



Low SES School Communities
National Partnerships
Evaluation

**Case studies of school external
partnerships**

Fourth Progress Report

November, 2013

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Glossary

ABCN	Australian Business and Community Network
AEW	Aboriginal Education Worker
AP	Assistant Principal
ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admission Rank
ATSI	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
CEO	Community Engagement Officer
CLO	Community Liaison Officer
CSU	Charles Sturt University
DIAC	Department of Immigration and Citizenship
DEC	Department of Education and Communities
FDN	Future Direction Network
GOALS	Growing Opportunities and Learning Skills
HEPPP	Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program
HSC	Higher School Certificate
HSIE	Human Society and its Environment
HSLO	Home School Liaison Officer
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ISS	Indigenous Student Services
LBOTE	Language Background Other Than English
LCC	Learning and Community Centre
LCD	Liquid Crystal Display
LEAP	Learning, Education, Aspiration and Participation
MEGS	Making Education Goals Sustainable
MINiLit	Meeting Initial Needs in Literacy
MOODLE	Modular Object Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment
MULTiLit	Making Up Lost Time in Literacy

NAIDOC	National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy
PAT	Progressive Achievement Test
P&C	Parents and Citizens (P&C) Association
PaCE	Parental and Community Engagement program
PEC	Parent Engagement Coordinator
PLP	Personalised Learning Plan
SES	Socio-economic Status
SPARK	St Vincent de Paul Assisting Refugee Kids
SPinS	Speech Pathology in School
SRC	Student Representative Council
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
UTS	University of Technology Sydney
UWS	University of Western Sydney
UNSW	University of New South Wales

Executive Summary

This report presents case studies of schools that are participating in the Low Socio-economic Status School Communities National Partnerships (Low SES NP). It is part of an agreed work plan for the *Evaluation of School External Partnerships*, and the fourth in a series of progress reports that will contribute to the final report of the evaluation to be submitted in 2017. The final report will draw on information from surveys, case studies, and other research.

The case studies relate to the *Evaluation of School External Partnerships* project conducted by the University of Canberra's Education Institute (UCEI) in conjunction with the Centre for Research on Education Systems (CRES) at the University of Melbourne. The project entails an evaluation of initiatives designed to address Reform Area 6 of the Low SES NP program. This reform area aims to strengthen the ability of participating schools to address identified needs through ongoing engagement with the broader community. It encourages schools to work with communities and to expand schools' services.

The *Evaluation of School External Partnerships* project aims to:

- identify and explore types of external partnerships (such as with parents, universities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) communities)
- explore characteristics and factors contributing to successful partnerships
- determine the impacts and outcomes of partnership initiatives implemented by schools.

Part A of this report provides six case studies of government, Catholic and independent schools that have implemented a range of *university partnership initiatives* as part of the Low SES NP.

Part B of the report provides an update on the six school case studies that were conducted in 2012 on *school-parent partnerships*.

Part A: University partnerships

The six case studies are based on university partnerships that aim to raise levels of student transition to higher education, and improve the quality of student learning and school effectiveness.

One primary school is making use of university developed and owned programs, such as *Making Up Lost Time in Literacy* (MULTiLit), *Meeting Initial Needs in Literacy* (MINiLit) and *QuickSmart* numeracy. The school has purchased the programs and associated teacher training in order to improve student skills in literacy and numeracy. The programs seek to develop teacher capacity to devise and implement effective literacy and numeracy teaching strategies for students with weak skills. They also seek to develop parent ability to understand the skills involved in learning, observe changes and work with teachers. Since implementing the programs, the school has reported gains in student learning associated with the programs. The learning results are seen by the school to be due to increased levels of student confidence, motivation and knowledge and skill development.

Several schools are making use of the outreach activities offered by a range of universities under the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP). This scheme aims to assist Australians from low SES backgrounds get the opportunity to study at university by providing funding to assist universities undertake activities and implement strategies that improve access to undergraduate courses for people from low SES backgrounds. The Partnerships component of HEPPP has provided a number of universities in New South Wales with funding to develop activities in partnership with primary and secondary schools, to raise the aspirations and build the capacity of people from low SES backgrounds to participate in higher education. A number of the case study schools are engaged in these partnerships, providing student access to targeted support services (such as, mentoring, tutoring, career planning and goal setting support), providing schools and students with information on pathway options and scholarships available to provide student financial assistance, running workshops, university visits, exhibitions and targeted access on open days.

Two case study schools have entered into partnerships with universities to utilise the expertise of university staff and trainees to address school needs. At one secondary school, university researchers were asked to collaborate to help capture and measure parent, student and teacher perspectives. The researchers' expertise can enhance the school's process of evaluation of the effectiveness of the Low SES NP. This involvement of university staff through the partnership has also contributed to school efforts to build stronger relationships with parents. The trust built over time between school and university staff has led to the establishment of other collaborative initiatives and enhanced the sustainability of the relationship.

One primary school has formed a partnership with a university whereby trainee speech therapists and a clinical educator from the university provide weekly assessments and support for students with language difficulties. The school has also worked with the university to develop a program through reading which focuses on building the university aspirations of students, a program that is now being offered by the university to other schools.

Types of school-university partnerships

The case studies reveal a variety of relationships that are formed, not all of which might be considered 'partnerships' in the spirit of Reform 6 of the NP. Schools using MULTiLit and QuickSmart, for example, have purchased commercial products designed to improve student literacy and numeracy skill development. The products, with associated teacher training, may prove very effective in raising skills in literacy and numeracy. However, as commercial arrangements, the relationships with the suppliers could be with any private company or organisation, rather than with a university. The schools are purchasing products, materials and training and the question remains whether or not the 'partnership' or 'relationship' would exist or be sustainable outside of a strictly commercial arrangement. This might be described as the '*contract*' or '*commercial*' model of university-school partnerships.

Other 'partnerships' entered into with universities, those in support of raising aspirations to support increased transition into higher education and those in support of school improvement, are more in the spirit of school and community enhancement envisaged under Reform 6 of the low SES community NP. In these partnerships, schools and universities co-operate with mutual benefit. Schools seek support and expertise to help raise student

aspirations and attainment and to boost community involvement, while universities seek to increase positive awareness of university study as a post-school destination and improve transition rates in communities where these rates historically have been low. Other school/university partnerships are designed to help support school improvement. These ends are pursued through the provision of outreach and other services.

One partnership model is more dependent on ‘outreach’ activities offered by universities through which students and schools are given access to university organised activities. Universities are the senior partners in this model of partnership, with schools more dependent on what universities make available to schools, often to a range of schools within their region. The services often include activities such as workshops, exhibitions, performances, participation in open days, provision of speakers and school organised visits to the university designed to support the university’s outreach and community engagement charter. These are made available to all interested schools. This might best be described as the ‘*outreach*’ model of university-school partnerships.

Another type of partnership is one in which schools are more active in the partnership and greater flexibility and responsiveness from the university in addressing individual school and community needs, such as developing a program to address the needs of students with language difficulties, or developing a joint program to promote university aspirations. This type of partnership is more aligned to individual school needs and circumstances, and one in which research and specialist services support the school while providing training and research benefits for the university. This is more a ‘*service*’ model of university-school partnerships in which a university partners with a school to provide support and expertise to address an agreed issue or set of issues for the school or its community.

Impact

There is evidence from the case study schools suggesting that the school partnerships with universities are contributing to improvements. Schools have reported changes in the following:

- the number of students seeking university placements, including of Aboriginal students
- rates of student access of targeted support services (such as, mentoring, tutoring, career planning and goal setting support)
- student and parent awareness of pathway options and scholarships available to provide financial assistance
- levels of student focus on educational attainment evident through improved engagement in learning, development of higher aspirations, improved use of study periods and better preparation for class activities and examinations
- teacher capacity to make curriculum improvements and to better align teaching with student pathway plans
- parent ability to support student learning and career planning.

Part B: Parent partnerships

In 2012 six case studies were undertaken of Low SES NP schools focusing on parent partnerships in building their external partnership capacity under Reform Area 6. The powerful and well-documented association between parental engagement and student achievement in low socio-economic status school communities informed the determination of case study schools showcased in Progress Report 2 to focus on strengthening school-family partnerships. The key initiatives being implemented in each school are outlined in detail in Progress Report 2¹.

Discussions with school leaders indicate that parent partnerships initiatives led to improvements as follows:

- *establishing a strategic focus on parent partnership* – through initiatives aimed at driving significant change in the school, such as the employment of community liaison personnel and the incorporation of parent partnership perspectives in school policies and staff roles
- *developing parent knowledge about student learning* – through the provision of various parent education activities, such as workshops, seminars and briefing sessions
- *communicating effectively with parents* – through the dissemination of information to parents in order to better inform parents about school events and developments and build their capacity to work in partnership with the school.
- *increasing parent participation* – through initiatives aimed at increasing the number of parents participating in a range of activities, such as information sessions and workshops
- *engaging targeted groups* – through initiatives aimed at engaging targeted groups in the school community – for instance, Aboriginal parents, refugee parents and parents of kindergarten students
- *facilitating home-school collaboration* – through initiatives aimed at facilitating agreed understandings and joint actions related to supporting student with their learning, school attendance and engagement, welfare and transition support.

Conclusion

The university and parent partnerships case studies are part of the Low SES NP Reform Area 6, the establishment of external partnerships. The partnership initiatives are employed in conjunction with other reform areas, usually supported by a broader policy framework.

¹ http://www.cese.nsw.gov.au/images/stories/PDF/NP/Ext_Partnerships_Report_final-amended_%20280513-APPROVED.pdf

Partnerships are designed to enable schools to engage other relevant stakeholders in order to meet the complex needs of students in Low SES school communities. Given the critical role of parents in the education of students, schools seek to better engage parents by recognising the role of parents in school policy and practice.

Similarly, schools need support in making education relevant and meaningful to student lives. Partnerships with universities, for example, aim to enable schools to work on aspiration building in communities that previously have had low levels of participation in higher education. They work with universities to utilise expert services, programs and resources to support student learning and improve outcomes. They aim to broaden the horizons of students to consider university and higher education as a possible future pathway.

The school case studies provide evidence suggesting that successful partnerships:

- *are supported by leaders and reflect two-way communication*, enabling parents to have a ‘voice’ in the school and schools to ‘negotiate’ relevant and customised services with universities
- *avoid ‘deficit approaches’*, emphasising instead the importance of building on the strengths of the local community while seeking to provide for parents (as learners alongside their children) and for schools (as providers of foundational education)
- *have a strong focus on student learning*, fostering the engagement of parents with the school and their children’s learning. Likewise, the outreach activities organised by universities working in partnership with schools seek to promote changes in student views about university as a destination by providing activities for students, such as access to workshops and personalised visits, while also providing schools with associated professional development and training for staff and parent development.
- *are characterised by reciprocal trust and mutual benefits* which can serve as a foundation for sustainable partnership arrangements. These mutual benefits are, in the main, associated with achieving better educational outcomes for low SES students and their families, which is important to schools and can benefit families as well as universities through a broader pool of recruits.
- *entail the construction of new enabling structures*, for example, the establishment of new positions, the incorporation or clarification of functions in staff role descriptions, the development of school policies and the delivery of additional programs and services (related to parental engagement and transition to university).
- *are adequately resourced*, to support the development of professional understandings (through the use of a common language) and teacher and institutional capacity to be built.

