

October 2021

FAIR EDUCATION IN FOCUS:

Principles for effective family
and community engagement



SCHOOLS PLUS

Schools Plus is a national not-for-profit that exists to help close the education gap caused by disadvantage. We work with teachers and schools to create lasting change to help students succeed.

Schools Plus was founded following a recommendation in the [Gonski Review of Funding for Schools](#) in 2011, to deliver philanthropic support to help children facing disadvantage succeed at school. Carefully targeted funding allows schools and teachers to give students extra support, or to trial new ways to improve student outcomes.

We believe all children should have access to a great education regardless of their background. Schools Plus has worked to help close the education gap caused by disadvantage, by connecting schools in need, with donors who understand the value of a quality education.



ENGAGING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES TO IMPROVE STUDENT OUTCOMES

FAIR EDUCATION

The primary purpose of the Fair Education program is to produce long-term change by developing the capacity of schools to better engage families and communities in student learning.

Launched in NSW in 2016 with the support of the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation, the goal of Fair Education is to see tangible and sustainable improvements in student learning outcomes. After quality teaching, family and community engagement is one of the most significant factors in educational success.

The Fair Education program works with project teams leading sustainable change at an individual school level as well as cluster school projects working to establish a shared community of practice. Each Fair Education school designs their project to best suit their unique circumstances. The 3-year program comprises coaching for school leadership teams, funding for school-specific projects, and ongoing project management and evaluation. Coaching, provided throughout the program by Schools Plus, is a key element to assist schools to identify, implement and evaluate strategies, measure impact, build leadership capacity and facilitate knowledge sharing. These inputs provide the foundation 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.

This report highlights Fair Education 'Cohort 2' Projects which were active in the program between 2018-2020, with some lasting an additional 6 months due to COVID delays in 2020. Captured in this report are outcomes from the 11 projects which comprised of 63 schools across New South Wales.

ABOUT THE PROJECTS

FAIR EDUCATION COHORT 2 PROJECTS

Schools Plus acknowledges the work of the Fair Education project teams, coaches, schools and their families as they work together to implement initiatives to strengthen family and community engagement. By meeting the needs of their individual context their learnings have been successfully implemented, measured, shared and embedded into practice highlighting how positive engagement with their families and communities has led to improve student outcomes. Learnings from the Cohort 2 projects continue to inform future work of the Fair Education program.

63

Schools

11

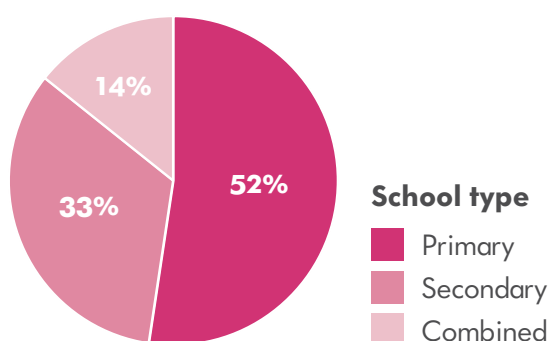
Projects

9

Cluster School Projects

2

Individual School Projects



School type

- Primary
- Secondary
- Combined



COACHING SUPPORT:

400 + hours of leadership coaching



DIRECT FUNDING TO SCHOOLS:
\$ 2,026,000

Cluster School Projects up to **\$250,000** across 3 years
Individual School Projects up to **\$70,000** across 3 years

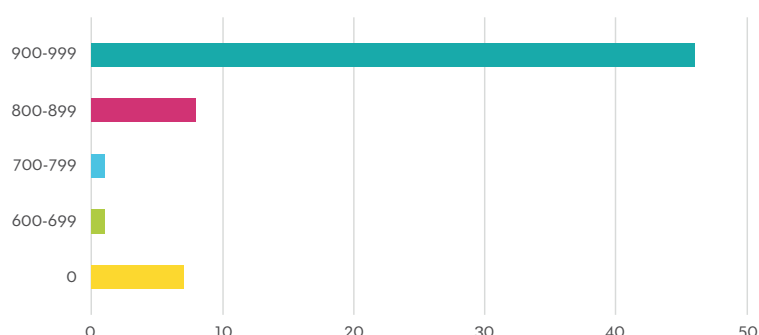
Schools Plus support is directed to Australian schools that have a value below 1000 on the national Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA). Measured by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) the Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage (ICSEA) is a scale of socio-educational advantage (SEA).

School scaling is calculated on the following formula:
ICSEA = SEA + Remoteness + Percent Indigenous student enrolment

There is a substantial body of research evidence that shows the educational performance of students, among many other things, is related to certain characteristics of their family (parental education, parental non-school education, and occupation) and school (location and socio-economic background of the students it serves).

Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

The 63 schools in Fair Education NSW Cohort 2 had a range of ICSEA values:

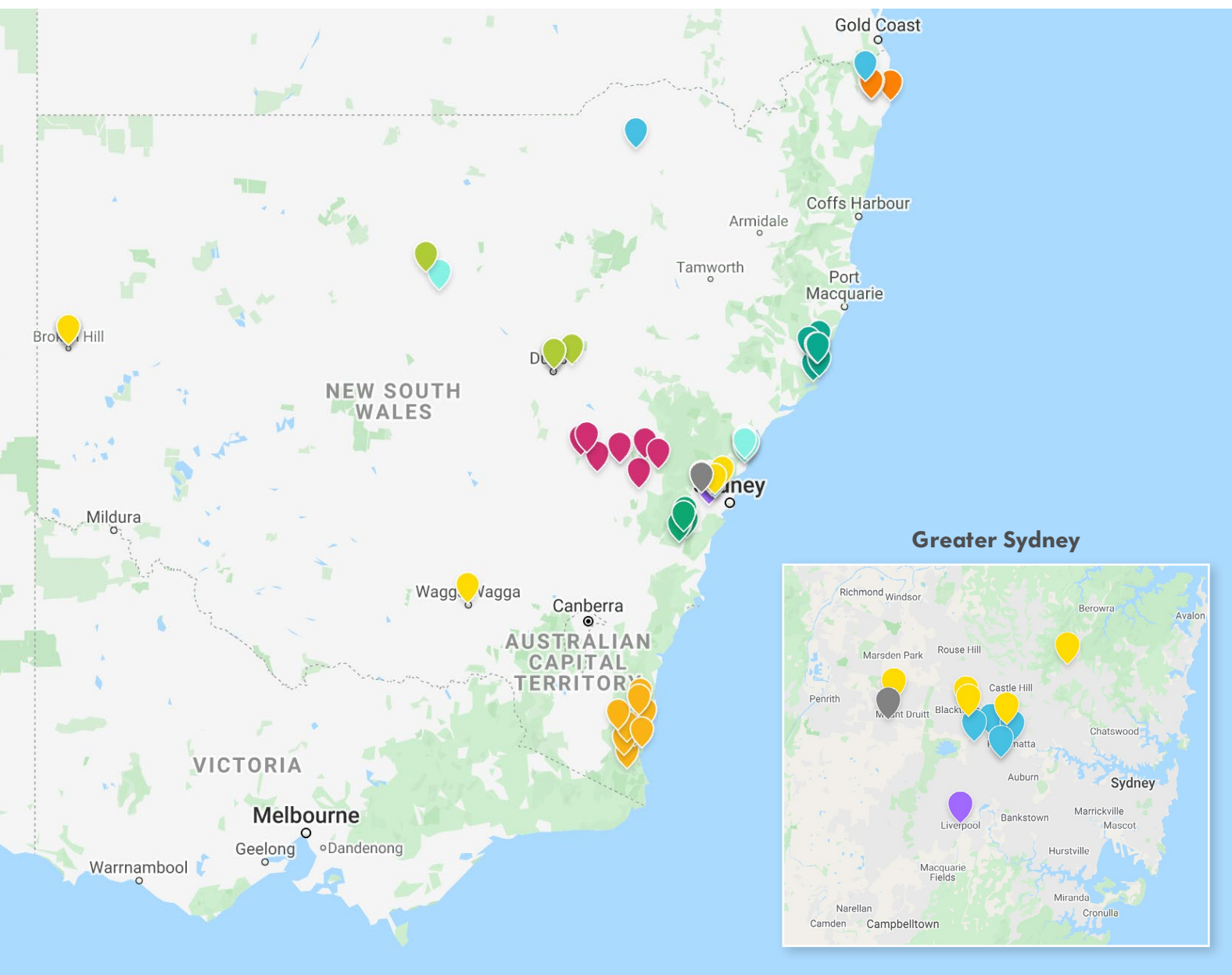













Schools that are categorised as special have an ICSEA value of 0.
The median ICSEA value in Australia is 1000.

PROJECT LOCATIONS

The schools in Cohort 2 are situated throughout NSW, in inner and outer regional areas as well as major cities. Many of the cluster projects, which are made up of three or more schools, worked collaboratively across great physical distance to share planning, resources and engagement strategies to improve student learning outcomes.

This map represents the NSW Cohort 2 Fair Education Community of Practice, which was fostered in person, online, at coaching sessions, Fair Education Forums and beyond.



- | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
|  | Success for Complex Learners |  | Empowering and enabling Colyton High School students as "Everyday Leaders" |
|  | Small Communities Championing STEM Project |  | New Choices - providing alternative pathways to positive education |
|  | Success for All project - inquiry based learning |  | Connections Through Technology |
|  | The Great Lakes Project |  | Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) |
|  | Liverpool Learning Community working together |  | Creating 'Learning Hubs' in semi-rural communities |
|  | Ready, Set, Connect | | |

FAIR EDUCATION FRAMEWORK

The principles for the Fair Education Framework were established from the learnings shared by 84 schools comprising of Cohorts 1 and 2 participating in the Fair Education program between 2016-2021. The principles highlight the foundations and professional actions that have been imperative to effectively engage parents and communities in supporting student learning and success. All of the projects and school teams working in the 63 schools across NSW in Fair Education Cohort 2 demonstrated elements of the framework's principles for effective family and community engagement through their projects. The Fair Education projects featured in this report highlight these principles. A full list of all the schools and their projects can be found at the end of the booklet.

PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

FOUNDATIONS

WE MUST

Develop contextual understanding

Deep, reciprocal understanding of student, family and community needs and culture

Build a safe and trustful environment

Respectful environment where all feel safe and welcome

Establish a shared vision and plan

Clearly articulated shared vision with structures and processes in place to enable success

PROFESSIONAL ACTIONS

WE DO THIS BY, AND CONTINUING TO

Engage through each student and their learning: Seek and create opportunities to engage family in tangible ways and provide positive feedback. Use professional knowledge and understanding of quality teaching and learning, and of individual students, to help family members understand and value their child's learning. Allow students to initiate and lead learning conversations. Draw upon positivity, creativity, resilience, consistency, persistence, flexibility and passion.

Demonstrate purposeful, nuanced leadership at all levels: Lead with intentionality, and with a clear vision for the future. Be agile and iterative – reflect, refine and try again. Be willing to move slowly and seek small wins as steps to achieving more complex goals. Celebrate the wins. Share the responsibility of leadership – create opportunities and value what others, including students, can contribute.

