

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Connected Communities Strategy

Final evaluation report

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation



Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation

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List of acronyms and abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
AECG	NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc.
AEO	Aboriginal Education Officer
ARR	Apparent retention rate
ATSIEAP	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan
CATI	Computer assisted telephone interview
CCAF	Connected Communities Asset and Facilities Strategy
CESE	Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation
department	NSW Department of Education
EaFS	Early Action for Success
FTE	Full-time equivalent
HSC	Higher Schools Certificate
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
NSSC	National School Statistics Collection
OCHRE	The NSW Government’s plan for Aboriginal affairs (Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment)
P&C	Parents & Citizens
SLCE/LCE	Senior Leader/Leader Community Engagement
SLSO	Student learning and support officer
SRG	School reference group
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics

Executive summary

Background

The Connected Communities Strategy (hereafter referred to as 'Connected Communities' or 'the Strategy') aims to address the educational and social aspirations of all students, and particularly Aboriginal children and young people, in 15 rural and remote schools in 11 of the most disadvantaged communities in NSW. The Strategy commenced implementation in 2013.

Evaluation

The evaluation of Connected Communities assesses the implementation and impact of Connected Communities, and aims to answer the following questions:

1. How well has the model of the Connected Communities Strategy been formed and implemented, and what variation exists across schools?
2. What are the outcomes and impact of the Connected Communities Strategy?
3. Does the Connected Communities Strategy deliver value for money?

This final evaluation report primarily addresses the outcomes and impact of Connected Communities. The Connected Communities interim evaluation report¹ primarily addressed the implementation of the Strategy. This report also monitors the progression of the implementation in some key areas.

The question of whether and how to answer the third evaluation question will be determined subsequent to future funding decisions.

Data sources in this report

We collected and analysed a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data for this final report:

- interviews with schools and community stakeholders during site visits to each school
- interviews with managers and executives responsible for the design and implementation of the Strategy
- internal documentation, and other reports on the progress of the Strategy to date
- student performance data pertaining to school attendance, NAPLAN, student retention to Year 12 and Higher School Certificate Awards
- responses from the *Tell Them From Me* student survey
- responses from the NSW Secondary Students Post-School Destinations and Expectations survey
- responses from a mixed-method telephone and face-to-face survey administered to parents/carers of students at Connected Communities schools
- responses from an online survey administered to teachers at Connected Communities schools.

Evaluation findings

There is moderate evidence to suggest that Connected Communities had a positive effect on Year 3 NAPLAN outcomes, but little evidence for positive effects on NAPLAN outcomes in older years

The results from our analysis indicate that those students who were fully exposed to Connected Communities from Kindergarten to Year 3 scored around 36 points higher (95% CI [-10, 82]) on average on their Year 3 Numeracy assessments, and around 31 points higher (95% CI [-16, 78]) on average on their Year 3 Reading assessments than they would have had the Strategy not been in place. Furthermore, the results from our analysis indicate that the percentage of students achieving below national minimum standards on their Year 3 Numeracy and Year 3 Reading assessments decreased by around 19 (95% CI [-42, 3]) and 22 (95% CI [-47, 3]) percentage points, respectively.

¹ <https://www.cese.nsw.gov.au/publications-filter/connected-communities-strategy-interim-evaluation-report>

For students fully exposed from Year 3 to Year 5, and Year 7 to Year 9, there were negligible impacts of Connected Communities on NAPLAN results (on either mean scores, or the proportion below national minimum standards).

There was a large variation in the impact of Connected Communities on individual schools' NAPLAN results, to the extent that the Year 3 improvements would have disappeared, and the Year 9 results would have been more positive, if a single school was excluded from the analysis in each case.

There is strong evidence to suggest that student attendance increased following the introduction of Connected Communities, but only for primary school students

The gap in attendance rates for all primary students across comparison and Connected Communities schools decreased by around 2.3 percentage points (95% CI [0.0, 4.6]) and the gap in attendance rates for Aboriginal primary students across comparison and Connected Communities schools decreased by around 2.5 percentage points (95% CI [0.0, 5.0]), after the introduction of the Strategy.

The early years focus appears to be having a positive impact on students' developmental readiness

All Connected Communities primary and central schools have developed a transition-to-school program or preschool program. Feedback from interview participants suggests that these programs have had a positive impact on school readiness, however there was no quantitative data available that could isolate the impact of the Strategy on this outcome.

Retention rates changed only for non-Aboriginal students in Connected Communities schools

In 2017, the year 10-12 apparent retention rate was 38 per cent for Aboriginal students in Connected Communities schools (secondary schools and central schools), a rate that has remained stable over time. The apparent retention rate for non-Aboriginal students in Connected Communities schools increased from 64 per cent in 2012 to 84 per cent in 2017.

Post school outcomes for all students in Connected Communities schools have not changed

At this point there has been no meaningful change in students' post-school outcomes (the proportion of past students engaged in further education or employment one year after leaving school) since the implementation of the Strategy: this rate was estimated to be 3.1 percentage points lower (95% CI [-18.0, 11.7]) than it would have been had the Strategy not been in place.

The focus on culture is having positive effects on the school environment

All schools have integrated Aboriginal culture into the school environment and teaching. This appears to be having an impact on students' views of the cultural responsiveness of their schools. Using the *Tell Them From Me* student survey, in 2017, we estimated that 80 per cent (95% CI [65, 90]) of Aboriginal secondary students at Connected Communities schools reported feeling 'good about their culture when they are at school', compared to 63 per cent (95% CI [62, 65]) of Aboriginal secondary students in other schools across NSW. Students also felt their teachers had a good understanding of local Aboriginal culture, with 66 per cent (95% CI [54, 77]) of Aboriginal secondary students in Connected Communities schools agreeing with this, compared to 42 per cent (95% CI [41, 44]) of Aboriginal students from non-Connected Communities schools.

Community engagement is improving but is still uneven

Data from the survey of parents/carers suggests that engagement has not changed since 2015, however qualitative data suggests that family and community engagement appears to be slowly improving in Connected Communities schools. Barriers still exist to stronger engagement and a greater sense of trust between schools and communities.

Service access has increased

Schools have adapted the service delivery model according to the circumstances of their community. Overall, school staff reported more linkages with services and more students accessing health services in particular. When surveyed in 2017, 64 per cent (95% CI [52, 74]) of Aboriginal parents/carers reported their child had accessed a general health check in their school. However, service provision is still being impeded by a lack of coordination between services.

Teachers are being provided with effective professional development

A majority of teachers are reporting that they are being provided with valuable professional development. We estimated that 88 per cent (95% CI [76, 95]) of teachers in Connected Communities schools in 2017 agreed that their school provided them with professional learning that built their understanding of the local Aboriginal culture, context and history. We estimated that 76 per cent (95% CI [63, 85]) cent of teachers in Connected Communities schools agreed that their school provided them with professional learning to help personalise their teaching to meet the needs of all students.

Discussion

Overall, Connected Communities is showing promising results

Overall, this evaluation has shown that Connected Communities has had a positive impact in schools, particularly on outcomes for students in their early years. Most school staff and communities generally support Connected Communities and feel that it is benefitting their schools overall. Connected Communities represents a sound policy approach that has the potential to provide further positive outcomes for students and communities. Further time will be required to see if these results can be sustained, and whether results in later years improve as the cohort of 'fully exposed' students (that is, those students who have been in a Connected Communities school for their whole time at school) complete their schooling.

The Strategy appears to be more effective at the primary level than the secondary level

The focus of Connected Communities on early childhood education and the transition into school is having a positive impact on early childhood and primary school outcomes.

The primary school cohort of students who have been 'fully exposed' to Connected Communities appear to be showing the greatest benefit from the Strategy in terms of NAPLAN results, and appear to be more developmentally ready for school than earlier cohorts. Family and community engagement also appears to be stronger in early years than later years.

Conversely, secondary student NAPLAN, school attendance, suspensions, and post-school transitions outcomes have not improved.

Attendance is key yet increased only for primary school students and remained unchanged for secondary students

Many schools still face the challenge of establishing consistently successful attendance strategies. Additionally, attendance may be affected in later years by the lack of post-school opportunities in many communities and the reluctance of young people to leave their community.

Environmental factors and staff buy-in affect outcomes

Both implementation and outcomes have varied across individual schools. As mentioned above, there was variation in the impact of Connected Communities on NAPLAN results at a school level, and our qualitative research found variability in the progress that individual schools have made in implementing the Strategy. Implementation could be affected by environmental factors outside of the school's control, such as the size and/or remoteness of the community and the existing services available. Implementation could also be impacted by the 'buy-in' from school staff and the extent of whole-school commitment to the Strategy. The buy-in of all staff remains key to the successful implementation of Connected Communities, and it is critical that Executive Principals continue to articulate a clear vision of the Strategy, ensure staff support, and prioritise high expectations for all students.

Effectiveness and stability of key roles is critical to the Strategy's success

Effective Executive Principals that remain in their role for a reasonable amount of time drive the commitment and adherence to the Strategy and prioritise high expectations for all students. Senior Leaders/Leaders Community Engagement and Executive Principals are also responsible for establishing and maintaining links between the school and service providers, and with the broader local community. Qualitative data suggests that Senior Leaders/Leaders Community Engagement were having positive impacts in some schools, however there are many teachers who still do not fully understand the role.

1. Background

The Connected Communities Strategy

The Connected Communities Strategy was launched on the 30th May 2012 and commenced implementation in schools in 2013. The Strategy aims to improve outcomes for students in 15 schools in some of the most complex and vulnerable communities in NSW². The Strategy is underpinned by a commitment to ongoing partnership with Aboriginal communities, supporting Aboriginal people to actively influence and fully participate in social, economic and cultural life, consistent with the NSW Government's plan for Aboriginal affairs, OCHRE³ (Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment).

The 15 Connected Communities schools are:

- Boggabilla Central School
- Bourke High School
- Bourke Public School
- Brewarrina Central School
- Coonamble High School
- Coonamble Public School
- Hillvue Public School
- Menindee Central School
- Moree East Public School
- Moree Secondary College
- Taree High School
- Taree Public School
- Toomelah Public School
- Walgett Community College
- Wilcannia Central School.

² All the schools chosen to take part in Connected Communities are located in the most disadvantaged postcodes in NSW based on 22 indicators of disadvantage including low family income, educational attainment, housing stress, unemployment, domestic and family violence, child maltreatment, adult and juvenile convictions, and student literacy and numeracy performance.

³ <https://www.aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au/our-agency/staying-accountable/ochre>

The Department of Education developed Connected Communities after extensive consultation, beginning in 2011, with the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG), principals' groups, the NSW Teachers Federation and community representatives. A map showing the location of the 11 communities in which the 15 schools are located is presented below (Figure 1).

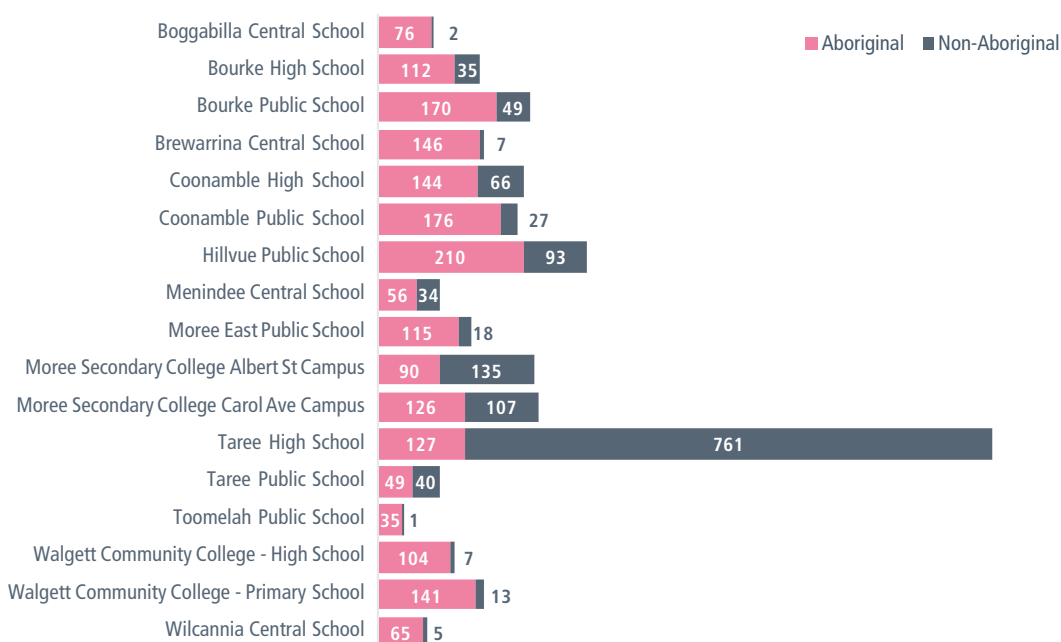
Figure 1:
Map of Connected
Communities Schools



Although the focus of Connected Communities is on Aboriginal students as the majority of schools are located in areas with a high Aboriginal population, the Strategy explicitly aims to improve outcomes for all students in participating schools. Enrolments in Connected Communities schools in 2017 are presented in Figure 2. In 2017, 42 per cent of Connected Communities students were non-Aboriginal. This figure drops to 26 per cent if Taree High School is excluded, where there are more non-Aboriginal students relative to the other schools.

Figure 2:
Full time equivalent
enrolments at
Connected Communities
Schools, 2017

Source: CESE



Note: Enrolments are sourced from the mid-year census conducted annually in August by the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation. Data were extracted in January 2018.

What is the Strategy?

The Strategy documentation underlined three guiding principles:

- effective leadership;
- good governance; and
- genuine community partnerships.

Effective Leadership

A key initiative under Connected Communities has been the creation of **Executive Principal** positions. Executive Principals are appointed by merit selection, and are tasked with achieving the key deliverables of the Strategy at their respective schools. Executive Principals are appointed on three-year contracts, with the possibility of extension to five years subject to satisfactory performance.

The Executive Principal roles are classified at a higher level than other principals due to the high level of leadership required, particularly with regard to family and community engagement, and the broader expectation to work more strategically with external organisations. Schools were primarily selected as Connected Communities schools based on a number of variables including sustained low levels of academic achievement; poor attendance; poor secondary retention and HSC participation, and inadequate parent and Community engagement and participation.

A key feature of the Strategy is that its implementation is driven by Executive Principals, with a focus on local language, culture and evidence-based development of programs to address local student need. This provides schools with the imprimatur and agility to respond quickly to identify and address tailored approaches to local issues.

Good Governance

At the commencement of the Strategy, Connected Communities Schools were grouped into a network that was overseen by the then Executive Director, Connected Communities and supported by a team in the department. Part way through the Strategy, this structure changed as individual Connected Communities schools came under the responsibility of the Director, Public Schools for the geographical area in which they were located. The Director, Connected Communities and the Aboriginal Education and Communities Directorate continue to support Executive Principals to implement the Strategy. This two-tiered support structure means that Connected Communities schools receive targeted support for operational matters at the local level as well as strategic support from the department.

Genuine Community Partnerships

Each participating school recruited a **Senior Leader/Leader Community Engagement**, which were newly recruited positions on the School Executive tasked with supporting the Executive Principal and school staff to implement Connected Communities. The Senior Leader/Leader Community Engagement role is intended to provide a link between the school and the community, and provide strategic advice regarding community engagement and matters in the community that could impact students and the school. Another key function of the Senior Leader/Leader Community Engagement is to provide executive support to the School Reference Group (see below).

Given the strategic mandate of the role, the Senior Leader/Leader Community Engagement classification has the requirement of Aboriginality, which is a legitimate occupational qualification under the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 (NSW)*. Senior Leaders/Leaders Community Engagement were supported by a Team Leader, Community Engagement within the Connected Communities Directorate.

Each Connected Communities school also has a School Reference Group to provide advice and support its implementation. These reference groups operate according to a Terms of Reference and are chaired by the Local AECG President. The core membership of School Reference Groups comprises:

- Two parents
- Two Aboriginal Elders or Aboriginal Community members
- Parents and Citizens (P&C) representative (or local AECG nominated member where a P&C doesn't operate locally)
- Executive Principal

The decision that local AECG Presidents be the Chairs of School Reference Groups acknowledged the partnership agreement between the department and the AECG and validated the key role the AECG played in the initiation and development of the Strategy⁴. Under that agreement, the AECG was recognised as the peak advisory and consultancy group to the department regarding the education and training needs of Aboriginal students.

School Reference Groups were established to help drive authentic school-community partnerships in the local design and implementation of Connected Communities. Reference Group members act as a conduit between the school and the sections of the community they represent, providing a forum for sections of the community to be informed about and contribute to school decisions. Reference Groups are not designed to be involved in 'day-to-day' operational decision making at schools; as with other NSW government schools this remains the responsibility of the principal.

In addition to School Reference Groups and Senior Leaders/Leaders Community Engagement, a feature of all Connected Communities schools is that they engage local Community members to work (in either a paid or voluntary capacity) with students and staff on specified activities and to provide cultural support and advice.

Chapter 5 provides more detail on the nature of the above roles, and the governance structures in Connected Communities schools.

Other key features

The Strategy has several other key components, including the following.

Cultural awareness training for staff

For staff to gain deeper knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal culture, histories and contemporary issues, all Connected Communities schools engage in *Connecting to Country* cultural immersion training and *Healthy Culture: Healthy Country* curriculum training, in conjunction with the NSW AECG. The goal is to support teachers to develop an understanding of Aboriginal cultures and histories, and provide learning and teaching that is engaging for Aboriginal students. This training is locally adapted under a common framework to ensure local relevance.

Teaching Aboriginal language and culture

Under *OCHRE* the NSW Government has committed to revitalising Aboriginal languages in NSW. Research shows connections between language and culture, and the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people. There are further potential benefits, including changing Aboriginal students' perceptions of schooling, and helping to promote a culture of mutual respect within the school community (Commonwealth of Australia 2012). International research has also demonstrated that bilingualism has cognitive and developmental benefits (Kovacs and Meller 2012).

During consultations undertaken by the Ministerial Taskforce in 2012, Aboriginal communities expressed the desire to give Aboriginal people the opportunity to learn their language as a mechanism to discover and maintain their personal and cultural identity. By teaching and valuing language and culture, Connected Communities aims to improve school engagement and improve educational outcomes for students by validating their sense of belonging and identity.

⁴ Together We Are, Together We Can, Together We Will is the 2010-2020 partnership agreement between the NSW AECG and the then NSW Department of Education and Training.

Focus on transitions into and out of school

The Connected Communities Strategy aims to support Aboriginal students and young people from birth through to their transition from school.

Early years focus

Connected Communities aims to support students to enter Kindergarten as confident learners with age appropriate socialisation and literacy and numeracy skills.

Connected Communities initially aimed to address the issue of preschool access through two related projects: The Connected Communities Early Childhood Education Fee Relief Project and the Connected Communities Early Childhood Education Infrastructure Project. Both were funded under the National Partnership Agreement for Early Childhood Education under which NSW committed to increasing access to preschool in at least the year before school for all students.

The Connected Communities Early Childhood Education Fee Relief Project aimed to provide fee relief payments to target increased preschool access and participation by disadvantaged families at six Connected Communities sites that did not already have access to a department-operated preschool. The Connected Communities Early Childhood Education Infrastructure Project provided \$3 million for the upgrade of existing community-based preschool facilities and teaching and learning spaces for young children and their families, and outreach assistance such as transport that directly supported student engagement in early childhood education. The funding was spread across the six sites without access to a department-operated preschool.

Further education and employment

Connected Communities reinforces that it is important for schools to work with their communities to create opportunities for further education and employment for students, thereby contributing to improved economic stability and 'breaking the cycle of disadvantage'. To support this aspect of Connected Communities, schools were encouraged to form partnerships with a university, TAFE Institute, other Registered Training Organisation, or local business to provide a smooth transition from school into further education or training opportunities.

Schools as a hub for service delivery

A 'schools as service hub' approach was articulated in the Strategy to address the needs of students in these communities. While various configurations are possible for a school to be a hub for service delivery, the intention was that Executive Principals identify the service and support requirements of students and their families, and then work with local government and non-government agencies to identify and broker available services and address any service gaps.

Similar models exist in other jurisdictions, most notably the 'Full Service Extended Schools' in the United Kingdom and the 'Extended Service School' model in the United States. Similar models also exist in Australia, including the Victorian 'Extended Service Schools' model for low SES locations implemented under the Smarter Schools National Partnership (Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2013).

Capital expenditure

The department allocated \$10 million in capital funding for refurbishments that improved Connected Communities schools under Phase 1 of the Connected Communities Asset and Facilities Strategy (CCAF). Under Phase 2 of the CCAF, \$25 million was allocated for school rebuilds or substantial improvements to Moree East Public School (\$15 million), Walgett Community College (High School) (\$7 million) and Brewarrina Central School (\$3 million).

Key deliverables of Connected Communities

The targets and priorities for Connected Communities were set out to align with priorities under the National Indigenous Reform Agreement, NSW 2021, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014 (ATSIEAP) and OCHRE. As outlined in the Connected Communities Strategy⁵, the key deliverables for Connected Communities are:

1. Aboriginal students are increasingly developmentally ready to benefit from schooling - in their physical health, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills and communication.
2. Aboriginal families and community members are actively engaged in the school.
3. Attendance rates for Aboriginal students are equal to the state average.
4. Aboriginal students are increasingly achieving at or above national minimum standards and overall levels of literacy and numeracy achievement are improving.
5. Aboriginal students are staying at school until Year 12 (or equivalent training).
6. Aboriginal students are transitioning from school into post school training and employment.
7. Aboriginal parents and carers report that service delivery from the school site is flexible and responsive to their needs.
8. Aboriginal students and communities report that the school values their identity, culture, goals and aspirations.
9. Staff report that professional learning opportunities build their capacity to personalise their teaching to meet the learning needs of all students in their class.
10. Staff report that professional learning opportunities build their cultural understandings and connections with the community.

The key deliverables serve as the indicators of success that are used in this evaluation.

Evaluation of Connected Communities

The evaluation of Connected Communities commenced in 2014. The evaluation aims to answer the following questions:

1. How well has the model of the Connected Communities Strategy been formed and implemented, and what variation exists across schools?
2. What are the outcomes and impact of the Connected Communities Strategy?
3. Does the Connected Communities Strategy deliver value for money?

The focus of this final evaluation report is on the second evaluation question, the outcomes and impacts of the Strategy, and we have included a range of data in this report describing the impact of Connected Communities on its intended outcomes. The Connected Communities interim report, published in 2016⁶, focused on the implementation of the Strategy. The question of whether and how to answer the third evaluation question will be determined subsequent to future funding decisions.

We describe the outcomes of Connected Communities in general or 'Strategy-wide' terms, as the scope of the evaluation was to determine the overall impact across all schools. However, the way the Strategy has been implemented, and how successful it has been, also varies across the 15 schools and 11 communities. Indeed, local flexibility was a strength of the Strategy given the varied context in which it operated. Our goal is to consider this variation where possible, while still providing a robust assessment against the evaluation questions overall.

⁵ <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/aec/media/documents/connectedcommunitiesstrategy.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.cese.nsw.gov.au/publications-filter/connected-communities-strategy-interim-evaluation-report>

This report

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 2** provides a brief overview of the methods used in the evaluation (with further detail available in the appendices).
- **Chapters 3 to 5** provide an in-depth discussion of the findings, in particular the impact of Connected Communities on:
 - student development, achievement and attainment (relating to Deliverables 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6 of the Strategy)
 - student engagement and wellbeing (relating to Deliverable 8 of the Strategy)
 - families, communities and schools (relating to Deliverable 2, 7, 9 and 10 of the Strategy).
- **Chapter 6** provides a summary and discussion of the evaluation findings.
- **Chapter 7** presents a list of references used in the report.
- **Appendices 1 and 2** present technical details regarding the NAPLAN analysis.
- **Appendix 3** presents technical details regarding the analysis of the NSW Survey of Secondary Students' Post-School Destinations.

2. The evaluation

We used a large range of quantitative and qualitative data sources to investigate the evaluation questions. These included extensive consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, a series of surveys and various administrative datasets. An Evaluation Reference Group provided guidance and advice on the evaluation activities over the course of the project. The data sources and analysis methods are described briefly below.

Stakeholder consultations

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) researchers visited each of the 15 Connected Communities schools and communities in 2017 for between 3 and 5 days in each location.

During site visits, CESE conducted face-to-face interviews or small group discussions with the following stakeholders:

- Executive Principals
- Senior Leader/Leader Community Engagement
- members of the School Executive
- teachers
- Aboriginal Education Officers (AEOs)
- Student Learning and Support Officers (SLSOs)
- school administration staff
- School reference group members
- P&C representatives and other parents
- Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community leaders, and
- service providers.

The project team also conducted phone or face-to-face interviews with departmental staff and the President of the NSW AECG.

Overall, CESE staff conducted 187 individual and group interviews for the evaluation. Interviews were semi-structured and used a range of tailored discussion guides. Interviews and group discussions were recorded with the agreement of interview participants, otherwise notes were taken during interviews. Project team members developed a coding framework with which to thematically analyse the interview data by the key deliverables of Connected Communities.

The researchers conducted the consultations in adherence with best-practice guidelines on ethical research in Indigenous communities (AIATSIS 2012, AH&MRC 2016).

Surveys

Data was obtained from students, parents/carers and teachers from Connected Communities schools through a series of surveys, outlined below.

Survey of students

The *Tell Them From Me* student survey is an 'opt-in' survey of students in NSW conducted during Term 1 in each year, with an optional follow-up wave during Term 3 (data from the Term 3 wave has not been used in this report). *Tell Them From Me* was administered online at Connected Communities schools between 2014 and 2017 (for more information about *Tell Them From Me* refer to CESE 2014a). The survey includes a range of measures relating to student engagement and wellbeing. For the evaluation, we included two additional questions in *Tell Them From Me* to measure student perceptions of cultural safety at their school. These were derived from the work by Craven (2013), who developed several survey items for Aboriginal students. The additional survey questions were:

1. 'I feel good about my culture when I am at school'
2. 'My teachers have a good understanding of my culture'

Initial analysis revealed that the numbers of Connected Communities students and schools participating in *Tell Them From Me* had dropped in recent years; in particular that a large Connected Communities secondary school did not participate in the Term 1 survey in 2017, which caused a large reduction in overall number of participating students. To ensure that changes in results seen over time were not the result of different schools taking the survey, in our analysis we included data from five secondary schools and seven primary schools that administered the survey in each year between 2015 and 2017 (see Table 1).

Table 1:

Tell Them From Me survey data included in analyses (Term 1), 2015-2017

Year	No. of Connected Communities secondary student responses included in analysis	No. of Connected Communities primary student responses included in analysis
2015	510	261
2016	451	262
2017	495	306

Note: Numbers refer to the Snapshot 1 survey (taken in Term 1 of each year).

Survey of parents/carers

We conducted surveys of parents/carers across all Connected Communities schools in Term 4, 2014 and Term 3, 2017. The survey was designed to capture information about the level of family involvement in their child's education. The survey items were derived from a framework developed by Epstein (2016).

The methodology for the 2014 survey is described in the Connected Communities interim evaluation report. In 2017, the survey was conducted by Ipsos, who surveyed 851 parents using computer assisted telephone interviewing (CATI). Twenty-one parents completed the survey twice as they had students attending two Connected Communities schools, resulting in 872 completed interviews.

Ipsos attempted a total of five call backs for each correct phone number. Ipsos was unable to reach a relatively large proportion (17%) of parents or carers via the phone because their numbers were disconnected or incorrect.