Several schools are exploring strategies, such as the use of global school funds, to maintain and extend low SES NP parent and university partnership initiatives. Others suggest that partnerships with parents are being sustained through the integration of partnership perspectives in school policies and practices, and the incorporation of partnership functions in the roles of school staff.

The challenge for schools will be to maintain a strategic focus and responsiveness to the emerging needs of students, parents and school communities.

1. Introduction

This report presents case studies of schools that are participating in the Low Socio-economic Status School Communities National Partnerships (Low SES NP). It is part of an agreed work plan for the *Evaluation of School External Partnerships*, and the fourth in a series of progress reports that will contribute to the final report of the evaluation to be submitted in 2017. The final report will draw on information from surveys, case studies, analyses of data and other research.

The case studies relate to the *Evaluation of School External Partnerships* being conducted by the University of Canberra's Education Institute (UCEI) in conjunction with the Centre for Research on Education Systems (CRES) of the University of Melbourne.

The evaluation was commissioned on behalf of the NSW Minister for Education to address selected aspects of the bilateral National Partnership Agreement for Low SES Communities between the Commonwealth and NSW. This evaluation has its origin in the 2008 changes to Commonwealth-State funding arrangements and the Council of Australian Government's (COAG's) subsequent approval of the National Education Agreement and creation of the National Partnerships (NPs):

- the Literacy and Numeracy NP
- the Improving Teacher Quality NP
- the Low Socio-economic Status School Communities NP.

The importance of external partnerships is also reflected in the broader educational policy framework. The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (November 2008:11) outlines the commitment of Australian governments to support student learning through the building of strong partnerships between schools and young Australians, parents, carers, families, education and training providers, business and the community at large. This commitment recognises that partnerships are central to building and sustaining productive relationships, links and networks within schools and between schools and other entities. The *Evaluation of School External Partnerships* project addresses 'Reform area 6 of the Low NP program' and aims to:

- identify and explore types of external partnerships (such as with parents, universities and ATSI communities);
- explore characteristics and factors contributing to successful partnerships, and
- determine the impacts and outcomes of partnership initiatives implemented by schools.

An earlier report, Progress Report 2, provides a background to the Low SES NP as well as a description of the case study methodology that is used in the current report.

Part A of this report provides six case studies of schools—government, Catholic and independent—that have implemented a range of university partnership initiatives as part of the Low SES NP. They are presented in separate chapters, ordered by broad type – primary

and secondary. The case studies provide a snapshot of how partnership initiatives have been working in different school settings. The case studies provide insights into partnership purposes and intentions, implementation processes, and impacts and outcomes of key initiatives.

Part B of the report provides an update on the six school case studies undertaken in 2012 on parent partnerships. The case study updates are provided in separate chapters detailing recent developments and changes.

Prefacing the case studies in each part is an overview, providing background and contextual information and highlighting key themes, impacts and outcomes.

PART A: University Partnerships

2. Introduction

This section of the report presents six case studies of schools—government, Catholic and independent—that have implemented a range of university partnership initiatives as part of the Low SES NP. The case studies are presented in separate chapters and provide a snapshot of how partnership initiatives have been working in different school settings.

The six schools that are participating in the Low SES NP program and selected as case studies of school-university partnerships are diverse. Table 1 provides information on each school related to school type, sector, region, enrolment number, student characteristics as well as the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) score. The names of the schools have been changed to ensure anonymity. Enrolments have been rounded to the nearest 100 and ICSEA scores to the nearest 10 to minimise potential for identification.

Table 1: List of case study schools and characteristics

School Name	Sector	Region/ Diocese	Type	Enrolments	ICSEA	LBOTE	Aboriginal
Northern Non-Government School	Non-Gov	North Coast	9-12	<-100	Na	0%	77%
Tablelands High School	Gov	Western NSW	7-12	800-900	940-950	3%	3%
West Sydney Region High School	Gov	SW Sydney	7-12	1000-1100	910-920	85%	1%
Hunter Public School	Gov	Hunter	K-6	300-400	890-900	1%	17%
Sydney West High School 2	Gov	SW Sydney	7-12	700-800	940-950	76%	2%
North-West Non-Government Primary	Non-Gov	Maquarie-Barwon subdivision	K-6	100-200	870-880	2%	46%

The six case studies provide examples of partnerships between schools and universities that aim to do one or more of the following:

1. Raise aspirations and improve transition to higher education
2. Improve student learning and attainment
3. Promote school improvement.

1. Raise aspirations and improve transition to university

Five case study schools have established university partnerships to support student transition from school to higher education. University partnerships have a role to play in addressing the under-representation of students from low SES backgrounds in Australian higher education. Despite the overall expansion of higher education during the last two decades, university access rates for students from Low SES backgrounds are less than half of those from high SES backgrounds (McLachlan et al in Productivity Commission Staff Working Paper 2013:103). In 2009, 15 per cent of university students aged 18-25 years enrolled in a bachelor degree were from a low SES background. The proportion of high SES students was around 44 per cent of all enrollees (McLachlan et al in Productivity Commission Staff Working Paper 2013:103).

The case study schools, in the main, entered into university partnerships with the aim of shifting student aspirations, opening up possibilities, and helping improve learning outcomes by addressing a number of interrelated barriers to university education including:

- student and parent expectations and aspirations
- levels of school attainment
- awareness and exposure to the potential benefits of higher education
- understanding of what is involved in preparing for university.

The university partnerships support the:

- NSW Tertiary Education Plan to lift participation, attainment and university enrolments, especially in schools serving low socio-economic communities
- NSW Government efforts to meet the national target of increasing the proportion of undergraduate students from low SES backgrounds to 20 per cent
- *Bridges to University* Program target to increase the percentage of students in South Western Sydney gaining a university placement, in order to increase the proportion of enrolments from under-represented groups to 40 per cent by 2020.

Strategies to raise rates of transition to higher education include the implementation of the following university initiatives and programs:

- *Bridges to Higher Education*² initiative
- Sydney University's *Compass*³- *Find your way through education*, including partnership with *Conservatorium of Music*

² Bridges to Higher Education is a \$21.2m initiative, funded by the Commonwealth Government's Higher Education Participation and Partnerships program (HEPPP), to improve participation rates of students from communities under-represented in higher education. The partnership extends to include NSW DEC, TAFE NSW, The University Admissions Centre, local government organizations, education offices, ATSI organisations and other community philanthropic and social enterprise organizations.

³ Compass is a partnership between the University of Sydney and the NSW DEC and financially supported by

- University of New South Wales' *ASPIRE*⁴
- University of Western Sydney's *Fast Forward*⁵
- University of Newcastle's *Making Educational Goals Sustainable (MEGS)*⁶ and *Careers Through Reading*⁷
- Charles Sturt University's (CSU's) *Future Moves*⁸
- University of Technology Sydney's *Summer schools*

University initiatives are in the main resourced through the Commonwealth's *Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP)*⁹.

Schools are also using Low SES NP funding to resource their own activities and to facilitate co-ordination of programs and collaboration with university personnel. These initiatives, like their overseas counterparts, such as, *Aimhigher*¹⁰, are designed to:

- increase both primary and secondary school student aspirations and educational attainments
- demystify university through regular visits and ongoing exposure to university life
- inform students and parents about university options and benefits, financial support available, courses and requirements
- provide support for students through tutoring and mentoring relations with university students.

The case studies outlined in this report suggest some positive results in schools that have engaged in partnerships with universities. These studies suggest that school partnerships with universities have led to an increase in the:

the Department of Industry, Immigration, Science, Research and Tertiary Education. It is currently operating in 13 primary and 10 secondary schools as well as in two Intensive English Centres.

⁴ ASPIRE is a University of NSW (UNSW) equity initiative funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) and by a donation by Citi Foundation. This initiative which began in 2008, challenges attitudes to Higher Education from the very early stages of primary school right through to university through -workshops, events, learning activities and campus and industry visits. Careers education and community events are also delivered within partnership schools.

⁵ The Fast Forward program is a partnership between schools in Greater Western Sydney and the University of Western Sydney. The program encourages Year 9-12 high school students and their families to see tertiary study as a realistic and viable post school option. It aims to raise participants' expectations for the future.

⁶ MEGS is a partnership between the University, the Department of Education and TAFE. The program organizes for Year 6 students from partner schools to attend the university campus.

⁷ *Careers Through Reading* is an element of the *Aim High* program of the University of Newcastle's Equity and Diversity Unit, which works with schools, students and families from low SES backgrounds to increase awareness of higher education, and build aspiration and expectations.

⁸ *Future Moves* is CSU's pre-entry program - it aims to build students' aspirations and awareness of higher education. The program also seeks to enable students to seek entry into university through a non ATAR pathway.

⁹ HEPPP provides funding to assist universities to undertake activities and implement strategies that improve access to undergraduate courses for people from low SES backgrounds, as well as improving the retention and completion rates of those students.

¹⁰ *Aimhigher* is a UK initiative established in 2004 to increase the number of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds entering higher education. The aim of the program is to lift the aspirations and abilities of non-traditional entrants into higher education. (Passy and Morris, 2010)

- number of students obtaining university placements, including Aboriginal students
- level of student access to targeted support services (such as mentoring, tutoring, career planning and goal setting support)
- awareness of students and parents of pathway options and scholarships available to provide financial assistance
- student focus on educational attainment, evident through the observation of higher levels of engagement in learning, development of aspirations, improved use of study periods and better preparation for class activities and examinations
- teacher capacity to make curriculum improvements and to better align their teaching with students' pathway plans
- levels of parent ability to support student learning and career planning
- school capacity to facilitate successful student transition to higher education by creating relevant learning pathways and expanding options to meet diverse needs.

These outcomes are consistent with the findings of the evaluation of the Compass Program undertaken by Erebus International (2012). Compass is a partnership between the University of Sydney and the NSW DEC and financially supported by the Department of Industry, Immigration, Science, Research and Tertiary Education. It is currently operating in 13 primary and 10 secondary schools as well as in two Intensive English Centres. The program aims to encourage those primary and secondary school students traditionally less likely to participate in higher education to stay engaged in education. Students, teachers and parents are proffered support and offered one major campus-based activity per year group (Years 3-6 and Years 7-12) and a range of additional school-based programs.