Develop authentic relationships & invest in collaboration: Value and understand your stakeholders, and shared challenges and opportunities. Actively build and model productive relationships characterised by respect, trust, no-judgment and openness with families and the community (broad and professional). Prioritise collaboration to bring about creativity, innovation, support and solutions to shared challenges. Be patient and take time.

Use varied, purposeful communication: Prioritise and create opportunities for open and authentic conversations; characterised by active listening and variety. E.g. offsite, social occasions, and using technologies. Consider adopting a 'purposeful informality' approach – more frequent, casual, opportunistic connections to build trust and confidence, and break down barriers.

IMPROVED STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Engaged and successful students prepared for positive futures

FOUNDATIONS

DEVELOP CONTEXTUAL UNDERSTANDING

The Fair Education Framework recognises that a deep, reciprocal understanding of student, family, and community needs, and culture is necessary as schools prepare to engage families and community.

Ready, Set, Connect Project

Hilltop Road Public School (lead school), Greystanes High School, Arthur Phillip High School, Merrylands High School, Toongabbie East Public School, Moree East Public School

A cluster of schools in Western Sydney launched a collaborative initiative to help year 6 students prepare for their transition to high school. The schools trialled and implemented evidence-based practices around transition and parent/ community engagement. These strategies were carried out with the aim of reducing student anxiety and ensuring families were not isolated by helping families connect socially and gain a sense of belonging.



Through the project initiatives, the cluster recognised that for families to engage with schools in an authentic way, it was imperative for the schools to gain insight into the interests and needs of those people and to help connect them with other families. The cluster's work in this area also highlighted for them, that as educators, they would need to engage in meaningful conversations with parents, aware of their own bias, and with a willingness to learn from the conversation.

The Ready, Set, Connect team used focus interviews with parents, students, and teachers alongside the concept of auditing tiles based on the categories of Relationships, Interests, Connecting and Engagement (R.I.C.E.). These cards provided the stimulus for schools to reflect on their way of thinking about authentic relationships and to recognise areas that needed attention to grow parent and community engagement. The mindset of the cluster changed from:

“What do we think the parents/ community needs/want?” (e.g. running math workshops) to “What are the interests of our parents and community and where are the opportunities to connect with them?” (e.g. adult education classes, swimming lessons).

The work done by the cluster has seen a significant increase in student enrolment as well as high engagement from students and their families. Following the impact of COVID-19 in 2020, the cluster created alternate resources for transition and connection that could be delivered online. The genuine relationships that had already been formed with students and families were evident from the high engagement from students and families through digital platforms.

This project was a transition program for all enrolled year 6 students who were preparing for high school. There was significant growth in positive attitude towards transition to high school which was attributed to the project facilitating friendships with students from other schools who would be attending the same high school.

It was determined that context plays a significant role when developing and maintaining transition and parent engagement strategies. Each school, with their own opportunities and challenges, prototyped a new transition strategy. Trialling strategies on a small scale gave them the opportunity to “fail fast”. The schools were then able to share promising practices, and the reasons why they were successful, for other schools to adopt and adapt to be effective in their own contexts.

DEVELOP A SAFE AND TRUSTFUL ENVIRONMENT AT THE SCHOOL

The Fair Education Framework supports a respectful environment where all feel safe and welcome.

Connections through Technology Project

Denison College Bathurst High Campus (lead school), Denison College of Secondary Education, Kelso High Campus, Orange High School, Canobolas Rural Technology High School, Lithgow High School, Blayney High School, Portland Central School, Oberon High School

The cluster of eight high schools recognised that parents, especially first-time parents, can feel anxious about their child's transition to high school and need reassurance to feel welcome and comfortable.



The Connections through Technology project not only allowed the cluster of schools to upskill Year 6 students in various uses of ICT for learning in preparation for high school, but also enabled the schools to capture the imagination and interest of their incoming students.

The project provided students and parents with an understanding of the high school's expectations, which helped to alleviate worries and concerns. By working with their feeder schools, the cluster was able to develop connections that provided the incoming students and their families with a sense of safety and trust in their new high school.

Parents need reassurance about their child's transition to high school. It is necessary for schools to find different ways to provide reassurance in particular contexts.

When Year 6 families were finding the impacts of Covid19 very difficult, the virtual activities and other connections between the high school and primary school groups, proved incredibly powerful. Overall, student self-confidence and sense of belonging was greatly improved due to the work of the project. However, there were a significant number of Year 7 students who did not transition well to high school in comparison to previous cohorts. The disruption caused by Covid19 may have been a contributing factor to the poor transition of some students.

ESTABLISH A SHARED VISION AND PLAN

A principle of the Fair Education Framework is that a shared vision should be clearly articulated, with structures and processes in place to enable success.

Success for Complex Learners Project

Clarke Road School (lead school), The Hills School, Willyama High School, Burke Ward Public School, Alma Public School, Broken Hill High School, Halinda School, William Rose School, Willans Hill School, Lalor Park Public School

The aim of the Success for Complex Learners project was to support families, teachers, support staff and community members to better understand their child through innovative teaching in special education, using evidence-based frameworks and practices. These frameworks are used to enhance teaching practices and to deliver personalised and relevant learning programs for the cluster's most complex learners.

The cluster developed a shared vision clearly outlining their goals, processes and practices under the headings of Students, Communities, Educators and Cluster. Their main vision is "To empower and extend our complex learners through the collective power of educators, parents, families and community members. To innovate learning and teaching. To shape educational policy and practice."

Acknowledging and involving all partners and their roles in the project's framework, gave clarity and direction, enabling successful implementation of the project.

