

FAIR EDUCATION:

Engaging families and communities
to improve student outcomes



Executive summary

The primary purpose of Fair Education is to develop the capacity of school leaders in disadvantaged communities to better engage families and communities in student learning. The program comprises coaching for school leadership teams, funding for school specific projects, ongoing project management and evaluation.

Since launching in NSW in 2016 with the support of the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation, Fair Education has expanded to delivering results across 140 schools in three states: NSW, Queensland and Victoria, with 40,000+ students benefitting from the program. Fair Education is a 3-year program and therefore the impact of the projects from our first cohort of schools in NSW provide the basis of the majority of our findings.

Data from the NSW first cohort demonstrates an improvement in engagement amongst families and local communities, which in turn has translated to an improvement in student results. Participating schools have also reported that the coaching offered as part of the Fair Education program has improved leadership skills.



STRIVING TO CLOSE THE EDUCATION GAP

About Schools Plus

Schools Plus is a national charity that exists to help vulnerable children succeed at school. Our vision is that all young Australians reach their full potential through access to a great education. Formed after the 2011 Review of Funding for Schooling (the 'Gonski Review') called for a much stronger focus on philanthropy in education, Schools Plus has worked to help close the education gap caused by disadvantage, by connecting schools in need with donors who know the value of a great education.

We work with teachers and schools to empower schools in disadvantaged communities¹ to implement projects and initiatives that will help address the key issues which are preventing their students from thriving. Carefully targeted funding allows schools and teachers to give students extra support, or to trial new ways to improve student outcomes.

¹ Our support is directed to Australian schools that have a value below 1000 on the national Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA).

Focus on Fair Education

In 2015 the **Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation (VFFF)** selected Schools Plus to deliver its vision for the Fair Education program. The foundation's ambition was to improve student outcomes by providing opportunities for school leaders and teachers in disadvantaged areas to become more effective at engaging families and communities. Ultimately, the goal of this program is to see tangible and sustainable improvements in student learning outcomes. This is achieved by providing schools with funding, leadership coaching, project management support and facilitating knowledge sharing.

FAIR EDUCATION GOALS

1. To build strategic capability of school leadership teams to promote family and community engagement

2. To improve family and community engagement in student learning

3. To improve the capacity of low SES schools to work together to generate real world learning environments

4. To enhance student learning outcomes

Each Fair Education project is designed and planned by schools based on their knowledge of local conditions and challenges. Schools' flexibility to adapt and shift the program are key to successful implementation and adjustments can be both a response to changing community situations and needs and allow for trial and error to find the most effective solution.

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT



2016

Fair Education was launched in 2016 in NSW, where it receives ongoing support from the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation (VFFF).



2017-2018

The first 2 cohorts were launched in NSW with 74 schools and 22 projects in total.

A Queensland office was established in preparation for a new cohort to be launched in 2019.



2019-2020

NSW launched its 3rd cohort with 33 schools and 11 projects and applications were opened for the 2021 cohort.

Queensland launched its 1st cohort with 35 schools and 15 projects.

Operations expanded to Victoria with a pilot program.

The Fair Education program has experienced significant growth and maturity, particularly in 2019 when our cohorts expanded from one state to three, thanks to the support of the Tim Fairfax Family Foundation, The Bryan Foundation in Queensland and the RE Ross Trust, the Ian Potter Foundation and The Foundation of Graduates in Early Childhood Studies in Victoria in 2020.

The first cohort of NSW schools has officially finished their formal funding. Each school engaged their families and communities in very different ways to address challenges in their own contexts and now continue to work to sustain their work and embed their strategies into practice.

When designing the Queensland and Victorian cohorts, lessons learned from the implementation of the NSW program resulted in some key improvements. These include a more rigorous approach to project planning and reporting to ensure a greater impact for students, wider leadership team engagement, as well as building a stronger alignment between the school project and broader school plan.

HOW IT WORKS

The Fair Education program supports schools in NSW, Queensland and Victoria to lead thoughtful inquiry, creative design and strategic delivery of innovative projects that explore progressive approaches to engaging families and communities to bring about cultural, sustainable transformation in schools. This is achieved primarily through funding and project coaching.