The evaluation report concludes that the program has had positive impact on key stakeholders. It has “demonstrated immeasurable benefits for students, in terms of their aspirations for future education” (Erebus International, 2012, p.65). Many teachers have been enabled to “become brokers for building students’ aspirations and charting a pathway towards further education” (p.65). Their involvement in the program has “broadened their perspective about what students can achieve both now and into the future” (p.65). Further, the added benefit for teachers has been “the opportunity to enhance their own pedagogy, through both in-classroom learning experiences with experts and also through attendance of professional learning opportunities offered by the university” (p.65).

The importance of positive teacher attitudes in low SES schools has also been highlighted by a recent Productivity Commission Report. The report concludes that “teachers contributing to a positive school culture tends to reduce the gap because it has a greater estimated effect on retaining low SES students... where academic achievement may not be the norm amongst students and their parents” (McLachlan et al 2013:22).

2. Improve student learning

Literacy and numeracy development

Two case study schools have established university partnerships to enhance student literacy and numeracy skill development. One, a Catholic primary school, is delivering two programs that have been developed by universities and funded under the National Partnership

agreement on Literacy and Numeracy in NSW. Funding to support the delivery of these programs is accessed via the Diocesan Office.

- *MULTiLit Reading Tutor Program* is a research and development enterprise founded by the Special Education Centre staff, Macquarie University. The program targets low-progress readers from Year 2 and above through one-to-one tuition. The NSW Institute of Teaching also recognizes professional development undertaken in MULTiLit to maintain accreditation at proficient teacher / professional competence level.
- *QuickSmart* numeracy is an intervention program developed by a team at the National Centre for Science, Information and Communication Technology and Mathematics Education of Rural and Regional Australia (SiMERR National Centre) at the University of Newcastle.

School leaders report gains in student literacy and numeracy learning. The reported gains were linked to increased levels of confidence, motivation, knowledge and skill development. The intervention programs aim to improve the overall communication within the school and between teachers and parents as a result of the adoption of a ‘common language’ relating to teaching and learning.

The evaluation report of MULTiLit prepared by Urbis for NSW DEC in 2012 reported positive results for the program in achieving student learning outcomes and staff development. The report concludes that “numerous examples were provided by school staff of students whose test scores and reading levels had improved, many of them significantly. Anecdotal evidence was also provided by students who were involved in the program, parents/carers and staff to demonstrate the gains in reading”. For many children, “participation in the program and the improvements they made had led to increased levels of confidence, greater enjoyment in reading, improved attitudes to school and schoolwork, and a broadening of their world”.

Furthermore, “a number of teachers and tutors reported positive impacts through using MULTiLit, including greater use of data in student monitoring and planning, a greater appreciation of the difficulties some children experience in learning to read, and improved confidence in teaching reading”.

Language development

Another case study school established a strong partnership with the University of Newcastle through the *Speech Pathology in Schools*¹¹ Program (SPinS) model of service delivery. SPinS was developed not only to provide appropriate service provision for school-aged children with communication difficulties, but also to provide relevant clinical education placements for students undertaking speech pathology training. A qualified speech pathologist oversees several undergraduates as they assess teacher-identified K-2 students. In addition to individual

¹¹ *SPinS* was originally developed by the University of Newcastle to provide an effective speech pathology service to school students, enhance skills and resources of classroom teachers and as a means of providing fourth year speech pathology students with clinical experience in the education setting. SPinS is now a partnership between the University of Newcastle, the University Department of Rural Health (UDRH) and Hunter New England Local Health District (HNELHD).

interventions the program provides teacher professional learning, including in-class support and parent information sessions. This partnership emphasises the importance of sharing resources to provide service-focused programs.

Successful results of SPinS was reported by both school and university personnel.

3. Promote school improvement

A secondary government high school is working with staff at Charles Sturt University to support its efforts to be inclusive of parent, student and teacher perspectives and also to evaluate the effectiveness of the Low SES NP program. Through this partnership educational research activities have been created to try to enhance classroom learning and enrich the curriculum.

Initial evidence suggests that the school–university partnership has contributed to an improvement in the relationships being formed with parents. In addition, the school reports that the trust built over time between school and university staff has led to the establishment of other collaborative initiatives and enhanced the sustainability of the relationship.

Types of partnerships

It is clear in examining the various partnerships outlined in the case studies that there is a variety of relationships that are formed with universities, not all of which might be considered ‘partnerships’ in the spirit of Reform 6 of the NP. Those schools using MULTiLit and QuickSmart, for example, have purchased commercial products designed to improve literacy and numeracy skill development. The products, with the associated teacher training, may prove very effective in raising skills in literacy and numeracy. However, as commercial arrangements, the relationships with the suppliers could be with any private company or organisation, rather than with a university. The schools are purchasing products, materials and training and the question remains whether or not the ‘partnership’ or ‘relationship’ would exist or be sustainable outside of a strictly commercial arrangement. This might best be described as the ‘*contract*’ model of university-school partnerships.

Other ‘partnerships’ entered into with universities, those in support of raising aspirations to support increased transition into higher education and those in support of school improvement, are more in the spirit of school and community enhancement envisaged under Reform 6 of the low SES community NP.

In these partnerships, schools and universities co-operate with mutual benefit. Schools seek support and expertise to help raise student aspirations and attainment and to boost community involvement, while universities seek to increase positive awareness of university study as a post-school destination and improve transition rates in communities where these rates are historically low. Other school/university partnerships are designed to help support school improvement. These ends are pursued through the provision of outreach and other services.

One partnership model is more dependent on ‘outreach’ activities offered by universities through which students and schools are given access to university organised activities. Universities are the senior partners in this model of partnership, with schools more dependent on what universities make available to schools, often to a range of schools within their

region. The services often include activities such as workshops, exhibitions, performances, open days, provision of speakers and school organised visits to the university designed to support the university's outreach and community engagement charter. These are made available to all interested schools. This might best be described as the '*outreach*' model of university-school partnerships.

Another type of partnership may encompass more active participation by the school and greater responsiveness and flexibility from the university, which can focus more particularly on specific school and community needs - for example, through the joint development of a program to address the needs of students with language difficulties, or to promote aspiration to university study in the school. Benefits from this type of partnership can include a stronger alignment of programs and activities with individual school needs and circumstances, and training and research opportunities for the university in the provision of specialist services to the school. This is more a '*service*' model of university-school partnerships in which universities partner with a school to provide support and expertise to address an agreed issue or set of issues for the school or its community.

3. North-West Non-Government Primary

North-West Non-Government Primary school's literacy and numeracy intervention strategy is resourced by Macquarie University's MULTiLit¹² and MINiLit programs and the University of New England's QuickSmart¹³ Numeracy Program. These programs are funded under the NSW National Partnership agreement on Literacy and Numeracy.

The school's intervention strategy supports low progress readers in the early and final years of primary schooling and low numeracy achieving students across the school. Low SES NP funds are used to employ a school leader and several tutors to implement the intervention programs.

Pre- and post-assessment data suggests the achievement of positive students learning results, due to increased confidence, motivation and knowledge and skill development of students. School leaders report that as a result of the intervention programs, a common language is now used in the school community.

Teachers report being better equipped as a result of the programs to devise and implement strategies to assist student learning and more prepared to participate in practitioner research. Parents too, according to school staff, have developed a better understanding of the skills involved in reading and the importance of self-confidence to academic achievement.

The partnership arrangements with universities for North-West Non-Government Primary School are an example of what might be termed a 'contract' model of school-university partnership in which a school enters into a commercial arrangement with a university, purchasing selected products, materials and training to support efforts to gain improvements in targeted areas such as literacy and numeracy skill development.

School Profile

North-West Non-Government Primary is a kindergarten to Year 6 primary school in the Macquarie-Barwon subdivision catering for around 100-200 students. The school's ICSEA value in 2012 was 870-880, compared to a state average of 1005 for primary schools. Forty-six per cent of students in 2012 identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, against the state average of 7.2 per cent for primary schools. Two per cent of students were from language backgrounds other than English compared with the state average of 20 per cent¹⁴.

¹² MULTiLit Pty Ltd, founded by Professor Kevin Wheldall, Dr Robyn Wheldall and Iain Rothwell. MULTiLit initiative is a research and development enterprise from the Special Education Centre.

¹³ QuickSmart was developed by a team, led by Professor John Pegg at National Centre for Science, Information and Communication Technology and Mathematics Education of Rural and Regional Australia (SiMERR National Centre). QuickSmart Intervention Research Program: Using Data, Full Report to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

¹⁴ Data on school profiles and state averages are derived from ACARA

Introduction

The school aims to lift all students' literacy and numeracy skills to above national benchmark levels¹⁵ by catering for the range of needs and ability levels in each class. Intervention programs, funded under the NSW National Partnership agreement on Literacy and Numeracy are being implemented to complement whole school approaches, such as, *Focus on Reading*. These programs are designed to cater for students experiencing difficulties with learning.

Since 2009, low progress readers in the senior years, requiring assistance with phonic word attack, sight words recognition and text reading, have had access to intensive and systematic support in regular classes through the MULTiLit program. Similarly, since the beginning of 2013, Year 1 students requiring assistance with developing basics of letter /sound knowledge, decoding skills and work attack knowledge, have had access to the year one focused MINiLit program (which is part of the MULTiLIT suite of programs). In small groups students participate in 80 structured lessons over a 20-week period, engaging in sounds and word attack activities, text reading and story-book reading. Students' progress is recorded following each session and communicated on a regular basis to classroom teachers to ensure targeted teaching and learning needs are supported in the classroom.

The QuickSmart Numeracy program has been implemented since 2010, to assist low achieving students with recalling number facts, performing elementary calculations and solving problems. Students participate in 30 minute structured lessons, based around a focus set of number facts, three times a week, over 36 weeks.

Several considerations informed the selection of these intervention programs:

- *NSW DEC's endorsement and funding of programs* under the National Partnership agreement on Literacy and Numeracy
- *Schools' recognition of the critical importance of an evidence based approach* to educational provision. The universities enabled the school to draw on a body of empirical research into literacy and numeracy. This research evidence informed the selection of strategies for effectively preparing students for life in the mainstream (and for maintaining them once they are there) through behavioral and instructional support.
- *Universities' desire to bring about major educational change* by supporting schools to implement programs of proven efficacy. As these programs are data driven, the universities welcome feedback on program implementation in order to continually improve their services and products.
- *Proven success of programs developed by universities in partnership with schools.* For example, MULTiLit demonstrates evidence of effectiveness of withdrawal model of service delivery and the efficacy of short term, intensive intervention.