In the Zone professional learning, provided the framework for the whole school community to understand how to best provide deeply personalised and meaningful programs for complex learners. Subsequently, teachers periodically met with the school's occupational therapist and speech therapist to allow opportunity for collaborative interpretation of the strategies and principles for their individual class groups. New activities, routines, and resources were introduced to support individual students to assist with learning. Supervisors follow up with consultation and support of the teachers they supervise, who have been involved in the professional learning.

Through the clear shared vision and plan the project team have been able to implement broad impacts across the sector. The implementation of Passport for Learning and In the Zone practices and programs continued to target and deliver deeply personalised learning programs for their students. In 2020, the Centre for Education, Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) facilitated a Passport for Learning trial in a number of schools across New South Wales.

“Parents + family + schools + community working together = great things happen for our children” – Parent

Members of Clarke Road School's Executive team participated in the professional learning, alongside their staff, to build capacity to support their teachers and ensure a consistent shared vision was achieved. The educators, support staff, parents and communities worked together under the model provided, and as a result the whole school community contributed to the strategies and support of students, with a greater understanding of each child and how to best assist each student to be in the zone for learning.



“We had so many hopes for my child, then, in one diagnosis, it was all taken away. There was confusion for our whole family. I used to feel so demotivated, but now I am motivated to help them move through.

The project gives a clear pathway for parents and for teachers - we know and use common terms.... We feel more confident working with therapists too. I feel more comfortable to discuss the strategies that can be helpful.” – Parent

PROFESSIONAL ACTIONS

ENGAGE WITH STUDENTS AND THEIR LEARNING

This principle involves schools seeking and creating opportunities to engage families in tangible ways and to provide positive feedback. It anticipates that schools use professional knowledge and understanding of quality teaching and learning, and of individual students, to help family members understand and value their child's learning. It allows students to initiate and lead learning conversations while the school draws upon positivity, creativity, resilience, consistency, persistence, flexibility, and passion.

Learning community working together project

Liverpool Boys High School

The aim of Liverpool Boys High school's project was to find ways to better personalise learning for each student to improve engagement and ultimately student outcomes.

It is the school's belief that if students are learning based on their passions and interests, with close engagement from parents, more learning outcomes and increased student engagement can be achieved. As a result, the school implemented passion-led learning where the teachers act as mentors, and parents are involved to encourage their child to discuss their passions and where they might lead.

“Passion-led learning occurs when teachers are able to personalise learning in line with a student's passion and can ignite and develop better student engagement with deep learning”.

– The Passion Toolkit

Initially, a Year 7 passion-based project was trialled. Each term, the students completed a passion survey, and through this process staff observed the students to be increasingly articulate about their passions and more engaged in their learning overall.

The impact of the passion project trial was 'overwhelming', 'unexpected' and 'profound'. Student participation was elevated, and student engagement was remarkable. This was evidenced by both the strong completion rate and the exceptional quality of the projects. When students presented their work at an exhibition, the high attendance of families demonstrated the positive relationships that had been built.

Following the impact of the Year 7 passion-led projects, the school began heavily monitoring the passions and interests of Year 10 students. Previously, the school had noticed that students often struggled when considering HSC subjects and future pathways, with parents either disengaged from the process, or alternatively, holding traditional views around what their child should be doing. Processes are now in place to guarantee a high level of parent engagement with student interests and passions, to ensure suitable subject choices or pathways are followed.

Community Learning was key to working collaboratively with the student's parents and communities. This involved increasing parent engagement, understanding and knowledge of student learning. The school also created real-world learning partnerships and connections with other learning institutions.

The school's strategies began to focus on this, by helping parents to see themselves, no matter what their background, as active participants in their child's learning. The school also worked with the students to help communicate this message to their parents.

The school encouraged students to have conversations about their subject selection evening and set parameters requiring attendance from a family member or carer. This resulted in the school's best attendance at a subject information night and families engaging with their children about their learning.

With the increase of mentoring for the students there were a number of positive measurements that included:



The number of students who changed their subject choices

In 2020 there were only 4 students who changed their subjects compared to 20 students changing their mind in 2019. Changing subjects after the course has started causes quite a lot of disruption for the student's learning. They have to 'catch up' on work missed and enter a subject well after the introduction and basics of the course have been delivered. The in depth mentoring of the students has meant less boys changed subjects in 2020/2021 which caused much less disruption to their learning.



Clarity in student pathways post high school

Each year usually 30% of students change their pathways or are unsure of their pathway of either TAFE, University or the Workforce. During 2020/2021 this change in pathways reduced to less than 5%. The project team ascribe this to the access to mentoring well before they chose subjects. The staff ensured their subjects were aligned to their pathway so the students had a clear plan and goal for what they needed post school. Sometimes parent influence, change of passion, COVID and other variables can impact on students changing their mind about pathways.