Following completion of the CATI fieldwork, Ipsos conducted 94 additional face-to-face interviews in the five locations with the lowest response rates from parents or carers of Aboriginal students. Members of Ipsos' Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Unit conducted these interviews. All interviewers were from the Western NSW area and had appropriate cultural connections in the communities in which they conducted interviews. Interviewers spent one to two weeks in each location between 15th October 2017 and 14th December 2017.

Table 2:

Completed surveys of parents/carers and method, 2017 survey

	Total parent sample	CATI interviews undertaken	Aboriginal CATI interviews	Non-Aboriginal CATI interviews	Face-to-face interviews undertaken	Total interviews undertaken	Total response rate
Boggabilla Central School	33	9	8	1	6	15	45%
Bourke High School	98	25	10	19	37	62	63%
Bourke Public School	114	50	18	32	-	50	44%
Brewarrina Central School	72	19	17	2	26	45	63%
Coonamble High School	139	59	29	30	-	59	42%
Coonamble Public School	89	34	26	8	-	34	38%
Hillvue Public School	167	69	36	33	-	69	41%
Menindee Central School	57	22	9	13	-	22	39%
Moree East Public School	69	20	15	5	-	20	29%
Moree Secondary College	345	158	54	104	-	158	46%
Taree High School	635	335	31	304	-	335	53%
Taree Public School	46	16	10	6	-	16	35%
Toomelah Public School	17	-	-	-	15	15	88%
Walgett Community College	138	48	30	18	-	48	35%
Wilcannia Central School	36	8	5	3	10	18	50%
Total	2055	872	298	578	94	966	47%

Research has previously identified the existence of a 'mode' effect, where different survey modes (e.g. CATI, face-to-face) have an impact on how people respond (Vannieuwenhuyze 2010). In this instance, it is possible that any differences between responses using different survey modes could in fact have been driven by underlying differences between those who responded to the CATI survey and those who undertook a face-to-face interview, rather than being an effect of survey mode. Nevertheless, we investigated whether the responses of parents/carers to this survey varied by mode, by comparing the CATI and face-to-face responses from parents/carers from the same schools. We found no evidence of systematic differences between these two modes of survey responses.

Survey of teachers

We conducted two waves of an online survey for teachers at Connected Communities schools; the first in May and June 2015, and the second in November and December 2017. All teachers at all schools were invited to participate in both waves of the survey. The survey instrument was identical in both waves and included questions regarding access to professional learning; the impact of cultural immersion activities; teachers' understanding of Connected Communities and the support available to implement it; teachers' ability and support to personalise student learning; parent and student engagement⁷; and students' developmental readiness for learning. Teachers who identified as teaching at schools since at least 2013 were also asked in both waves about changes at their school since the start of Connected Communities.

In 2017, the final sample included 163 Connected Communities teachers. This represented a response rate of 37 per cent. A lower response rate such as this increases the risk of non-response bias (the error resulting from underlying differences between those who responded to the survey and those who did not). Table 3 shows the number of responses by school.

Table 3:
Response rates for
survey of teachers, 2015
and 2017

	2015		2017	
	Responses	Response rate	Responses	Response rate
Boggabilla Central School	14	78%	8	44%
Bourke High School	13	57%	7	30%
Bourke Public School	23	96%	-	-
Brewarrina Central School	10	40%	13	52%
Coonamble High School	14	41%	13	38%
Coonamble Public School	13	46%	10	36%
Hillvue Public School	11	33%	10	30%
Menindee Central School	9	50%	7	39%
Moree East Public School	-	-	7	39%
Moree Secondary College Albert St Campus	39	58%	28	42%
Taree High School	26	36%	25	35%
Taree Public School	6	46%	-	-
Toomelah Public School	-	-	-	-
Walgett Community College – High School	20	51%	19	49%
Wilcannia Central School	10	53%	7	37%
Total	213	47%	163	37%

Note: Numbers of responses have been suppressed where less than five per school.

In our analysis of the survey data we have reported response frequencies, cross tabulations, and 95 per cent confidence intervals. The 95 per cent confidence intervals included in this report account for the fact that we have surveyed only samples of respondents (of teachers, parents/carers and students). As such, there is uncertainty around how confident we can be in making inferences to the broader populations. The 95 per cent confidence intervals indicate a range of plausible values for the statistic of interest (e.g. population percentage), given the information available (including sample size and variance). In the report, we estimate results for the broader populations (of teachers, parents/carers and students) rather than referring to 'surveyed parents/carers', as we are making inferences to the broader populations.

⁷ Measures of parent/carer involvement were based on the work of Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2002) as part of the Teachers Involving Parents project.

Administrative data

This report includes data from the following administrative datasets.

Table 4:

Details of administrative data used in the evaluation

Data	Source	Notes
School enrolments	National Schools Statistics Collection (NSSC) data cube, held by Statistics and Analysis Unit, CESE.	Enrolments are based on a midyear census undertaken in August by the Statistics and Analysis Unit, CESE. For the purposes of NSW reporting, only students in Year 11 and 12 may be part-time. Hence there is no difference between 'full-time' and 'full-time equivalent' (FTE) enrolments for grades K-10 or ungraded year groups in NSW government schools.
School attendance	Return of absences census conducted in the final week of term two by the Statistics and Analysis Unit, CESE.	Distance education and Schools for Specific Purposes (SSPs) do not participate in the absences collection.
National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)	Statistics and Analysis Unit, CESE NAPLAN data cube.	Further information on the NAPLAN assessment is available from: http://www.nap.edu.au
Higher School Certificate (HSC) awards	Statistics and Analysis Unit, CESE	Sourced in February each year.
Year 10-12 full-time equivalent apparent retention rates.	Statistics and Analysis Unit, CESE	Retention rates are calculated from enrolment data and are 'apparent' as they do not track individual students through their final years of secondary schooling. They measure the ratio of the total FTE of students in a designated year (i.e. Year 12 in 2014) divided by the total FTE of students in a previous year (i.e. Year 10 in 2012).

For the analysis of administrative data we used a range of modelling techniques. These are as described in further detail in Appendices 1, 2, and 3.

This report contains analyses on data up to August 2018. Appendix 4 contains data from 2009 to 2019 (where available) for all Connected Communities schools across a range of indicators related to the Strategy's key deliverables.

Document analysis

We reviewed program documentation and other reports to gain contextual information and to help us to address the evaluation questions. These documents included:

- Strategy documents
- school reports to the department Secretary and Minister
- other Cabinet Minutes and Briefings
- the final report on Connected Communities delivered by the Department Audit Directorate in 2014
- other relevant documents related to key features of Connected Communities; school newsletters; and social media content.

3. Evaluation findings: Student development, achievement and attainment

In this chapter (the first of three results chapters) we describe the findings of the evaluation in terms of NAPLAN achievement, school attendance and Year 12 completion. These indicators relate to the following deliverables of Connected Communities:

- Aboriginal students are increasingly achieving at or above national minimum standards and overall levels of literacy and numeracy achievement are improving.
- Aboriginal students are increasingly developmentally ready to benefit from schooling - in their physical health, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills and communication.
- Attendance rates for Aboriginal students are equal to the state average.
- Aboriginal students are staying at school until Year 12 (or equivalent training).
- Aboriginal students are transitioning from school into post school training and employment.

The evidence suggests that the effects of Connected Communities on NAPLAN results are mixed

The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) is an annual assessment for students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. NAPLAN tests the sorts of skills that are essential for every child to progress through school and life: reading, writing, spelling and numeracy. NAPLAN assessments are undertaken nationwide, in the second full week in May each year.

Connected Communities Deliverable 4: Aboriginal students are increasingly achieving at or above national minimum standards, and overall levels of literacy and numeracy achievement are improving.

According to the Australia Curriculum and Reporting Authority, NAPLAN measures some of the knowledge and skills that students should be able to demonstrate at each scholastic year⁸. While NAPLAN tests are intended to complement other formal and informal assessments, they provide a standardised measure of student progress that can be used to inform teaching practice and education policy.

We aimed to estimate the effect of Connected Communities on students' Reading and Numeracy NAPLAN scores. We examined these two measures as Reading is highly correlated with the other literacy measures included in NAPLAN (Writing, Spelling and Grammar), and is a critical foundational skill for students. Specifically, we estimated the effect of the Strategy across three different growth periods:

1. Kindergarten⁹ to Year 3 NAPLAN;
2. Year 3 NAPLAN to Year 5 NAPLAN; and
3. Year 7 NAPLAN to Year 9 NAPLAN.

To effectively isolate the impact of Connected Communities, we compared the NAPLAN scores for students in Connected Communities schools to students from a similar group of schools that were not part of the Strategy. For our comparison group, we used focus schools from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan (ATSIEAP) that were not part of the Connected Communities Strategy. The targets and priorities for these schools were broadly similar to those for Connected Communities schools, and all Connected Communities schools were focus schools in the ATSIEAP.

⁸ See <http://nap.edu.au>

⁹ Students' Best Start-informed achievement on the department's Literacy and Numeracy Continua formed the baseline achievement measures for Kindergarten.

While we considered the comparison schools to be the most similar to those that participated in Connected Communities Strategy, we still accounted for differences across the two groups of schools in our analyses by using propensity scores to weight the data from the comparison schools. We were able to show that this procedure produced groups of students who had:

- similar baseline literacy and numeracy scores;
- similar expected outcomes;
- similar levels of socio-educational advantage;
- similar rates of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students;
- similar rates of male students; and
- similar rates of students from non-English speaking backgrounds.

The difference between the mean outcome for Connected Communities students and the weighted mean outcome for the comparison students represents the estimated average treatment effect on the 'treated' (i.e. the 'pure' impact of the Strategy).

Student Cohorts

We used data from two student cohorts to estimate the effect of Connected Communities:

1. Students who completed the relevant baseline and outcome assessments before the implementation of the Strategy (the 'pre-implementation' group). Kindergarten students in this cohort took their baseline assessments in 2010 and their outcome assessment in 2013 (when they were in Year 3). Year 3 and 7 students in this cohort took their baseline assessments in 2011 and their outcome assessments in 2013 (when they were in Year 5 and 9 respectively).
2. Students who completed the relevant baseline and outcome assessments after the implementation of the Strategy (the 'post-implementation' group). Kindergarten students in this cohort took their baseline assessments in 2014 and their outcome assessment in 2017. Year 3 and 7 students in this cohort took their baseline assessments in 2014 and their outcome assessments in 2016 (when they were in Year 5 and 9 respectively).

It was important for us to use the data from the pre-implementation group to predict the outcomes for those students in the post-implementation group because different schools 'grow' their students at different rates. By predicting the expected outcomes for the students in the post-implementation group, we could control for both pre-existing differences at baseline and pre-existing differences in expected growth. This resulted in a more robust estimate of the impact of Connected Communities.

There is moderate evidence to suggest that Connected Communities had a positive effect on Year 3 NAPLAN outcomes

The results from our analysis indicate that those students who were fully exposed to Connected Communities from Kindergarten to Year 3 scored around 36 points higher (95% CI [-10, 82]) on average on their Year 3 Numeracy assessments, and around 31 points higher (95% CI [-16, 78]) on average on their Year 3 Reading assessments than they would have had the Strategy not been in place. In terms of standardised mean differences, these results represent small to medium effects (d numeracy = 0.49; d reading = 0.38)¹⁰. Furthermore, the results from our analysis indicate that the percentage of students achieving below national minimum standards on their Year 3 Numeracy and Year 3 Reading assessments decreased by around 19 percentage points (95% CI [-42, 3]) and 22 percentage points (95% CI [-47, 3]), respectively.

It should be noted that these results were largely driven by one school to the extent that the effect disappears if that school is excluded (see Appendix 1 for details).

¹⁰ According to Cohen (1988), standardised effect sizes between 0 and 0.2 represent trivial effects, between 0.2 and 0.5 represent small effects, between 0.5 and 0.8 represent medium effects, and above 0.8 represent large effects. However, it is important to note that these classifications are somewhat arbitrary and do not consider the consequences of the effects.

There is little evidence to suggest that Connected Communities had a positive effect on Year 5 or Year 9 NAPLAN outcomes

The results from our analysis indicate that the students who were exposed to Connected Communities from Year 3 to Year 5 scored around 4 points higher (95% CI [-16, 24]) on average on their Year 5 Numeracy assessments and around 9 points lower (95% CI [-33, 15]) on average on their Year 5 Reading assessments than they would have had the Strategy not been in place. In terms of standardised mean differences, these results represent very small effects (d numeracy = 0.07; d reading = -0.12).

Students who were exposed to the Connected Communities Strategy from Year 7 to Year 9 scored 5 points higher (95% CI [-18, 28]) on average on their Year 9 Numeracy assessments and around 3 points higher (95% CI [-22, 29]) on average on their Year 9 Reading assessments than they would have had the Strategy not been in place. In terms of standardised mean differences, these results represent very small effects (d numeracy = 0.08; d reading = 0.04).

It should be noted that these results were largely driven by one school to the extent that the point estimates for the Year 9 NAPLAN Numeracy and Reading assessments increases from 5 to 29 and from 3 to 30, respectively, if that school is excluded (see Appendix 1 for details).

School staff reported the positive impact of Instructional Leaders

Through the Early Action for Success Strategy¹¹ (EAFS), all Connected Communities schools with K-2 enrolments were provided with a dedicated Instructional Leader position – above the level of funding support provided for other comparable EAFS schools. Instructional Leaders were responsible for building the capacity and confidence of classroom teachers in teaching literacy and numeracy, using data to monitor students' academic capacity and attainment. This process of monitoring student progress, targeting professional development, personalising teaching practices and reassessing student achievement was carried out continuously through the K-2 stages. It was also used to inform students' Personalised Learning Plans. School staff reported that the quality of instructional leadership in their schools had improved, and as a result their own teaching practices had improved (see also Figure 23).

We do a lot of work together and mentoring with our instructional leader... In our office we have a data wall, so we can see all our students and we can see who is needing support and that kind of stuff. (Teacher, primary school)

It's helped me with my teaching, to be able to pull students out of different levels... looking at data, seeing where they need to go, and then creating lessons together. It's more of a collaborative approach, all together. We're all working as a team, and that's what [our instructional leader] has a big thing about: being a team. (Teacher, primary school)

It's not, 'Why are you doing this?' it's, 'Let's just change that.' Instead of saying, 'That's not what you should be doing,' it's, 'Let's just focus on this.' It's a more positive and collaborative approach. (Teacher, primary school)

School staff also reported the value of instructional leadership on both relatively inexperienced or beginning teachers, as well as more experienced teachers.

We have a very young staff base now who are fresh and open to ideas, and they've been moulded well by the instructional leaders. (Senior Leader Community Engagement, primary school)

Whether you've been here 10 years or five years or you're a new teacher, it has a very positive effect. She's lifted my game and I've been teaching for yonks. I've learned so much through her. (Teacher, primary school)

Summary

In summary, there is moderate evidence to suggest that Connected Communities had a positive effect on Year 3 NAPLAN outcomes and little evidence to suggest that it had a positive effect on Year 5 or Year 9 NAPLAN outcomes. Please note that one important limitation of this analysis is that the estimates are highly variable due to the low number of students who were exposed to the Strategy. This means that we would expect variable, albeit broadly similar, results if the study was repeated again with similar schools and students.

¹¹ Early Action for Success is the Department of Education's strategy for implementing the NSW Government's State Literacy and Numeracy Plan. It aims to improve students' literacy and numeracy skills through a targeted approach in the early years of schooling. An evaluation of EAFS is due for completion in 2020.

There is strong evidence to suggest that student attendance increased following the introduction of Connected Communities, but only for primary school students.

In addition to academic achievement, the Strategy also aims to increase attendance rates for Aboriginal students. School attendance is considered a critical outcome for Aboriginal students. It is one of the seven national Closing the Gap targets and has also been targeted through the Commonwealth Government's Remote Schools Attendance Strategy. Research shows links between attendance and other outcomes; average academic achievement (measured by NAPLAN test scores) declines with increasing rates of school absence, and particularly so for Aboriginal, low socioeconomic status or remote students (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2013). School staff and community members frequently raised student attendance as a major issue of concern during our site visits.

Connected Communities Deliverable 3: Attendance rates for Aboriginal students are equal to the state average.

To investigate changes in attendance since the introduction of Connected Communities, we used school-level attendance data from 2009 to 2017. We compared mean attendance rates in Connected Communities schools during the years before (2009-2012) and after (2013-2017) the implementation of the Strategy, with the mean attendance rates for a group of comparison schools (again we used the focus schools from the ATSIEAP). We analysed data separately for primary and secondary schools. We also investigated the differences across schools for Aboriginal students only.

It is important to point out that our analysis of the attendance data is inherently descriptive and does not fully isolate the effect of the Strategy. While student-level data (e.g. NAPLAN outcomes) allows the differences between the students who attended Connected Communities schools and comparison schools to be controlled in statistical analyses, school-level data does not afford a sufficiently rich set of statistical controls. This means that the results of our analysis must be interpreted with caution.

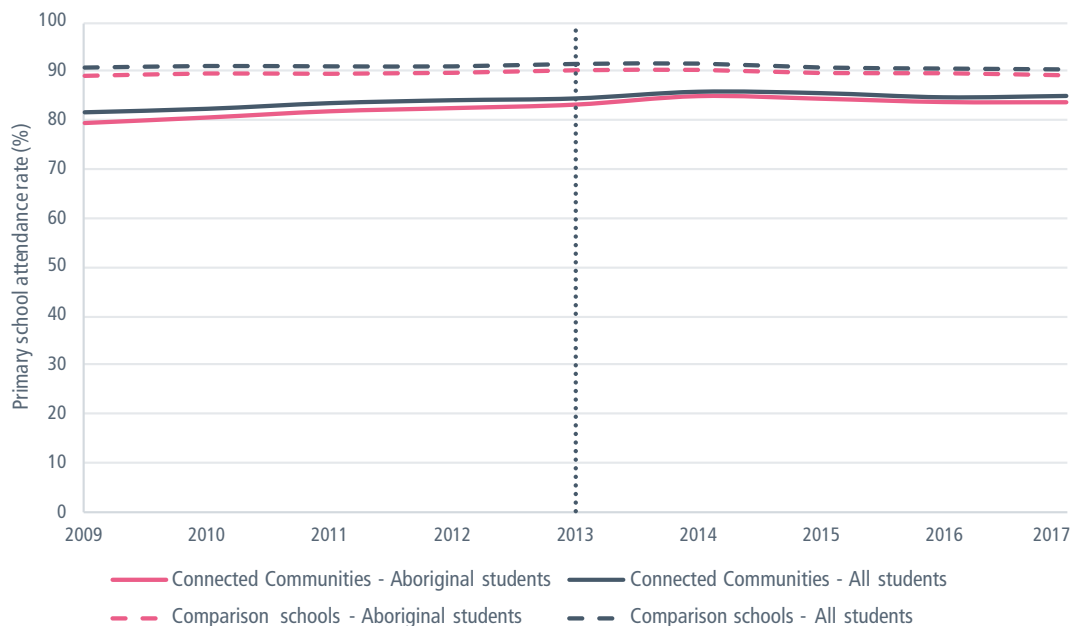
We present the yearly attendance rates for primary students attending comparison and Connected Communities schools in Figure 3. Our analysis shows that the average attendance rate for all primary students in comparison schools decreased by around 0.01 percentage points (95% CI [-0.3, 0.2]) after the introduction of the Strategy. In Connected Communities schools, however, the average attendance rate for all primary students increased by around 2.3 percentage points (95% CI [0.0, 4.6]). This means that the gap in attendance rates for all primary students across comparison and Connected Communities schools decreased by around 2.3 percentage points (95% CI [-4.6, 0.0]). These findings are consistent with a positive effect of Connected Communities, but do not provide direct evidence that the observed changes were caused by the Strategy due to the unavailability of student-level data.

The results from our analysis also show that the average attendance rate for Aboriginal students in comparison schools increased by around 0.5 percentage points (95% CI [0.1, 1.0]) after the introduction of the Strategy. In Connected Communities schools, however, the average attendance rate for Aboriginal students increased by around 3.0 percentage points (95% CI [0.6, 5.5]). This means that the gap in attendance rates for Aboriginal students across comparison and Connected Communities schools decreased by around 2.5 percentage points (95% CI [-5.0, 0.0]).

Figure 3:

Attendance rates for primary students in Connected Communities schools and comparison schools, 2009-2017

Source: Return of absences census, CESE Statistics and Analysis Unit



Note: The vertical dotted line indicates the year in which the Connected Communities Strategy came into effect. Attendance rates were calculated as the sum of the total number of attended days divided by the sum of the total number of enrolled days across all schools in the group of interest. Distance education and SSPs do not participate in the absences collection.

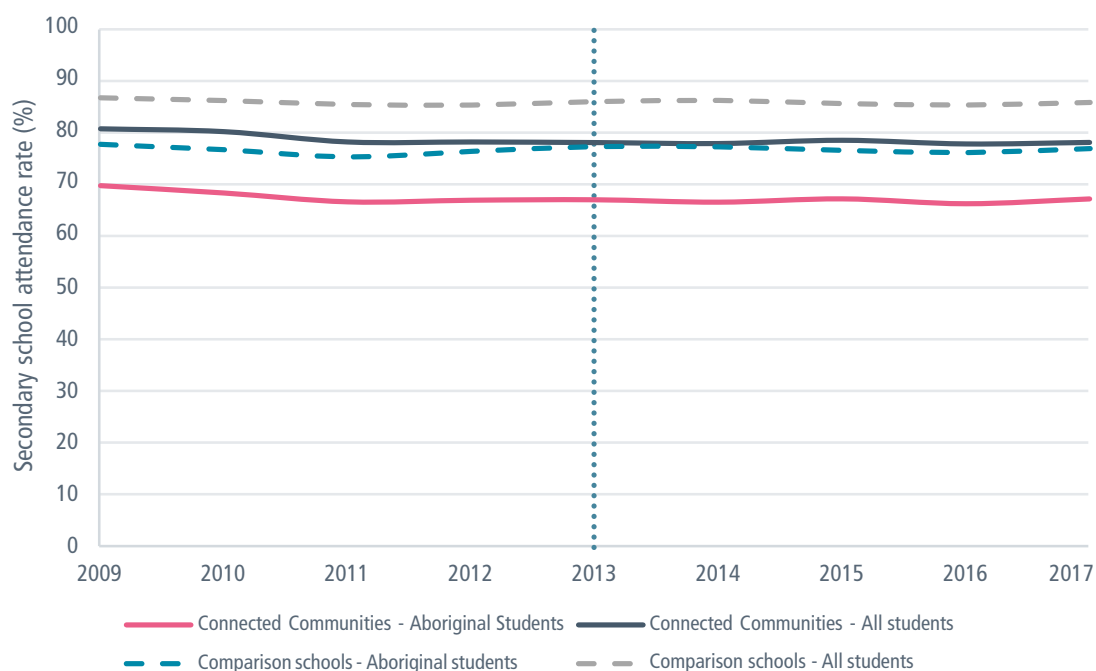
We present the results for secondary students in Figure 4 below. Our analysis shows that the average attendance rate for all secondary students in comparison schools decreased by around 0.1 percentage points (95% CI [-0.7, 0.5]) after the introduction of the Strategy. In Connected Communities schools, however, the average attendance rate for all secondary students decreased by around 1.3 percentage points (95% CI [-3.7, 1.0]). This means that the gap in attendance rates for secondary students across comparison and Connected Communities schools increased by around 1.2 percentage points (95% CI [-3.7, 1.2]).

The results from our analysis also show that the average attendance rate for Aboriginal secondary students in comparison schools increased by around 0.3 percentage points (95% CI [-1.1, 1.7]) after the introduction of the Strategy. In Connected Communities schools, however, the average attendance rate for Aboriginal secondary students decreased by around 1.1 percentage points (95% CI [-5.5, 3.4]). This means that the gap in attendance rates for Aboriginal secondary students across comparison and Connected Communities schools increased by around 1.3 percentage points (95% CI [-6.0, 3.3]).

Figure 4:

Attendance rates for secondary students in Connected Communities schools and comparison schools, 2009-2017

Source: Return of absences census, CESE Statistics and Analysis Unit



Note: The vertical dotted line indicates the year in which the Connected Communities Strategy came into effect. Attendance rates were calculated as the sum of the total number of attended days divided by the sum of the total number of enrolled days across all schools. Distance education and SSPs do not participate in the absences collection.

Barriers to improving school attendance and strategies to improve attendance

Attendance rates vary greatly between Connected Communities schools. School staff described the issues they had regarding attendance and the strategies they used to try to address these issues.

Many interview participants felt that staff engagement with parents and families had the potential to increase attendance (see Chapter 5 for further discussion on community engagement). Senior Leaders/ Leaders Community Engagement and Aboriginal Education Officers reported the positive impact of visiting families in their homes to talk to parents/carers, or follow up on absences. In some schools, support staff sent text messages to parents to advise whether their child was at school that day. Some schools also provided transport to help students get to school.

In other cases, officers from the Australian Government's Remote School Attendance Strategy were also active in picking students up and taking them to school. However, an interim evaluation of the Remote School Attendance Strategy found no evidence that the program was having a positive impact on attendance at the NSW schools where it operated¹².

¹² The Remote School Attendance Strategy started is a Commonwealth program that began in 2014, and operates in schools and communities across New South Wales, Western Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory. More information is available at: <https://www.niaa.gov.au/indigenous-affairs/education/remote-school-attendance-strategy> The interim progress report for the Remote School Attendance Strategy is available at: <https://www.niaa.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/remote-school-attendance-strategy-interim-progress-report.docx>

One of the greatest perceived drivers of attendance was parental views and attitudes towards the school and to education in general. Some school staff felt that some parents/carers did not value their students' education, while others did their utmost to see their students achieve positive outcomes. It is important to note that complex factors drive parental attitudes, including poor educational experiences for many parents and grandparents themselves.

Some schools had success providing incentives to students to attend school. These rewards varied from excursions to the local pool to holidays. However, some school staff disagreed with the concept of incentivising students.

I mean, how could you take students away for a week and not have an English lesson? That is just beyond my thoughts as a parent, and the same with Clontarf Foundation: it's supposed to get them there at school for attendance, but interfering with these kids' education. How are you supposed to give these kids an education if they've gone away, or playing football? The thing is, yes, they are good programs. Could they be done outside of school? Why does it have to interfere with school? Why do we have to reward these kids to come and get an education? (Teacher, central school)

In addition, some interview participants discussed the fact that attempting to re-engage students who weren't ready or suited for school, had experienced long absences, or for whom there wasn't adequate support, could be counterproductive:

We're chasing kids that are so disengaged and so violent in the community, enticing them back because it makes us look good, when they're not ready. I've got what agencies need to help us to do that. You know we need Juvenile Justice to do a program with them about the drugs and alcohol before they start re-engaging. But, you know if we get them back in the school for just a couple of hours a day, we get a massive high five, do you know what I mean? (School counsellor, central school)

Interview participants suggested various strategies to address this issue such as closer collaboration with other departments or agencies (such as NSW Health or Juvenile Justice NSW), dedicated reintegration services or other programs. As noted in following chapters, the department has attempted to increase collaboration by setting up a high level interagency group and an interagency framework to support schools to facilitate services and schools have worked at the community level to facilitate local linkages.

Finally, interviewees cited the impact that unsettled home lives, particularly due to drug and alcohol misuse, domestic violence and unstable living conditions, had on students' attendance. School staff were acutely aware of the effect that a bad night at home could have on a student's attendance or engagement the following day.

Summary

School attendance is crucial to successful educational outcomes. There appears to have been an improvement in attendance among Aboriginal primary students across Connected Communities schools, with no improvement among secondary-aged students, compared to our comparison group schools.