¹⁵ The targets are: a reduction by 2.5% or more the proportion of students at and below the National Minimum Standard; an increase by 1.5% or more the proportion of students above the proficient standard. The National Minimum Standard refers to the basic level *needed to function* at that year level whereas the proficient standard refers to what *is expected* of a student at that year level.

Achievement of significant and appreciable gains is also demonstrated in reading and related skills over two and four terms of instruction. The QuickSmart Literacy and Numeracy intervention programs have also shown to narrow the achievement gap.¹⁶

Intervention Strategies

Training and professional development

A significant aspect of the partnership strategy is the school's access to training and professional development delivered by university personnel. Through collaboration with the universities, teachers and paraprofessionals were trained to deliver the MULTiLit, MINiLit and QuickSmart programs by the universities. MULTiLit workshops for tutors and teachers built knowledge of the philosophy underpinning the approach (i.e. putting evidence into practice) and word attack skills, sight words and reinforced reading through hands-on practical exercises. Similarly, MINiLit professional development programs developed an understanding of the 'balanced approach to reading intervention' and skills in identifying students requiring assistance, lesson planning and program implementation

The school provided additional opportunities for staff to be trained to analyze NAPLAN test results and identify student literacy and numeracy learning needs.

Program delivery

The school's *Quality Teaching Development Leader* facilitates a team-based approach to the delivery of programs and provides mentoring support to teachers and tutors requiring assistance. School teams report the delivery of MULTiLit, QuickSmart numeracy and MINiLit programs in a focused, systematic and consistent manner. These programs are predicated on methods and strategies of documented effectiveness. They take a non-categorical approach to teaching and build on student knowledge through direct, systematic and intensive teaching and tutoring.

Tracking of student learning

Pre and post-tests enable teachers to see growth in student learning. Curriculum measures are used to provide an indication of performance and allow for regular tracking of reading and numeracy progress. The growth is measured by analyzing the baseline data with post implementation testing.

Provision of expert advice and ongoing support

University staff encourages school staff to provide feedback on the impact of programs and strategies and their observations and inquiry questions. They provide timely expert advice and support post implementation - continually communicating with teachers using email, responding to questions, assisting with resolution of issues, noting observations and recording outcomes.

¹⁶ Growth of up to two or three years and sometimes more is facilitated, enabling low-achieving students to proceed with their studies successfully (SiMERR, 2009).

Outcomes

Discussions with schools about their experiences suggest that the intervention strategy is producing positive results for students, teachers, parents and the universities.

Improved student learning

School staff reports that gains in mean reading scores are evident for students participating in MULTiLit, with most students improving by an average of three reading levels. Improvement is due to students' increased level of confidence and motivation to learn as a result of enhanced decoding and sight reading skills and increased capacity to apply new learning in classrooms.

Similarly, staff and parents report positive learning outcomes achieved through the MINiLit program.

MINiLit is producing extra-ordinary results (Teacher)

This program has been fantastic for my daughter. I would not have realised how important or valuable reading was until seeing the delight she shows when able to read something. It has improved her confidence in all aspects of her school life, even to say she is happy to go to school and talks about going to MINiLit. (Parent)

My child has shown a noticeable improvement since participating in the MINiLit program. His oral reading has improved out of sight, with greater fluency and expression. He also seems to enjoy reading more at home. (Parent)

Positive learning results are being achieved through QuickSmart Numeracy Program, as evidenced by student results provided by the school. Anecdotal feedback from teachers also alluded to the success of the program:

I have noticed that the QuickSmart students in my class, who were traditionally quiet and reluctant during mathematics lessons, have become noticeably more involved – offering answers, contributing to discussions. This improvement is shown across all strands, not just Number. Needless to say, some QuickSmart students seem to have gained more confidence than others. (Teacher)

Many of the QuickSmart students are using the language and strategies learned in QS sessions in their everyday classroom lessons. (Teacher)

According to the school a significant outcome is students' perception of themselves as 'successful learners'. This perception has been developed as a result of the one-to-one targeted teaching sessions and the positive feedback provided on personal progress.

Improved teacher knowledge and skills

School leaders suggest that teachers, too, have learnt from their exposure to the intervention programs. School leaders report that teachers have attained:

- increased level of knowledge about their students' needs

- capacity to devise and implement strategies that effectively respond to needs
- confidence in their teaching skills and capacity to be proactive in the classroom
- willingness to engage in productive and professional conversations with their peers and to take full responsibility for students' learning outcomes
- interest in engaging in practitioner research and collaborating with academics.

Leaders also report that as a result of participating in intervention programs, early career teachers develop explicit teaching skills.

Increased parental support

As a result of involvement with intervention programs, school leaders report that parents are better able to support their children in their learning. They report that parents are better equipped to make informed judgments about their children's achievements as well as their performance against benchmark standards.

School leaders suggest that through their involvement in the intervention programs, parents have developed an understanding of the skills involved in reading skills and the importance of self-confidence in academic achievement. They report that parent understandings equip them to observe changes in their children's learning, and can heighten motivation for them to collaborate with teachers.

Improved communication and collaboration

Discussions with school leaders highlight the importance of the 'common language' used in the school community. Through the implementation of the intervention programs, school leaders, teachers, paraprofessional staff and parents have been better able to communicate and collaborate on student learning both in the classroom and in the home.

Improved research base of university

Discussions with school leaders suggest that universities are perceived to benefit from their relationships with schools. School leaders suggest that through their ongoing access to teachers' feedback on the implementation of their programs, universities are able to collect evidence to inform their work. This evidence feeds into the universities' research base, and supports the continuous improvement of their products and training.

Future directions

The school will maintain its commercial arrangements with Macquarie University and the University of New England, enabling it to purchase products, materials and training services that are considered to be essential for achieving school goals.

The availability of university owned and developed programs; resources and services will continually provide the school with options and choices. The challenge for the school will be to increase its capacity to negotiate specialized services from universities and to make informed choices about the products and services and are most relevant and responsive to the

needs of students at the school. Alternatively, the challenge for the universities is to continually be responsive to the complex needs of low SES school communities, reflecting on feedback and advice from schools, in order to ensure quality services to school communities.

4. West Sydney Region High School

West Sydney Region High School takes a multi-faceted approach to expanding student pathways to higher education. In partnership with a range of universities, the school actively seeks to raise student awareness of the range of options open to students and facilitate their transition to university through a number of initiatives:

- *Greater Western Sydney University consortium, through the Bridges to Higher Education*
- *University of Sydney, through the Compass Program and the Future Directions Network*
- *University of New South Wales (UNSW), through U@UNSW*
- *University of Western Sydney, through the Fast Forward Program*
- *University of Technology Sydney (UTS) through initiatives, such as the Higher School Certificate (HSC) Tutorial Program and the Summer School Program, the Jumbana School Program, and the UTS Principal's Recommendation Scheme.*

University programs are put into place within a broader framework to support their impact, including an integrated model of student support. This model is aligned with whole school approaches to literacy and numeracy development, subject selection, goal setting and career, pathway and exit planning. A Senior Learning Space was established in 2011, to provide students with access to advice and support from teachers, careers advisers and HSC work-skills coordinators.

To enable designated staff to co-ordinate and implement key initiatives and collaborate with university personnel. Low SES NP funds are used to cover staffing costs associated with classroom relief time, additional duties and associated costs. Assistant University Coordinator positions have been funded through the school's global budget, to provide for the sustainability of university relationships and programs.

Evaluations and anecdotal evidence suggest that the initiatives are starting to have an impact. The number of 2012 Year 12 students who attained a university placement was 54, representing a 32 per cent increase over the previous year.

The partnership arrangements with universities for West Sydney Region High School are an example of what might be termed an 'outreach' model of school-university partnership in which the university offers a variety of outreach services to a range of schools including West Sydney Region High School. The services include workshops, exhibitions, open days, provision of speakers, school organised visits, and scholarships.

School profile

West Sydney Region High School is a Year 7 to 12 Government school in the South West Sydney region catering for around 1000-1100 students. The school's ICSEA value in 2012 was 910-920, compared to a state average of 996 for secondary schools.

Eighty-five percent of students in 2012 were from Language Backgrounds Other Than English (LBOTE), against a state average of 27 per cent. One per cent of students identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, compared with the state average of 6 per cent for secondary schools.

Introduction

West Sydney Region High School has worked to establish partnerships with a range of universities in order to expand student pathways to higher education. It has done this as part of a whole of school approach which has included the development of goals and targets designed to increase student attendance, improve performance in NAPLAN (National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy) and the Higher School Certificate, and improve levels of transition from school to university.

Through the university partnerships the school has focused on building a wider range of programs and services to students, teachers and parents, with the aim of increasing the school's capacity to be responsive to the needs of students. In particular, the partnerships are viewed as a way for the school to improve home and school connections. While some parent aspirations for children are high, parents still require knowledge about the pathways, requirements and resources available to students. For other parents, negative experiences of schooling have influenced student aspirations for higher education.

University Programs

Bridges to Higher Education

The *Bridges to Higher Education*¹⁷ initiative, funded by the Commonwealth Government's HEPPP, involves several universities including the University of Western Sydney, The University of Sydney, the University of Technology Sydney, Macquarie University and the Australian Catholic University. *Bridges to Higher Education* works with primary and secondary schools, Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and community partners in Greater Western Sydney to encourage young people who previously might not have considered higher education as an option. It aims to equip students, their families, school staff and community groups with information about university as a study option for students.

The *Bridges to Higher Education* initiative is governed by a management committee and serviced by a partner advisory group and project groups. Activities and initiatives are planned and put into place by the project groups with the aim of identifying and developing opportunities for greater coordination and collaboration between schools and universities. Individual partners implement specific elements, based on their strengths. For example, they build on particular programs, such as the University of Sydney Compass program, the University of Technology Sydney U@Uni, the University of Western Sydney *Fast Forward and Fair Go* programs; and Macquarie University's *Learning, Education, Aspiration and Participation* (LEAP)¹⁸ outreach program.

The *Bridges to Higher Education* initiative aims to provide a range of benefits for schools:

¹⁷ *Bridges to Higher Education* is a \$21.2m initiative, funded by the Commonwealth Government's HEPPP, to improve participation rates of students from communities under-represented in higher education. The partnership extends to include NSW DEC, TAFE NSW, The University Admissions Centre, local government organizations, education offices, ATSI organizations and other community philanthropic and social enterprise organizations.

¹⁸ LEAP was established by Macquarie University and is funded by HEPPP, as part of the Bridges to Higher Education program. This outreach program aims to raise aspirations, creates possibilities and actively supports students from disadvantaged backgrounds to successfully participate in higher education.

- capacity to access a range of services that are coordinated through the partnership.
- opportunity for parents to visit a number of universities. For example, parents from West Sydney Region High School were recently given the opportunity to visit Macquarie University, University of Sydney and the Australian Catholic University. They were taken on a campus tour and informed about getting into university, university life, costs, courses and the support available.
- opportunity for students to apply for scholarships to support them in pursuing higher education.