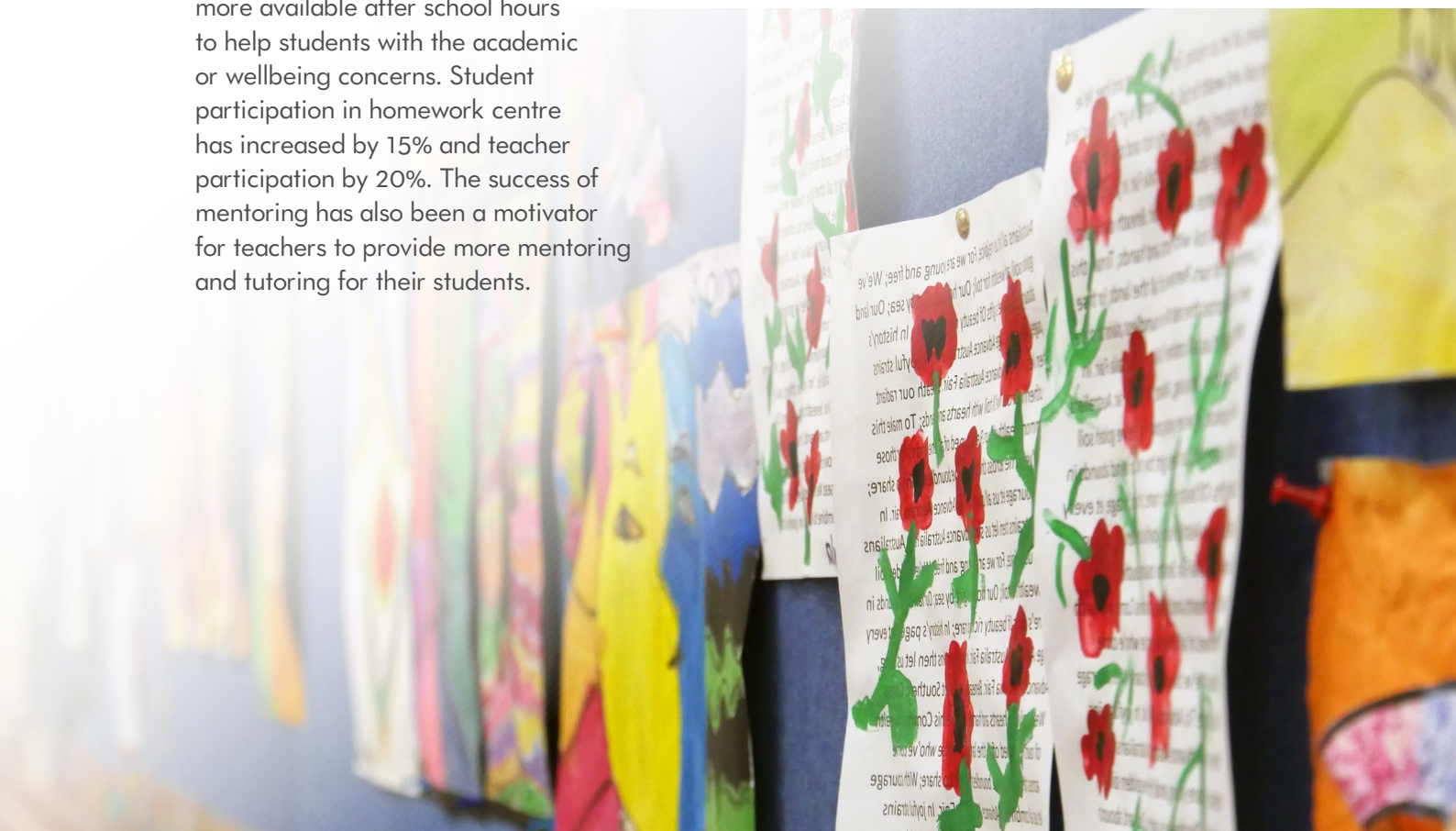


Student learning outcomes

The improvement in student learning outcomes (when students make better choices their learning outcomes improve). This is measured with the decreased rate of change in choice of subjects as well as students engaging more with 'extra help' provided by the school. Weekly home centre has had increased participation by 20%. This is due to the mentor teachers being more available after school hours to help students with the academic or wellbeing concerns. Student participation in homework centre has increased by 15% and teacher participation by 20%. The success of mentoring has also been a motivator for teachers to provide more mentoring and tutoring for their students.

“During the student's time here, we made sure we kept engaging the student and family so they were well aware of their child's capacity to success in the various pathways”

– Head Teacher Community



DEMONSTRATE PURPOSEFUL, NUANCED LEADERSHIP AT ALL LEVELS

Lead with intentionality, and with a clear vision for the future. Be agile and iterative – reflect, refine and try again. Be willing to move slowly and seek small wins as steps to achieving more complex goals. Celebrate the wins. Share the responsibility of leadership – create opportunities and value what others, including students, can do.

Everyday Leaders Project

Colyton High School

The Everyday Leaders project aimed to significantly increase student engagement and connection with school by building individual student's leadership capacity and empowering them as everyday leaders. The increase in leadership density through the three years of the project was multifaceted across students, staff and families. Their goal was to develop successful leaders who would commit to a genuine partnership in improving the school and extending their leadership influence into the community. Qualities that are being fostered in the "everyday leaders" include resilience, communication, presence and emotional intelligence.

Through the three years of the project, the team moved the focus of student leadership towards self-responsibility and efficacy. This resulted in a significant shift, not only in leadership practice, but equally to a developing understanding of the principles of student leadership and their importance to the achievement of the school's ethos, strategic growth and improvement. The project team had a strong collegiate ethos and comprised school leaders, passionate educators at all points of their career, including early career teachers and the Community Liaison Officer working to foster community partnerships, and mentors for the students.

The project identified opportunities to support students where they excel, not only in academic pursuits, but where their strengths and interests are, and to connect with their family and community. When this occurs, parents and community

“An example of the gains in engaging parents is the huge increase in numbers of parents and students who attended a ‘Meet the Teacher’ evening to which more than 200 attended... where for three hours, parents spoke with teachers about their child’s learning; note that this was NOT a PT night designated for this type of discussion. Many parents commented on the improved partnership in their child’s learning between the school and home”. – Project Coach 2020

members are authentically engaged in their child's education and can help them prepare them for the future. The project has increased leadership engagement and the willingness of students to nominate themselves for a wide range of leadership roles in the school. The school provides regular mentoring and coaching sessions for the various leadership groups. These staff mentors have reported an increased level of confidence and self-worth in the students, with staff morale improving as a result. This positive engagement has allowed students to connect with their school and teachers on a new level, with meaningful relationships being formed.

