

# Purposeful Partnering

## A summary for schools

### Enabling students to thrive in today's complex world

Students today are living in a rapidly changing world. Each student needs to develop the knowledge, skills and capabilities, and the experiences and confidence to succeed in this complex environment.

School-business partnering is key. Evidence has shown that diverse ways of engaging can and already are positioning students to thrive.

### The power of strategic partnering for students

In national reviews, the Chief Scientist, schools and university experts have reinforced the *value* and *need* for school-business relationships. In practice, however, how to start, maintain and track the impact of such relationships can still be a challenge for both schools and businesses.

*Purposeful Partnering* offers a rich mix of guidance from different perspectives, with clear illustrations of practice and stories drawn from a multitude of sources. The education-focused Origin Energy Foundation enabled this work.

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**“We have learnt major lessons in the power of strategic partnering to promote student learning, agency, family engagement and opportunity.**

**It is being done. It can be done.”**

Christine Cawsey, AM  
Principal, Rooty Hill High School, western Sydney, NSW; Non-Executive Director, The Smith Family.

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**“I encourage other businesses to engage constructively with schools through purposeful partnering so together we can meet the challenges of a new world of work, and support young people to achieve their best.”**

Frank Calabria  
Chief Executive Officer, Origin Energy; and Origin Energy Foundation Board member.

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### Seven evidenced benefits for students

The case for school-business partnering is strong, with multiple student benefits. Working directly together or with other experts, school-business partnering can bring to life one or more benefits in new and interesting ways at any stage of education.

- **Improving learning** - new knowledge, skills, capabilities and dispositions (e.g. By students learning how to prepare an argument or a piece of persuasive writing).
- **Inspiring possibilities** – considering new choices and/or directions, lifting ambitions (e.g. By schools developing or connecting with career experiences, with students hearing stories from relatable role models, such as alumni or business volunteers).
- **Building confidence** – pursuing ideas, passions, leadership aspirations (e.g. By students working with an architect on their own school's building project).
- **Enabling greater participation** – pursuing career ambitions, autonomy, equity and co-designed learning (e.g. By co-creating a university career breakfast program for high-school parents and carers).
- **Becoming empathetic** – new and deepening understandings of stereotypes and barriers to social connectedness (e.g. Through authentic employer engagement opportunities designed to break down gender stereotypes).
- **Broadening connections** – accessing new expertise, building new networks (e.g. By teachers *and* volunteer STEM professionals co-designing lessons).
- **Deepening engagement** – positive associations with school and work, putting in the effort (e.g. By integrating curriculum content into real-world applications through student social enterprises).

Benefits for students can also have a flow-on effect for adults, creating mutual and multiple benefits (e.g. mentoring students can challenge people from business in new ways of thinking and improve their communication skills while helping students do the same).

There are also wider and personal reasons schools and businesses *want* and *need* to be partnering. Shaping the context for Australian students are challenges and disruptors. These include deepening inequities in the education experience, a rapidly changing job market, and recognition that students rightfully want a say in the educational choices that affect their present and all our futures.

## Engaging together for impact

Once a school decides to connect with business, they can set the stage for partnering beyond *involving* business in activities to intentionally *engaging* with business for impact.

Three partnering preparation fundamentals are:

- There is an evidenced student need or opportunity. Who are the students and families and what are their lives like? What will change by engaging with business? **Practice tip:** Write a purpose statement – the learning intent and expected benefits and outcomes.
- Visible values, principles and priorities guide ‘the what’ (focus) and ‘the how’ (the relationship) of partnering. **Practice tip:** Recognise and build partnering capacity and capability through three principles: Equity; Transparency and trust; and Mutual benefit.
- All connections require school leadership commitment, effort, expertise, resourcing and a degree of coordination for sustainability. **Practice tip:** Include and align business partnering in the school’s strategic and annual planning processes and documentation. This gives visibility to the school-business relationship and reinforces the identified benefits to students.

Every partnering life-cycle will involve three continuous phases:

- **Emerging:** Scoping who to connect with and in what ways can be an early hurdle to overcome. **Practice tip:** Map existing relations with families, alumni or business service or student program providers. Effective partnering is not about who and how many you connect with, but *why* and *how* you connect. Strategic partnering can take many forms (e.g. from a one-off donation through to a fully collaborative project or program over time).
- **Executing:** Both educational *and* business leaders recognise a child’s understanding of self-worth, working with others, and work and careers begins early. Students benefit from exposure to multiple meaningful experiences and opportunities across every educational stage. **Practice tip:** Consider mentoring, hosting people from business (sharing career stories and Q&A), through to various types of career expos online or in person.
- **Embedding:** Leaders pay attention to *why* and *how* to build and measure partnering cultures. **Practice tip:** Consider three key measures: intent (*why* are schools and businesses working together?); engagement (*how* are they working together?); and impact (how are interactions translating into value beyond self-benefit?).

Creating *impactful* ways of partnering ‘takes a village’. Together, school and business leaders are in strong positions to recognise and use their expertise.

Each young Australian can connect with those they need, when they need, and in ways most useful to each of them in making their own learning, working and active citizenship choices. Starting early at every stage of education is key.

**“It is being done. It can be done.”**