Compass Program

The University of Sydney *Compass - Find your way to higher education* Program aims to encourage those primary and secondary school students who are traditionally less likely to participate in higher education to stay engaged in education¹⁹. Students, teachers and parents are offered one major campus-based activity per year group (Years 3-6 and Years 7-12) and a range of additional school-based programs²⁰.

According to the school, since joining the Compass program in 2011, over 300 students at West Sydney Region High School have participated in:

- visits to the University of Sydney – providing over 80 Year 7 students with exposure to university through a variety of university taster lessons
- Open Days - enabling them to see what universities have to offer, gain advice and develop knowledge about upcoming events, access programs and scholarship information
- range of workshops – promoting further study in areas, such as biology, chemistry, physics and medical physics
- special programs at the university such as Science, enabling top science students to undertake competitive experiments at the university with their teachers
- skills days and HSC revision days– assisting senior students to develop and improve essential skills and curriculum knowledge
- excursions to diverse workplaces and cultural organizations - such as, the museum, or attending events to listen to famous people and learn about diverse cultures and groups –

¹⁹ Compass is a partnership between the University of Sydney and the NSW DEC and financially supported by the Department of Industry, Immigration, Science, Research and Tertiary Education. It is currently operating in 13 primary and 10 secondary schools as well as two Intensive English Centres.

²⁰ Compass activities for primary school students are designed to acquaint them with the concept and goals of a university and to introduce them to the work of a university (through theatre and museum visits, and science workshops). Other programs, such as literacy and homework support, contribute to academic development. Activities for high school students are designed to nurture interest in lifelong learning and to support the attainment of high results in order to continue in higher education. These activities include writing workshops, careers information, campus visits and leadership development.

for example, students had the opportunity to listen to the Dalai Lama.

- school based activities in areas of interest to students - such as, filmmaking, editing and animation.

The Compass program also aims to build teacher capacity through professional development activities. Faculty of Education and Social Work staff, for example, have assisted teachers to improve their teaching skills through delivery of filmmaking, occupational therapy and literacy based initiatives.

The Compass program supports parents at the school by providing them with opportunities to visit the university as well as information about the range of programs available to their children.

Future Directions Network

The Future Direction Network (FDN) was designed to help inform, educate and inspire young people from South West Sydney about the importance of attending university. Young people have been given access to mentoring programs, career pathway planning support and scholarships. The FDN works in partnerships with the University of Sydney's Compass program, University of Sydney Business School, Westfield's Sports High School and West Sydney Region High School .

As a partner, the school is given access to guest speakers and to financial assistance to cover costs associated with travelling to University Open Days, provision of scholarships and website maintenance.

U@UNSW

The U@UNSW program was initiated to help improve access for students from low SES or educationally disadvantaged backgrounds. Senior high school students are given opportunities to experience the university environment through interactive activities including attendance at two, three-day conferences at the UNSW and participation in university style lectures and tutorials.

UWS Fast Forward Program

The *Fast Forward* program is a partnership between schools in Greater Western Sydney and the University of Western Sydney (UWS). The program aims to encourage Year 9-12 high school students and their families to consider tertiary study as a realistic and viable post school option by giving students an opportunity to take part in a series of experiential learning opportunities. A number of students from West Sydney Region High School attended a recent event at the university and over 90 per cent of the children were accompanied by their parents.

Under the program, West Sydney Region High School nominated a member of staff as the liaison person who was responsible for organising various program activities, assisting with the identification of suitable participants for the program, circulating information to the students and their families regarding the program, promoting the program within the school community, and coordinating in and out of school program activities.

UTS Initiatives

UTS provides a range of outreach activities designed to build student aspiration for university study. University staff members visit schools to provide information about the benefits of studying at university, about university life, about the cost of university study and the various scholarships that are available, the pathways into university, and the academic and social support available to students. A key event is the U@UTS Day, held annually for Year 10 students including students from West Sydney Region High School. It aims to develop student insights into university life and encourage them to consider university as a viable option²¹. The importance of study and informed subject selection is also stressed.

Another outreach activity is the Jumbana School's "*How Big are Your Dreams?*" program for Year 9 and Year 10 Aboriginal students. The two-year program aims to expand student world views and widen their future horizons and options. It provides mentoring support as well as opportunities to undertake personal projects, go on excursions, and attend workshops and a four-day cultural camp.

School Activities

A number of school initiatives at West Sydney Region High School are designed to work in support of the university outreach programs.

The school has established a student support service model that attempts to integrate the services provided by the Head Teacher Welfare, the Year Advisors, the Careers Teacher, the Home School Liaison Officer (HSLO), the Community Liaison Officer (CLO), the Work Skills Coordinators and the Student Counsellors. This involves intensive liaison and cooperation between the head teacher of student support and the head teacher of student engagement. The aim is to better coordinate the provision of student support services. This includes making and maintaining connections with the broader community by considering the services available through the school partnerships with universities, TAFEs, private training and education providers, employment agencies and other community organisations.

The integrated student support model is supplemented by a range of other initiatives:

- *Numeracy and literacy* development, in particular, the Focus on Reading program²²
- *Career advice* and vocational skill building initiatives, such as the Australian Business and Community Network (ABCN)²³ Growing Opportunities and Learning Skills (GOALS) program²⁴. Year 9 students are selected and paired up with mentors working

²¹ The event involves students in a variety of faculty-led interactive workshops; faculty and campus tours; conversations with university students and staff; and panel sessions exploring student life, including finding accommodation, working while studying, managing the costs of university and selecting courses.

²² The Focus on Reading Program aims to provide professional learning support to classroom teachers with the goal of increasing teacher knowledge about ways to develop fluent readers and ways to develop comprehension and vocabulary skills based on effective evidence-based practice. The program involves explicit teaching of critical aspects of reading.

²³ The ABCN is a partnership of national business leaders and companies committed to working on mentoring programs for students from high needs schools. The goal of the partnership is to improve student opportunities to find and keep fulfilling employment, to raise aspirations and to set and achieve life goals.

²⁴ GOALS is a one-to-one mentoring partnership designed to widen the life choices of students considered to be at risk of disengaging from school.

for various companies, such as National Australia Bank and Stockland to help students set goals and develop employment competencies.

- *Subject selection* processes to assist students to connect curriculum with vocational and career pathways. Students are encouraged to make subject choices based on plans set out in their Individual Education Plans.
- Supporting senior students to effectively use their study sessions. A *Senior Learning Space* was established in 2011, to give students access to advice and support from teachers, careers advisers and HSC work skills coordinators.

The school provides mentoring support to Year 12 students. An Exit Plan Conference is held annually to assist with the development of personalised exit plans. At the conference, staff members demonstrate how iPads can assist students in their planning and how the technology can record and track student progress. Student plans are centrally stored on SENTRAL, a web-based, modular school administration, online learning and student management software suite.

Students are given access to two key resources, the Mentoring Package and the Career Planning Package. The Mentoring Package gives guidance on accessing mentoring support, to gain guidance, for example, in managing during the examination process and in developing exit plans. The Career Planning Package is designed to build student understanding of the core employment competencies. These include knowledge about resume preparation and information on available support services and networks in the community, and on the development of exit plans. This resource is designed to support students both in clarifying future goals and identifying possible pathways in their development of a work plan, and in assessing the suitability and practicality of their chosen direction. To assist students to identify career paths, they are asked to complete the University of Western Sydney's MYCAREERMATCH online survey²⁵ which gives them insight into their strengths, personality style and personal qualities.

The school also provides information to students on accessing a range of scholarships and grants provided by universities, governments and community organisations.

As part of the FDN, students at the school can hear from role models at guest speaker events where former students or similarly selected speakers tell their stories²⁶. The aim of these activities is to provide inspiration and direction by demonstrating that it is possible for members of students' communities to be successful in transition to university and in employment. Students can gain insight into the life, educational and work journeys of people in the community. Four Aboriginal students were provided with the opportunity through the Compass program to listen to Aboriginal university students talk about their experiences at

²⁵ The MYCAREERMATCH survey can be found on <http://myfuture.uws.edu.au>. After completion of an online survey, students receive a report and information about how to access resources, such as, a Resume Guide and the online Resume Builder.

²⁶ One recent speaker, a successful chartered accountant, told parents, teachers and students that neither of his parents had gone to university, and stressed that students in a similar situation should not assume that university is not open to them. He explained that a university degree and chartered accounting qualifications had given him the opportunity to travel the world and work abroad, enabling him to meet people from very different backgrounds, have fun studying with them and walk out of university with a set of qualifications that are valued by employers.

university and their academic learning in areas such as dentistry, archaeology, environmental science, sport and fitness and engineering.

Similarly, students are supported to develop career plans and aspirations through participation in school based activities such as the ACBN GOALS programs. One hundred and sixty Year 10-12 students attended a three-day skill event held recently. Business mentors shared their experiences and paths through education and provided students with insights into the pathways to work. Mentors facilitated workshops aimed at skilling students in goal setting, presentation at interview and planning for the future.

Students at West Sydney Region High School are able to access academic support services provided by universities, such as the UTS Summer School Program. The program provides Year 11 students access to a two-week program in January. It explores prospects at university such as film-making, engineering, information technology, design, nursing and midwifery and science. Students participate in workshops delivered over a two week period. The school reports that feedback from participating students is positive. After successfully completing the program early in the year, one student confirmed her goal to study midwifery. The UTS “How Big Are Your Dreams?” program also received positive responses from two Aboriginal students who stated that as a result they now planned to attend university. A Year 9 student at the Open Day attended a lecture on nutrition to help him obtain a place in the Applied Science (Exercise and Sports Science) course.

Outcomes

Student performance data, program evaluations and anecdotal observations support the view that levels of student transition to higher education are improving and that the overall capacity of West Sydney Region High School to expand student pathways to higher education has been enhanced.

Student transition to higher education

Student numbers increased substantially in 2012. The number of Year 12 students who gained a university place increased from 41 to 54. Similarly, the number of students who obtained a TAFE, college or apprenticeship/traineeship placement increased from 44 to 53.

Aspirations for further education

A Year 7 survey, undertaken at the school in 2012, highlighted the role of the *Compass* program in:

- demonstrating the benefits of university (51.9 per cent strongly agreed and 42.6 per cent agreed with the statement “Compass has helped me to see the benefits of going to university”)
- motivating students to attend university (43.4 per cent strongly agreed and 43.4 per cent agreed with the statement “Compass activities have made me more interested in going to university”)

- developing career aspirations (63.0 per cent strongly agreed and 29.6 per cent agreed with the statement “Compass activities have helped me think about the kinds of jobs I might like to do in the future”)
- developing understandings about the pathway to university (42.3 per cent strongly agreed and 44.2 per cent agreed with the statement “Compass activities have helped me to understand what I have to do at school to study at University”)

Planning pathways

The University of New South Wales participates in a Year 12 Exit Conference providing speakers to discuss student plans for study and careers after high school. It aims to develop better understanding of what is required for particular courses, entry and jobs.