The project recognised that adopting a whole school vision and culture takes time, and that it is the small steps taken to embed policies and procedures that enable long-term, sustainable change. For the project to have the greatest impact, it was dynamic and allowed for flexibility and change.

Helping students to understand leadership principles and qualities, and learning to value their own personal character strengths, played an important role in activating a positive student voice in the school and community.

Fair Education funds allowed the school to employ a Community Liaison Officer to help implement the project and connect the school with the community. This enabled the school to work strategically as a team and embed structures, policies and processes.

DEVELOP AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS & INVEST IN COLLABORATION

Value and understand your stakeholders, and shared challenges and opportunities. Actively build and model productive relationships characterised by respect, trust, no-judgment and openness with families and the community (broad and professional). Prioritise collaboration to bring about creativity, innovation, support, and solutions to shared challenges. Be patient and take time.

New Choices: providing alternative pathways to positive education

The Rivers Secondary College Lismore High Campus (lead school), The Rivers Secondary College Richmond River Campus, The Rivers Secondary College Kadina High Campus, Southern Cross School of Distance Education, Nimbin Central School.

The aim of the New Choices project was to change the lives of the most disengaged students and families by providing an alternative to mainstream education that will lead to positive pathways into further education, training or employment.

The factors that may contribute to student disengagement are:



Family and community factors

such as poverty, parental unemployment and/or low educational attainment, homelessness, transience or living in out-of-home care, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander status, refugee background, family breakdown/relationship issues and domestic violence.
(education.vic.gov.au)



Personal factors

such as physical or mental health issues, disability, behavioural issues, offending behaviour and/or contact with police or justice system, substance misuse or dependency, pregnancy or parenting, caring responsibilities, and learning difficulties.
(education.vic.gov.au)



School-related factors

such as negative relationships with teachers or peers, unsupportive school culture, limited subject options and lack of student participation in decision making.
(education.vic.gov.au)

Why New Choices works:

Trauma, abuse, and neglect have a biological effect on the developing brain and consequently on behaviour (van der Kolk & McFarlane, 2012). Van der Kolk & McFarlane (2012) explain that trauma, including disrupted attachment, has been shown to change the physical architecture of the developing brain as well as the connectivity between various areas of the brain resulting in reduced capacity of the brain to acquire complex emotion regulation skills.

In response to this, the New Choices team:

- Built relationships with both students and their families/carers based on unconditional positive regard and empathetic understanding whilst upholding high expectations
- Fostered communication between the team students and their families/carers
- Embraced a holistic approach with all invested stakeholders
- Connected with community
- Hired and supported passionate and dedicated staff
- Invested in time and resources to enable flexibility
- Facilitated experiential learning to give students a love of the little things in life

New Choices uses an individualised approach that focuses on what is going well for students, as well as looking at what the barriers are to student learning. A key dimension of this approach is to engage the parents of students in the New Choices program and to encourage them to support their children. Parents visiting the New Choices centre daily, both before and after school, has been essential to the program as teachers and parents communicate about the student and their education. Having the New Choices centre located outside the school setting has created a safe and less intimidating environment for parents, carers and family to engage on site.

Through this strengths-based, individualised and wholistic approach, with parental engagement and support, the New Choices program helps students overcome their barriers.



New Choices structure:

- New Choices is an innovative innovative program designed to engage their most disengaged young people.
- It operates Mon to Thu from 9:30am - 2:30pm.
- It supports students to achieve their Record of School Achievement (RoSA) through the DoE.
- It provides a flexible learning environment with individualised programs.
- A pedagogical program was launched to catch Stage 4 students before they disengage.
- After students have completed the program, New Choices aims to transition students to enrol in school, TAFE, traineeships or onto employment.



Evidence of impact:

- There has been a reduction in suspensions, an increase in attendance and the participating mainstream schools have become more settled.
- Participant class sizes have stayed the same or increased over the course of the program.
- There has been a long-term post program employment effect, with all students who have been through the program either in employment, training, or another educational setting.
- Students are accessing mental health support and are engaged in the community.
- In 2019, all Year 10 students achieved their RoSA, which was seen as an outstanding achievement.
- Due to the excellent levels of positive student engagement, there has been significant interest from schools beyond the cluster and there is currently a waiting list of students wanting to access the New Choices Program. As a result, New Choices have partnered with the Department of Education through Distance Education, who have approved extra staffing to enable the program to grow.
- The program has matured by bringing in counselling, Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), a workplace program, a workplace facility and an 'after care' program that supports young people after they depart the New Choices program.

USE VARIED, PURPOSEFUL COMMUNICATION

Prioritise and create opportunities for open and authentic conversations; characterised by active listening and variety. e.g., offsite, social occasions, and using technologies. Consider adopting a 'purposeful informality' approach – more frequent, casual, opportunistic connections to build trust and confidence, and breakdown barriers.

Far South Coast Small Schools - Small Schools Engaging Communities and Championing STEM

*Quaama Public School (lead school), Bemboka Public School, Bournda Environmental Education Centre
Candelo Public School, Cobargo Public School, Wyndham Public School, Wolumla Public School, Tanja Public School,
Towamba PS*

The Far South Coast Small Schools cluster, set themselves the challenge of effectively engaging families and communities in student learning, to implement STEM and Project-Based Learning, by harnessing expertise in their community.

Learnings across the Fair Education Program and the Small Communities Championing STEM have found common themes of the importance of understanding their stakeholders, lowering the threshold for engagement and centring the conversations with families around their child's learning. By increasing their understanding of family and community interests and cultures, the schools were able to utilise community expertise, inviting them into the schools to deliver and support STEM projects, such as sustainable gardens, recycling programs, robotics and coding. Fostering these authentic connections also led to families and community members sharing their knowledge and skills in other areas such as language, music, art, filmmaking, science and sport.

