

Macquarie Fields High School:

Using *Tell Them From Me* data as a starting point for consultation with the broader school community.



Tell Them From Me is an online survey system that assists schools to capture the views of students, teachers and parents. The survey system has been devised by Canadian company, The Learning Bar, under the leadership of Professor Doug Willms. Dr Willms is an expert in education who led the development of questions on student engagement for the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

The surveys have been offered to NSW government schools since 2013/2014 (student and teacher surveys) in pilot form, and to all schools since 2015 (student, teacher and parent surveys). The surveys have been adapted to suit the NSW context.

In 2015, 236,000 students from 1,157 NSW government schools completed the student survey; 14,000 teachers did the teacher survey; and 29,000 parents completed the parent survey.

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Introduction

This case study looks at how Macquarie Fields High School has been using *Tell Them From Me* data as a starting point for consultation with the broader school community.

Background

Macquarie Fields High School is a partially selective government school located in Macquarie Fields in the south west Sydney Local Government Area of Campbelltown. It has an enrolment of 1,062 students, with 78 per cent of students coming from a non-English speaking background. The school's Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA¹) value is higher than the state average and NAPLAN results are above to substantially above similar schools. The attendance rate was around 95 per cent in 2014² (My School 2014). In addition to selective and comprehensive streams, the school also has a three class support unit catering for students with autism spectrum disorder (NSW Department of Education 2015).

Using *Tell Them From Me*

Macquarie Fields High School has been using *Tell Them From Me* data since 2013 when they participated in the pilot survey. Since then, they have participated annually in the student surveys, and from 2015 have also been completing the teacher and parent surveys. The school leadership team finds that *Tell Them From Me* data is particularly useful for strategic planning. It helps to verify issues that existed anecdotally but could not previously be measured, and highlights new issues of which the leadership team were previously unaware.

Macquarie Fields High School has implemented a number of new initiatives informed by the *Tell Them From Me* data. For instance, the data indicated that Year 10 engagement could be improved. To address this, the school leadership team decided to introduce one week of 'taster courses' for Year 10 students, to introduce them to what was on offer in Year 11. The leadership team believed that these taster courses would

¹ ICSEA is a measure of school socio-educational advantage created by ACARA.

² For students in Years 7 to 10 only.

boost engagement and interest in the senior years and that if students are engaged earlier, they will become more motivated. The school has received very positive feedback from students about this new initiative, and it will be continued. Another initiative introduced by Macquarie Fields has been the 'sister speak' program for Aboriginal girls, run through one of Aboriginal Affairs' OCHRE opportunity hubs. This was introduced after *Tell Them From Me* data showed that Aboriginal girls had low levels of advocacy in and outside of school.

Starting point for consultation with the broader school community

One of the key ways that Macquarie Fields High School has been using the *Tell Them From Me* data is as a means to start a conversation with the broader school community about engagement, wellbeing and effective teaching practices.

Staff meetings

Data from the student, teacher and parent surveys is presented at staff meetings. These staff meetings include all staff members at the school, including ancillary staff, who are seen as a crucial part of the school community. The data is presented by one of the teachers in the form of a slide set with a verbal interpretation of each graph. Handouts are also provided. Staff are not only invited to listen to the presentation but also to provide feedback – in the form of any questions or issues with the data presented, and also on strategies the school can potentially put in place to improve student engagement, wellbeing and effective teaching practices. The result of involving all staff in the process is that staff feel that they are a valuable part of the school team, feedback can be gathered from various perspectives, and the survey becomes not just an annual data collection exercise, but is fully integrated into broader school planning processes.

School 'pillar' team meetings

The data is also disseminated at school 'pillar' team meetings. These teams, rather than being faculty based as traditionally they might be, are instead based around the three key strategic directions for the school: leadership, learning and wellbeing. *Tell Them From Me* data is a crucial part of informing, verifying and evaluating the strategic directions at Macquarie Fields across all pillars. The *Tell Them From Me* survey has been embedded into the school plan, with the plan stating that students will complete the survey annually. *Tell Them From Me* is also used in the school plan as a measure of improvement. For example, the plan states that Macquarie Fields hopes to see increases in the following *Tell Them From Me* measures: a 10 per cent increase in the number of students valuing school outcomes, a 10 per cent increase in students trying hard to succeed in their learning, and an increase of 20 per cent in students who are interested and motivated in their learning. It is the responsibility of each of the school 'pillar' teams to see the school plan enacted.

Student and P&C meetings

Tell Them From Me data is presented in year group meeting times. It was initially only presented to the SRC, but then the school leadership realised the potential value in the whole student body seeing the data. Students are shown the survey findings and any ideas the staff have come up with to improve engagement across different measures. The students are then asked to brainstorm and come up with ideas that they think could improve engagement. Students can also give their feedback anonymously if they wish. The school leadership wants the students to know that the school is actively listening and acting upon what they have said via the survey. To date, the students have been particularly interested in how they compare on measures of engagement against the rest of the state, and between year groups. The students often talk about the *Tell Them From Me* data in classes. Some students have even been asking staff 'when will we be doing the survey again?' as they are so keen to give their feedback. The school leadership team feels that the more students engage with and see the data, the more reliable the data will become as students see the value in doing the survey.

The student survey data is also presented to the P&C and parents are asked to give feedback on the survey results in a similar way to the students. Building on this practice, the parent survey results will be presented to the P&C in future.

Reference list

My School 2014, *My School: Macquarie Fields High School*, viewed 9 December 2015, <http://www.myschool.edu.au/>.

NSW Department of Education 2015, *School Plan 2015-2017: Macquarie Fields High School Strategic Directions*, school plan, report prepared by Macquarie Fields High School.