A majority of students and teachers gave an ‘excellent’ rating on the quality of speakers and the content and relevance of information presented at the last conference. Student survey responses revealed a positive response with a number of comments:

The presentations were helpful in reassuring me of what is expected in HSC and post HSC. The basics – rules and procedures and breakdown of requirements – made HSC seem less daunting. (Student)

I wasn’t expecting the information to be so interesting and fun. The psychometric and career match profile was very personalized. (Student)

The content was very relevant to us during our high school and the future – university and tertiary education. (Student)

Achievement and attainment

It would be unrealistic to expect the university partnership strategies, which focus primarily on building aspirations and supporting student pathways into post-school study, to directly impact on learning measures, especially in the middle years. Nevertheless the enhanced student achievement and engagement (especially at senior year levels) reported by the school align with and support external partnership aims. The contribution of external partnerships to the school’s teaching and learning culture is an important aspect of Reform Area 6, and must be seen in the context of other Reform areas in the school’s strategic plan. Higher student achievement and engagement rates will of course enable stronger pathways in coming years.

School annual reports (2011 and 2012) indicate improvement in the 2012 percentage of students achieving above the minimum standard in NAPLAN compared with 2011. Some examples include

- Year 7 - writing 77 per cent compared with 72 per cent, spelling 87 per cent compared with 73 per cent, punctuation and grammar 73 per cent compared with 66 per cent, and numeracy 87 per cent compared with 80 per cent.
- Year 9 - reading 69 per cent compared with 67 per cent, punctuation and grammar 74 per cent compared with 60 per cent, and numeracy 84 per cent compared with 75 per cent.

The school's Higher School Certificate results indicate movement towards the higher bands. The school attained above average scores in three subjects and improvements in nine subjects for the 2012 Year 12 cohort, even though the percentage of students studying HSC as a percentage of all Year 12 enrolments fell slightly.

The student attendance rate increased from 82.3 per cent in 2011 to 90 per cent in 2012. This result was higher than the 2012 state average of 89.1 per cent. The improvement was most evident for Year 12 students, with the attendance rate increasing from 79.4 per cent in 2011 to 88.6 per cent in 2012.

Accessing financial assistance

Part of the university outreach is providing information about financial support for students when they are at university, and offering scholarships to potential students, and a number sought this support. For the period 2011-12, 117 students from West Sydney Region High School received scholarships and grants to the total value of \$273,420. The Bridges to Higher Education initiative facilitated access to a wide range of scholarships, including FDN scholarships (\$36,000), 'Inspired By Business' scholarships (\$30,000), the UWS Highest Academic Achiever Award (\$20,000), and the UTS Science Scholarships (\$12,000). The Smith Family also awarded 50 *Learning for Life* scholarships.

Future directions

Following the '*outreach*' model of school-university partnerships, funded mainly through HEPPP, universities are working to continue the provision of access for the school to a variety of services designed to support university goals and targets. Building on the high profile of recent university programs in the school, school leaders are now seeking to ensure that their internal operational arrangements continue to support the effective integration of programs and services provided by a number of universities. Assistant Co-ordinator positions have been established and funded from the global budget to ensure sustainability beyond the Low SES NP program.

The challenge for the school is to continually negotiate partnerships arrangements that are responsive to emerging needs, enabling it to cater for the diverse pathway needs of students. By negotiating desired services, the school aims to increase its capacity to drive program and service development and to devise partnership arrangements that effectively cater for the specific needs of students and the school community.

5. Sydney West High School 2

Sydney West High School 2 is accessing a variety of opportunities offered by universities in order to support students' post-school pathways. It has established partnerships with:

- *UWS, through the undergraduate tutorial programs, where Master of Teaching students are matched with students attending the senior and junior learning centres. These students provide targeted assistance to students in HSC subjects and across all learning areas.*
- *University of Sydney, through the Compass Program, where a comprehensive range of learning programs and cultural activities are delivered for students, parents and teachers.*
- *UNSW, through ASPIRE, where student Ambassadors and university staff engage students in a range of activities, designed to build their awareness of university and encourage them to consider a range of options for the future.*

These programs are complemented by school efforts and activities to increase university aspirations and improve transition to further study. The school has implemented a student support service which is career focused, providing access to career advice, and individualised assistance with pathway planning, goal setting and subject selection. Additional guidance is provided through the delivery of study skills workshops and study groups. Homework centres are being used with the aim of providing students with support in targeted key learning areas, in particular, literacy and numeracy skill development.

Sydney West High School 2 reports positive results from its university partnerships and the promotion of higher education. The number of students obtaining university placements and accessing student support services has increased according to school leaders, certainly in absolute numbers. Student survey responses indicate that awareness of university pathways has also increased. School leaders report a change in teacher capacity to better align their teaching with student pathway plans.

The partnership arrangements with universities for Sydney West High School 2 are an example of what might be termed an 'outreach' model of school-university partnership in which the university offers a variety of outreach services to a range of schools including Sydney West High School 2. The services include university student placements, exhibitions, open days, provision of speakers, school organised visits.

School Profile

Sydney West High School 2 is a Year 7 to 12 coeducational government school in the south west region of Sydney with enrolments of 700-800 students. Of these, 76 per cent are from LBOTE and two per cent are ATSI. The school has an established Special Education Unit. Its ICSEA value in 2012 was 940-950.

Introduction

Sydney West High School 2 is participating in a range of partnerships with universities which aim to build school capacity to better meet the needs of its diverse student population and to facilitate improvement in student retention, NAPLAN and HSC outcomes. An important goal is to raise aspirations for higher education for its diverse student population, and improve rates of transition.

The school's key challenges include:

- devising relevant learning support for LBOTE students and Aboriginal students
- addressing disruption to learning caused by student mobility
- establishing effective relationships and partnerships with parents
- assisting staff to address barriers to student learning and provide learning pathway and transition from school support.

Discussions with the school suggest that it utilises opportunities and resources made available through university partnerships. University students provide tutoring assistance to a range of students. University students and staff also organise a variety of activities for students, staff and parents that are designed to raise awareness of post school options and student aspirations to continue with their education.

University Programs

Tutoring support

The school is operating two Student Learning Centres, one for senior students (Years 11 and 12) and the other for junior students (Years 7 to 10). UWS undergraduate students seeking professional placements in school and community settings, as part of their accredited study, assist the school to provide additional out of class learning support to students at the school. They offer tutoring assistance and mentoring support to help targeted students at Sydney West High School 2 develop their literacy and numeracy skills and improve their learning outcomes.

UWS's third year Master of Teaching (secondary) students, as part of the service, tutor Year 11 and Year 12 students, in their area of expertise. The Senior Learning Centre's Coordinator matches them with senior school students during their scheduled study periods after consultation with students. University students also participate in after-school tuition activities, and provide individuals and/or study groups with additional learning support, in specific study and exam preparation skills.

UWS's Master of Teaching (Primary) students undertake a placement in the school's Junior Learning Centre. The teacher trainees work predominantly with community agencies or not-for-profit organisations on projects that assist disadvantaged people or minority groups in Greater Western Sydney (GWS). The initiative recognises the importance of educating beyond the classroom and the benefit of placing education students in culturally and socially diverse settings in order to gain valuable insights into teaching and learning.

University students provide tutoring support to school students across all KLAs. The Junior Learning Centre Coordinator liaises with classroom teachers and the school's learning

support team, including university students, to design individualized programs for students. University students implement the one-on-one tuition strategies, designed to improve specific literacy and numeracy skills or extend those of gifted and talented students. As well as providing practical academic support, university students share their experiences of university life.

The school complements the tutoring service through the implementation of additional strategies, such as writing and numeracy competitions. The Junior Learning Centre enables students to complete their work during breaks, use Information and Communications Technology (ICT) resources and other advisory and information services.

Compass Program

Through the University of Sydney's *Compass – Find your way to higher education* program

- Year 7 and selected Years 8-10 students visited the university and participate in orientation and educational tours
- Senior students participate in study skills and examination preparation workshops delivered by university staff both on and off campus
- Senior students attend workshops delivered by a Faculty of Agriculture staff member at a local farm
- ATSI students attend the *Indigenous Students' Experience Day Program* and participate in various workshops that provide insights into courses available and related pathways. They meet ATSI university students and engage in orientation and cultural activities.
- Final year, Advanced English students receive complimentary tickets, provided by the *Seymour Centre*, to attend a production linked to their HSC studies.
- Students engage in filmmaking and animation projects facilitated by *Sydney College of the Arts* students.

Compass supported *Conservatorium of Music* staff to develop an innovative program for the school. As part of the program, under-graduate university students were placed in the school to foster the identification and promotion of artistic talent through the provision of regular performance opportunities at school and local community level. A regular program of lunchtime playground concerts was implemented, providing performance opportunities for students and staff. In addition, a school choir was established to provide quality choral performance opportunities. The program culminates in performances at the Conservatorium at the end of the year.

The school upgraded the school hall to improve facilities for music, drama and dance performances, art exhibitions, concerts and audio technology. It is currently investigating the introduction of new course options for students in the performing arts including entertainment VET courses. The Compass program also provided opportunities for parents to attend the *Art Gallery of NSW* and to go on a tour of the university campus.

ASPIRE Program

The school works in partnership with ASPIRE program student volunteers (i.e. ASPIRE Ambassadors) and university staff to build Year 8-12 student awareness of university and to encourage students to consider options for the future through a range of activities. ASPIRE is a UNSW equity initiative funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) and by a donation by Citi Foundation. The initiative which began in 2008 challenges attitudes to Higher Education from the very early stages of primary school right through to university through workshops, events, learning activities and campus and industry visits. Careers education and community events are also delivered within partnership schools

University students conduct workshops with students at the school, and throughout the year various year groups (20–30 students) participate in whole day events at the university. ASPIRE interacted with students 170 times during 2012 and 210 times during 2011, providing various activities from Years 8-12. The key activities included:

- Uni for a Day event - Year 8 students participated in a range of activities on campus, interacting with UNSW students and learning about university culture.
- Taster day – Every Year 9 student attended a number of mini lectures and was given the chance to interact with academics. Students were given a taste of electrical engineering, business, law and science, ranging from putting together electrical snap circuits, attending a law lecture and the Star Lab.
- Specialised workshop - Year 10 students participated in a workshop delivered by Faculty of Built Environment Architecture
- StepUP - Year 11 students participated in a three-day program, aiming to develop academic skills and prepare them for university study. Students were encouraged to think about the link between effective study skills and academic success in both the short and long term.
- Student shadowing - Year 12 students were matched with a university student who provided mentoring support. Students experienced a typical university day, accompanying their mentors to lectures and tutorials and taking part in the mainstream events (such as, Courses and Careers Day).