FUNDING

Fair Education provides funding for three-year projects for individual schools or school clusters.

- Up to \$70,000 for individual schools
- Up to \$250,000 for clusters



COACHING

Leadership development is achieved through the provision of coaching for the project leadership team, each term, for the life of the project.

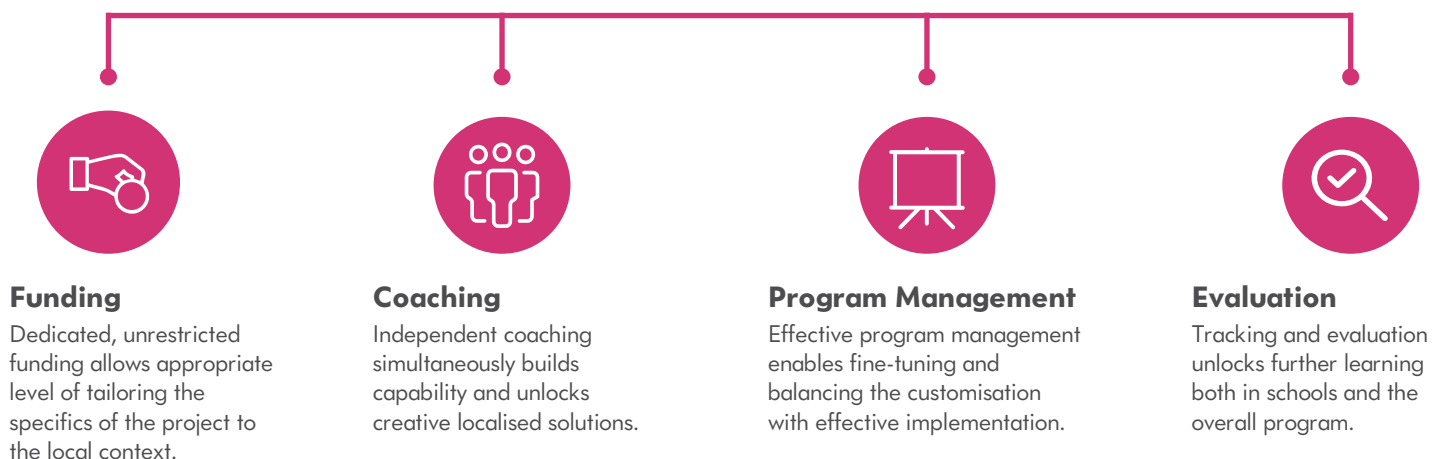
OUR CRITERIA FOR SUCCESS

Evidence from Fair Education projects to date suggests that schools are unlikely to achieve increases in family and community engagement outcomes without an increase in leadership capability.



Inputs

The inputs (funding, independent coaching, effective program management, tracking and evaluation) provide the foundations for change and sustainable results. With these foundations in place, we start seeing some of the outcomes of the program in the form of an increase in leadership capability and family and community engagement.