These partnerships united the school communities, allowing parents to feel appreciated and respected. The cluster identified and focused on key factors that have deepened understanding and connection with families and communities:

1. Effective communication - inclusive and involves information sharing and opportunities to learn from each other.
2. Partnerships between parents, families, students and schools to promote student learning, wellbeing and high expectations for student success.
3. Relationships between the school and wider community that strengthen the collective ability to support student learning, wellbeing, and developmental outcomes.
4. School decision-making has meaningful roles for families, students and community members.
5. Respectful school culture in which students, parents and the school community are valued and enhance the promotion of student learning and wellbeing.

With the challenges raised by COVID19, the cluster was able to adapt quickly and productively.

“We were in a better position because of our alignment with Fair Education and the relationships that had been fostered with our parents and families to plan for Home Learning with the specific needs of parents/families in mind. We were able to turn the challenges into new opportunities!”

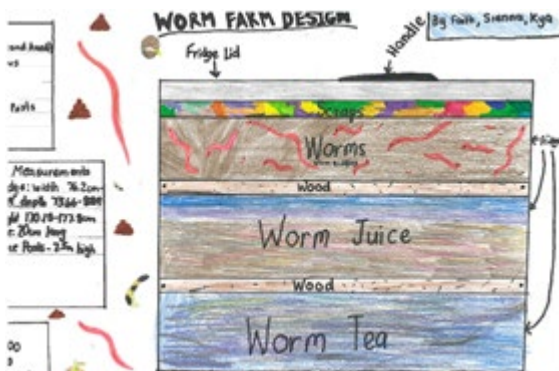
– Principal of Wolumla Public School

The cluster reported that it was through the coaching conversations and workshops provided by Fair Education that they were able to clarify their vision and maintain focus. These meetings also stimulated discussion between the schools to support each other with purpose and direction.

Parents were engaged to support their children's learning based on the premise that “the focus on community engagement in learning will raise the bar for students and teachers and create a stronger more cohesive community in which people feel valued and respected”.

Evidence of successful implementation included high engagement in learning, with stronger three-way dialogue between the teachers, students and parents. Parent and community members sharing their expertise as mentors in the classroom and participating in home-based research also demonstrated effective parent engagement.

“... it was a challenge, the way learning is now, it is so different... I googled lots to get help and watched the teacher made videos so I could help the kids. I learned that one son needs help and lots of encouragement, I had to remember to use a growth mindset...” – Parent



“... after doing my class work, mum and I planned some STEM activities, we built a vegetable garden and my brother experimented with different places to build his fort.” – Student



IMPROVED STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

The Fair Education Framework ultimately aims to see students engaged and successful, both academically and in wellbeing, who are prepared for a positive future. Across the projects there have been considerable learning outcomes, a highlighting example is:

Buxton Public School - Creating 'Learning Hubs' in semi-rural communities with the aim of improving student learning outcomes

Buxton Public School (lead school), Thirlmere Public School, Colo Vale Public School, Hill Top Public School, Yanderra Public School

The cluster approached their goal of engaging families in their children's learning, by holding a feedback forum to explore each school's needs from a parent perspective. A common parent concern, held across all five schools, was a lack of understanding and connection to the reporting process. Feedback was also sought from students who felt their reports were not important, and from teachers who regarded report writing as a tedious process, disconnected from the planning and evaluative teaching and learning cycle and not valued by the families.

This feedback from the community led to a collaboration between all five schools to design a new reporting system that:



met the needs of the community



listened to families and what they wanted to see in a report



made the reporting process relevant to teaching & learning



included student voice by engaging students in their learning goals and giving them an opportunity to reflect upon this in their actual report



was personalised and incorporated a learning disposition comment as requested by families

The new reporting system received an overwhelmingly positive response from the school community.

"This is the best report I have seen as I know what my child can actually do" – Parent

"I have never enjoyed doing reports before!" – Teacher

"I love reflecting in my report and it always makes my mum smile when she reads it" – Student

The successful engagement of parents and families in student learning, resulted in improved student outcomes across the cluster. The schools witnessed growth in both student wellbeing and engagement.

Creating an opportunity for parents and families to share their feedback, led to the implementation of the new reporting system, which included personal student reflection and goal setting. This resulted in students beginning to demonstrate their commitment to the pursuit of learning. Students can now articulate expectations of their learning and their goals for the future, asking why and how their learning matters.

“This is the first time I have sat down and discussed the actual report with my child.” – Parent

“I get excited at report time because when I do my report it makes me think about all my learning.” – Student

“The system makes it so easy.” – Teacher

The cluster reported the following improved student outcomes:

- Increased evidence of student autonomy and a classroom environment that supports this.
- Students contribute actively to their own learning as well as the learning of others.
- Students can articulate the purpose of their learning and how to be successful.
- Students demonstrate behaviours that support their learning and the learning of others and demonstrate a positive attitude.

The Tell Them From Me (TTFM) data reflected growth in wellbeing from 2018 to 2020, with the cluster currently sitting above the state average and Statistically Similar School Groups (SSSG). Students are now able to articulate what they can achieve, and the behaviour data has significantly improved to evidence engaged learning.

The cluster schools collaborate to develop strategies, share practice, and continue to learn and inquire together. Feedback from the Fair Education meetings was regularly provided by leaders to their staff on the progress and direction of the project. Evaluation and analysis of data identified the impact of student engagement and drove professional learning.

School reports have a focus on student voice and goal setting, are personalized and comprehensive, provide detailed clear and specific information about student learning, next steps and improvement measures. For several of the cluster schools, goal setting has been embedded into teaching practice to support authentic student reflections. Formative assessments are frequently undertaken to guide the reporting process and student learning dispositions are reflected in their reports.