Some students are still not prepared for school, but the focus on early childhood is having an impact

Connected Communities aimed to support students to enter Kindergarten as confident learners, with age appropriate socialisation and literacy and numeracy skills. It did this by improving access to preschool through two related projects: The Early Childhood Education Fee Relief Project and the Early Childhood Education Infrastructure Project.

Connected Communities Deliverable 1: Aboriginal students are increasingly developmentally ready to benefit from schooling - in their physical health, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills and communication.

The Early Childhood Education Fee Relief Project aimed to provide fee relief payments to increase preschool access and participation by disadvantaged families at six Connected Communities sites that did not already have access to a department-operated preschool. The Early Childhood Education Infrastructure Project provided \$3 million for the upgrade of existing community-based preschool facilities and teaching and learning spaces for young children and their families, and outreach assistance such as transport that directly supports student engagement in early childhood education.

Apart from these projects, all Connected Communities primary and central schools were expected to set up a transition program in their schools to engage preschool-age students in the year before starting school. Preschool and transition-to-school programs are an important component of the Connected Communities approach. According to interview participants, these had a dual purpose: to help young students become comfortable with the school environment and with learning behaviours (e.g. sitting down and paying attention to the teacher); and to help schools become 'student ready' through early identification of any teaching or learning needs. They also help parents and family members to connect with the school, and to know how they can support and encourage their children.

School staff felt that many students were not developmentally ready to benefit from learning

Some school staff indicated that many were not beginning school developmentally ready to learn. They felt that students' emotional and social maturity was not always at a level conducive to learning, and that students lacked foundational levels of aptitude. This lack of developmental readiness could manifest itself in poor behaviour or socialisation, or physical issues such as poor fine motor skills or speech issues.

So, in first term in Kindergarten I always say, because of the trauma and because of the other backgrounds that these students come from, they come to the school not ready to start school, and we have got to give them the foundations for learning and wanting to learn. That's not pushing kids to read and write in first term in Kindergarten, because they don't have the language. They don't have the vocabulary. They don't have those sorts of skills. However, department policy states that these kids should be along the continuum by such and such a date. I say, no. Back off and let them learn how to be kids first. Let them learn how to become social, to interact with each other, to share. (Teacher, primary school)

School staff provided us a range of reasons they thought might explain this: most commonly, environmental factors associated with disadvantage such as a challenging home life and broader social issues in the community.

I think the town really impacts on if they're developmentally ready, like with the low socioeconomic Indigenous backgrounds and all that sort of thing. I think that impacts greatly on their developmental readiness for school – but that's not to say that that's an excuse, or that they can't achieve great things at school. (Deputy Principal, central school)

School staff sometimes perceived that home environments that were not conducive to students' development reflected a lack of parental interest or investment in education in general. Staff and community members shared with us their impression that for many in the community, education was considered the domain of the school only, and not the responsibility of parents or carers.

Sometimes I think we're just a glorified day care. (Home School Liaison Officer, secondary school)

What I'm seeing is more like babysitting. 'Send your kid to school for the day, that's it, they're at school... they can deal with them.' That's the perception we get off the parents. (Aboriginal Education Officer, primary school)

Some school staff also felt that some parents were resistant to delaying their child's entry to school or to repeating a year if their child was deemed to be not developmentally ready. It is possible that such preferences were driven by a sense of 'shame' (lack of confidence, embarrassment or negative attention), on behalf of parents.

Sometimes when the preschool has said, 'I really think they would benefit from another year of preschool,' or when - because we do a kinder start - we do a transition program as well and we've often said maybe another year at preschool would be good, because they are not socially ready, they're not ready in any circumstance. But since they hit school age, or because all their brothers and sisters are at school, or cousins or whatever, they need to come to school. Which is a bit of a hurdle. Then they think that you're having a go at their parenting style and all that, which is not the case. It's just that they are certainly not ready for school.' (Deputy Principal, primary school)

I'm really concerned about how old the kids are when they're coming and I feel as though there needs to be something put in place that gives the school some security if we think they need to be repeated ... because there are lot of kids that are four in June, which is so young and there are kids 18 months older than them. Or if they've missed so much school because of their attendance and we've said, 'You need to repeat.'... Parents just say flat out, 'I'm not repeating.' The kids have their little friendship group and they think that repeating them is a bad thing. There's a stigma about it. (Teacher, primary school)

School staff also noted the impact of transience on school readiness. Sometimes students would enrol at a school with limited notice, affecting teachers' ability to prepare adequately for them, including adapting lessons to their ability. Alternatively, staff also told us that students sometimes left town for extended periods with their family, such as for sorry business, and could find themselves behind academically when they returned to school. This was related to the remoteness of some communities and the efforts that families would have to go to travel between them.

Preschool and the transition to school model appear to be having a positive effect

Despite these concerns about school readiness, staff reported a strong positive impact of the early years transition models. School staff could see clear benefits from higher rates of preschool attendance, and made the point that the transition-to-school model helped students understand how to engage, behave and interact in a classroom.

So, we get a child...who turns up and doesn't know how to hold a pencil sometimes, or who is very shy because they're not used to having lots of students around them. Everyone comes with something, but they start without being able to count, whereas a lot of them can do that. Without the transition program, Kindergarten, they'd never meet benchmarks really. And [now] they do really, really well. (Deputy Principal, primary school)

Starting Kindergarten this year, I had kids that have done one year at the transition centre and kids that haven't, and I could see the difference and I'm like, 'Oh my God.' They're rolling around the floor, they're hoovering the ground with their face on the floor and their butts in the air or they're throwing things. They just weren't socially or emotionally ready, whereas the kids who had done that 12 months - they probably could've done another 12 months but they were ready to go. The ones that weren't ready are definitely repeats for next year. (Teacher, primary school)

School staff also reported that the positive effects of preschool and transition to school programs can have a flow-on effect in later years.

So previously, students would get to the end of Kindergarten with 90 per cent not achieving Kindergarten. And then you go into year 1 and you go into year 2 and there's this snowball effect that's been happening for years and years where there's no achievement. There's no growth, there's nothing... But now, they're getting ready for school and all these good routines and habits, not only for the kids, but for the parents, were being instilled prior to getting to Kindergarten. (Executive Principal, primary school)

Staff members reported that the refurbishments and renovations to community preschools have also enhanced their appeal, community buy-in to early education, and student engagement.

The preschool, I think, will make a big difference to the education of kids here because it's well regarded. The building's beautiful. The parents are happy to send their students there. The preschool teachers are wonderful. (Executive Principal, central school)

Finally, school staff told us that a major ancillary benefit of the program was the early identification of health problems, learning difficulties, disabilities and developmental disorders in students in these communities. Many of these problems are more commonly seen among Aboriginal students in remote communities, such as otitis media, or respiratory problems. The SWAY Program (Sounds, Words, Aboriginal Yarning) conducted through Royal Far West Health is an example of a program facilitated by Connected Communities, that connected students to a speech pathologist via video conference.

We hosted a three year old health and development check. We had 39 kids that got screened, after we opened it up to other ages, if they needed assessments done. Of the 39, 32 of them needed specialist referral. That was only half the three year olds... And it's stopping those kids from getting through to, say, as far as Year 5 or 6 and then someone saying, 'This kid's got a problem. Why hasn't this been addressed before now?' (School Reference Group member, primary school)

So, what we've seen – growth and kids being ready for school – it's been amazing. And the biggest thing we've gotten out of it is the readiness for school in students with special needs, we've got a high level of students with special needs – so, we can do all their screening, their vision, their hearing, we do all that while they're in their early years. If they've got any physical impairments, we've got to put in for funding, they need a wheelchair, they need this, they need that. We can do it all in that year, so when they land in Kindergarten on that first day, it's all in place, ready to go. (Executive Principal, primary school)

Summary

The focus of Connected Communities on early childhood and transitioning into school is having a positive, measurable impact on students' achievement and attendance. School staff also felt Instructional Leaders were having a positive impact.

Non-Aboriginal Connected Communities students have become more likely to stay at school until Year 12; rates have not changed for Aboriginal students

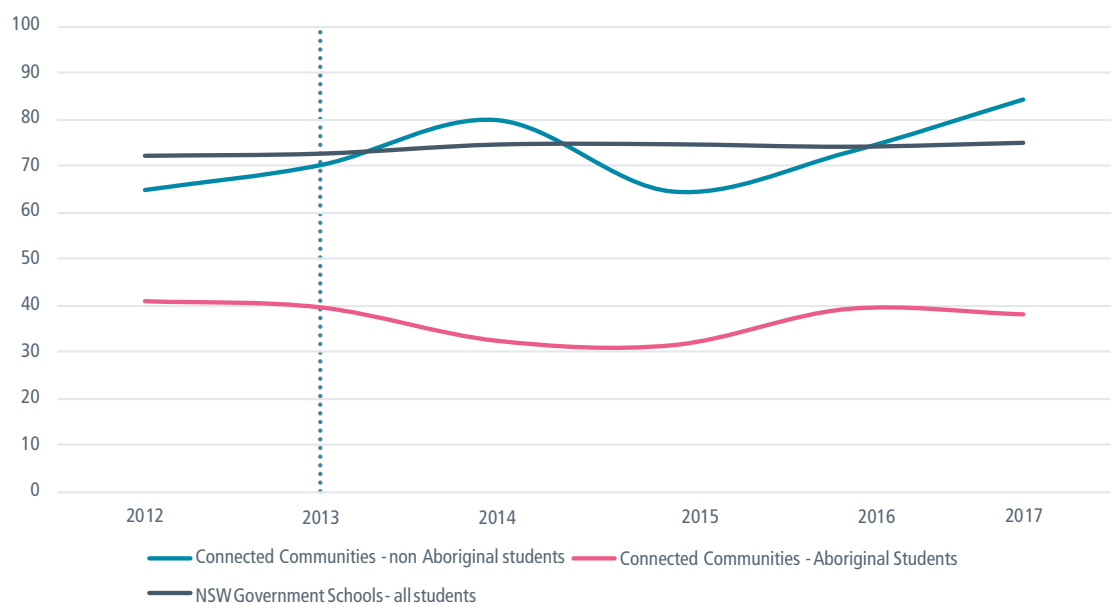
Retaining Aboriginal students until Year 12 is another of the Strategy's key deliverables. Year 12 attainment is associated with a range of education, employment and health outcomes (ABS 2011). Below, we describe the Year 10-12 apparent retention rate (ARR) for Connected Communities students and all NSW students between 2012 and 2017 (Figure 5). We have only presented post-2012 data due to the increase in the school leaving age in 2010 that resulted in an artificial decline in the Year 10-12 ARR between 2011 and 2013 as more students were required to finish Year 10. We have examined the Year 10-12 ARR rather than the Year 7-12 ARR to minimise the impact of high student mobility associated with Connected Communities schools.

Connected Communities Deliverable 5: Aboriginal students are staying at school until Year 12 (or equivalent training).

The results show that retention among Aboriginal students in Connected Communities schools has remained largely stable; after a drop from 39 per cent in 2013 to 32 per cent in 2014, it increased to 39 per cent in 2016, and remained stable in 2017. Among non-Aboriginal students in Connected Communities schools, the ARR has increased over time, from 65 per cent in 2012, to 84 per cent in 2017.

Figure 5:

Full time equivalent (FTE) Year 10-12 Apparent Retention Rates (ARRs) across Connected Communities Schools and NSW Schools, 2012-2017



Note: Figures represent average ARR for all Connected Communities students combined, not the average of rates for each school.

Secondary student aspirations to finish Year 12 and complete further education have remained stable

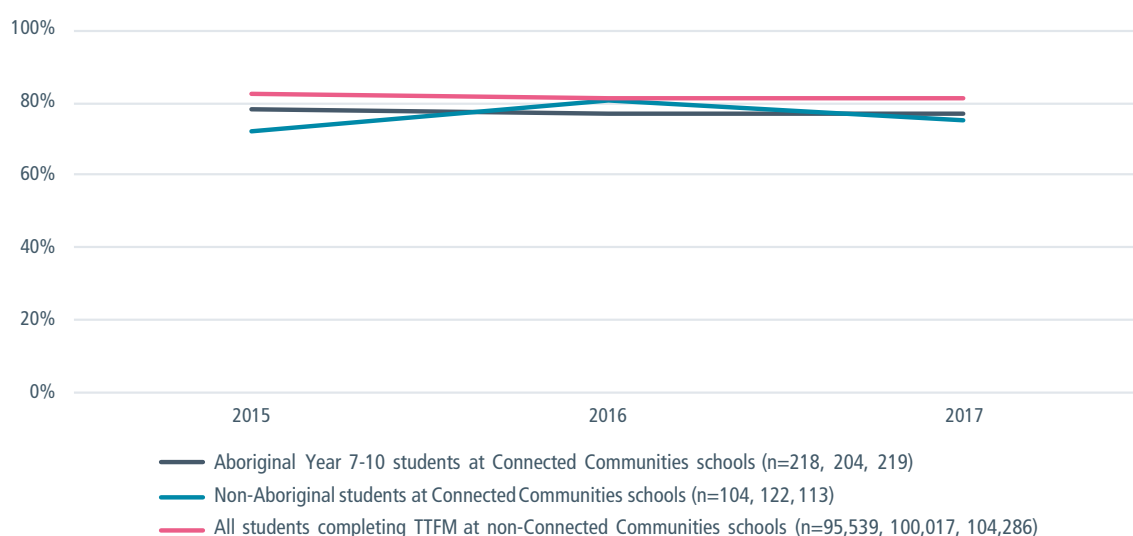
Despite the differences in Year 12 retention between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students reported above, we found little evidence of a difference between these groups in their aspirations to finish Year 12, or to go on to further education. We estimated the proportion of Year 7-10 students in Connected Communities schools who planned to complete Year 12 or go on to post-secondary education, and compared this to non-Aboriginal students from Connected Communities schools, as well as the NSW average. The results are presented in Figure 6 and Figure 7 below.

In 2017, we estimated that 77 per cent (95% CI [66, 85]) of Aboriginal Year 7-10 students in Connected Communities schools planned to complete Year 12, compared to 75 per cent (95% CI [69, 80]) of non-Aboriginal students in Connected Communities schools, and 81 per cent (95% CI [80, 82]) of all Year 7-10 students from across NSW. There were no meaningful changes in these proportions over time.

Figure 6:

Estimated proportions of Year 7-10 students planning to complete Year 12

Source: Tell Them From Me student survey 2015-2017



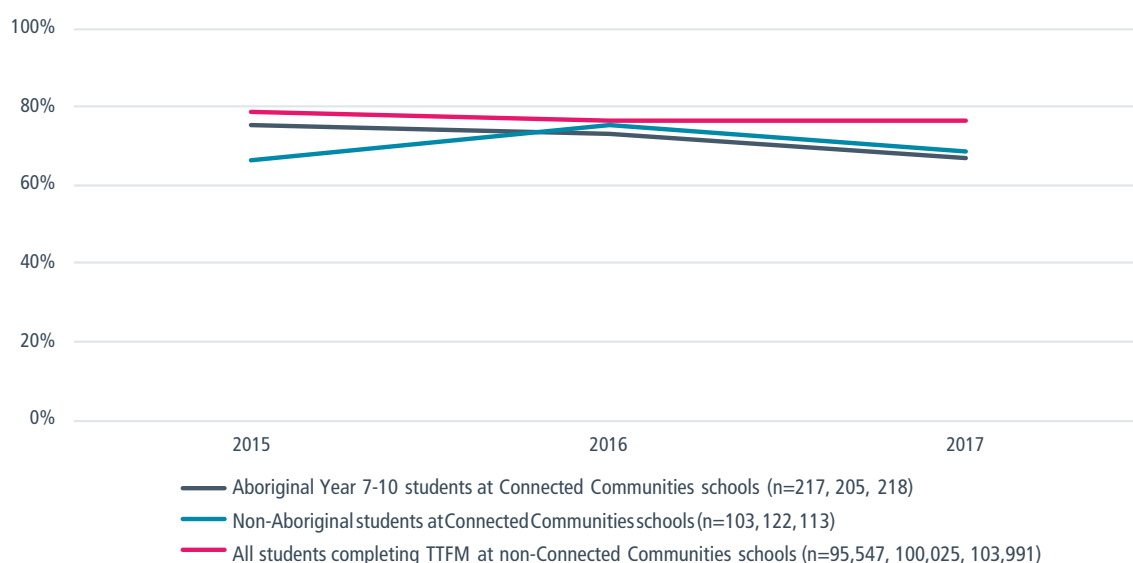
Note: 95 per cent confidence intervals are not displayed in the figure for visual clarity

A similar pattern was seen in the proportions of students who planned to complete post-secondary education, however there were slightly larger changes over time. In 2017, we estimated that 67 per cent (95% CI [62, 71]) of Aboriginal Year 7-10 students in Connected Communities schools planned to complete Year 12, dropping from 76 per cent (95% CI [69, 81]) in 2015. Among non-Aboriginal students from Connected Communities schools, the proportion increased from 66 per cent (95% CI [50, 80]) in 2015 to 75 per cent (95% CI [70, 80]) in 2016, before dropping again to 68 per cent (95% CI [54, 80]) in 2017. There were no meaningful changes in aspirations across the state, with 76 per cent (95% CI [75, 78]) of Year 7-10 students across NSW planning to complete post-secondary education in 2017 (see Figure 7).

Figure 7:

Estimated proportions of Year 7-10 students planning to complete post-secondary education

Source: Tell Them From Me student survey 2015-2017



Note: 95 per cent confidence intervals are not displayed in the figure for visual clarity

Considering the results from Figure 5 and Figures 6 and 7 together reveals a discrepancy between student aspirations at Connected Communities schools, and eventual outcomes. The available data suggests that Aboriginal students in Years 7 to 10 at Connected Communities schools aspire to finish Year 12 at a similar rate as their non-Aboriginal peers. Yet a gap in eventual outcomes remain, with retention of Aboriginal students to Year 12 in Connected Communities schools lower than for non-Aboriginal students¹³.

There is little evidence to date that Connected Communities had a positive impact on post-school outcomes

In addition to ensuring students reach Year 12, Connected Communities also contains a deliverable related to Aboriginal students successfully transitioning from school to training and employment. To determine how successful the Strategy has been in terms of this deliverable, we examined data from the NSW Secondary Students Post-School Destinations and Expectations survey. This survey follows up students 12 months after they leave school (both year 12 completers and early leavers).

Connected Communities Deliverable 6: Aboriginal students are transitioning from school into post school training and employment.

The earliest data available was from 2014 (students who left school in 2013). We used this wave of survey data as a pre-implementation baseline. We used the 2017 data as a post-implementation indicator. We again used the focus schools from the ATSIEAP as a comparison group. Like our analysis of the NAPLAN data, we used propensity scores to weight the data from the comparison schools to improve the comparability of the two groups.

For the analysis, we categorised students as being either 'engaged' (if they were engaged in employment or study in any capacity), or 'not engaged' (either 'looking for work', or not in the labour force, or any education or training). Estimated proportions in each of these groups are presented in Table 5.

Table 5:

Estimated proportions of Connected Communities and comparison group students engaged in study or working, 2017

Source: NSW Survey of Secondary Students' Post-School Destinations

		2017
Connected Communities students	Estimated proportion engaged in work or study (95% CI)	73% (61, 82)
Comparison group students	Estimated proportion engaged in work or study (95% CI)	76% (64, 85)

We fitted a logistic model to determine the impact of Connected Communities on post-school outcomes. The analysis indicated that the rate at which students from Connected Communities schools were engaged in employment or study after leaving school was around 3.1 percentage points (95% CI [-18.0, 11.7]) lower than it would have been had the Strategy not been in place. Given the wide confidence intervals, we do not consider this to be a meaningful change.

¹³ The ARR does not track individual students across time, rather it is a school level estimate of retention, calculated by the number of students in Year 12 at a particular school, divided by the number of students in year 10 at that school 2 years prior.

Access to further education remains a challenge

We discussed the reasons for the lack of progress in improving post-school outcomes with interview participants. Many Connected Communities schools have established links with local TAFEs, training providers, and businesses and have formal links with universities who may provide scholarships and supported opportunities, as well as 'sampling' opportunities for prospective students. Table 6 shows steps Connected Communities schools have taken to address this deliverable.

Table 6:

Reported further education and employment activities undertaken by schools

School	Head teacher - VET	Careers teams	Partnership with a university	Partnership with TAFE for specific programs	Other school initiatives
Boggabilla Central School	No	Yes	No	TAFE Western (Certificate III Youth Work)	School Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships (SBAT)
Bourke High School	No	Yes	UNSW (Aspire)	Beacon Foundation (Employment program)	Our Place Program Maranguka Community Hub Desert pea media Clontarf Academy Partnership with Darling River Meats and Labour Force for employment provision Beacon Foundation Girri Girri Sports Academy Healing Foundation
Bourke Public School	N/A	N/A	Broken Hill University Department of Rural Health (Speech and OT program)	N/A	Clontarf Academy Royal Far West Speech Pathology Program (SWAY) Mara Nooka Initiative
Brewarrina Central School	No	Under development	Western Sydney University	Dubbo TAFE (IPROWD)	Clontarf Academy Establishing links with Brewarrina Shire Council for Work Experience
Coonamble High School	Yes	Yes	University of New England and University of New South Wales (Aspire, social worker in schools) Charles Sturt University (Building executive and teacher capacity to improve student learning)	Coonamble TAFE (Youth Engagement Strategy, Automotive course, Construction)	Enterprise Education class Transition class Attendance officer Clontarf Academy Girls Academy
Coonamble Public School	N/A	N/A	No	TAFE Western (Aboriginal Language and Culture Cert I and II)	Healthy Culture, Healthy Country Aboriginal dance and music Tiered Attendance Strategy
Hillvue Public School	N/A	N/A	University of New England (After school program, social worker)	TAFE Western/New England (Cert 1/2 Gamilaroy language)	
Menindee Central School	No	Yes	University of Sydney Broken Hill University Department of Rural Health	TAFE Western	School based traineeships
Moree East Public School	N/A	N/A	University of Sydney		Book Fair Healthy Culture, Healthy Country Career Network with the Department of Industry
Moree Secondary College	No (HT with VET responsibilities)	Yes	Charles Sturt University/ CIN (Consulting Pilot), University of New England (Aspire)	TAFE NSW New England - Moree and Narrabri (various courses)	Project Based Learning (MSCOOL) Clontarf Academy Sista Speak Bro Speak

Table 6:

Reported further education and employment activities undertaken by schools

School	Head teacher - VET	Careers teams	Partnership with a university	Partnership with TAFE for specific programs	Other school initiatives
Taree High School	Yes	Yes	Charles Sturt University (Aspire/ Early Entry/Career Transition), University of Newcastle - Wollatuka Institute (Medical Science Faculty/Early Entry Scheme/Career Transition), University of New England (Early Entry Scheme)	TAFE NSW Taree Campus (TAFE Tasters for Stage 5)	Targeted Aboriginal Traineeships (TIDE-Park Ranger Traineeships, Allied Health Traineeships) Certificate 1 Financial Literacy (Mission Australia)
Taree Public School	N/A	N/A	University of Newcastle inc. Department of Rural Health (Go for Fun, Robot/ STEM activity, Teddy Bear hospitals, medical students) University of New England (Social workers in Schools)		Wellbeing programs Trauma informed practice Culture and caring Bro Speak Sista Speak Gathang language Mindfulness Drum beat Personal development programs Australian Children's Music Foundation program Healthy Living Eternity Aid transition to high school Crossing the road transition with Eternity Aide to High school Use of Early learning room for Mums and bubs HIPPY (Uniting Burnside) Playgroup FAST-Families and Schools Together
Toomelah Public School	N/A	N/A	University of Sydney (Poche Dental, Brain Mind Institute)		University of Newcastle Healthy Skin Project
Walgett Community College	No (HT Secondary Studies)	Yes	University of Sydney (Aspire)	TAFE Western ('Yes' Program)	
Wilcannia Central School	No	Yes	Charles Sturt University	TAFE Western (Welding in 2016)	Alternative Boys program for disengaged students Stephanie Alexander Garden Literacy and art program

However, despite the number of links made, many participants felt these ended up offering only limited 'real' opportunities to students, in a small range of fields.

[Compared to a school in a metropolitan area]...there's a lot more discussion, negotiation, searching, organisation that you've got to do to get those extra things to happen for students and then sometimes it falls through. I mean, there is some TAFE that's in town, but it's limited, and you've got to work quite hard with people to find out what's on offer and to get it to happen. There's less opportunities for apprenticeships or traineeships or just employment in general. (Executive Principal, central school)

Some school staff also mentioned the negative effect of limited employment opportunities in the broader community. In some cases, this may dissuade students from staying at school until Year 12.

Even people who did work hard at school, because there's the limited range of opportunities in [town], they're like, 'Well, that person went to school and worked really hard at school and they're not doing much better than I'm doing, so what's the point?' (Deputy Principal, secondary school)

All you can think is, these kids are not even going to get a job at the end of the school years. (Teacher, central school)

Despite these factors, some school staff explained how they would tailor vocational training to align with the sort of work that did exist in their local communities, often through working with local training organisations or employers. Schools took creative approaches to providing training or employment, particularly for disengaged students who might otherwise have been at risk of dropping out altogether.

Well, when you're designing HSCs and stuff like that, what's around? What work is here available? There's no work here, basically. So you widen the scale. There's a lot of people that want to stay local. National Parks and Wildlife are here, there's a lot of properties that require rural skills. So you're looking at driving licences, big trucks, mechanics, all those type of things... Because it's no good training kids up because you look at the HSC that is directly aimed at going to uni. What's the local services? What's the local community and what input can they put into it as well? (Teacher, central school)

We've got to look at all sorts of alternative possibilities, not just 'there's no work here' so put your hands up and just say, 'There's just no work so we can't do any training based thing here'. That's just rubbish. But the hospital is just one but then you've got National Parks, you've got the Lands Councils. They can do all sorts of different traineeships. (Teacher, central school)

Distance impacts on the ability of students to access or remain in work, study or training

School staff also reported that homesickness among Aboriginal students acted as a barrier to students moving away from their communities to locations with greater employment or study opportunities.

Interview participants also said that Aboriginal students often struggled with tertiary education without the appropriate support, being away from family and country, or the style and intensity of learning.

We also have a general reluctance from a lot of kids, which isn't uncommon, a reluctance to leave town once they're finished school, as though, 'You don't leave your town. You don't leave country. You don't leave family. This is where our community is,' and that's all tied in with the idea of, 'Well, what are you offering us?' Because really, there's not a lot. (Deputy Principal, secondary school)

They're frightened of what that outside world is going to be like. So [it can help] if we can show them a bit more than that, getting them out. (Teacher, central school)

Even if they do get a good education, but they don't want to leave town, and want to stay here, there's nothing here. So, you can have a great education, but there's still not much else in your own town, and moving away is big for a lot of them. (Teacher, central school)

For any young person, moving away from home to study can present challenges. These challenges may be particularly acute for Aboriginal students. Most tertiary educational institutions now offer support that attempts to address these challenges. However, it may be possible that an improved model would allow students from remote areas to engage with further education while remaining in their own community.

Summary

There is little evidence that the Connected Communities Strategy has had an impact on students' likelihood to stay at school until Year 12, and Aboriginal students are still leaving school earlier than non-Aboriginal students. Similarly, Connected Communities does not appear to have had any impact yet on post-school outcomes. While schools have attempted to provide options for students to pursue after school, this does not appear to be having any measurable impact on these indicators as links to further education remain patchy, students lack positive role models, and success is often limited for those students who do pursue post-school opportunities. These results must be read in the context of environmental factors such as poor employment opportunities in many communities.