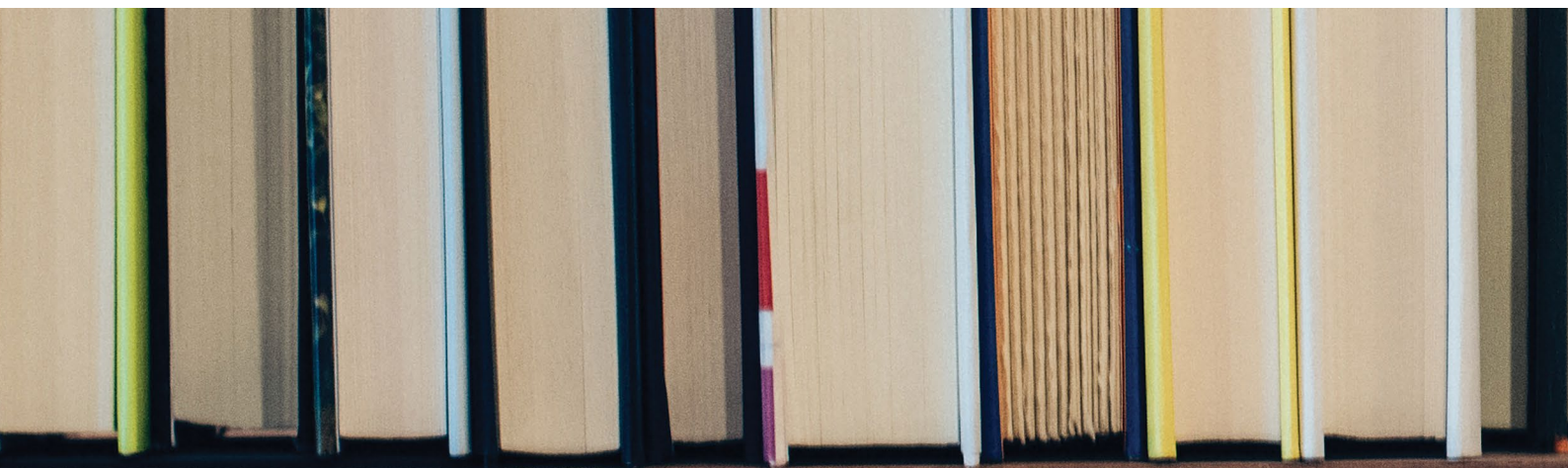


Fair Education supports bespoke projects, designed and implemented by the schools themselves, that help the schools achieve their Fair Education goals. The diversity of projects captures the individual school and community needs. Here are some examples of the projects that schools implemented.

Ballina Coast High School NSW “No Halls No Walls” project created a student learning hub, a responsive and creative place for students to think outside the lines. This project embraced the opportunity and challenge to redesign learning and the environment to be purposeful, personalised and relevant in a contemporary world to support its vulnerable students.

Darling Heights State School QLD in partnership with the University of Southern Queensland, created a program aimed at empowering local families with English language skills to enable them to participate in their children’s learning at school. This helped increase the families’ confidence and encourage them to take a more active role in their children’s education.

Hill Top Rd Cluster NSW “Ready, Set, Connect” supported student transitions between primary and high schools. The project developed a learning culture with established ways of working across the schools to support students and parent engagement by collaborating and sharing resources.



Intermediate outcomes

Intermediate outcomes are simultaneously benefits and ingredients for the final result.



Family and community engagement

Improved family and community engagement in the children's education.



School leadership capability

Increased school leadership capability to be more effective in improving student outcomes.



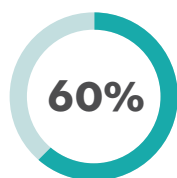
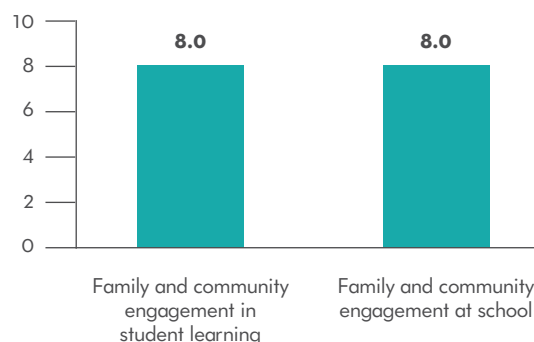
Community of practice

Building a community of practice ensures that the learning and approaches are shared.

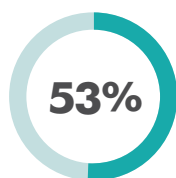
FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Fair Education believes collaboration between schools, family and community is a powerful tool to unlock student outcomes. By providing coaching to school leadership teams, we increase their capacity and motivation to drive an outward looking school culture. Evidence is building that in Fair Education schools these projects are contributing to more effective family and community engagement. Schools from Cohort 1 and 2 in NSW have given a high rating to community engagement variables and schools in QLD have also reported significant progress in achieving their community engagement goals after their first year in the program.

Single schools' leaders in NSW have rated FE as having a high impact across all the community engagement variables'



Of school leaders in NSW indicated that they had explicitly taken on board ideas they had gained from other school leaders involved in FE.