Complementary School Activities

Career focused student support

The school provides various student support services through the career advisory program:

- implementation of a student pathways survey²⁷ with Years 9-12, as an initial step to

²⁷ The Student Pathways Survey is a DEC School to Work initiative, developed in 2009. It consists of a number of resources including the survey and administration guidelines. The Survey is accessed on-line and on completion, students receive an instantaneous feedback report. It also enables efficient electronic storage of students' feedback reports.

identify actions in their career and transition planning. The survey questions encourage students to reflect and report on their confidence in relation to their goal setting, part-time work, job choices and aspirations, career information and support, pathway options, career and transition planning and intended school exit and destination plans

- development of transition pathway plans to guide learning focus, in consultation with parents and teachers.
- provision of a variety of workshops to students and parents regarding subject selection, work experience, traineeships /apprenticeships and scholarships.
- organisation of career expos, including the Year 10 subject selection workshops and the Year 12 ATAR students' *My Career Match* workshop delivered in partnership with the University of Western Sydney.
- facilitation of the ABCN programs held in a corporate venue to enable Year 9 and Year 11 students to experience a modern workplace. Year 9 GOAL students and Year 11 Aspirations students are matched students with business mentors from companies, such as Deloitte and Microsoft.

Outcomes

Student performance data, program evaluations and anecdotal observations provide evidence suggesting that the partnerships with universities are contributing to positive outcomes at the school.

Increased access to university

School annual reports (2011 and 2012) indicate that the number of students who obtained university places has increased from 18 per cent (17 students) of the total number of students who completed HSC in 2010, to 28 per cent (27 students) in 2011 and 30 per cent in 2012 (32 students).

Enhanced engagement of senior students

The student attendance rate increased from 83.9 per cent in 2011 to 87.4 per cent in 2012. The improvement was most evident for senior students, who are provided with a range of programs and options under university partnerships. Year 12 students' attendance rate increased from 79 per cent in 2011 to 86.2 per cent in 2012.

Increased access to student support

School staff report that up to twelve UWS undergraduate students annually provide consistent individual and small group tuition to students attending Student Learning Centres. A school survey of senior students, undertaken at the end of 2012, indicates that 78 per cent of students (i.e. 73 students) accessed the tutoring support service. Tutoring support assisted them with learning in their specialist subjects (65 per cent), assessment tasks (59 per cent), exam preparation (34 per cent), and homework (22 per cent). The top specialist subjects that students sought assistance for were English, Business Studies, mathematics and legal studies.

Discussion with staff suggests that as well as providing students with mentoring or tutoring support, university students gain exposure to student diversity and the challenges facing students whose needs are not well met through mainstream provision. These outcomes are consistent with the University of Western Sydney's program evaluation that highlighted a high level of satisfaction by both university and school students. The main benefits were the provision of language and learning support to the students and the assistance related to navigation of school and post-school options²⁸.

The school has also supported students to select subjects that are aligned with their academic performance and higher education intentions, including the selection of prerequisite subjects. The pre and post surveys of students and teachers, undertaken by the school, indicate a high level of satisfaction with the workshops and seminars delivered and the subject selection processes.

Increased awareness of university pathways

Staff report that the Compass and ASPIRE programs have helped to increase student awareness of university life and the opportunities and options provided by universities. They suggest that the Compass program helped better inform students, teachers and parents about the variety of offerings at the University of Sydney.

Students and their parents have gained a real insight into the nature of university life and increased their confidence to aspire to go to university (School leader)

Student evaluations undertaken in 2012 indicated positive responses to their engagement in a range of ASPIRE activities.

It was amazing fun and the university people were amazing.

It was great. It made me think twice about my option.

It was useful and educational. I am a lot more confident because I have gained knowledge.

It was really good and expanded my knowledge in what to do after school.

I was very inspired by the advice ... I would really like more workshops like this...

It was great fun, seeing other schools and learning new information and skills.

Responses to student evaluation surveys also suggest positive responses to student interaction with the ASPIRE Ambassadors:

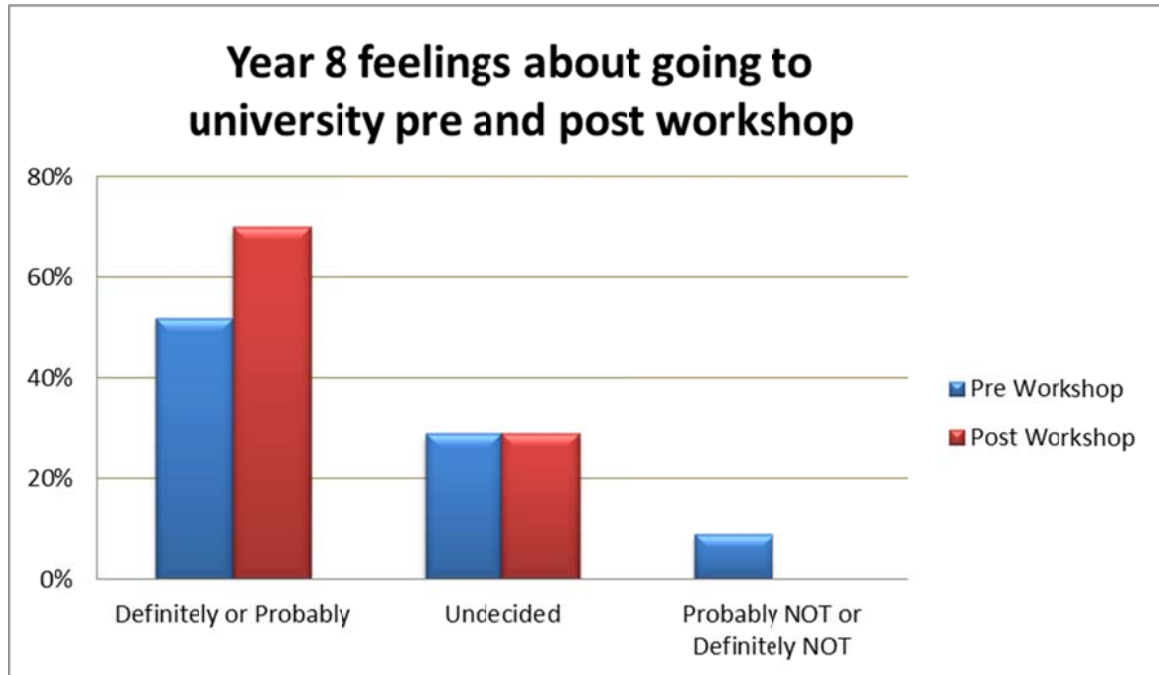
The Ambassadors were great.

Our student Ambassador covered every aspect and answered every question, also she motivated us.

²⁸ *So who goes to University? A package for Schools* was developed by NSW DET (2010) in consultation with schools, this package aims to share the strategies and approaches teachers and other school staff are using to improve student attainment, and develop students' awareness of and interest in undertaking higher education.

She is very kind. She became my friend. She taught me law.

They also suggest that the ASPIRE program has helped influence the aspirations for higher education of some students. Pre and post surveys of students who had participated in activities showed an increase in the number of students who reported an expectation of going to university and a decrease in the number of students who did not expect to go to university. The greatest shift in attitude was most evident in the Year 8 cohort.



(chart based on school-provided data)

Increased curriculum and professional learning support

School leaders report that working collaboratively with the *Conservatorium of Music* undergraduate students teachers have given their students access to an innovative music and art curriculum, because they are now better equipped to engage students in composing original music, creating artistic works and involving them in filmmaking, digital media and animation projects.

Future directions

The partnerships that Sydney West High School 2 has entered into with universities are largely based on the outreach activities that universities offer as part of their HEPPP-funded schemes. Universities are the senior partners in this model of partnership, with the school dependent on what universities make available. The services often include activities such as workshops, exhibitions, performances, open days, provision of speakers and school organised visits to the university designed to support university outreach and community engagement. Sydney West High School 2 has attempted to enrich this approach through complementary school activities and arrangements, such as making better use of its student learning centres to target career planning and guidance.

In the future, the challenge for the school is to continually negotiate partnership arrangements that increase capacity to drive program and service development from within the school and effectively cater for the specific needs of students and the school community.

6. Hunter Public School

Hunter Public School is a primary school with a longstanding relationship with the University of Newcastle, through the delivery of the:

- *Speech Pathology in Schools (SPinS) program which assists the school to provide intervention support to students experiencing language difficulties, where trainee speech therapists and a clinical educator work at the school weekly to support students with language difficulties*
- *Careers Through Reading program and the Making Educational Goals Sustainable program, assisting the school to build student aspirations for higher education and to develop their awareness and knowledge about study options and alternative pathways from school, involving teacher trainees and students from the university working with school students and teachers.*

Low SES NP funding supports the implementation of these programs. A Speech Pathologist is also employed to facilitate the delivery of SPinS. In addition, staff are released to attend workshops and to work with the speech pathologist and university students involved in the delivery of the program.

School staff report that SPinS has helped the school to better meet the language needs of students. Teachers also report that the programs, Careers Through Reading and MEGS, have helped increase student engagement in learning as well as aspirations for higher education. They claim that the university programs have facilitated increased parental support for student learning and career aspirations, helped change classroom practices and enhance the school's relationship with the university.

The partnership arrangements with Newcastle University are an example of a 'service' model of school-university partnership. The school has been active in the partnership in helping develop with the university the Careers through Reading program, which targets reading skills and raising university aspirations, and the university has been responsive and interested in addressing the needs of the school and the community around language difficulties.

School Profile

Hunter Public School is a kindergarten to Year 6 Government public school in the Hunter region catering for around 300-400 students. The school's ICSEA value in 2012 was 890-900, compared to a state average of 1005 for primary schools. Seventeen per cent of students in 2012 identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, against the state average of 7 per cent for primary schools. One per cent of students were from language backgrounds other than English compared with the state average of 20 per cent.

Introduction

Hunter Public School is making use of a range of university outreach programs which aim to

support the efforts of the school to improve learning outcomes for students in line with annual targets. The programs cater for the needs of specific groups of students at the school.

One program is *Speech Pathology in Schools* (SPinS) which is offered by the University of Newcastle. The program involves the university providing the services of trainee speech therapists and clinical educator for one day a week. At Hunter Public School the SPinS model of service delivery was seen to be responsive to the needs of a number of students with language difficulties. The service delivery model was originally developed by the University of Newcastle to provide a speech pathology service to school students, to enhance the skills and resources of classroom teachers and as a means of providing fourth year speech pathology students with clinical experience in the education setting. SPinS is now a partnership between the University of Newcastle, the University Department of Rural Health (UDRH) and Hunter New England Local Health District (HNELHD).