4. Evaluation findings: Student engagement and wellbeing

In this section of the report, we focus on the extent to which Connected Communities has had an impact on student engagement and wellbeing. One of the key ways that Connected Communities schools have attempted to increase student engagement is through a focus on Aboriginal culture. Research shows that connecting Aboriginal students to their culture can increase engagement and lead to improved educational outcomes (Griffiths 2011).

Connected Communities Deliverable 8: Aboriginal students and communities report that the school values their identity, culture, goals and aspirations.

In the Connected Communities interim evaluation report, we reported that staff had begun the process of incorporating cultural content into their schools, but there had been some challenges regarding the teaching of Aboriginal languages. These challenges are reflective of the loss of Aboriginal languages in many communities; a direct consequence of past government policies and practices, including assimilationist policies that discouraged and/or prevented Aboriginal people from speaking their own languages (Australian Human Rights Commission 2009, Mühlhäusler and Damania 2004).

During the 2017 site visits, school staff were highly positive about the effects of incorporating cultural content into their schools. Schools had taught and promoted traditional knowledge, dancing, music and artwork and provided opportunities for students to showcase what they had learnt at events such as NAIDOC. Many schools involved their students in cultural excursions or experiences such as visits to important cultural sites or meeting with local Aboriginal organisations or individuals. Schools also marked important Aboriginal cultural occasions such as NAIDOC week, National Reconciliation Week and the multicultural celebration Harmony Day. Cultural tuition was provided by recognised Aboriginal people who were endorsed by parents/carers and the local community.

All Connected Communities schools had established or revitalised community rooms as part of the capital funding for refurbishments. These rooms were designed specifically as welcoming places for local community members to access the school and staff, as a meeting room for community members or as a multipurpose facility to hold events.

The main differences [pre-and post-Connected Communities] are this school has this room, which - we had pretty much a condemned demountable that we were operating out of before. It was pretty much coming down at the walls but we were holding onto it. We all wanted a place, and the community did as well - wanted a place of identity for the Aboriginal kids. This school's got a permanent structure now which is a place of identity for the Aboriginal students and community. The students and the community take a lot of pride in this room. (Aboriginal Education Officer, secondary school)

The position of [the community room] is very, very important. It's now part of - to me it's the heartbeat of the school. It's also symbolic in the fact that it is immersed in our practice. (Teacher, secondary school)

Another way that schools supported cultural pride and identity in students was by offering specific cultural programs such as Sista Speak and Bro Speak; Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics camps; Aboriginal Culture and Dance camps; and Junior AECG.

Some schools also engaged Aboriginal Elders, either within the school in an 'Elder in residence' capacity or in the community, to promote cultural pride and knowledge in students and to strengthen partnership with the local Aboriginal community.

Our Elder in residence has been probably one of the most valuable things that the school could have done. I've used Uncle [name] in so many different capacities over time. Uncle [name] has been one of our most valued assets to us personally, because he can come in and he can add the context. We can add the knowledge, but he can add context that I can't. (Teacher, secondary school)

He's such a respected Elder. He runs everything in his own time and he does a lot for the community which from my perspective an Elder does. Somebody that earns the respect from the community. Having Uncle [name] at the school, I think, has definitely strengthened the relationship with the community. (Service provider, secondary school)

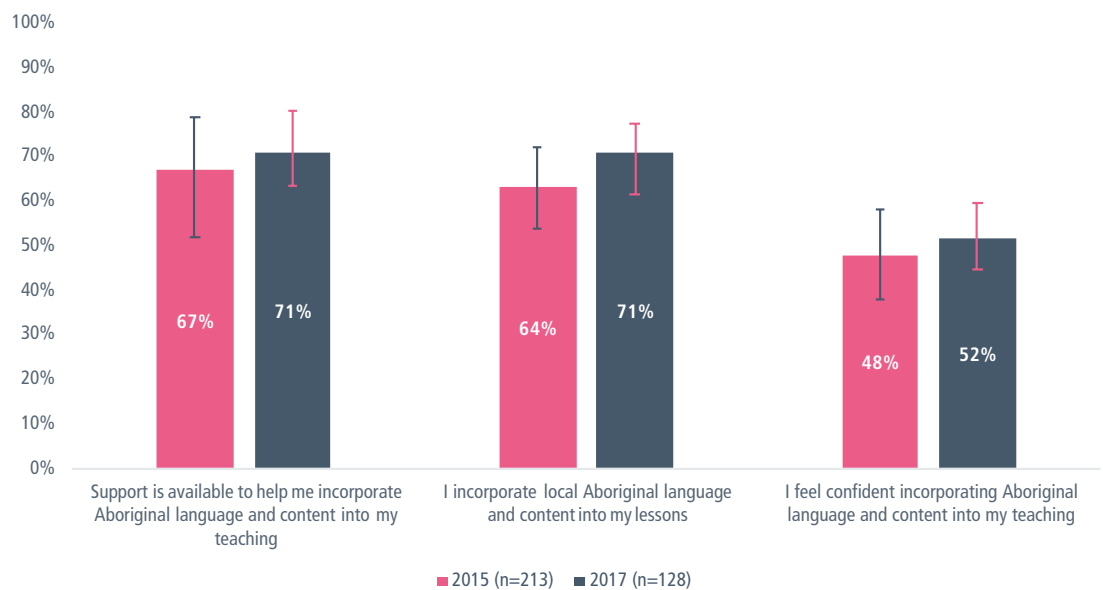
Teachers are incorporating local Aboriginal content into mainstream units of work

Based on the results from the 2017 CESE Connected Communities teacher survey, we estimated that around 71 per cent (95% CI [59, 80]) of teachers in Connected Communities schools had support to help incorporate Aboriginal language into their teaching. Furthermore, we estimated that around 71 per cent (95% CI [63, 77]) of teachers in Connected Communities schools actually incorporated Aboriginal content into their lessons. However, our analysis also suggests that only 52 per cent of teachers in Connected Communities schools actually felt confident in incorporating Aboriginal content into their lessons. There were small changes in responses from the 2015 survey (see Figure 8). The results indicate that the majority of Connected Communities teachers were incorporating local cultural content into their teaching.

Figure 8:

Estimated proportions (and 95% confidence intervals) of teachers agreeing with the following statements

Source: Connected Communities teacher survey, 2015 and 2017



The focus on culture is having a positive effect on the school environment

Many interview participants could highlight positive outcomes from the schools' focus on culture.

I think that it's something that has just been so positive and [has resulted in] the best positive feedback across our whole community. The year we started it, one of the Elders for example was crying at the assembly because she hadn't seen the students dance at our school for such a long time. It has a huge effect because the Elders just really feel that you can just see the respect and just see how proud and strong the students feel. (Executive Principal, central school)

The Connected Communities is a good strategy. It makes Indigenous people feel that this is a part of the community, like this is Indigenous, like we do have a voice now. Like I said, it gave Indigenous people much more confidence in knowing it was a community school; a sense of belonging. (Teacher, central school)

As noted above, research shows that valuing the cultural identity of students can improve attendance. Some interview participants identified a link between the extent to which schools valued Aboriginal and student engagement in the classroom.

I'm extremely passionate about this. We have – there's huge cultural shifts, there's huge mind shifts that have gone on here, and I want to really try and get that across. I feel that our students are more connected to the school. Whereas [pre-Connected Communities] they would have turned up for school but not felt like they belonged, they know they belong now, in my opinion. Now that's had a huge effect, so that they feel when they go to lessons, and I'm going to probably talk about a negative, I'm just trying to think if I turned up for a lesson I felt I didn't really belong and I thought oh geez, this teacher doesn't like me. Straight away I'm gone, I'm out. Now I'm not going to say to you that every Aboriginal student is engaged in every lesson, but they feel they belong in this school. We welcome every single student within our school. (Teacher, secondary school)

Aboriginal students in Connected Communities schools are increasingly reporting that schools are culturally responsive

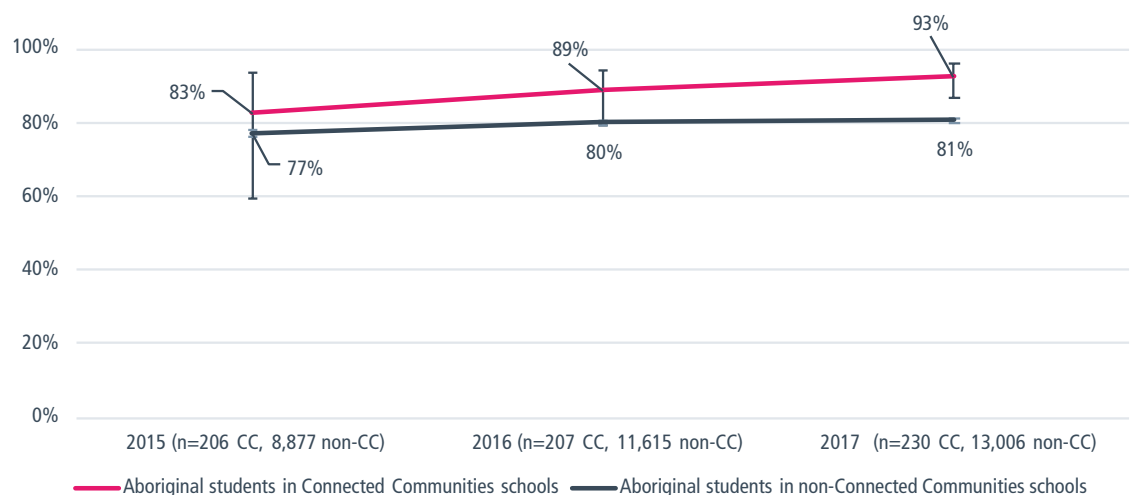
To determine the impact of the above efforts on student perceptions of their schools, we used data from the *Tell Them From Me* student survey. We analysed data from primary and secondary students separately.

We estimated the proportion of Aboriginal primary students reporting that they 'feel good about their culture when they are at school' between 2015 and 2017. Over that time, we estimated an increase in the proportion of Aboriginal primary students in Connected Communities schools responding positively to this question, from around 83% (95% CI [60, 94]) agreeing in 2015, to 93% (95% CI [65, 90]) agreeing in 2017. By comparison, we estimated that 81% (95% CI [80, 81]) of Aboriginal primary students in other schools across NSW agreed with this statement in 2017 (see Figure 9).

Figure 9:

Estimated proportions (and 95% confidence intervals) of Aboriginal primary school students reporting that they feel good about their culture when at school

Source: Tell Them From Me student survey, 2015-2017

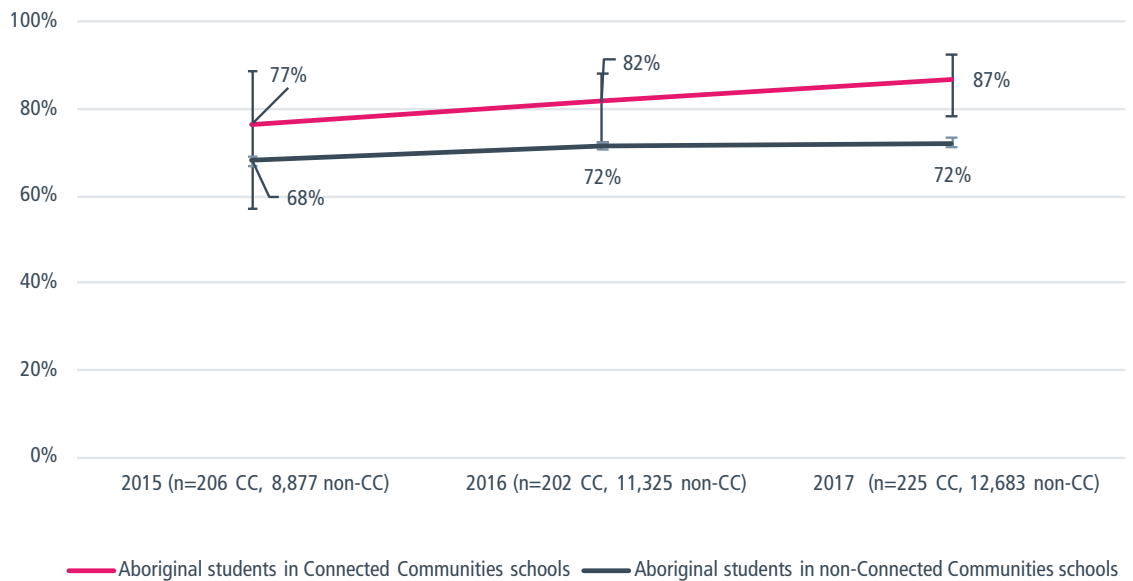


We also estimated that 87% (95% CI [78, 93]) of Aboriginal primary students in Connected Communities schools felt that their teacher had a good understanding of local Aboriginal culture in 2017, up from 77% (95% CI [57, 89]) in 2015. By comparison, we estimated that 72% (95% CI [71, 73]) of Aboriginal primary students in other schools across NSW agreed with this statement in 2017 (see Figure 10).

Figure 10:

Estimated proportions (and 95% confidence intervals) of Aboriginal primary school students reporting that their teacher had a good understanding of local Aboriginal culture

Source: Tell Them From Me student survey, 2015-2017

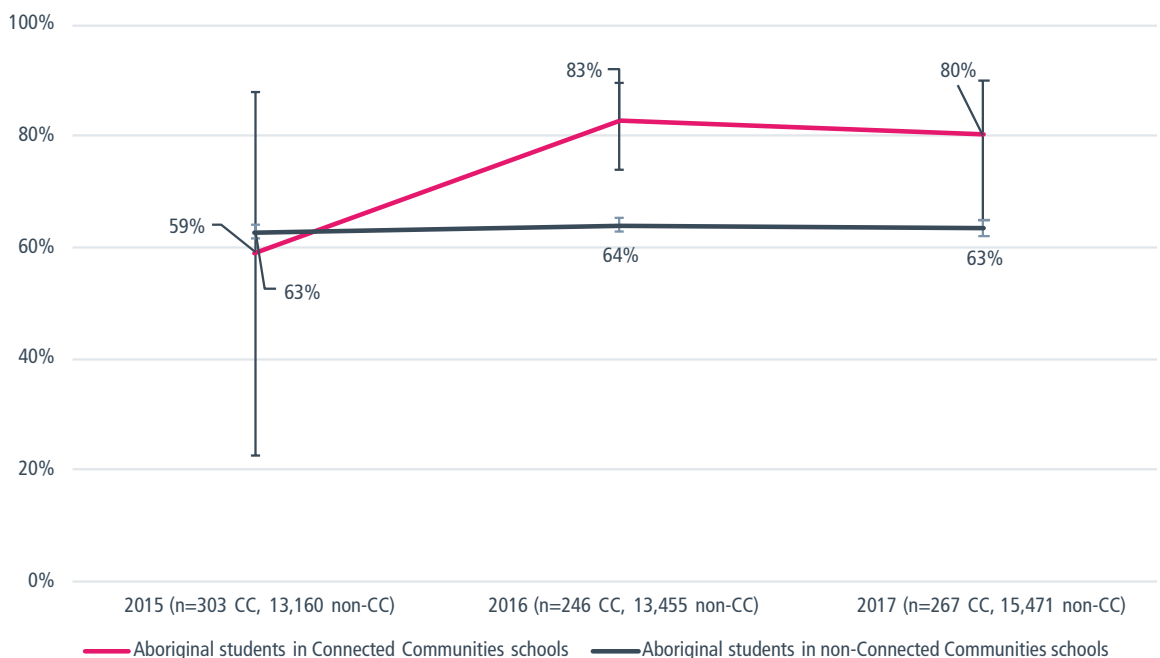


The changes seen among secondary students were larger in magnitude than those seen among primary students. The proportion of Aboriginal secondary students in Connected Communities schools reporting that they 'feel good about their culture when they are at school' increased from around 59% (95% CI [22, 8]) in 2015, to 80% (95% CI [65, 90]) agreeing in 2017. By comparison, we estimated that 63% (95% CI [62, 65]) of Aboriginal secondary students in other schools across NSW agreed with this statement in 2017 (see Figure 11).

Figure 11:

Estimated proportions (and 95% confidence intervals) of Aboriginal secondary school students reporting that they feel good about their culture when at school

Source: Tell Them From Me student survey, 2015-2017

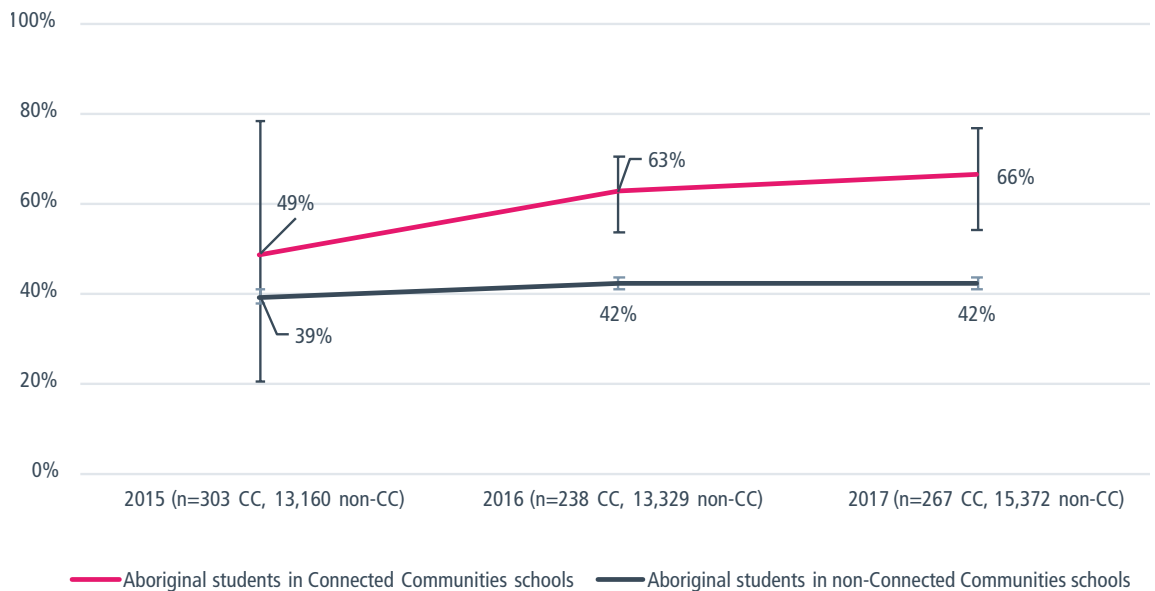


We observed a similar pattern when secondary students were asked whether they felt their teacher had a good understanding of local Aboriginal culture. Over time, we estimated a greater proportion of Aboriginal secondary students in Connected Communities schools agreeing with this statement, from 49% (95% CI [28, 67]) in 2015 to 66% (95% CI [54, 77]) in 2017. In comparison, we estimated little change in the proportion of Aboriginal students from non-Connected Communities schools agreeing with this statement over the same timeframe (see Figure 12). As mentioned previously, schools and students self-select to participate in the *Tell Them From Me* survey.

Figure 12:

Estimated proportions (and 95% confidence intervals) of Aboriginal secondary school students reporting that their teacher had a good understanding of local Aboriginal culture

Source: Tell Them From Me student survey, 2015-2017



Schools have had mixed success implementing Aboriginal language programs

Language holds a particularly important place in forming cultural identity. Being able to communicate effectively in one's own language connects people to their family and lore and shapes their identity.

As discussed earlier, previous state and Commonwealth government policies and practices suppressed the use of Aboriginal languages. This has resulted in a significant loss of Aboriginal languages since European invasion. The 2016 Australian Census showed that only 10 per cent of people identifying as Aboriginal spoke an Indigenous language across Australia, and only 1 per cent in NSW (ABS 2016).

Connected Communities schools are required to implement the teaching of Aboriginal languages. Schools have established language programs at different rates; some schools had language programs and cultural teaching practices in place prior to Connected Communities and others had only established them by the midpoint of the Strategy, while one school had not established them at all. This was a reflection of the efforts that schools have made in order to rejuvenate and reclaim local languages in light of past policies, but also of the challenges they faced in doing so, as outlined in this section below. In Figure 13 we show which schools had language programs implemented in each stage at the time of writing this report.

Figure 13:

Local Aboriginal language programs being delivered in Connected Communities Schools

Source: Executive Principals

	Preschool	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5	Stage 6
Boggabilla CS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Bourke HS					✓	✓	✓
Bourke PS	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Brewarrina CS							
Coonamble HS					✓		✓
Coonamble PS	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Hillvue PS		✓	✓	✓			
Menindee CS		✓	✓	✓	✓		
Moree East PS	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Moree SC					✓	✓	✓
Taree HS					✓	✓	✓
Taree PS	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
Toomelah PS	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Walgett CC	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Wilcannia CS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		

In our interim evaluation report, we found the major challenges that schools faced in implementing language programs were gaining community agreement about which language should be taught (and how), and recruiting language teachers; again issues related to the impacts of past policies and practices on Aboriginal languages. School staff raised similar issues when discussing their Aboriginal language problems during the 2017 site visits. Schools and communities generally made decisions about teaching Aboriginal languages through consultation with the School Reference Group and local AECG.

We found that positive impacts from teaching Aboriginal languages appeared to be stronger in schools with more established language programs.

I suppose having that language taught in these schools is very vital. Having these kids speak that language, that brings out the sense of pride, but it's also strengthening their identity, young Aboriginal people, to be able to even bounce back against barriers. Especially when they talk to their grandparents, to say that their grandparents didn't get to learn it, but obviously these young kids are learning it in their schools. I think that's a powerful movement in itself, because like I said, it does bring out that identity within these kids. (Aboriginal Land Council members, primary school)

We've got a fully qualified language teacher who taught them their language and the grammar that goes with it. One of those kids, I remember, came back one day, they'd had a couple of lessons – he went and spoke to his grandfather. And he come back and was telling our language teacher. He just started crying. I think he was 13 or 14. Because he'd never been able to talk to his [grandfather in language]. (Service provider, central school)

Some staff mentioned the notion of 'shame' to be a factor impacting on some students. Being able to teach Aboriginal languages was often seen as a way to counter these feelings among students. Some school staff reported the flow-on effects of students learning language in other Strategy deliverables such as engagement and attendance:

At the end of last term we did a play for NAIDOC Week and we did it in language, or some of it in language and I told them, I kept saying to them, 'We have to come to school every day because we've got to practice our play,' and she did not miss a day, and for her, that's massive (Teacher, primary school)

Embedding local culture within schools

Some schools also reported taking steps towards embedding Aboriginal ways of learning into teaching practices across the school, such as using the 8 [Aboriginal] Ways of Learning framework (Yunkaporta & Kirby 2011).

'We've just achieved so much. But ultimately I think what it is, we've become embedded into the school. We're not bolted onto this. This is not a bolt on. We're actually part of the school now. Our [Aboriginal education] staff, the whole ethos of being cultural. Yes it's just in us, which I really love.' (Senior Leader Community Engagement, secondary school)

'It's very strong isn't it? It's ingrained. Just overall. The school is actually - like I'd say if someone asked me, they focus a lot on culture and there's a lot of involvement with Aboriginal organisations and stuff like that. It's big. I mean I guess you could say it is an Aboriginal school.' (Parent, secondary school)

Schools also reported taking steps towards embedding Aboriginal ways of learning into teaching practices across the school, such as using the 8 [Aboriginal] Ways of Learning framework (Yunkaporta & Kirby 2011)

The Deputy Principal Connected Communities... they've come and talked to the executive about ways we could [embed culture in teaching]. A lot of things happened culturally here that I don't think gets enough recognition for what actually does happen. It is embedded. The teachers are very aware, and 'cause I've talked to them, I've actually - and I did Performance and Development Plan interviews with all the teachers and asked, 'How do you embed?' So, I know it does, and they're looking to further ways; they've all done 8 Ways training. (Executive Principal, central school)

The Healing and Wellbeing Model

The Healing and Wellbeing Model provided flexible funding aimed at addressing the wellbeing needs of students, staff and community. Schools used the funding to provide additional staffing resources to support student wellbeing, resources for staff, and training to build the skills of community members. This training was provided in partnership with TAFE NSW to deliver a Certificate IV in Youth Work.

Many schools used the funding provided through the Healing and Wellbeing Model to provide additional counselling support to students. Some Connected Communities school staff reported difficulties in filling full-time roles - despite the additional resources - due to the lack of available counsellors.

We haven't had a counsellor here until the beginning of this term. No counsellor, whatsoever. The funds were there, nobody could get me a counsellor... We couldn't employ anybody from within or without, we couldn't find anyone that worked with our healing and wellbeing funding. (Executive Principal, secondary school)

It is important to note that this is not an issue unique to Connected Communities schools: filling such roles is difficult for many government schools across NSW. Through the Healing and Wellbeing Model, schools were able to flexibly purchase additional resources, including additional counselling time based on need.

We bought more counsellor time with [the Healing and Wellbeing funding]... 0.5FTE of a counsellor we got with that, then a student support officer. (Executive Principal, high school)

We've employed additional staff and tried to utilise different programs to re-engage the kids that are failing to strive or thrive; that have become disengaged or are at danger of becoming disengaged. And for some, that's involved one on one support in the classroom. For some, that's involved inclusion in things like boys' group. (Deputy Principal, primary school)

School staff said that it often took some time to see positive results from counselling, however many reported the positive impact that school counsellors were having on students and the increased capacity this provided for referral and assessment.

I do counselling, but the trust, as we talked about, there's very few students who actually want to come in and talk to me like I would in a mainstream high school. I'm trying to build trust informally with them and that's working... but that hasn't transferred into 'he's alright, I trust him to talk about my problems'. (School counsellor, central school)

We're very lucky now that we've got a counsellor. At the start of the year, no one wanted to see them. Now the kids are really engaging with them, slowly, slowly. Now they're starting to talk. (Head teacher, central school)

We were very fortunate through Connected Communities to be offered a school counsellor... that's been one of the biggest achievements this year. For the first time our students have been assessed. They were never – or, very rarely, I should say – tested. (Executive Principal, central school)

Summary

Overall, Connected Communities school staff reported many examples of Aboriginal culture being integrated into the school environment, and most teachers surveyed agreed that they were incorporating local cultural content into their lessons. Anecdotally, we heard of the positive impact it was having on student engagement and sense of belonging in the school system. This was also reflected in the results of the *Tell Them From Me* student survey which saw an estimated increase in the proportion of students reporting that their school was culturally responsive.

There is moderate evidence to suggest that long suspension rates increased after the introduction of Connected Communities

To investigate changes in long suspensions since the introduction of Connected Communities, we used school-level suspensions data from 2012 to 2017. We only considered long suspensions as the application of short suspensions (up to and including four days) can vary considerably between schools. However, the criteria for long suspensions (between five and twenty days long¹⁴) is clearer, thus they are less likely to be subject to school level variations. We compared the mean suspension rate in Connected Communities schools for the year before (2012) and the years after (2013-2017) the implementation of the Strategy with the mean suspension rates for the comparison schools. We analysed data separately for primary and secondary students, and also investigated the differences across schools for only Aboriginal students.

Similar to our analysis of the school attendance data, our analysis of the long suspension data is inherently descriptive and does not fully isolate the effect of the Strategy. While student-level data (e.g. NAPLAN outcomes) allows the differences between the students who attend comparison and Connected Communities schools to be controlled in statistical analyses, school-level data does not afford a sufficiently rich set of statistical controls. This means that the results of our analysis must be interpreted with caution.