The cluster of schools collectively have a low socio-economic demographic, and it had been identified that aspirations beyond high school were limited. The cluster identified that the intrinsic motivation for student learning and progress, would come from a change in the conversation at home to include, “What I am learning. How am I going? Where am I going? What do I need to get there? How will I know?”.

75% of parents questioned indicated that contemporary teaching and learning was unknown to them. As a result, the new reporting format was developed and, in some schools, parent/teacher interviews now focus on goal setting with student involvement. The rollout for the new system was implemented across all schools in 2019.



In 2020, due to the impact of COVID-19, all 5 schools engaged in home-learning. Parents shared positive feedback regarding the support they received and their engagement in their child's learning. 61% of parents said that the new reporting process gave them more information about their child's learning capabilities than in previous years.

The cluster's results of the Tell Them From Me (TTFM) survey, were overwhelmingly in support of the new reporting system, with positive responses in all 5 schools from teachers, students and parents.

The LITEforSchools Reporting Software is now utilised across the cluster and has also been adopted in other school communities. The system continues to evolve to incorporate personal learning reports and personal learning plans.

FAIR EDUCATION PROJECTS ‘COHORT 2’

Schools Plus acknowledges the work of the Fair Education project teams, coaches, schools and their families as they work together to implement initiatives to strengthen family and community engagement. Learnings from these projects continue to inform future work of the Fair Education program.

Connections Through Technology

Denison College Bathurst High Campus (lead school)
Denison College of Secondary Education, Kelso High Campus
Orange High School
Canobolas Rural Technology High School
Lithgow High School
Blayney High School
Portland Central School
Oberon High School

Empowering and enabling Colyton High School students as “EVERYDAY LEADERS”

Colyton High School

Ready, Set, Connect

Hilltop Road Public School (lead school)
Greystanes High School
Arthur Phillip High School
Merrylands High School
Toongabbie East Public School
Moree East Public School

Liverpool Learning Community working together

Liverpool Boys High School

The Great Lakes Project

Great Lakes College Forster Campus (lead school)
Forster Public School
Tuncurry Public School
Pacific Palms Public School
Great Lakes College Tuncurry Campus
Nabiac Public School
Hallidays Point
Bungwahl Public School

Success for All project - inquiry based learning

Dubbo South Public School
Dubbo Public School
Ballimore Public School
Buninyong Public School
Orana Heights Public School
Eumungerie Public School

Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID)

Tuggerah Lakes Secondary College Tumby Umbi Campus (lead school)
Tuggerah Lakes Secondary College Berkley Campus
The Entrance Public School
Wamberal Public School
Brooke Avenue Public School
Berkeley Vale Public School
Killarney Vale Public School
Chittaway Bay Public School
Bateau Bay Public School

Creating ‘Learning Hubs’ in semi-rural communities

Buxton Public School (lead school)
Thirlmere Public School
Colo Vale Public School
Hill Top Public School
Yanderra Public School

New Choices - providing alternative pathways to positive education

The Rivers Secondary College Lismore High Campus (lead school)
The Rivers Secondary College Richmond River Campus
The Rivers Secondary College Kadina High Campus
Southern Cross School of Distance Education
Nimbin Central School

Small Communities Championing STEM Project

Far South Small School Cluster
Quaama Public School (lead school)
Bemboka Public School
Bournda Environmental Education Centre
Candelo Public School
Cobargo Public School
Wyndham Public School
Wolumla Public School
Tanja Public School
Towamba Public School

Success for Complex Learners

Clarke Road School (lead school)
The Hills School
Willyama High School
Burke Ward Public School
Alma Public School
Broken Hill High School
Halinda School
William Rose School
Willans Hill School
Lalor Park Public School

REFERENCE LIST

In this final section we provide a range of resources which have been utilised in this report and informed the Fair Education Program.

Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority 2020
[guide-to-understanding-icsea-values.pdf \(myschool.edu.au\)](#)

Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
[Australian Professional Standards for Teachers](#)

Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
[The Australian Professional Standard for Principals](#)

Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, Parent & Family Engagement Implementation Guide
[Publications and Resources - Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth \(ARACY\)](#)

New South Wales Department of Education [School Excellence Framework](#)

NSW Education Standards Authority (2021) [The Australian professional standards for teachers](#)

Victorian State Government [Identify students at risk of disengaging \(education.vic.gov.au\)](#)

The Passion Toolkit (2015) <https://all-learning.org.au/>

Van Der Kolk, McFarlane, A., Weisaeth, L. (2012) Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society

Australian Parent, Family and Community Engagement frameworks

National Framework: [Australian National Framework Supporting Family-School-Community- Partnerships](#)

Australian Capital Territory: [Progressing Parental Engagement Project - Education \(act.gov.au\)](#)

New South Wales: [Community Consultation & Parent involvement \(education.nsw.gov.au\)](#)

Northern Territory: [Family Engagement Charter - Department of Education \(education.nt.gov.au\)](#)

Queensland: Advancing Partnerships - [Parent and community engagement \(education.qld.gov.au\)](#)

South Australia: [Parent engagement framework – building parent-school partnerships \(education.sa.gov.au\)](#)

Tasmania: [Together with Families - The Department of Education Tasmania \(education.tas.gov.au\)](#)

Victoria: Priority: [community engagement in learning \(education.vic.gov.au\)](#)

Western Australia: [Engaging and Working with your Community Framework\(education.wa.edu.au\)](#)

**Together, we can help
close the education gap.**



Schools Plus 

T: 02 8880 0296

E: info@schoolsplus.org.au

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