Average completion rate across all schools in QLD for family and community engagement objectives at the end of the 1st year.

After applying those lessons in QLD, one school leader reported to CIRES: ***'We've got closer connections to the community that we never had before. And this is mainly our targeted parents, a group of parents we have been struggling to bring into the school, and to get their children to school. They were the 'hard-core' truants. So, we have got more of those parents wanting to engage with the school.'***

COACHING AND LEADERSHIP CAPABILITY

Development of leadership skills for school leaders through coaching is a central component of the Fair Education program and it is one of the key differentiators between Fair Education and other programs providing funding for schools.

COACHING OBJECTIVES

TO INCREASE THE CAPACITY OF SCHOOLS/ SCHOOL LEADERS IN DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES TO:

1. Design, deliver and evaluate evidence-based projects that demonstrate **measurable change** and contribute to **improved student outcomes**.

2. Grow the evidence base for what works for schools in disadvantaged communities through **connecting and sharing expertise** with professional peers tackling similar challenges.

Coaches are the face of Fair education in schools and coaching is delivered by highly experienced education professionals who provide an independent sounding board beyond the education system. They establish trusted relationships and draw on their experience to encourage bigger thinking and provide challenge in a supported way. The coaching provides a space for reflection and learning, where risks can be taken to change practice and successes celebrated.

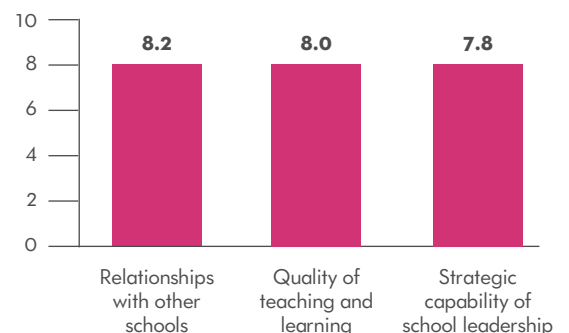
According to the CIRES report for NSW, coaching was viewed by nearly all school leaders as critical to the success of Fair Education. One school leader provided the following response to a survey from CIRES: ‘the money was really great to resource our school, but the coaching is what gave us the time and the space to think about what was important and to keep us working towards that vision. To re-energise us as well’.

Several leaders mentioned that the support of the coach was critical in the early stages of the projects, mentoring the leaders in project management best practices, as well as to help them keep the impetus in the later stages of the project. **‘[The coach in our project] has an exceptional capacity to see what is happening now, in real time, and to always keep people on track. But at the same time makes us feel like we are owning the ideas.’**

As noted in the CIRES report, the role of a coach is supported by research on leadership and school improvement which shows that school leaders perform better when they are supported by peers and additional resourcing including time-release, professional learning and coaching (Darling-Hammond, 2012; Hay Group, 2013). School leaders also highlighted the fact that the Fair Education coach was not connected to the Department of Education, which helped them **‘view their coach more as an impartial critical friend than as a line supervisor’**.

Schools in Cohort 1 and 2 in NSW have rated the impact of coaching on leadership development at an average score of 8 out of 10. In QLD, after only one year in the program, over 70% of all schools are already reporting improvements in leadership capabilities.

63 School leaders in NSW have rated FE as having a high impact across all the leadership variables of the program¹



¹ Average score across all responses from school leaders in NSW. Scale from 1 to 10, where 10 is high impact and 1 is little or no impact

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

To achieve effective knowledge transfer during implementation of the projects, school leaders are brought into the community of practice. This builds a collective knowledge across and beyond the Fair Education schools' network, sharing learnings, new approaches, and generating meaningful transformation in system practices. A community of practice is developing within and across schools.