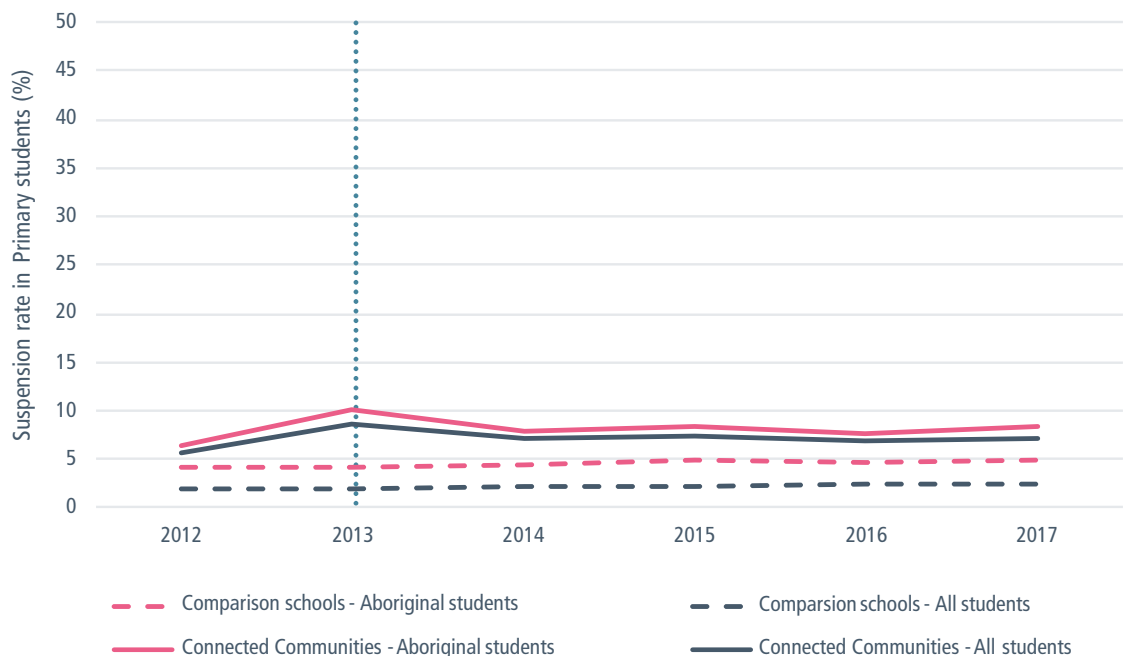
We present the yearly long suspension rates for primary students attending comparison and Connected Communities schools in Figure 14. Our analysis shows that the average long suspension rate for all primary students in comparison schools increased by around 0.2 percentage points (95% CI [-0.2, 0.7]) after the introduction of the Strategy. In Connected Communities schools, however, the average long suspension rate for all primary students increased by around 1.8 percentage points (95% CI [-0.3, 3.9]). This means that the gap in long suspension rates for all primary school students across comparison and Connected Communities schools increased by around 1.6 percentage points (95% CI [-0.5, 3.7]).

Our analysis also shows that the average long suspension rate for Aboriginal primary students in comparison schools increased by around 0.4 percentage points (95% CI [-0.7, 1.6]) after the introduction of the Strategy. In Connected Communities schools, however, the average long suspension rate for Aboriginal primary students increased by around 1.9 percentage points (95% CI [-0.6, 4.6]). This means that the gap in long suspension rates for Aboriginal primary students across comparison and Connected Communities schools increased by around 1.6 percentage points (95% CI [-1.3, 4.4]).

Figure 14:

Primary school students with long suspensions as a proportion of all primary students in Connected Communities schools (solid lines) and comparison schools (dashed lines) between 2012 and 2017

Source: CESE Statistics Unit. Data prior to 2012 were not collected in a comparable manner and were therefore not used



14 https://education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/associated-documents/suspol_07.pdf

We present the yearly long suspension rates for secondary students attending comparison and Connected Communities schools in Figure 15. Our analysis shows that the average long suspension rate for all secondary students in comparison schools increased by around 0.1 percentage points (95% CI [-0.6, 0.7]) after the introduction of the Strategy. In Connected Communities schools, however, the average long suspension rate for all secondary students increased by around 2.3 percentage points (95% CI [-1.5, 6.0]). This means that the gap in long suspension rates for all secondary students across comparison and Connected Communities schools increased by around 2.2 percentage points (95% CI [-1.6, 6.0]).

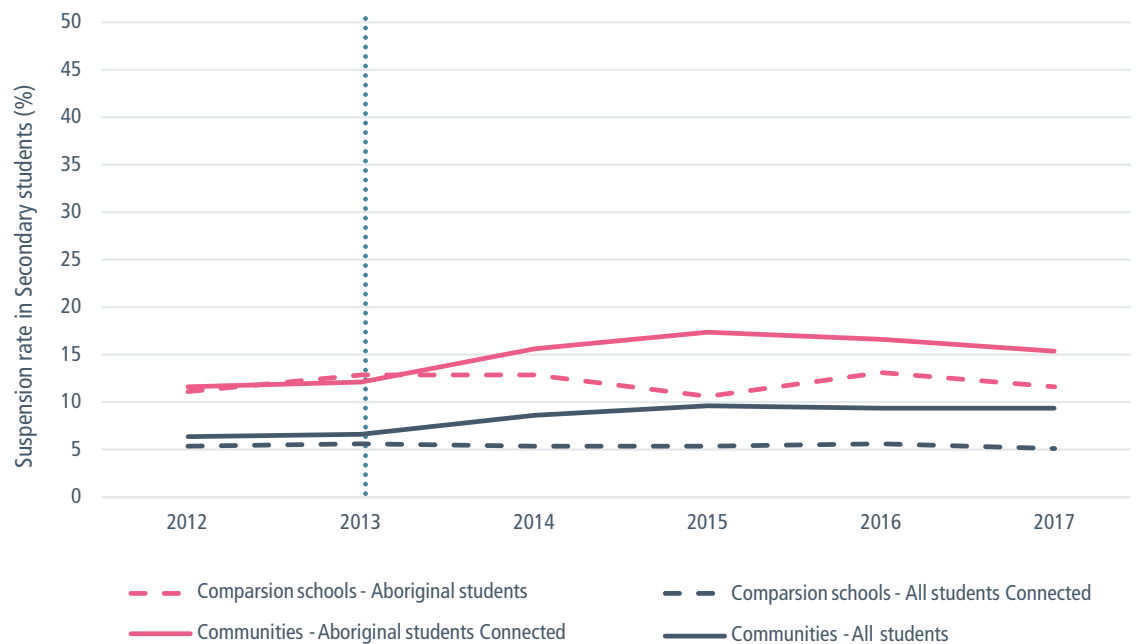
Our analysis also shows that the average long suspension rate for Aboriginal secondary students in comparison schools increased by around 1.2 percentage points (95% CI [-0.6, 3.0]) after the introduction of the Strategy. In Connected Communities schools, however, the average long suspension rate for Aboriginal secondary students increased by around 3.7 percentage points (95% CI [-0.9, 8.3]). This means that the gap in long suspension rates for Aboriginal secondary students across comparison and Connected Communities schools increased by around 2.5 percentage points (95% CI [-2.4, 7.4]).

Increased long suspension rates in Connected Communities schools may not represent a deterioration of student behaviour. Anecdotally, long suspensions are likely to have increased because of a decreased tolerance for misbehaviour after the implementation of Connected Communities due to heightening the focus on school and parent/carer and community expectations.

Figure 15:

Secondary students with long suspensions as a proportion of all secondary students in Connected Communities schools (solid lines) and comparison schools (dashed lines) between 2012 and 2017

Source: CESE Statistics Unit. Data prior to 2012 were not collected in a comparable manner and were therefore not used



Summary

There is moderate evidence to suggest that long suspension rates increased after the introduction of Connected Communities. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this increase is likely to reflect a decreased acceptance of misbehaviours following the implementation of Connected Communities.

The additional funding provided through the Healing and Wellbeing Model provided schools with flexibility in how they could address student and community wellbeing. School staff reported that the most common way that this funding was used was to increase counselling support for students and schools were able to provide this even when facing difficulties in recruiting for full-time counsellor roles.

5. Evaluation findings: Families, communities and schools

This section of the report focuses on the extent to which Connected Communities improved engagement with families and the broader community.

Connected Communities Deliverable 2: Aboriginal family members and community members are actively engaged in the school

Research shows that the drivers of low family and community engagement with education are complex and often interrelated. Berthelsen and Walker (2008) identified several drivers of family engagement with education:

- parental socio-economic status and level of educational attainment
- parents' sense of capacity to help their students meet educational outcomes
- parents' previous negative educational experiences and views of the school
- differing expectations and interpretations of what it means to be educationally supportive.

Poor engagement can only be successfully countered through a systematic, consistent and wide-ranging approach that employs a range of strategies. Higgins and Morley (2014) outlined the major elements of school-led programs to improve parental and community engagement in education, including:

- modelling behaviours and empowering parents to support their students' learning
- creating a welcoming and culturally respectful school environment
- actively including parents in programs directed at students
- inviting parents into the school in passive (observational) or active (volunteer) capacities
- active community outreach and coordination with relevant agencies and community groups
- addressing contextual barriers to engagement, such as substance abuse, poor adult education, supportive home environment, etc.

Many Connected Communities schools are undertaking these measures, as detailed below, and school staff - from teachers to the school executive - were highly conscious of the need to increase engagement with their local communities. The schools that appeared to be the most successful at increasing engagement took a rigorous approach that involved a lot of 'legwork', usually involving staff engaging personally with family and community members. Interviewed participants stressed that meaningful change in engagement that centred on trust and relationship building takes time.

I think it's improved immensely. It's one of those things that you can't just do overnight, and it's one of those things that you've got to continue to work on. You've got to build that relationship and that rapport with the different families, but also – different things happen at different times and you've got to be aware of what's happening and how that family's affected, or how you've got to meet that family on their level, whether it's knocking on their door or giving them a ring or whether they might come in for a meeting. Different things work with different aspects or different parts of the community. (Executive Principal, primary school)

We've got a very positive relationship, but it's something that you're constantly working on, and it's something that we're going to need to continue to work on, and the best thing that I've found that works well for us is just to keep doing things differently all the time. I find that works really well, because if you just keep doing the same thing, you don't always get the same results. (Executive Principal, primary school)

Qualitative feedback from parents/carers who were surveyed for the evaluation showed a range of views on school engagement, with some parents very positive, and others not as positive.

I'm proud of my kids and I really like that school. My daughter went to a previous school and wasn't very good, but she's fine now. It's very family oriented, the teachers aren't teachers they are friends which is important...the kids know they can go to anyone and they respect them a lot. (Parent/carer, secondary school)

Changes need to be made in the way the school communicates with the community, (there is) no communication, I feel unwelcome, we need more cultural programs in the school and cultural awareness for teachers and principal (Parent/carer, primary school)

Community engagement

Historically poor relations between schools and communities affect engagement

Many interview participants said that historically, family and community engagement with their schools has been poor and often tokenistic. Some interviewees commented that parental disengagement may be due to parents' own prior poor experiences with racist or discriminatory policies in schools, or the poor education that they received.

It's complex, because we're dealing with human beings who have different experiences of schooling and of life in general, and this is an institution which has not always been and is still not always in their favour. (Head teacher, secondary school)

The grandparent of some of our kids now, her experience was just - you know, not allowed to go to school. Made to feel inferior. So if that's the experience she had, then it makes you understand why little Johnny - if nan says it was horrible at school and then, when mum went to school, it was horrible; Johnny's not going to want to go to school. (School Reference Group member, primary school)

In some cases, parents or family members, who may have received a poor education, or been subject to discriminatory policies or attitudes, felt fear, discomfort or 'shame' within schools.

This is the cycle we're trying to break. Some of the parents are illiterate themselves, so they're in a place where they don't feel comfortable [coming to the school] anyway. (Student Learning and Support Officer, central school)

It's just the idea that the fear is coming to the school. It's a big thing which is coming back from community. It's the fear of actually coming in here and being judged, and that is a very difficult thing. (Head teacher, central school)

School staff often centred their efforts to re-engage parents and community members on attempts to counter these negative perceptions of the school.

I think a lot of these kids are second, third, maybe even fourth generation kids to attend school here. And if their parents and/or grandparents have had negative experiences with school here, that flows onto the kids where they're fed B.S. about the school and it's hard - that's a cultural/cyclical thing that it's hard to break sometimes. We tend to get the message out that "Hey, yes this is a good school, we do lots of great things here, we do care for your kid's education, we do want what's best for your kid, so instead of working against us, work with us and I'm sure we can reach some better outcomes for your kids". (Head teacher, central school)

The roles of Senior Leader/Leader Community Engagement are key but awareness of the roles is low in some schools

As explained in the Background chapter, The Senior Leader/Leader Community Engagement roles were intended to provide a link between the school and the community, and provide strategic advice regarding community engagement and matters in the community that could impact students and the school.

The interim evaluation report found that many teachers at Connected Communities schools did not know about or understand the Senior Leader/Leader Community Engagement roles. In addition, some schools faced problems in recruiting for those roles, and there was relatively high turnover. During the interviews conducted for this final report, we heard that these recruitment issues had often been overcome. However, there was still a substantial proportion of teachers with little knowledge of the role in 2017; we estimated that only 22% of teachers fully understood the role (95% CI [14, 33]), and 41% had little or no understanding of the role (95% CI [30, 53]). These results were similar to those reported in 2015, where we estimated that 19% of teachers fully understood the role (95% CI [13, 29]), whilst 39% had little or no understanding (95% CI [27, 53]). This suggests that Executive Principals need to be more proactive in communicating the role of the Senior Leader/Leader Community Engagement to their staff.

Although the survey of teachers showed low awareness of the role(s), many school staff we interviewed saw the role as crucial to the Strategy. In some schools, Senior Leaders/Leaders Community Engagement did indeed seem to play a crucial role in terms of leadership and engagement and carried out many and varied activities across the school. However, some were felt to be more effective than others, particularly those who were more 'visible' within the school and community, those who garnered respect from all sections of the school and community, and those who could act as leaders within the school.

Some school staff viewed the ambiguity of the role as one of its strengths in that it allowed the Senior Leader/Leader Community Engagement to do what was required to meet community need:

I don't think you could really box that role in too much. Because every community you've gone to, the context is different, the school, and the towns – it wouldn't work to have it too boxed in, I think. It is what it is – senior leader community engagement. You do what's required to engage the community. (Executive Principal, high school)

Placing the Senior Leader/Leader Community Engagement role within the school executive was seen as important in both a symbolic and strategic sense.

I really enjoy having [the Senior Leader/Leader Community Engagement] as part of the executive team, and to have that person and the community know that they're part of the executive team – a local person, an Aboriginal person, sitting at the executive table. Now that, to me, says a lot. And I think it's a really powerful message: that presence is there. Their input into the executive is as important as mine. It's as important as anybody else's. (Executive Principal, central school)

Our [Senior Leader/Leader Community Engagement] does a lot of, 'You need to come down and I'm not taking no for an answer, your kids want you there,' and that's it. We've got the beauty of that... a senior engagement officer that talks to the whole community. (Assistant Principal, central school)

The role of Local School Reference Groups and the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group in community engagement

A key feature of the Connected Communities Strategy is partnerships and co-leadership with the Aboriginal community. Local School Reference Groups are a key feature of the Connected Communities strategy and are intended to provide an avenue for the community to provide guidance and advice to the schools at the executive level.

Our SRG has a community elder in there, myself [the Senior Leader/Leader Community Engagement], [our Executive Principal], the AECG rep and two parent reps. Our two parent reps and our elder rep, if they've got anything to say, they'll say it. I feel that the community feel as though that we are a big link, that the school reference group is a big link to the – well to their voice really if there's a problem there. (Senior Leader Community Engagement, central school)

Most school staff recognise the importance of School Reference Groups and the Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups in community engagement

Connected Communities prioritises partnerships with the Aboriginal community. Local School Reference Groups are a key feature of the Connected Communities Strategy. They are intended to provide an avenue for the community to provide guidance and advice to the schools at the executive level.

I was the President of the AECG. I obviously chaired the SRG meetings and they were very accepting and wanting to work closely with the AECG and have a good input. They'd regularly report what they were doing to the whole of the AECG, to both members and non-members, to full members and non-members. It was all good. (AECG member, secondary school)

The Connected Communities interim evaluation report recommended that the Connected Communities Directorate deliver more training for School Reference Groups in order to address challenges such as attendance and role clarification. Despite the department delivering this training, we heard a wide range of views about the effectiveness of School Reference Groups. In some schools we heard that they were an integral part of the school's governance and direction; effective in helping to develop school plans, facilitating community engagement, and providing feedback on major issues in schools.

It's great working with them. I involve them in our decisions... I use the reference group as my ears for the community, as well and what they see as the direction for the future of the school. (Executive Principal, central school)

If I have any major spending ideas, consultation with the school plan, I go to the reference group. Any other major initiatives that are coming up, I go to the reference group with those things as well. If they need more explanation, or for their tick [of approval], or just their knowledge, they know that's what the school's going to do. If I'm seeking to go this way, I'm looking into this, they're always very supportive of what we do. (Executive Principal, secondary school)

In other schools we heard that School Reference Groups members were struggling to attend meetings regularly (due to either personal or work commitments) or that meetings were held intermittently. In some instances, interview participants told us that members did not work together effectively.

We have an AECG, an SRG and the school and none of us seem to be working together, everyone seems to have their own agendas. I don't think the school makes necessarily the best decisions because they're worried about what's going to happen, in terms of community. And it's paralysing. (Deputy Principal, central school)

Some interview participants also felt that School Reference Groups did not adequately represent all parts of the community, or that some voices could drown out others. However, most interview participants believed that they were a valuable element of the Strategy, even if they did not believe they were functioning as effectively as they could be in their school.

They [the School Reference Group and AECG] don't have too much say in how things are run. They do put a lot of pressure on us at various times if they don't think that we're meeting the mark. Would I expect that? Yeah. I mean I think that's a fair call...it's not unwanted and certainly it's supportive in the fact that we want to improve, because we're all after the same thing. (Executive Principal, central school)

It should be acknowledged that individuals' comments about the effectiveness of School Reference Groups may have reflected their personal feelings about other individuals in the group rather than their true opinion about the effectiveness of the group as a whole. Having said this, where School Reference Groups aren't as effective as they could be, the department and schools themselves – including Executive Principals and Senior Leaders/Leaders Community Engagement – have a role to play in building the capacity and confidence of community members to be able to effectively carry out those roles.

Schools have used both event-based and personal contact to increase engagement

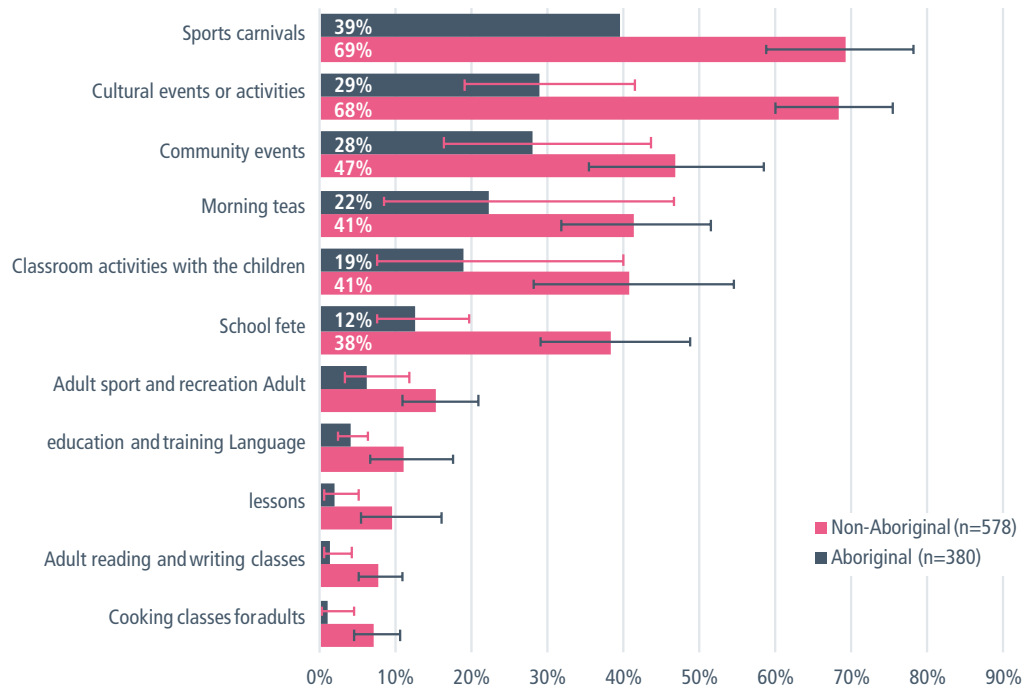
A key strategy that schools used to build community engagement was to hold community events at the school. Senior Leaders/Leaders Community Engagement were usually responsible for organising these events. They generally centred on cultural or sporting occasions such as NAIDOC week, National Sorry Day, school fetes and fundraisers, and sport carnivals.

The parent/carer Survey contained a question about attendance at school events. The results are presented in Figure 16. We estimated that parents/carers of Aboriginal students were more likely than parents/carers of non-Aboriginal students to report attending a range of different activities at schools. In 2017, we estimated that around 69 per cent (95% CI [59, 78]) of Aboriginal parents/carers had attended a sports carnival, which was the same proportion that we estimated had attended in 2015. We also estimated that around 68 per cent of Aboriginal parents/carers had attended a cultural event at their school, which was an increase from 57 per cent (95% CI [49, 64]) in 2015.

Figure 16:

Estimated proportions (and 95% confidence intervals) of parents reporting attendance at activities at schools, 2017

Source: Connected Communities parent/carer survey, 2017



While most school staff felt that these types of events increased engagement with the community, some staff pointed out that they needed to be accompanied by other, more personal forms of engagement. Some school staff engaged with Aboriginal families and community members through home visits, phone calls, or by sending home positive reports. They often leveraged Aboriginal staff members to assist with this. School staff used these home visits to inform families about any issues with their students, but increasingly also to discuss their students' positive development, progress or achievements. This helped to counter the common perception that the school only contacted parents when their students were in trouble.

Many Connected Communities schools used their Senior Leader/Leader Community Engagement, Aboriginal Education Officers and Student Learning and Support Officers as a bridge between the school and the community, as a source of community information, or to provide guidance on appropriate teaching methods or classroom content. Conversely, however, some Aboriginal teaching staff cautioned against non-Aboriginal teachers becoming overly reliant on Aboriginal staff members to act as a conduit to community as opposed to engaging directly with community themselves.

Interview participants also told us that staff members often interacted with family members when dropping off and collecting their students from preschool or the transition-to-school facility. School staff reported that building a rapport with parents when their students had just entered the school system helped to ensure sustained engagement as they continued their schooling, as well as helping to counter some family members' own negative experiences of school.

(Parents) seem to want to be more involved, especially in pre-school when that filters into K to 2, and I know we're getting more parent involvement by [inviting parents into the school] and having open classrooms and such, but I think it comes back to the stigma of the school. We've got to break that vision that the community have that that school is bad and whatever else they think about it. So, the more good things, the more things we promote and invite parents into positive things, hopefully we'll get that shift and they'll want to be more involved. (Instructional Leader, central school)

This year we've seen an increase with the parent support. At the beginning of the year we ran an information session one afternoon. We'd normally, on average, get 10 parents or carers, if we're lucky, but at the beginning of this year, we had the whole room... The engagement is increasing, and they're wanting to come to school. And they drop off, and they chat. (Teachers, transition program)

Some school staff also reported that the implementation of compulsory personalised learning pathways (formerly known as personalised learning plans or PLPs) for all Aboriginal students was a positive method for engaging families by actively involving them in their child's learning. PLPs are a tool for increasing Aboriginal student engagement. They are developed in partnership between the student, parent/carer and teacher, to identify, organise and apply personal approaches to learning and engagement (NSW Department of Education, 2016). Conversely, we also heard that in some cases, it had been difficult to genuinely involve families in the process or indeed that PLPs had been completed with little or no family involvement at all. Similarly, we heard that some schools had had trouble engaging families in parent-teacher interviews (this is discussed further on Page 55).

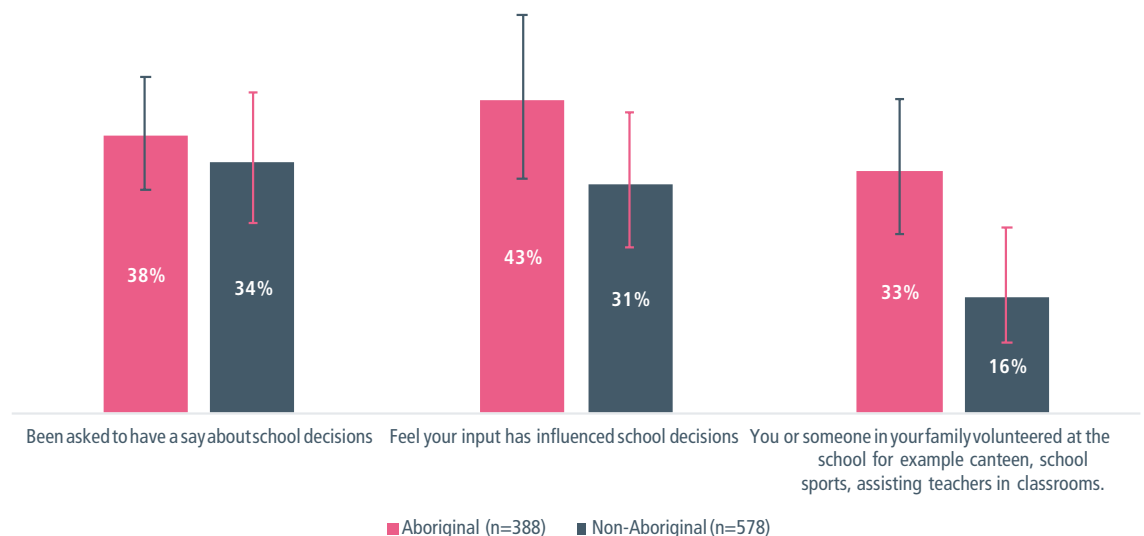
There was little evidence of a difference between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parents/carers reporting input into their schools

We estimated the proportion of parents/carers at Connected Communities schools that were being involved in decisions at their school; we present the responses from Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parents/carers in Figure 17. We estimated that 38 per cent (95% CI [31,46]) of Aboriginal parents/carers had 'often' or 'sometimes' been asked to have a say about school decisions, and 43 per cent (95% CI [32, 55]) felt their input had influenced school decisions, compared to 34 per cent (95% CI [26,44]) and 31 per cent (95% CI [23, 41]) of non-Aboriginal parents/carers, respectively. We estimated a greater difference between the two groups when questioned about volunteering; 33 per cent (95% CI [25, 43]) of Aboriginal parents/carers reported that they or another family member had volunteered at the school, compared to 16 per cent (95% CI [10, 25]) of non-Aboriginal parents/carers.

