensen, Principal, Olds



What is the impact on staff?

Building relationships with home and community makes new connections in ways that might not always be evident. Teachers have the opportunity to learn from, and invite into their classrooms, other community experts and community members in the school’s fields of study. For example, teachers may meet a parent who is a professional musician. When one of the school’s students speaks about an interest in music, a new opportunity exists to introduce the two like-minded individuals.

Tom Christensen notes, “The teachers have seen that the classroom isn’t just the four walls. They might be doing work with the community garden, or with the college course in meat-cutting, or my science teacher might see that the college wetlands project is very relevant to what they’re doing in Bio 20.”

When home and community involvement is a focus in a school:

- school-wide strategies are in place to engage the home and community
- the community appreciates the learning opportunities available to students
- parents are more actively involved in the learning, and understand its intent, import and value
- students get out into the community to learn on a regular basis
- schools are more available to the public
- business and industry are invited to be partners in the education happening at the school.