"The (Fair Education) project has provided us with a framework to work collegiately. Everything about the project has allowed this to happen, the money allows teachers to be trained, the time allows things to come together and the coaching allows us to reflect and develop." Dubbo College - AVID Project

"Fair Education impact has been to mobilise our network to collaborate to affect purposeful and future focussed pedagogy." Far South Coast Small Schools - Small Schools Engaging Communities Project

In 2019, Schools Plus together with donor partners, hosted Fair Education Conferences for teachers and school leaders in NSW and QLD. Of the 171 participants, representing 71 schools and 41 projects, feedback reflected they most valued:



Sharing school stories:

Opportunity to share successes and challenges of projects, ideas and crowd source solutions



Networking:

Opportunity to network, make connections and establish partnerships with other schools nationally



Professional dialogue and reflection time with colleagues.



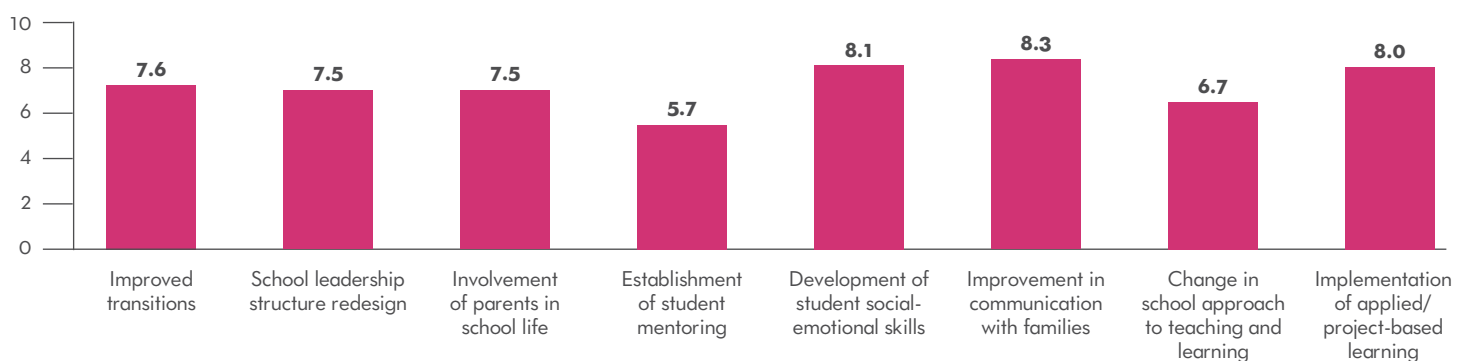
Student outcomes and ultimate success

Fair Education is now working with over 140 schools in 3 states with 40,000+ students benefitting from these projects.

Schools participating in Fair Education have seen a wide range of improvements. Since the program is tailored to specific school contexts there is no single metric that would apply to all schools. These changes can be reflected in a number of ways, from an improvement in grades, a change in behaviour, increase in participation, and ultimately, to a fairer education for all students.

School Leaders are noting Fair Education is delivering student outcomes across the entire range of projects

Impact on student outcomes per project type¹



The data shows that schools are meeting the goals that they set for themselves at the onset. The first cohort in Queensland for example, reported that on average across the cohort, the progress towards their student outcome objectives was over 50% after only one year of the program.

As part of an independent report commissioned to the Centre for International Research on Education Systems (CIRES) about the progress from Fair Education, it has been shown that, on average, there has been an improvement in NAPLAN results for the schools in NSW participating in Fair Education projects. CIRES does point out that due to the number of factors involved, at this stage it isn't possible to prove a causal relationship between Fair Education and the improvement in NAPLAN results. However, anecdotal evidence points to clear impact.

'You never know the impact of one thing over everything else, but over the three years of the project, with regard to our NAPLAN results we have got double the number of kids getting in the proficient bands than we did in 2016...it is not a direct relation but things are aligning'. NSW School Leader



The road ahead

As the program grows, Fair Education will continue to strengthen our partnership objectives to achieve meaningful and sustainable transformation in education.

Contribute to the national conversation on ways to improve educational outcomes in schools through greater family and community engagement



Significantly expand on the community of practice throughout the system

OUR PARTNERSHIP OBJECTIVES

Strengthen the evidence base by adding more and better data




Bring the program and outcomes to more schools across Australia


Into the future, we look to engage with other partners to ensure the benefits of Fair Education are far reaching and many more students, families and schools can be positively impacted. **Together we can help close the education gap.**


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