Figure 17:

Estimated proportions (and 95% confidence intervals) of parents/carers who have 'often' or 'sometimes' had contact with the school in the following ways

Source: Connected Communities parent/carer survey, 2017

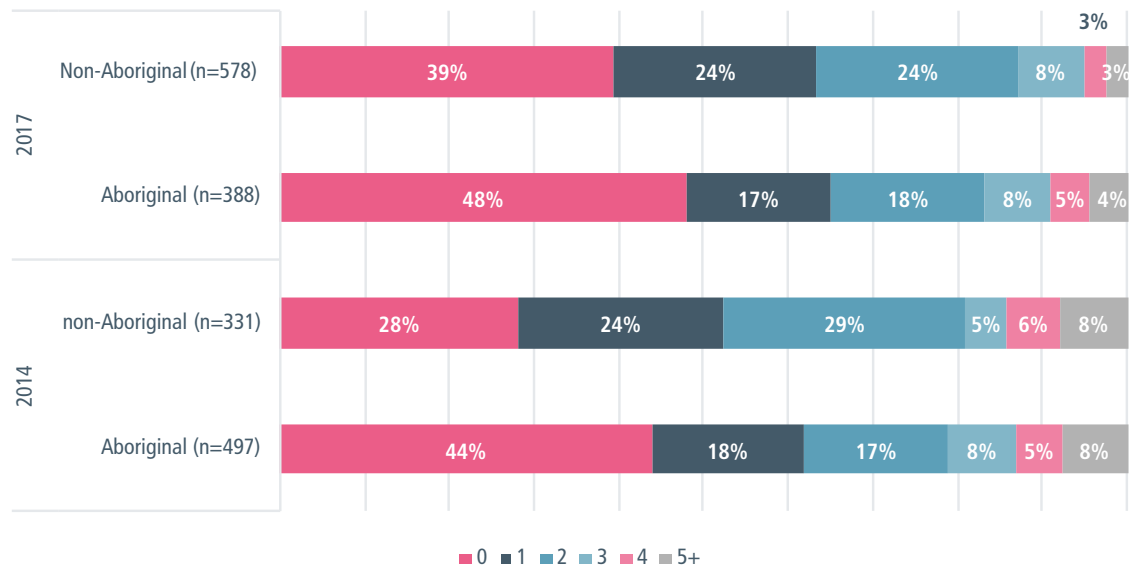


We also found little evidence of a difference between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parents/carers in how often they reported attending parent/teacher interviews (see Figure 18). In 2017, we estimated that 48 per cent (95% CI [36, 60]) of Aboriginal parents/carers attended no parent-teacher meetings, compared to 39 per cent (95% CI [32, 47]) of non-Aboriginal parents/carers.

Figure 18:

Estimated proportions of parents attending 0 to 5 or more parent teacher interviews

Connected Communities parent/carer survey, 2015 and 2017



Teachers report greater engagement among parents of non-Aboriginal students

The results in the previous section showed that there was little evidence of a difference between how often Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parents/carers of students in Connected Communities schools had contact with their school.

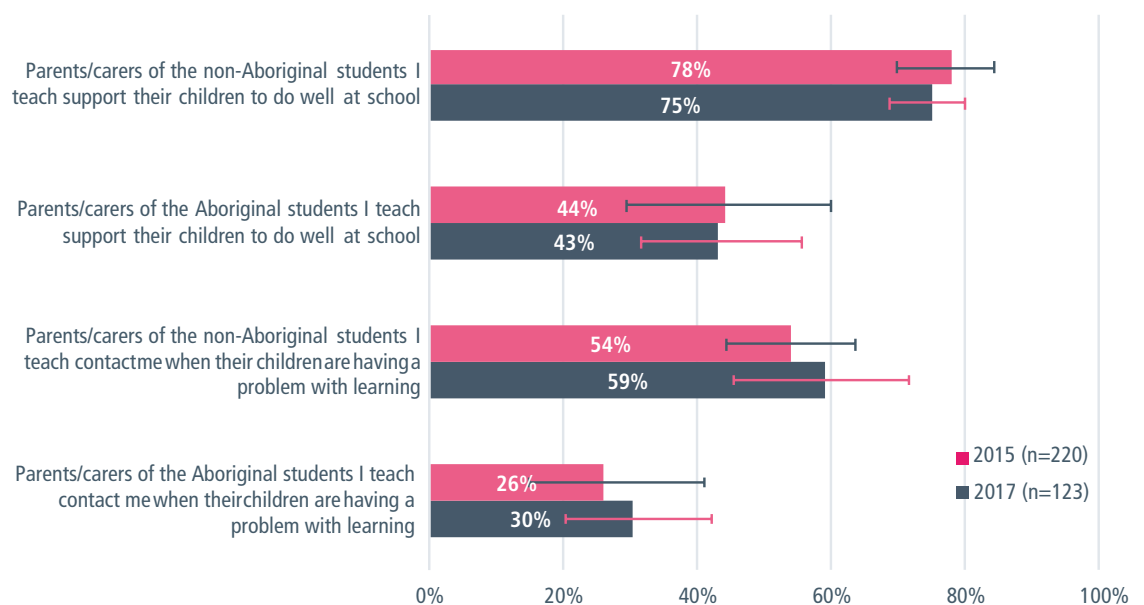
The survey of teachers demonstrated that overall, teachers felt that the parents of Aboriginal students were less engaged with their child’s education, compared to the parents of non-Aboriginal students. We estimated that in 2017 around 75 per cent (95% CI [69, 80]) of teachers in Connected Communities schools felt that parents/carers of non-Aboriginal students support their students to do well. In contrast, we estimated that only 43 per cent (95% CI [31, 56]) of teachers in Connected Communities schools felt the same about parents/carers of Aboriginal students.

Similarly, the results of our analysis suggest that in 2017, around 59 per cent (95% CI [45,72]) of teachers in Connected Communities schools reported that parents/carers of non-Aboriginal students contacted them when their students were experiencing problems with learning, compared to around 30 per cent (95% CI [20,42]) of parents of Aboriginal students (see Figure 19). There were no meaningful changes from the 2015 survey of teachers on any of these results.

Figure 19:

Estimated proportions (and 95% confidence intervals) of teachers agreeing with the following statements

Source: Connected Communities teacher Survey, 2015 and 2017

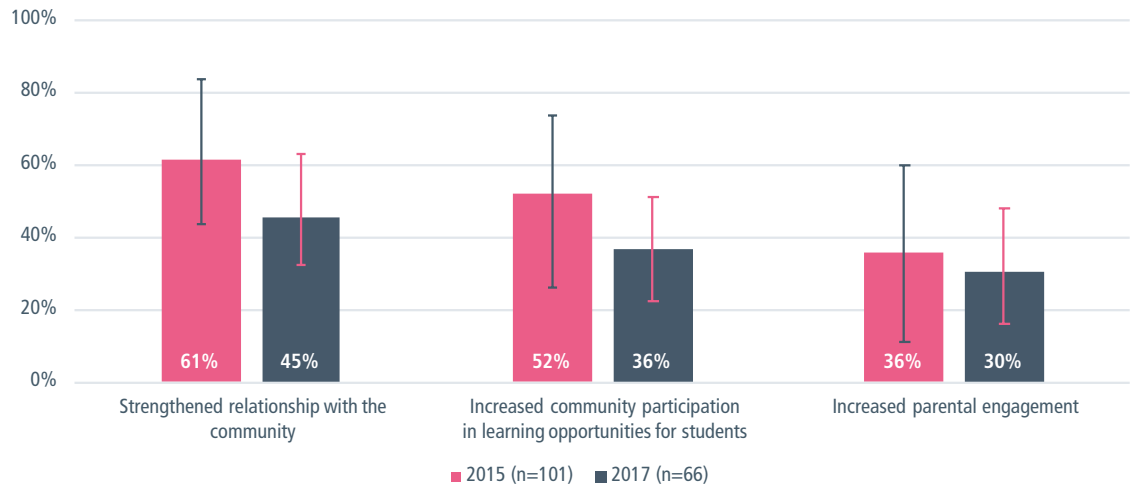


The results of our analysis also showed that there were a minority of teachers who agreed that engagement between the school and community had improved since the start of Connected Communities (see Figure 20). We estimated that in 2017, around 45 per cent (95% CI [32, 60]) of Connected Communities teachers agreed that there had been a strengthened relationship with the community since the introduction of the Strategy, around 36 per cent (95% CI [22, 53]) agreed that there was increased community participation in learning opportunities for students, and around 30 per cent (95% CI [17, 48]) agreed that there was increased parental engagement. We estimated that a greater proportion of teachers agreed with these statements in 2015 compared to 2017. However, given the wide confidence intervals, we do not consider these changes to be meaningful.

Figure 20:

Estimated proportions (and 95% confidence intervals) of teachers who agreed that engagement with community had improved since the start of Connected Communities

Source: Connected Communities teacher Survey, 2015 and 2017



Note: Only includes responses of teachers who had been at their school since the start of Connected Communities.

The results of the above analyses taken together, show that Aboriginal parents/carers reported greater engagement with their children's schools than non-Aboriginal parents/carers. Despite this, the results from the teacher survey suggest that teachers believed engagement with Aboriginal families was lower than with non-Aboriginal families. These results suggest there may be a disjuncture between how teachers see the engagement of parents with their schools, and how parents see this themselves.

Summary

Overall, the data from the surveys of parents and teachers shows little indication that engagement between schools and families has improved since 2015 (we were not able to collect pre-Strategy data from parents or teachers). However, the qualitative data from interviews provides examples where family and community engagement may be improving in Connected Communities schools.

Parents and community members may still feel a sense of inadequacy or 'shame' when dealing with the school because of their own experiences with the education system, or may lack the literacy, language or knowledge to feel confident enough to engage with schools. Schools have generally succeeded in creating welcoming and culturally respectful environments and have been able to engage some parents well through event-based activities. However, the onus remains on schools to strengthen engagement with families and communities, particularly regarding student learning. Aboriginal staff members are key to this process by leading and facilitating engagement between families and communities and non-Aboriginal staff members; however all school staff have a responsibility to reach out to parents and community members and to make the school environment as welcoming as possible.

Service access is increasing but effectively linking with external providers remains a challenge

Another focus of the Connected Communities strategy was to facilitate external services through schools. Given the central and permanent position of schools in many regional and remote communities, the Strategy laid out a 'schools as hubs' model where the school would establish links with providers and would facilitate access to these services from the school site itself.

Connected Communities Deliverable 7: Aboriginal parents/carers report that service delivery from the school site is flexible and responsive to their needs

When you look in some of these communities, the school is actually the most stable place...other agencies come and go depending on funding; they get funded for a year, they go, they come back. But a school will always stay there and it will never go. So the whole idea was that the school would be the hub and provide the services because everybody goes to school. So that meant if a student needed - whatever support...to actually access an education, whether it be health needs or whatever, that that would actually be provided through the wrap around services that the school. (Senior executive, Department of Education)

The schools as hubs model has been implemented variably across schools

The Connected Communities interim evaluation report found that the implementation of schools as hubs for service delivery and the formation of interagency linkages had occurred variably across schools, with only a few of these linkages considered to be strong. This situation has largely remained, even though the number of linkages has increased since the publication of the interim report. Table 7 shows the linkages between schools and services.

Table 7:

Interagency linkages in Connected Communities schools 2017

Source: Executive Principals.

	Aboriginal Medical Service	NSW Health	Medicare locals	Other health locals	Police (inc. PCYC)	FACS	Juvenile Justice NSW	Family referral service	Other family or child services	Community steering committees	Community working parties	Other interagency coordination groups
Boggabilla CS		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Bourke HS	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Bourke PS	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Brewarrina CS	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
Coonamble HS	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Coonamble PS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hillvue PS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Menindee CS		✓		✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓
Moree East PS			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Moree SC	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Taree HS	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Taree PS	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Toomelah PS	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		
Walgett CC	✓				✓	✓	✓				✓	
Wilcannia CS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Many interview participants explained they had adapted their service delivery models to the needs of their community, as the Strategy itself suggests they do. Some school leaders focused their efforts on broad, interagency approaches, often incorporating case coordination, while others collaborated with targeted services on a needs-based, ad hoc basis. Schools in smaller communities often derived more value from establishing the school as a central hub from which to administer services (particularly medical services), than schools in larger communities where services were more likely to be established and accessible.

So, it's us being a Connected Communities school and being able to have those inter-agencies come in here, is really good. And it's also makes them a little bit accountable too that they have to service our community. So we're like the community hub essentially. (Senior Leader Community Engagement, central school)

School staff felt that schools had increased their links to services under Connected Communities

Many interview participants correctly perceived that their school had improved links to services and that their school was now offering services that they had not previously offered.

The ability for, say, the Aboriginal Medical Service to actually come into the school...has certainly changed dramatically. Because [before Connected Communities] it was only government, mainstream health that could come in. Whereas now, you have all of health providers, the NGO sector. Our services in the community have decreased because of funding, so our access to allied health, like speech and occupational therapists and physiotherapy has decreased. But because of that flexibility around Connected Communities now, you've got others who come into community through the Connected Communities Strategy. So there has been that real collaboration between services and agencies. And I believe it's been on the back of Connected Communities. I worked in the NGO sector around mental health and we had better access to schools because of Connected Communities than prior to that. We couldn't get a look in. (SRG/AECG member, primary school)

At the moment I've got speech therapy happening, and hearing done as well - trying to get that through. If we didn't have Connected Communities we didn't have those resources. We don't have any of that, and it's another really critical factor of this school for those kids and their general health and wellbeing. They've seen at least a medical practitioner for their hearing and their sight. That's all from the Connected Communities relationship with the agencies. It wouldn't have happened otherwise because it's targeted. (Teacher, primary school)

Some service providers we interviewed echoed the view that partnerships with Connected Communities schools had strengthened since the Strategy began.

I think - yeah, everyone's more on the same page here, more or less, than at other schools. There seems to be more of an accord, harmonious togetherness. But yeah, I find it's a lot more together. Yeah, everyone is more on the same page. We know everyone here. Everyone knows who we are. (Service provider, primary school)

I don't know how we would have done this dental program in the school had it not been a Connected Communities school because, you know we wanted to bring in graduates, we bring dental students in here, we bring Bachelor of Oral Health students in here, we have researchers in here and what it's meant is that we've gone from elimination of infection or pain, through to water bottle and tooth brushing programs. (Service provider, central school)

More students and families are accessing health services

Connected Communities students have access to a greater number of services than they have previously. Table 8 illustrates the range of services that students have accessed at Connected Communities schools since the introduction of the strategy. The range of services has increased since the publication of the interim evaluation report.

Table 8:

Types of services being accessed through Connected Communities schools

Source: Executive Principals

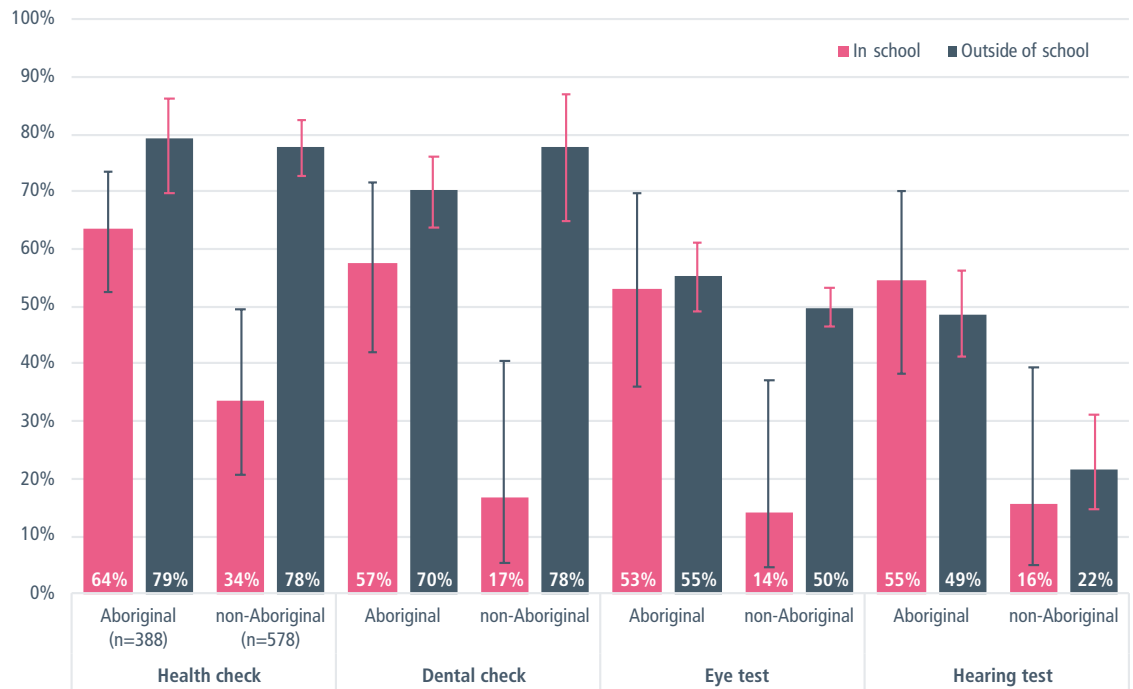
	Student health checks	Student dental checks	Speech pathology	Wound clinic	Student breakfast program	Trauma counselling for students	Programs for students (e.g. alcohol/drug, bullying, sexual health, protective behaviour)	Adult literacy classes	Parenting classes	Interagency co-development of strategies to address community issues impacting the school	Interagency student and family case management
Boggabilla CS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Bourke HS	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Bourke PS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓
Brewarrina CS	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓				
Coonamble HS	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Coonamble PS	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Hillvue PS	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
Menindee CS			✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Moree East PS	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
Moree SC					✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Taree HS	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Taree PS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Toomelah PS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Walgett CC	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓			✓
Wilcannia CS	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓

There were differing patterns of service access among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families, with non-Aboriginal students less frequently accessing services through their schools than Aboriginal students. From the results of the 2017 parent/carer survey, we estimated that 64 per cent (95% CI [52, 74]) of Aboriginal parents/carers reported their child had accessed a general health check in their school, compared to 34 per cent (95% CI [21, 50]) of non-Aboriginal parents/carers. A similar pattern was seen for dental checks and eye tests. These results suggest that Connected Communities schools are facilitating access to health services for Aboriginal students. There was no evidence of a difference between the two groups when it came to accessing services outside of the school, with the exception of hearing tests, where we estimated that 49 per cent (95% CI [56, 75]) of Aboriginal parents/carers reported that their child had done so, compared to 22 per cent (95% CI [15, 31]) of non-Aboriginal parents/carers (see Figure 21).

Figure 21:

Estimated proportions (and 95% confidence interval) of parents reporting that their students had health checks within and outside of school

Source: Connected Communities parent/carer survey, 2017



Note: Data could not be compared with 2015 due to inconsistencies in the way the question was asked.

Facilitating service delivery provides wider benefits for schools

School staff also pinpointed what they felt to be secondary benefits for their school of linking with service providers. These benefits often centred on the signal that it created to the community that the school was actively working in partnership with community organisations. This could reduce the stigma that community members may hold around accessing services, expose them to the type of services that were available to them, and build trust in local services.

The school involving Aboriginal community organisations is great, and to involve [the Aboriginal Medical Service] is great, because [the Aboriginal Medical Service] is the biggest Aboriginal organisation in this area. So that relationship actually assists the school in the long term such as with referrals for students, families and such like that. But it also gives the Aboriginal community the image that the school is willing to work with the Aboriginal community and Aboriginal organisations to advance the education of Aboriginal students. Not only educationally and academically, but also culturally. That is a huge thing. (Service provider, secondary school)

I think for the school we bring them a referral, soft entry, referral pathway, a safety plan. I think if we're working with families they've got access to programs that they [might not be aware of and which aren't] about them being a bad parent. So I think we bring some safety around parents being able to access groups without stigma. And it's linking those kids into people in community that they see their faces and it's all good stuff so maybe when something's not so good that's a person you can go to that you actually met in a really nice way. (Service provider, secondary school)

Some interviewees also said that links with service providers had the potential to open career pathways for both students and families and community members.

I think there's been engagement between the university students and Rural Health. So it also gives our students an idea of what they can achieve. (Teacher, primary school)

To be involved some of our playgroup mums actually have become our [Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters] tutors so again it's a pathway for actually getting employment. And then after those two mums became employed the next time we had six people putting their hands up to do it. (Service provider, secondary school)

Schools faced issues trying to engage with services

Many interview participants in schools discussed problems they had experienced trying to engage with service providers. Many mentioned the lack of coordination between services, both at the higher level of interagency coordination and at the ground level of service provision.

I don't think it's a Connected Communities problem - it's [town name] service providers – there's too many of them. Too many of them doing the same thing, and often staffed by people who are unqualified. And it is quite a dysfunctional service in [town name]. No matter what strategy you use, it would be really hard to engage with a lot of service providers. (Deputy Principal, secondary school)

My personal opinion is that we have too many services. That's not just within the school; that's within the town itself. And there's not enough talk within those services on how we can help - so we've got one fella - he might be a student, he might be a past student, but you've got about four or five different services looking after this fella and nothing's getting done. Because I feel like there's a communication level where everybody's not on the same wavelength. (Student Learning and Support Officer, secondary school)

Interview participants also said that staff turnover within service providers could hinder their effectiveness and make it more difficult for the school to establish ongoing relationships.

Changing staff. Changing organisations. One week you can have somebody in a job and then two weeks later there's somebody new in a job, that makes it challenging. (Executive Principal, central school)

Some interview participants also said that it could be difficult to fit service provision into already-crowded classroom schedules. These participants were worried that the time allocated to service provision could detract from teaching time.

There's too many stakeholders and NGOs want to come out here and do something and they parachute in for a week, we pull kids out of class, we do this and we do that, and then they're gone again and we might see them next year, we might not. What ends up happening is that the learning of the kids gets convoluted, the conversations they have get convoluted, and consequently the NAPLAN and other things, those real sort of core things that we're trying to get done suffer. (Teacher, secondary school)

Interagency coordination is still lacking despite recommendations from the interim report

The Connected Communities interim evaluation report recommended that the interagency group that was assembled in 2014 continue to convene to ensure senior-level coordination of services. This group has only met intermittently since this recommendation was made, with a limited effect on ensuring operational collaboration between agencies. This followed a decision to devolve the responsibility of coordination to schools, where the resources were held.

Summary

Schools have adapted the service delivery model according to the circumstances of their community and the availability of services in their area. Overall, schools have made more linkages with services, but these partnerships are not always as strong as they could be. Interview participants felt that services still lacked coordination in some communities, and that staff turnover within service providers affected their ability to form positive relationships with schools. Despite this, many interview participants felt that Connected Communities had had a positive effect on their ability to link with services, and that these linkages often had secondary benefits for their school and community. Aboriginal parents/carers were more likely to report their students had accessed medical checks in school, compared to non-Aboriginal parents/carers, with both groups accessing medical checks outside of school at a similar level.

Teachers are being provided with appropriate professional learning

Teachers felt that professional learning improved their teaching and connections with the community. Teachers were positive about the professional learning that they had received in their schools. Some school staff reported difficulties in being able to access professional learning because of geographical isolation and a lack of available casual relief staff.

Connected Communities Deliverable 9: Staff report that professional learning opportunities build their capacity to personalise their teaching to meet the learning needs of all students in their class.

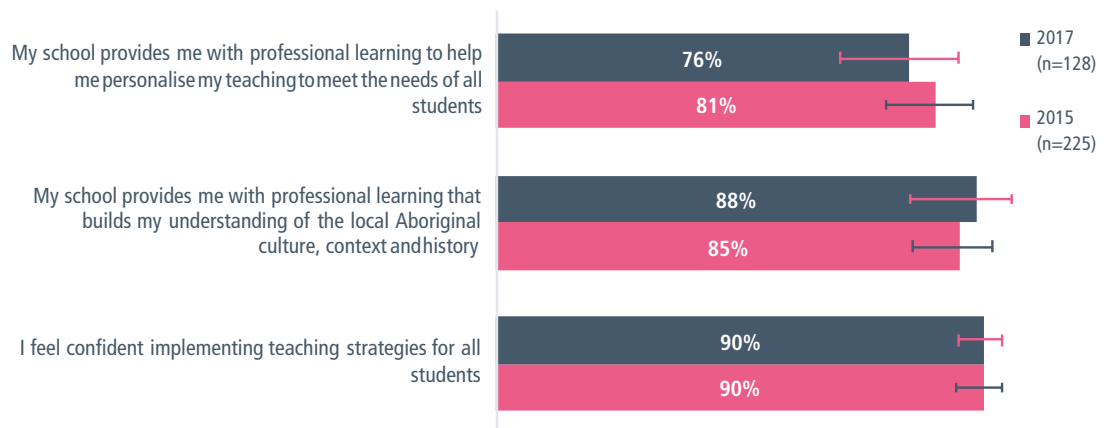
Connected Communities Deliverable 10: Staff report that professional learning opportunities build their cultural understandings and connections with the community.

However, the results from the Connected Communities teacher survey showed that most teachers in 2017 felt that they received sufficient professional learning, and that they were confident in implementing teaching strategies for all students. We estimated that 76 per cent of teachers (95% CI [63, 85]) agreed that they were provided with professional learning to help personalise their teaching to meet the needs of all students, 88 per cent (95% CI [76, 95]) agreed that their school provided them with professional learning that built their understanding of local Aboriginal culture, and 90 per cent (95% CI [85, 93]) were confident in implementing teaching strategies for all students. There were no meaningful changes from 2015 (see Figure 22).

Figure 22:

Estimated proportions (and 95% confidence intervals) of teachers agreeing with the following statements

Source: Connected Communities teacher survey, 2015 and 2017



All Connected Communities schools reported providing cultural awareness training on a yearly basis, including Connecting to Country and Healthy Culture, Healthy Country, in conjunction with the NSW AECG. This training is provided to help staff gain a deeper knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal culture, histories and contemporary issues, and to help them provide learning and teaching that is relevant and engaging for Aboriginal students. In some instances, staff also studied local Aboriginal languages.

Not all teachers participated in cultural awareness training every year, and in fact, some told us they had not done any for several years. While this may have been due to a range of reasons, including teachers being appointed after the training was held, being employed on a casual or temporary basis, or being absent on the day of the training, consideration should be given to providing more regular opportunities for staff to attend this training.

School staff who had participated in Connecting to Country and other cultural awareness training said that it had had a positive impact on how they interacted with and taught their students due to a greater appreciation of their personal circumstances and understanding of the local community.

Other training highlighted by school staff as being particularly beneficial included professional development provided by Instructional Leaders, and trauma-informed practice training.

Our kids experience ongoing trauma all the time. And to have that understanding... having that knowledge behind us, we've brought in behaviour strategies [to better meet their needs]. (Teacher, primary school)

Staff were actually crying because it was really, really powerful. I think some of our staff need to be taught more about the trauma our kids live with every day. You know, some of our kids don't get to go home to a warm bed like you and I, or go home and sit down to a meal and talk to their parents about how their day was. And the teachers I'm talking about, they just needed to realise that and understand that. And you're forever reminding them why we're here, that we are a Connected Communities school. (Senior Leader Community Engagement, central school)

Primary teachers have perceived more benefits from Connected Communities than secondary teachers

Teachers at Connected Communities schools were surveyed and asked what had changed in their schools since the introduction of the Strategy. We provide the results in Figure 23. To accurately estimate perceived changes, the results presented here are only from those teachers who reported that they had been at their school since at least 2013.

Overall, the results reported by teachers in their schools in 2015, were maintained in 2017. We estimated that more primary than secondary teachers agreed there had been positive changes in their schools since the introduction of Connected Communities. In 2017, around 65 per cent (95% CI [33, 88]) of primary teachers agreed that student behaviour had improved, and around 87 per cent (95% CI [58, 97]) agreed that instructional leadership had improved and that school leaders had higher expectations for student learning. There were no meaningful changes in the proportions of primary teachers agreeing with these statements since 2015.

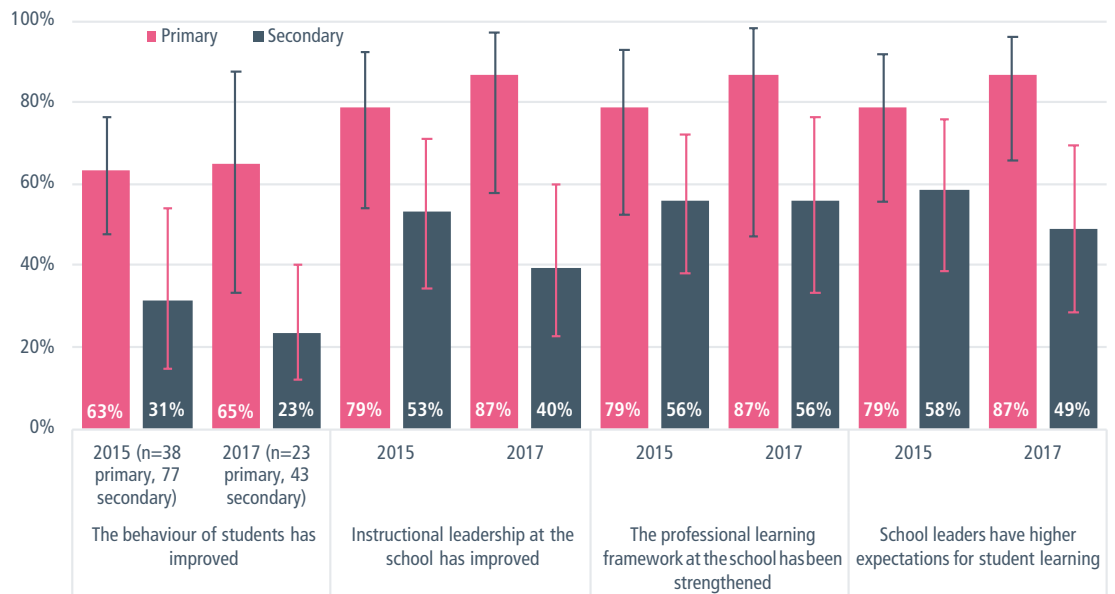
Secondary teachers were less positive about the changes seen in their schools. They felt that student behaviour remained a problem; we estimated that around only 23 per cent (95% CI [12, 40]) of secondary teachers reported that student behaviour had improved in 2017, compared to 31% (95% CI [15, 54]) in 2015.

Given the small sample size and wide confidence intervals, the results should be interpreted with some caution, but the different patterns of responses between primary and secondary teachers across all items suggests that there is a difference between how these groups feel about the impact of Connected Communities, with primary teachers being more positive than secondary.

Figure 23:

Estimated proportions (and 95% confidence intervals) of primary and secondary teachers agreeing with the following statements

Source: Connected Communities teacher survey, 2015 and 2017



Discontent with the way Connected Communities was initiated continues to affect buy-in

When interviewed in 2017, some school staff continued to reflect on the process that led to their school being selected for Connected Communities. Many school staff and community members still felt that they weren't properly consulted, and that the decision on whether they would become a Connected Communities school was made without their input and with poor communication from the department. For many school staff and community members, this feeling of disempowerment and the sense that they had been labelled a 'bad' school negatively coloured the first few years of the Strategy, creating suspicion and apprehension.

It is likely that in some schools, this led to teachers and other school staff not being fully committed to the Strategy. While almost all staff agreed with the intent of the Strategy, a perceived lack of consultation with school staff and communities may have resulted in poorer implementation in some schools. Negative perceptions have lingered for some staff, and have only begun to reduce after the positives of the Strategy have become more obvious. As these positives have emerged, some school staff and community members have been more willing to acknowledge and truly support the goals of the Strategy and its implementation in their school.

The recruitment of Executive Principals remains a challenge

The Executive Principal position is a critical component of the Connected Communities Strategy. Executive Principals are responsible for driving the implementation and vision of the strategy, and providing the strong leadership that is key to improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students (National Curriculum Services 2012). Executive Principals are graded at a higher level than other principals, and are also entitled to bonus payments if they remain in their position for 3 years, acknowledging the fact that this role requires a specific set of knowledge and skills. Some Executive Principals were also Aboriginal themselves, which in some cases has enhanced community engagement.

Despite these financial incentives, recruiting high quality Executive Principals has remained a challenge. From the beginning of the Strategy, it took at least 12 months to appoint an Executive Principal in each school. Replacing Executive Principals has also proven difficult, often requiring the use of relieving principals.

This has contributed to differing levels of success in implementing the strategy in different schools. It can take several years for the additional leadership provided by Executive Principals to filter down to other school staff and impact on student-level outcomes.

6. Conclusions and discussion

The Connected Communities Strategy includes ten key deliverables that represent the measures of its success. We have addressed each of these deliverables in this report. Here we summarise the findings of the evaluation, and provide a discussion of these findings

Summary of findings

There is moderate evidence to suggest that Connected Communities had a positive effect on Year 3 NAPLAN outcomes, but little evidence for positive effects in older years

The results from our analysis indicate that those students who were fully exposed to Connected Communities from Kindergarten to Year 3 scored around 36 points higher (95% CI [-10, 82]) on average on their Year 3 Numeracy assessments, and around 31 points higher (95% CI [-16, 78]) on average on their Year 3 Reading assessments than they would have had the Strategy not been in place. Furthermore, the results from our analysis indicate that the percentage of students achieving below national minimum standards on their Year 3 Numeracy and Year 3 Reading assessments decreased by around 19 (95% CI [-42, 3]) and 22 (95% CI [-47, 3]) percentage points, respectively.

For students exposed from Year 3 to Year 5, and Year 7 to Year 9, there were negligible impacts of Connected Communities on NAPLAN results. The results for Year 3 and Year 9 NAPLAN were largely driven by individual schools, to the extent that the Year 3 improvements would have disappeared, and the Year 9 results would have been more positive, if those schools were excluded.

There is strong evidence to suggest that student attendance increased following the introduction of Connected Communities, but only for primary school students

In Connected Communities schools the average attendance rate for all primary students increased by around 2.3 percentage points (95% CI [0.0, 4.6]), and for Aboriginal students by around 3.0 percentage points (95% CI [0.6, 5.5]) after the introduction of the strategy. This compares to the changes in attendance in comparison group schools; a decrease of around 0.01 percentage points (95% CI [-0.3, 0.2]) for all students and an increase of around 0.5 percentage points (95% CI [0.1, 1.0]) for Aboriginal students.

This means that the gap in attendance rates for all primary students across comparison and Connected Communities schools decreased by around 2.3 percentage points (95% CI [-4.6, 0.0]) and the gap in attendance rates for Aboriginal primary students across comparison and Connected Communities schools decreased by around 2.5 percentage points (95% CI [-5.0, 0.0]), after the introduction of the Strategy.

The early years focus appears to be having a positive impact on students' developmental readiness

Feedback from interview participants suggests that the focus on early childhood and transition into school was having a positive impact on students' developmental readiness. However, many students at Connected Communities schools are still not coming to school developmentally ready, particularly those who have not received the full 'exposure' to preschool, transition-to-school, and Instructional Leaders.

Retention rates changed only for non-Aboriginal students in Connected Communities schools, and post school outcomes for all students in Connected Communities schools have not changed

In 2017, the year 10-12 apparent retention rate was 38 per cent for Aboriginal students in Connected Communities schools (secondary schools and central schools), a rate that has remained stable over time. The apparent retention rate for non-Aboriginal students in Connected Communities schools increased from 64 per cent in 2012 to 84% in 2017.

There has been no meaningful change in the proportion of past students engaged in further education or employment since the implementation of the Strategy: this rate was around 3.1 percentage points (95% CI [-18.0, 11.7]) lower than it would have been had the Strategy not been in place. Although schools have attempted to provide further choices for students to pursue after school, this has not had any measurable impact.

The focus on culture is having positive effects on the school environment

Connected Communities school staff reported many examples where local Aboriginal culture was being integrated into the school environment. There is also some evidence that this is having an impact on students' views of the cultural responsiveness of their schools. According to the *Tell Them From Me* student survey, in 2017, we estimated that 80 per cent (95% CI [65, 90]) of Aboriginal secondary students at Connected Communities schools reported feeling 'good about their culture when they are at school', compared to 63 per cent (95% CI [62, 65]) of Aboriginal secondary students in other schools across NSW. Students also felt their teachers had a good understanding of local Aboriginal culture, with 66 per cent (95% CI [54, 77]) of Aboriginal secondary students in Connected Communities schools agreeing with this statement in 2017, compared to 42 per cent (95% CI [41, 44]) of Aboriginal students from non-Connected Communities schools.

Community engagement is improving but is still uneven

Data from the surveys of parents/carers and teachers suggests that overall engagement has not changed since 2015 (after the Strategy had begun to be implemented). Barriers still exist to stronger engagement and a greater sense of trust between schools and communities. However, interview participants provided examples of improvements to family and community engagement in Connected Communities schools. Schools have generally succeeded in creating welcoming and culturally respectful environments, and have been able to engage some parents well through event-based activities. However, schools need to lead the process of engaging with families and communities, particularly regarding student learning, rather than expecting families and communities themselves to do so.

Service access has increased

Schools have adapted the service delivery model according to the circumstances of their community. Overall, schools have made more linkages with services, but schools could further strengthen many of these partnerships. Interview participants also felt that services still lacked coordination in some communities, which led to a duplication of services in some areas and a gap in others. Staff turnover within service providers affected their ability to form positive relationships with schools. Despite this, many interview participants felt that Connected Communities had had a positive effect on their ability to link with services. A large proportion of Aboriginal students (64%, 95% CI [52, 74]) were accessing medical checks via their schools.

Teachers are being provided with effective professional development

In 2017, we estimated that 88 per cent (95% CI [76, 95]) of teachers in Connected Communities schools agreed that their school provided them with professional learning that built their understanding of the local Aboriginal culture, context and history. We estimated that 76 per cent (95% CI [63, 85]) cent of teachers in Connected Communities schools agreed that their school provided them with professional learning to help personalise their teaching to meet the needs of all students.

Discussion

Taking each source of data together, the following patterns have emerged regarding the impact of Connected Communities.

Overall, Connected Communities is showing promising results

Overall, this evaluation has shown that Connected Communities has had a positive impact in schools, particularly with regard to early years outcomes including Year 3 NAPLAN, school attendance among primary students, and school readiness. In addition, most school staff and communities generally support Connected Communities and feel that it is benefitting their school overall. We would argue that Connected Communities is a sound policy approach that has the potential to provide further positive outcomes for students and communities.

Further time will be required to see if these results can be sustained, and whether results in later years improve as the cohort of 'fully exposed' students (that is, those students who have been in a Connected Communities school for their whole time at school) complete their schooling.

We have endeavoured to, where possible, conduct analyses that provide the best opportunity to attribute changes in observed outcomes to the Connected Communities Strategy and not other activities that may have been taking place in schools at the time. Despite this, given the differences in results among schools, and the range of factors both in and outside of schools that can impact on outcomes, being able to fully attribute the changes in outcomes to Connected Communities remains difficult. We discuss the results, and a number of these factors in more detail below.

The Strategy appears to be more effective at the primary level than the secondary level

There has been evidence of a positive impact on students' Year 3 NAPLAN results and slight improvement in attendance among Aboriginal primary students across Connected Communities schools. Along with feedback from interview participants, the focus of Connected Communities on early childhood and transitioning into school appears to be having a positive impact on early childhood and primary school outcomes.

The primary school cohort of students who have been 'fully exposed' to Connected Communities (that is, those students who have been in a Connected Communities school for the whole of their schooling, including transition-to-school and early-years Instructional Leaders) appear to be showing the greatest benefit from the Strategy in terms of NAPLAN results, and importantly appear to be more developmentally ready for school than earlier cohorts. Engagement with the community and attendance are also stronger in primary years than later years (although this is also true in all NSW government schools in general). This early years engagement is driven by the trust that has been established between school staff and families and communities, including the support from service providers. This relatively strong early engagement has the potential to establish a lasting pattern of stronger engagement.

Whilst Connected Communities has shown a positive impact in the earlier years, to this point, there has been little improvement in outcomes for secondary students. Although a greater proportion of secondary students now report feeling good about their culture whilst at school, this has not yet translated into improvements in engagement and educational outcomes. NAPLAN results have not improved, nor has school attendance, suspensions, or post-school transitions, despite the concerted effort that schools have made in these areas.

Attendance is key yet increased only for primary school students and remained unchanged for secondary students

Research shows, and school staff and stakeholders agree, that improving attendance is critical to improving overall outcomes for students. But many schools are still struggling to establish consistently successful attendance strategies. Additionally, attendance may be affected in later years by the lack of post-school opportunities in many communities and the reluctance of young people to leave their community. Where students do not see any advantage in staying at school until Year 12, it is less likely that they will do so.

There was variation across schools in outcomes

As discussed in the Introduction section, no two communities in which Connected Communities was implemented are the same. Connected Communities schools had different ‘starting points’ in terms of both community context and the stability of each school, and there was variation in schools’ ability to work towards the Strategy’s deliverables. The Strategy has necessarily been adapted to a wide range of contexts. As such, while we have reported on Connected Communities schools in general in this report, there is significant variability in the experiences and outcomes of individual schools. For example, while Year 3 NAPLAN results have shown improvement across Connected Communities as a whole, there was a large amount of variation between individual schools. Factors such as remoteness and availability of services can also unevenly affect schools’ ability to implement the Strategy.

Environmental factors impacted on the Strategy’s implementation and impact

Connected Communities needs to be viewed in terms of the contexts in which the schools operate. Despite more resources being aimed at student and community engagement and outcomes, these communities are some of the most disadvantaged in NSW. While schools can always improve their approach, it is also true that Connected Communities schools are generally contending with a unique range of contextual disadvantages. The effects of disadvantage have a particularly strong impact on attendance and engagement, both of which are crucial to educational outcomes. And without clear and achievable study or employment pathways for students to follow after school, Year 12 attainment and positive post-school transitions have remained modest.

In many cases, interview participants understood the reasons why there might have been poorer engagement from parents and the community, and remained willing to meet the community on their own terms. In other cases, participants felt that some families and communities did not ‘value’ education, instead of acknowledging the complicated causal factors behind issues like poor engagement.

There is clear evidence that placing high expectations on students is associated with improved outcomes (National Curriculum Services 2012), while failing to hold such expectations will likely produce the opposite effect. Schools should take a long-term approach in partnership with communities, families, service providers and businesses to improve student outcomes, and staff in Connected Communities schools should continue to place high expectations on their students. Whilst environmental factors must be considered, they should not be used as an excuse for failure.

Staff buy-in affects outcomes

The progress individual schools have made in implementing the Strategy appears to have had an effect on their outcomes. The schools that appeared to be more successful seemed to have shown a greater sense of whole-school commitment to the Strategy, with a greater level of buy-in from all staff.

Conversely, in some of the schools with less positive outcomes, it was not uncommon for school staff to have a poor understanding of the intent of the Strategy, or even to question the philosophy, aims or methods of the Strategy. For example, some teachers resented the way the Strategy was ‘forced’ upon their school, or felt that poor student behaviour was not being adequately addressed. These attitudes represent a barrier for the effective implementation of the Strategy, and it is critical that Executive Principals continue to articulate a clear vision of the Strategy, ensure staff buy-in, and prioritise high expectations for all students.

Stability of key roles is key to the Strategy’s success

Another key to the success of the Strategy was the stability of the key Executive Principal and Senior Leader/Leader Community Engagement roles. Research has shown that changes in school management can take considerable time to produce a measurable impact on student outcomes (Coelli & Green 2012, Day et al. 2009, Day et al. 2016), and there has been great variation across Connected Communities schools in terms of how stable these roles have been. The effectiveness of the roles, and therefore the Strategy itself to a large extent, appears to be related to the stability of these roles; simply put, the longer Executive Principals stay in their role, the greater their ability to implement the Strategy and see through any measures that they have put in place.

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Appendix 1: Technical Details Regarding NAPLAN Analysis

Our analysis aimed to estimate the causal effects of Connected Communities on NAPLAN achievement. In line with Rubin (2005), we defined causal effects as comparisons of potential outcomes under different treatments (Connected Communities vs. no Connected Communities) for a common population (students who attended Connected Communities schools). One difficulty with this definition is that the untreated outcomes for those students who were exposed to the Connected Communities Strategy cannot be observed. Our analysis therefore aimed to recover the unobserved outcomes for those students who were exposed to the Strategy.

To further improve the comparability of the data, we used propensity scores to weight the data from the focus schools from the ATSIEAP. We were able to show that this procedure produced groups of students who had:

- similar baseline literacy and numeracy scores;
- similar expected outcomes;
- similar levels of socio-educational advantage;
- similar rates of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students;
- similar rates of male students; and
- similar rates of students from non-English speaking backgrounds.

To estimate the effect of the Connected Communities Strategy in the early years of Primary school, we used data from:

1. those students who completed Kindergarten in 2010 and stayed at the same school until their Year 3 NAPLAN assessments in 2013; and
2. those students who completed Kindergarten in 2014 and stayed at the same school until their Year 3 NAPLAN assessments in 2017.

Also, to estimate the effect of the Connected Communities Strategy in the later years of Primary school, we used data from:

1. students who completed Year 3 in 2011 and stayed at the same school until their Year 5 NAPLAN assessments in 2013; and
2. students who completed Year 3 in 2014 and stayed at the same school until their Year 5 NAPLAN assessments in 2016.

Finally, to estimate the effect of the Connected Communities Strategy in secondary schools, we used data from:

1. students who completed Year 7 in 2011 and stayed at the same school until their Year 9 NAPLAN assessments in 2013; and
2. students who completed Year 7 in 2014 and stayed at the same school until their Year 9 NAPLAN assessments in 2016.

Background information

To enrol a student in a NSW Government school, parents or carers must complete a student enrolment form. This form has questions regarding: (1) student gender; (2) student Aboriginal status; (3) language spoken at home; (4) parent school education; (5) parent educational qualification; and (6) parent occupation group. While we did not need to modify the first three variables to include them in the analysis, we created a composite measure of socio-educational advantage (SEA) from the parent background variables^{15 16}.

More detailed information about the student cohorts used in this study is presented in Appendix 2.

Outcome measures

The outcome measures were the results from the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN).

Baseline literacy and numeracy measures

When the Year 5 NAPLAN and Year 9 NAPLAN scores were the focus of the analysis, students' Year 3 NAPLAN and Year 7 NAPLAN scores formed the baseline achievement measures, respectively. When the Year 3 NAPLAN scores were the focus of the analysis, students' achievement on the department's Literacy and Numeracy Continua (described below) formed the baseline achievement measures.

Prior to their first NAPLAN tests in Year 3, all students in NSW Government primary schools undergo an assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills within the first 5 weeks of Kindergarten. All students participate in a teacher-administered assessment that consists of 36 literacy and 36 numeracy tasks. These tasks were designed to help teachers identify the literacy and numeracy skills that each student brings with them to school. After the item-level assessment, teachers make discretionary judgements regarding each student's placement on the department's Literacy and Numeracy Continua. The Continua consist of empirically supported aspects of literacy and numeracy learning¹⁷. To track student progress along the Continua, each aspect is delineated by a series of sequential clusters that describe the skills and knowledge students should be able to demonstrate at particular point in times.

As stated in the body of the report, we define causal effects as comparisons of potential outcomes under different treatments (Connected Communities vs. no Connected Communities) for a common population (students who attended Connected Communities schools). One difficulty with this definition is that the untreated outcomes for those students who were exposed to the Connected Communities Strategy (treated students) cannot be observed. Our analysis therefore aimed to recover the unobserved outcomes for those students who were exposed to the Strategy.

The first step in the analysis involved identifying samples of students who were not exposed to the Strategy but who were similar to those who were exposed. These similar students (control students) provide counterfactual information for the treated students. As a source of counterfactual information, we used data from schools that participated in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan (ATSIEAP). We selected these schools because that targets and priorities for the ATSIEAP were similar to those for Connected Communities. Furthermore, Connected Communities schools also participated in the ATSIEAP from 2010 to 2014.

¹⁵ Between 10 and 16 per cent of the students in the various samples were missing some parent background information. To reduce the potential bias due to the missing parent background data, we used multiple imputation techniques to estimate a range of plausible values for the missing information (see Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation 2014b for more information on the imputation techniques).

¹⁶ To operationalise SEA, we coded the ordinal response categories for the parent variables for school education and non-school educational qualification from 1 to 4 (or from 1 to 5 for the occupation group variable), with 1 representing the lowest category and 4 (or 5) representing the highest category. We then summed the coded parent variables. For two parent families, we summed the information for each parent separately and averaged the two results.

¹⁷ The Literacy Continuum has eight aspects, including: (1) Reading Texts; (2) Vocabulary Knowledge; (3) Comprehension; (4) Aspects of Writing; (5) Aspects of Speaking; (6) Phonics; (7) Phonemic Awareness; and (8) Concepts about Print. The Numeracy Continuum has seven aspects, including: (1) Counting Sequences and Numerical Identification; (2) Early Arithmetical Strategies; (3) Pattern and Number Structure; (4) Multi-unit Place Value; (5) Multiplication and Division; (6) Fraction Units; and (7) Measurement.

For each growth period of interest (Kindergarten to Year 3, Year 3 to Year 5, and Year 7 to Year 9), we used data from two student cohorts: (1) students who completed the relevant baseline and outcome assessments before the implementation of the Strategy (pre-implementation group); and (2) students who completed the relevant baseline and outcome assessments after the implementation of the Strategy (post-implementation group). We used the data from the pre-implementation group to predict the outcomes for those in the post-implementation group. This was an important feature of the analysis because different schools are known to grow their students at different rates. By predicting the outcomes for the students in the post-implementation groups, we were not only able to control for pre-existing differences at baseline, but also pre-existing differences in expected growth.

To determine the expected outcomes for the post-implementation groups, we fit mixed-effects regression models to the data from the pre-implementation groups. The estimated model parameters were then used to predict the outcomes for the relevant post-implementation cohorts. The models included information regarding baseline literacy and numeracy achievement, level of socio-educational advantage (SEA), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status, non-English speaking background (NESB) status, and male status.

At the outset, we decomposed the model inputs into their constituent within and between components via cluster mean centering (see Enders & Tofighi 2007). We then used a series of locally weighted regression models to visual the functional relationships between each input and the decomposed outcomes. The bivariate analyses revealed that linear predictors were a good first choice, with the initial models written as:

$$y_{ij} = \beta_{00} + \beta_{01} \cdot \text{SM baseline numeracy}_j + \beta_{02} \cdot \text{SM baseline literacy}_j + \beta_{03} \cdot \text{SM SEA}_j + \beta_{04} \cdot \text{SM ATSI}_j + \beta_{05} \cdot \text{SM NESB}_j + \beta_{06} \cdot \text{SM male}_j + u_{0j} + \beta_{10} \cdot \text{CMC baseline numeracy}_{ij} + \beta_{20} \cdot \text{CMC baseline literacy}_{ij} + \beta_{30} \cdot \text{CMC SEA}_{ij} + \beta_{40} \cdot \text{CMC ATSI}_{ij} + \beta_{50} \cdot \text{CMC NESB}_{ij} + \beta_{60} \cdot \text{CMC male}_{ij} + e_{ij}$$

$$\text{for } j = 1, 2, \dots, J \text{ schools, } i = 1, 2, \dots, n_j \text{ students, } u_{0j} \sim N(0, \sigma_{u0}^2) \text{ and } e_{ij} \sim N(0, \sigma_e^2).$$

To check the specification of the initial models, we plotted the cluster centered student-level predictors against the full residuals from the relevant models. We also plotted the school-level predictors against the best linear unbiased predictions of the random effects from the relevant models. Once again, we used a series of locally weighted regression models to investigate areas of misfit.

Based on this analysis, we added quadratic and cubic terms for the baseline numeracy and literacy inputs. We then used likelihood ratio tests to assess whether the additional terms significantly improved the fit of the models. We then used Wald tests to assess the significance of each of the highest-order polynomials, with non-significant polynomials sequentially removed from the models. With each removal, we used likelihood ratio tests to assess whether the overall fit of the model decreased significantly.

Once we had determined the best fit for the continuous predictors, we allowed the coefficients for the within-school predictors to vary across schools. The random effects for the within-school predictors were added sequentially in a pre-determined order. The baseline literacy and numeracy scores were tested first, followed by the SEA, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and NESB predictors. None of the additional random-effects meaningfully improved the fit of the models.

Once we were satisfied that the various outcomes were appropriately conditioned on the inputs, we used the final estimated model parameters to predict the outcomes for the post-implementation cohorts. The predictions included the fixed-portion of the linear predictor plus the predicted Empirical Bayes means of the random effects. The final modelled proportion of variances are presented in Table A1.

Table A1:

Final modelled proportion of variances

	Year 3		Year 5		Year 9	
	Reading	Numeracy	Reading	Numeracy	Reading	Numeracy
Snijders/Bosker R-squared Level 1	.35	.38	.61	.60	.72	.79
Snijders/Bosker R-squared Level 2	.50	.49	.68	.68	.84	.85

After we estimated the expected outcomes for the students in the post-implementation cohorts, we used propensity scores to weight the data from the control students. These weights effectively reconfigured their data so that it matched the data from the treated students. Before we calculated the propensity scores, we excluded control students that had covariate values outside the range observed for the relevant treated students.

To calculate the propensity scores, we fit logistic regression models to the data from the post-implementation cohorts. The initial models can be written as:

$$\Pr(CC_i = 1) = \text{logit}(\beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot \text{baseline numeracy}_i + \beta_2 \cdot \text{predicted posttest numeracy}_i + \beta_3 \cdot \text{baseline literacy}_i + \beta_4 \cdot \text{predicted posttest literacy}_i + \beta_5 \cdot \text{SEA}_i + \beta_6 \cdot \text{male status}_i + \beta_7 \cdot \text{ATSI status}_i + \beta_8 \cdot \text{NESB status}_i)$$

for $i = 1, 2, \dots, N$ students.

As the population of interest concerned only those students who were exposed to the Connected Communities Strategy, we only weighted the data for those students who attended ATSI/EAP schools. The weights were applied as:

$$\text{weight}_i = \begin{cases} \text{PS}_i / (1 - \text{PS}_i) & \text{if } CC_i = 0 \\ 1 & \text{if } CC_i = 1 \end{cases}$$

One of the key assumptions underlying the propensity score weighting technique involves covariate balance. In brief, the technique only yields unbiased estimates of treatment effects when the groups of interest have equal levels of all confounders. To investigate whether the weighting procedure balanced the levels of the observed covariates, we calculated standardized bias measures for each covariate. For continuous covariates, we calculated the standardized bias measures as:

$$d = (\hat{\mu}_{CC} - \hat{\mu}_{\text{ATSI/EAP}}) / \hat{\sigma}_{CC}$$

where $\hat{\mu}_{CC}$ represents the estimated mean for the Connected Communities group, $\hat{\mu}_{\text{ATSI/EAP}}$ represents the estimated mean for the weighted ATSI/EAP group, and $\hat{\sigma}_{CC}$ represents the estimated standard deviation for the Connected Communities group. For dichotomous covariates, we calculated the standardized bias measures as:

$$d = (\hat{\pi}_{CC} - \hat{\pi}_{\text{ATSI/EAP}}) / \sqrt{\hat{\pi}_{CC}(1 - \hat{\pi}_{CC})}$$

where $\hat{\pi}_{CC}$ represents the estimated proportion for the Connected Communities group and $\hat{\pi}_{\text{ATSI/EAP}}$ represents the estimated proportion for the ATSI/EAP group. It is convention to consider a covariate balanced if the standardized bias is less than 0.25 (see Harder et al. 2010). The standardized bias measures for the weighted and unweighted samples are presented in Figures A1-A3.

Figure A1:
Standardised bias measures before and after weighting - Year 3 NAPLAN analysis

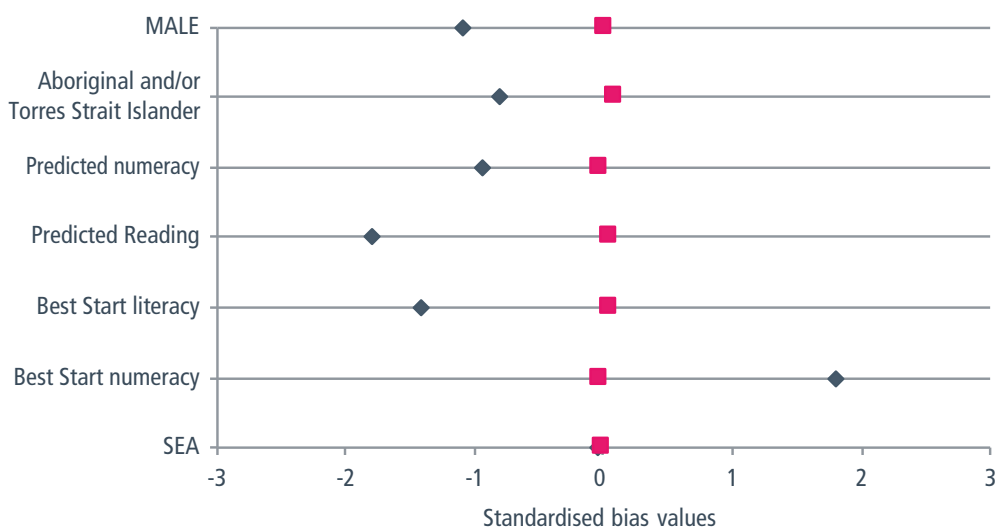


Figure A2:
Standardised bias measures before and after weighting - Year 5 NAPLAN analysis

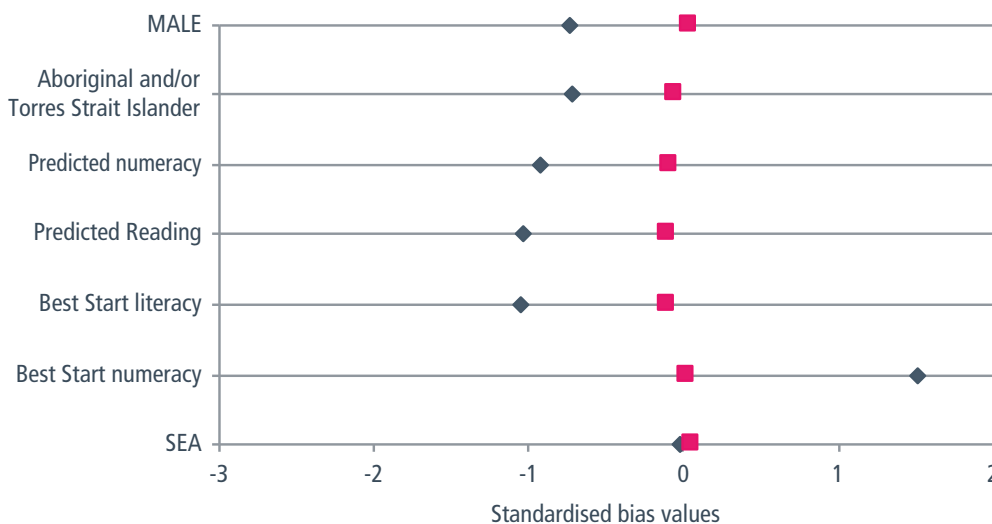
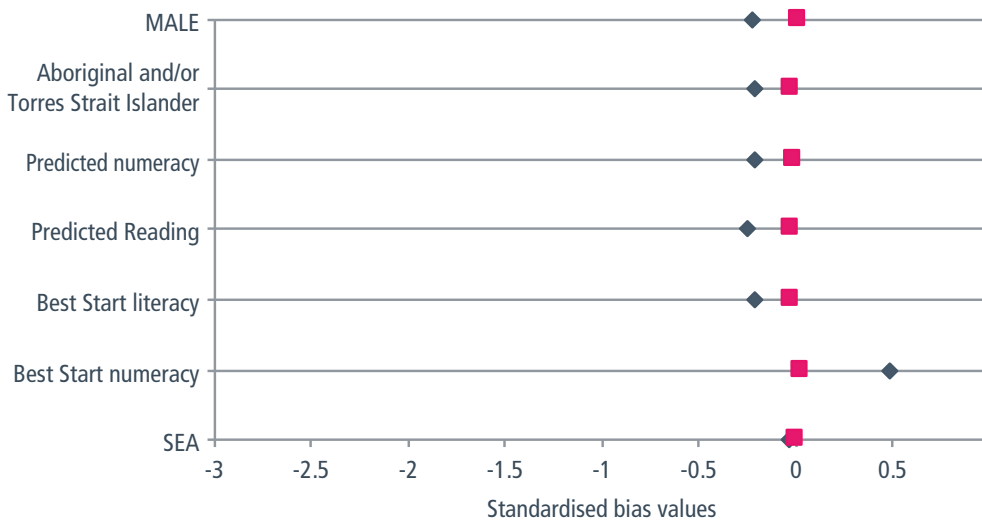


Figure A3:
Standardised bias measures before and after weighting - Year 9 NAPLAN analysis



The final step in the analysis involved determining the sampling distributions of the estimates. To this end, we computed cluster robust regression standard errors for each estimate. We also computed cluster jackknife bias and variance estimates.

The jackknife bias measures showed that the 22 students who attended Hillvue Public school had a positive influence on the estimated effect for the Kindergarten to Year 3 growth period. When these students were excluded from the analysis, the point estimates for the Year 3 NAPLAN Numeracy and Reading assessments decreased from 36 to 8 and from 31 to 1, respectively.

The jackknife bias measures also showed that the 107 students who attended Taree High school had a negative influence on the estimated effect for the Year 7 to Year 9 growth period. When these students were excluded from the analysis, the point estimates for the Year 9 NAPLAN Numeracy and Reading assessments increased from 5 to 29 and from 3 to 30, respectively.

Appendix 2: Additional information regarding student cohorts

Kindergarten to Year 3 NAPLAN cohorts

Of the 6,925 Kindergarten students who were enrolled in ATSIEAP and Connected Communities schools in 2010 and 2014, 4,592 (66.3%) stayed at the same school until their Year 3 NAPLAN assessments. While there were no meaningful differences in student mobility rates across the two cohorts (RR = 0.99, 95% CI [0.92, 1.07]), Kindergarten students from Connected Communities schools were around 1.26 times more likely (95% CI [1.10, 1.43]) to move school before their Year 3 NAPLAN assessments than those from ATSIEAP schools.

Of the 4,592 Kindergarten students who stayed at the same school, 346 (7.5%) did not participate in their Year 3 numeracy assessment while 319 (6.9%) did not participate in their Year 3 reading assessment. There were no meaningful differences in participation rates across the two cohorts (RR reading = 1.00, 95% CI [0.98, 1.01]; RR numeracy = 0.99, 95% CI [0.98, 1.01]) or across the two school types (RR reading = 0.94, 95% CI [0.87, 1.02]; RR numeracy = 0.96, 95% CI [0.88, 1.04]).

Of the 4,212 Kindergarten students who stayed at the same school and had valid Year 3 assessment data, 44 (1.0%) had missing Continua data and 519 (12.3%) had some missing parent background data. While it is unlikely that the small amount of missing Continua data would greatly influence the results of our analysis, the impact of the missing parent background data may be more substantial.

To reduce the potential bias due to the missing parent background data, we used multiple imputation techniques to estimate a range of plausible values for the missing information (see Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation 2014b for more information on the imputation techniques).

In total, the final 2010 sample included 1,907 students from ATSIEAP schools and 84 students from Connected Communities schools while the final 2014 sample included 2,082 students from ATSIEAP schools and 95 students from Connected Communities schools.

Year 3 NAPLAN to Year 5 NAPLAN cohorts

Of the 6,817 Year 3 students who were enrolled in ATSIEAP and Connected Communities schools in 2011 and 2014, 5,224 (76.6%) stayed at the same school until their Year 5 NAPLAN assessments. There were no meaningful differences in student mobility rates across the two cohorts (RR = 0.94, 95% CI [0.86, 1.03]) or school types (RR = 1.01, 95% CI [0.81, 1.26]).

Of the 5,224 Year 3 students who stayed at the same school, 415 (7.9%) did not participate in their Year 5 numeracy assessment while 380 (7.3%) did not participate in their Year 5 reading assessment. There were no meaningful differences in participation rates across the two cohorts (RR reading = 1.00, 95% CI [0.98, 1.01]; RR numeracy = 0.99, 95% CI [0.98, 1.01]) or across the two school types (RR = 0.97, 95% CI [0.94, 1.01]; RR numeracy = 0.99, 95% CI [0.95, 1.04]).

Of the 4,773 Year 3 students who stayed at the same school and had valid Year 5 assessment data, 247 (5.2%) had missing Year 3 assessment data and 413 (8.7%) had some missing parent background information. In total, the final 2011 sample included 2,100 students from ATSIEAP schools and 111 students from Connected Communities schools while the final 2014 sample included 2,207 students from ATSIEAP schools and 101 students from Connected Communities schools.

Year 7 NAPLAN to Year 9 NAPLAN cohorts

Of the 6,182 Year 7 students who were enrolled in ATSIEAP and Connected Communities schools in 2011 and 2014, 5,032 (81.4%) stayed at the same school until their Year 9 NAPLAN assessments. There were no meaningful differences in student mobility rates across the two cohorts (RR = 1.02, 95% CI [0.90, 1.15]) or school types (RR = 1.08, 95% CI [0.86, 1.36]).

Of the 5,032 Year 7 students who stayed at the same school, 795 (15.8%) did not participate in their Year 9 numeracy assessment while 709 (14.1%) did not participate in their Year 9 reading assessment. While there were no meaningful differences in participation rates across the two cohorts (RR reading = 1.00, 95% CI [0.98, 1.01]; RR numeracy = 1.00, 95% CI [0.98, 1.01]), students from Connected Communities schools were 1.14 times less likely (95% CI [1.00, 1.29]) to participate in their Year 9 numeracy assessments and 1.11 times less likely (95% CI [1.02, 1.20]) to participate in their Year 9 reading assessment than students from ATSIEAP schools.

Of the 4,131 Year 7 students who stayed at the same school and had valid Year 9 NAPLAN data, 197 (4.8%) had missing Year 7 NAPLAN data and 585 (14.2%) had some missing parent background information. In total, the final 2011 sample included 1,812 students from ATSIEAP schools and 224 students from Connected Communities schools while the final 2014 sample included 1,693 students from ATSIEAP schools and 202 students from Connected Communities schools.

Appendix 3: Technical details regarding analysis of Destinations and Expectations surveys

Modelling approach

In order to determine the effect of the Connected Communities (CC) strategy on post-school outcomes (measured in the Destinations survey), we compared the 2017 post-school outcomes of students in CC schools with students in ATSIEAP¹⁸ focus schools who were not exposed to the strategy but had similar characteristics to the CC students. To ensure that the characteristics of students from the CC schools and ATSIEAP focus schools were balanced, we rescaled the data so that each group had: (1) similar expected post-school outcomes; (2) similar gender status; (3) similar Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status; (4) similar language background other than English (LBOTE) status; (5) similar social economic status (SES); (6) similar Year 9 NAPLAN reading scores; and (7) similar Year 9 NAPLAN numeracy scores.

To determine the expected post-school outcomes for the post-implementation group, we predicted the post-school outcomes from a weighted¹⁹ logistic model from the pre-implementation group. The model was fitted as:

$$\Pr(\text{OUTCOME}_i = 1) = \text{logit}(\beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot \text{SES}_i + \beta_2 \cdot \text{NAPLAN reading score}_i + \beta_3 \cdot \text{NAPLAN numeracy score}_i + \beta_4 \cdot \text{Predicted outcome}_i + \beta_4 \cdot \text{male status}_i + \beta_5 \cdot \text{ATSI status}_i + \beta_6 \cdot \text{LBOTE status}_i)$$

for $i = 1, 2, \dots, 637$ students in 2014 survey.

We added quadratic and cubic terms for SES, NAPLAN reading score and NAPLAN numeracy score in the model and then used likelihood ratio tests to assess whether the additional terms significantly improved the fit of the model. We then used Wald tests to assess the significance of each of the highest-order polynomials, with non-significant polynomials sequentially removed from the models. With each removal, we used pseudo likelihood ratio tests to assess whether the overall fit of the model decreased significantly.

We then used the model to predict post-school outcomes for the post-implementation group. After we had calculated the expected chance of being engaged with studying or working, we used propensity scores to rescale the data from the ATSIEAP focus schools. This effectively reconfigured their data so that it matched the data from students in the CC schools. To calculate the propensity scores, we fitted a weighted logistic regression model to the data from the post-implementation cohorts. The model is:

$$\Pr(\text{CC}_i = 1) = \text{logit}(\beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot \text{SES}_i + \beta_2 \cdot \text{NAPLAN reading score}_i + \beta_3 \cdot \text{NAPLAN numeracy score}_i + \beta_4 \cdot \text{Predicted outcome}_i + \beta_4 \cdot \text{male status}_i + \beta_5 \cdot \text{ATSI status}_i + \beta_6 \cdot \text{LBOTE status}_i)$$

for $i = 1, 2, \dots, 388$ students in 2017 survey.

As the population of interest concerned only those students who were exposed to the CC Strategy, we only rescaled the data for those students who attended ATSIEAP focus schools. To rescale the data, a 'ratio' is produced and this ratio is the basis for the recalculation of the student data from ATSIEAP focus schools, making them equivalent to the students at the CC schools and is applied as:

$$\text{ratio}_i = \begin{cases} \text{PS}_i / (1 - \text{PS}_i) & \text{if } \text{CC}_i = 0 \\ 1 & \text{if } \text{CC}_i = 1 \end{cases}$$

¹⁸ As a source of counterfactual information, we used data from schools that participated in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan (ATSIEAP). These schools were selected because the targets and priorities for the ATSIEAP focus schools were similar to those for CC schools. Furthermore, CC schools also participated in the ATSIEAP from 2010 to 2014.

¹⁹ A weighted logistic regression model was used to overcome the sample bias created by the over-sampling of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students in the Destinations survey.

The new final sample weight used for analysis is the product of the ratio and original survey sample weight. We then calculated standardised bias measures for each covariate to demonstrate the groups were balanced on each characteristic. The sample weights had been included in each item calculation. For continuous covariates, the standardised bias measures are calculated as:

$$d = (\hat{\mu}_{CC} - \hat{\mu}_{ATSIEAP}) / \hat{\sigma}_{CC}$$

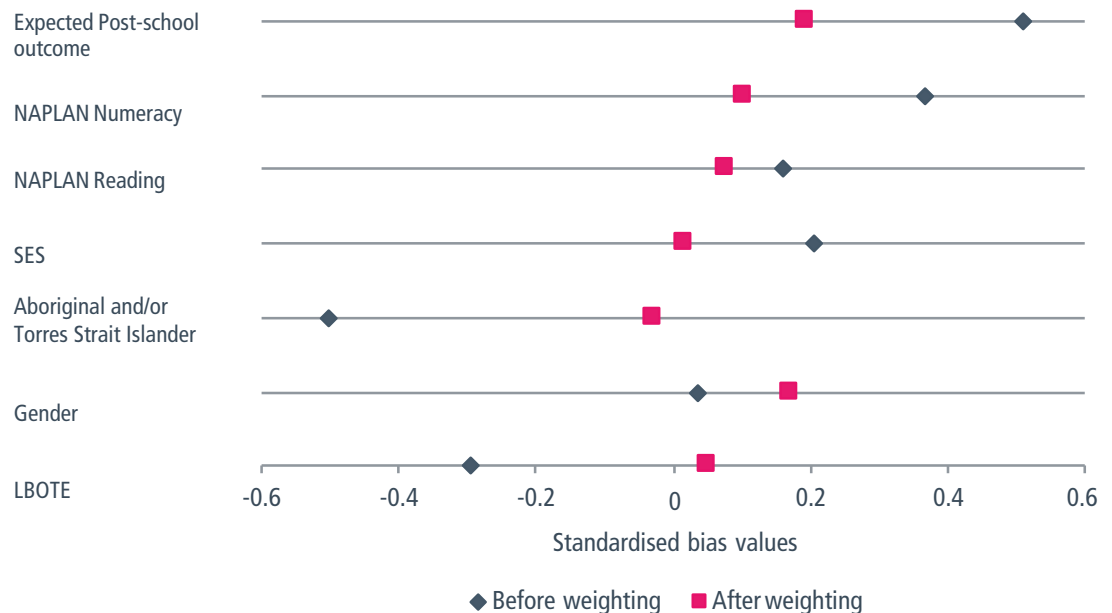
where $\hat{\mu}_{CC}$ represents the estimated mean for the CC group, $\hat{\mu}_{ATSIEAP}$ represents the estimated mean for the weighted ATSIEAP focus schools group, and $\hat{\sigma}_{CC}$ represents the estimated standard deviation for the CC group. For dichotomous covariates, the standardised bias measures are calculated as:

$$d = (\hat{\pi}_{CC} - \hat{\pi}_{ATSIEAP}) / \sqrt{\hat{\pi}_{CC}(1 - \hat{\pi}_{CC})}$$

where $\hat{\pi}_{CC}$ represents the estimated proportion for the CC group and $\hat{\pi}_{ATSIEAP}$ represents the estimated proportion for the ATSIEAP focus schools group. It is convention to consider a covariate balanced if the standardised bias is less than 0.25 (see Harder et al. 2010). The standardised bias measures for the weighted and unweighted samples are presented in Figure A4.

Figure A4:

Standardised bias measures before and after weighting



The final step in the analysis involved a weighted logistic regression model of the probability of being engaged with working or studying, on the indicator of treatment (CC or ATSIEAP focus school). The model is below:

$$\Pr(\text{OUTCOME}_i = 1) = \text{logit}(\beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{CC}_i)$$

The results showed that the probability of CC students being more engaged than students from ATSIEAP focus schools is 3.12% [-17.98%, 11.74%]. This result indicates that compared with similar students in the ATSIEAP focus schools, the engagement rate for CC students in 2017 is at best 11.7% higher and at worst 18.0% lower. The difference is probably very small to small and may be positive or negative.

Appendix 4: Connected Communities schools data, 2009-2019

Table A2 below contains data from 2009 to 2019 (where available) for all Connected Communities schools across a range of indicators related to the Strategy's key deliverables. The next evaluation of the Strategy will contain an analysis of this data.

The body of this report contains statistical analyses on data up to August 2018. These analyses are used to ensure that any observed relationship (e.g. trend or pattern) is true, meaningful, and not simply due to chance, measurement error or other alternative explanations. This allows us to make evaluative statements based on those observations about the effectiveness or otherwise of the Strategy. Conversely, simply observing data points such as those in the table below does not allow us to interpret or observe meaningful effects or to make such evaluative statements. For these reasons, **we do not advise that the data presented in this appendix be interpreted as evidence or used to support policymaking decisions.**

Please take particular caution when reading attendance, suspension, and NAPLAN data. Each of these types of data have different sources of error which are outlined in detail below. For these reasons, CESE does not typically report this data publicly.

- **Attendance:** Between 2014 and 2015 there was a change in the definition of students recorded as exempt. This does not substantively influence the data presented in Table A2 but should be noted generally. Between 2017 and 2018, there was a change in the definition of recorded absences. In addition, the collection of student-level attendance data has improved the accuracy of data. These two changes mean that attendance rates from 2018 should not be compared to prior attendance rate data.
- **Suspensions:** Methods of suspensions data collection have changed over time. Suspension data prior to 2012 are not comparable for this reason and are therefore not presented in the table. The differences in methods of data collection between 2012 and 2018 has also likely lead to apparent changes in the figures, therefore caution is advised when comparing data over time. The suspension rate is calculated by dividing the number of unique students who were suspended at any time during one calendar year by the number of individual students counted as enrolled at the August census date of that calendar year. This is an imprecise figure as the number of students who were enrolled at the August census date may not be the same as when each individual student was suspended. In schools with high levels of suspensions and student mobility, such as the Connected Communities schools, this is especially problematic.
- **NAPLAN:** As with all measures, NAPLAN data contains measurement error. Random measurement error is typically reduced by collecting large samples. The data presented below is based on relatively small student counts of between 85 – 390 students. This means that any changes in these numbers over time is more likely to be due to random fluctuations in the data as well as true changes. Statistical analyses can assist in identifying whether true changes may be distinguished from random error.

Table A2:

Connected Communities schools data, 2009-2019

		2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Enrolment (FTE) for primary schools	Aboriginal students	1,110.0	1,095.0	1,067.0	1,029.0	1,073.0	1,069.0	1,051.0	1,068.0	1,047.0	1,114.0	1,085.0
	All students	1,422.0	1,353.0	1,336.0	1,263.0	1,303.0	1,287.0	1,275.0	1,324.0	1,313.0	1,357.0	1,341.0
	% Aboriginal students	78	81	80	82	82	83	82	81	80	82	81
Enrolment (FTE) for secondary schools	Aboriginal students	787.5	843.5	871.0	877.6	900.9	853.2	823.3	835.5	798.4	858.2	868.8
	All students	2,054.1	2,175.9	2,221.2	2,194.0	2,191.7	2,091.3	1,972.9	1,988.7	1,922.6	1,895.8	1,888.8
	% Aboriginal students	38	39	39	40	41	41	42	42	42	45	46
Attendance rate (%) for K-6 students	Aboriginal students	79.2	80.4	81.7	82.4	83.2	85.0	84.4	83.7	83.7	81.2	-
	All students	81.6	82.4	83.5	84.2	84.5	85.9	85.6	84.8	85.1	82.7	-
Attendance rate (%) for Y7-10 students	Aboriginal students	68.2	67.3	65.8	65.8	67.0	67.1	67.1	67.0	68.4	65.2	-
	All students	79.1	79.2	77.2	77.4	77.8	77.9	78.1	77.4	78.0	75.5	-
Long suspension rate (%)	Aboriginal students	-	-	-	9	11	12	13	12	12	12	-
	All students	-	-	-	6	8	8	9	9	9	9	-
NAPLAN mean scores												
Y3 Reading	Aboriginal students	309	292	303	283	295	276	309	301	328	331	328
	All students	326	308	320	299	309	291	317	319	345	349	342
Y5 Reading	Aboriginal students	379	370	368	384	419	373	398	374	405	393	392
	All students	397	385	384	397	424	389	404	386	413	406	404
Y7 Reading	Aboriginal students	444	449	448	444	441	455	453	454	429	453	458
	All students	492	498	496	496	486	495	488	492	478	483	493
Y9 Reading	Aboriginal students	488	483	491	482	494	477	479	505	489	499	497
	All students	536	528	543	530	540	531	524	538	531	534	526
Y3 Numeracy	Aboriginal students	294	296	317	289	298	291	324	318	331	338	317
	All students	312	309	328	303	309	305	332	326	344	344	329
Y5 Numeracy	Aboriginal students	387	373	385	391	388	383	403	400	402	409	401
	All students	403	385	400	403	399	398	410	408	409	416	410
Y7 Numeracy	Aboriginal students	447	455	452	441	448	459	465	460	452	467	459
	All students	492	496	499	490	490	495	490	493	487	494	496
Y9 Numeracy	Aboriginal students	505	496	497	495	491	503	506	515	510	509	522
	All students	550	537	544	535	535	541	540	546	544	541	541
NAPLAN at or above NMS (%)												
Y3 Reading	Aboriginal students	68	65	74	55	72	57	65	65	77	68	78
	All students	74	71	79	60	73	63	68	72	80	73	82
Y5 Reading	Aboriginal students	46	42	49	48	81	45	59	47	62	61	64
	All students	55	48	53	54	80	52	63	54	63	64	67
Y7 Reading	Aboriginal students	56	66	68	59	60	73	75	62	44	67	64
	All students	76	81	84	81	81	84	87	79	69	78	77
Y9 Reading	Aboriginal students	49	50	57	51	59	43	55	58	55	55	60
	All students	72	71	79	76	80	72	74	78	76	75	73
Y3 Numeracy	Aboriginal students	59	67	80	57	71	66	80	77	82	81	78
	All students	67	73	84	62	72	71	82	80	84	83	82

Table A2:

Connected Communities schools data, 2009-2019

		2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Y5 Numeracy	Aboriginal students	60	52	56	55	61	50	69	68	71	72	63
	All students	69	57	62	60	65	57	72	71	72	75	66
Y7 Numeracy	Aboriginal students	65	71	72	64	70	76	86	74	69	81	63
	All students	82	84	86	82	85	86	92	85	83	90	79
Y9 Numeracy	Aboriginal students	69	61	61	68	52	77	78	72	84	71	84
	All students	85	79	82	84	77	89	88	86	93	83	90
NAPLAN top 2 bands (%)												
Y3 Reading	Aboriginal students	3	2	3	1	3	2	8	4	9	11	8
	All students	10	6	8	5	6	4	10	6	15	17	17
Y5 Reading	Aboriginal students	1	1	1	3	4	2	1	1	5	2	1
	All students	5	4	6	6	6	4	1	3	6	4	4
Y7 Reading	Aboriginal students	2	1	4	3	1	3	3	4	2	5	1
	All students	14	16	14	17	11	13	10	14	9	10	10
Y9 Reading	Aboriginal students	2	1	2	1	1	1	0	2	1	3	2
	All students	13	9	12	10	11	11	9	9	8	6	6
Y3 Numeracy	Aboriginal students	1	0	0	2	1	2	5	3	7	9	2
	All students	6	3	4	5	2	6	7	5	14	12	5
Y5 Numeracy	Aboriginal students	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	3
	All students	2	2	2	3	2	3	1	3	2	2	3
Y7 Numeracy	Aboriginal students	3	1	2	0	1	2	2	1	1	4	4
	All students	13	10	11	11	11	12	7	8	6	11	15
Y9 Numeracy	Aboriginal students	3	1	2	0	2	0	1	0	0	3	1
	All students	11	8	11	7	8	9	8	7	6	8	6
NAPLAN top 3 bands (%)												
Y3 Reading	Aboriginal students	15	12	11	8	12	8	21	11	21	28	23
	All students	23	17	17	16	19	13	27	18	30	37	31
Y5 Reading	Aboriginal students	9	3	4	7	12	8	8	6	19	10	13
	All students	14	8	11	12	18	14	10	10	21	15	17
Y7 Reading	Aboriginal students	8	9	7	7	8	9	10	9	7	15	14
	All students	28	32	33	34	25	30	25	25	24	26	32
Y9 Reading	Aboriginal students	10	5	8	6	8	7	4	12	12	10	11
	All students	30	23	30	24	27	29	21	26	23	24	22
Y3 Numeracy	Aboriginal students	8	4	11	11	6	14	18	8	20	28	15
	All students	18	9	17	18	12	19	23	14	27	30	21
Y5 Numeracy	Aboriginal students	4	0	3	7	4	7	4	7	5	7	8
	All students	9	6	9	12	7	14	8	11	8	10	12
Y7 Numeracy	Aboriginal students	5	9	6	4	6	7	9	9	8	15	11
	All students	26	30	33	26	26	25	24	23	24	29	31
Y9 Numeracy	Aboriginal students	11	4	6	3	4	4	5	7	3	9	7
	All students	32	21	28	19	19	24	21	22	20	24	17



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