In 2009, about two thirds of the kindergarten students were identified as having moderate to severe articulation and receptive language difficulties. SPinS enables the school to intervene early in order to prevent students from becoming disengaged and disconnected from schooling. As students are not placed on long waiting lists at Community Health Centres, it has the capacity to provide a more timely service.

The school has also adopted the *Making Educational Goals Sustainable* (MEGS) program and *Careers Through Reading* program, run by the University of Newcastle. MEGS aims to make schooling relevant and meaningful to students by linking learning with future planning. It targets students enrolled in low SES schools and aims to inspire them to think about their future.

The Principal's desire to strengthen and enhance the benefits of MEGS, led to the development of the *Careers Through Reading* initiative. Through the MEGS partnership, the University of Newcastle's Equity and Diversity Unit worked with the school to develop a multi-visit outreach program. *Careers Through Reading* is an element of the *Aim High* program, which works with schools, students and families from low SES backgrounds to increase the awareness of higher education, and build aspiration and expectations. Its primary purpose is to introduce students to a variety of career and study options in their early years of schooling. This approach is considered to be of value in low SES school communities, because it provides a focus on options and possibilities for the future.

The programs also support the university's efforts to improve the level of participation by low SES students. Currently, 27 per cent of undergraduate students are from low SES backgrounds against the national average of 16 per cent.

SPinS

The school began implementing the SPinS service delivery model in 2009. This model entails collaboration between classroom teachers, university speech pathology students and their clinical educator.

The students and the clinical educator attend the school one day a week to undertake assessments of children's language skills and develop and deliver intervention strategies via

- individual and group sessions, for 2-30 minutes' duration, focusing on conversation

skills that are reinforced in the mainstream classroom program

- classroom or a SPinS room (located in the school) activity
- teacher/parent support and resourcing through receipt of reports and input at meetings and demonstration of lessons.

In view of the SPinS work, Hunter Public School is employing a graduate speech pathologist (recommended by the university) to manage the program. In addition, the school has decided to employ a private speech therapist to provide specialist service to students.

Outcomes

School leaders suggest that the SPinS service delivery approach has provided some benefits.

Improved responsiveness to student language needs

Discussions with school leaders about the school experiences suggest that the SPinS model of service delivery is helping the school to be more responsive to student language needs. Through the partnership arrangement students are able to access essential services in a more timely and effective manner than through other methods, even if the therapists are trainees rather than fully accredited pathologists.

Teachers report improvements in the language and communication skills of students participating in SPinS. Anecdotal observations point to students being able to transfer their learning to the classroom setting and increase their level of engagement in classroom learning activities, in particular, in talking and listening activities. Further, teachers reported that students taking part in the scheme are demonstrating a better ability to manage their communication with their peers, resulting in reduced incidences of misbehaviour both in the classroom and the playground.

Improved home and school communication

School leaders suggest that teacher insights into the home lives of students have deepened as a result of participating in the delivery of SPinS.

They (university personnel) were able to bring another layer of information to us, because kids open up in different way (Teacher)

Staff leaders report “an increase in parent understanding and buy in” in regard to the development of their children’s language and communication skills.

Further, the school welcomed the university’s acceptance of advice to move away from the practice of sending home written reports to implementing face-to-face meetings with parents. According to the school, this changed approach enhanced parent knowledge about school expectations and strategies for supporting learning.

Validated language strategy

The school suggests that the SPinS model reinforces the mainstream strategy for early years

students, in particular, the *Reading 2* component, of focussing on conversational skills (analysing talk and linking speaking, writing and reading). SPinS teaches students to hold a conversation by developing the articulation and receptive language skills that underpin *Reading 2* and guided reading and writing strategies. These skills are relevant to articulating thought processes, linking language structures, developing thinking, communication and writing skill.

The kids were coming back (from SPinS) into a setting where they'd heard something from someone else, and displaying the same processes, or language conversation that they were doing for speech [therapy]. (Teacher)

Improved teaching practice

The school reports improvement in teacher knowledge as a result of participating in the initiative, in forming a better understanding of the language acquisition process.

The speechies (speech pathology personnel) brought us that whole extra layer of information (School Leader)

Furthermore, school leaders report a greater tendency for teachers to incorporate into classroom activities (such as, the *daily news*) learning strategies used in SPinS. The teaching of talking and listening skills is also being integrated into learning content and methodology.

Increased school –university staff collaboration

School and university staff members suggest that the SPinS model of service delivery has facilitated increased collaboration between personnel working with students, and feeding into classroom practice. According to the school, university personnel share with classroom teachers knowledge about the indicators of student need and the existing capacities of students and their progress.

Career Aspirations Programs

MEGS Program

Over the past four years, Year 6 students and their families have been given the opportunity to visit the University of Newcastle. The program aims to develop an understanding of the links between classroom learning and career aspirations. It provides an introduction to the range of education and training opportunities through NSW DEC, the university and TAFE. Students and parents are taken on orientation tours and invited to attend subject workshops organised by university lecturers and tutors.

Careers Through Reading Program

Careers Through Reading is a multi-visit outreach program that began as a partnership between the University of Newcastle and Valley Primary School in 2010. The program involves Year 2 students being introduced to a variety of career and study options through university students reading them children's books related to their study/career.

Under the program, the university selects university students who reflect the composition of

the school population, often students who have attended the primary school and other schools in the local area.

Two of this year's university students who came from Valley Public School said they are the first people in their family to ever go to the university. It makes it real - it makes it doable and attainable for our kids (Teacher)

It's a very powerful thing obviously, in terms of building aspirations, that narrative - my future, an example of home grown, further education in practice. (University staff)

Selected students are offered orientation support prior to going to the school. They are encouraged to motivate primary students to have high aspirations and to commit to taking decisive actions in order to realize their goals. Students are informed about the various careers options and provided with relevant role models. To ensure strong commitment to the program, the university uses HEPPP funding²⁹ to cover the cost of allowances provided to university students for their participation in the program.

The school appoints a Year 2 teacher to coordinate the program at the school, given that the program targets Year 2 students for the reading component. The university developed a PowerPoint for the school, including, a movie depicting a 12-year-old boy visiting the university and considering ideas about future options. The school is also devising special projects to coincide with the launch such as a joint initiative with the local high school, enabling students to pursue career questions and interests, through the Year 7 elective program.

The school has been implementing the five-week program since 2010. Year 2, Year 5 and Year 6 students are introduced to a variety of career and study options by university students, who read to them children's books related to their study and career. At the first session, university students make a presentation to Year 2 students, introducing the program and to Years 5 and 6 students. The presentation focuses on the concept of a university and selected stories of individuals who attend them. Over the following weeks Year 5 and Year 6 students are asked to work on answering the question *What is a university?* They are invited to attend the next session to present their findings to Year 2 students.

Furthermore, in week 3, Year 10 students and community members are invited to be special guests. They meet with Year 2, Year 5 and Year 6 students and share their understanding about universities. At the end of the program students attend an assembly and each Year 2 student receives a book, symbolizing graduation from the program. University staff members have written a book titled *Hope*, to be used in the future as the graduation gift. The book is based on the principles of positive psychology and explores how individuals aspire by identifying and then navigating pathways, through often difficult situations towards goals that have meaning and purpose.

School staff members have indicated that the university is continually making adjustments to the program based on feedback from the school. Surveys are undertaken and informal conversations are held with executive and teaching staff at the school to inform improvements.

²⁹ Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program funding, is aimed at increasing participation and success of students from low SES backgrounds in higher education.

We find that from school to school, year to year, from one group of university students to another group of university students – what we think worked last time and might work again does not necessarily work (University staff)

Further, school staff report that university personnel have provided data and tools to assist with measuring the impact of the program.

Outcomes

Discussions with school leaders and university personnel about their experiences of career aspirations programs, suggest various positive outcomes.

Increased aspirations and engagement

Teachers reported that students have become more aware of their aspirations, increased their knowledge about universities and developed some insights into what is involved in going to university.

One child has an aspiration of ending up in parliament house... He wants to do a double degree in economics and law and then a master's in political science. He told me that yesterday and that's the language he used. He asked (the university representative) that first day, whether Newcastle University would be okay or does he have to go to Sydney. He has it all mapped out. (Teacher)

According to university staff, the strong focus on developing aspirations, resilience and emotional wellbeing of these programs, supports the concern of the school for career planning and the achievement of positive student learning outcomes.

The most successful versions of careers reading I've seen have been the ones where the students understand that their school thinks it's important. (University Staff)

A survey of the level of hope kindergarten students' level of 'hope' was undertaken by the university across three schools, including this case school. The findings showed positive results. Kindergarten students responded in the affirmative to the following questions:

- *I think about what I want to be when I grow up* (82 per cent)
- *When I have a problem I can get help to fix it* (77 per cent).

Similarly, a survey of students, undertaken on the students' career aspirations, indicated that students were able to identify careers, such as, teacher, veterinarian, engineer and miner.

I think what everyone agreed on, all our studies, the results were much better than what we thought. (Teacher)

The school reports that students' expectations and perhaps their families' aspirations have increased, because it has provided them opportunities to express their thoughts and consider the full range of options. According to school staff, students have also increased their understanding of the significance of literacy skills to their lives (as a result of emphasis on reading at university) and their motivation to learn and engage in school activities.

This (Careers Through Reading) was a great program. We got to learn that reading is extremely important for our future career and it is never too young to start thinking about career choice. (Student Representative)

If you give purpose to the learning then you get their engagement... school makes sense (Teacher)

Increased parental support for career aspirations

Feedback and anecdotal observations made by staff suggest parents' appreciation of opportunities to participate in significant activities. Visits to the university, for instance, have enabled many of the parents to see a university for the first time. Two parents have been inspired to go to the university after their visit. They entered via the tertiary preparation program and are currently enrolled in courses at the university. Parents were also able to alleviate their concerns about the location and distance to the university.

Through participation of parents and students in programs, the school has been able to establish a family perspective to students' 'place in the world after leaving school'. Such an approach also alleviates teachers' concerns about imposing their values on their students.

I was conscious of setting these kids up in opposition to their family's values... So we have to be very careful around that (Teacher).

School staff report that parent and student surveys undertaken at the end of 2012, indicate that career aspirations programs generate discussions in the home about future career planning and path options to achieve goals.

Changed classroom practices

School leaders report that teachers have incorporated into their classroom discourse, the connection between learning at school and pathway options to higher education. They are also seeking greater input from students into classroom decision-making.

It's also changing some of those processes ... giving kids the voice... it's that conversation with them, where they are at, where they want to go to with their reading or their writing (Principal).

Expanded school-university partnership

School staff report that the joint initiatives have expanded the relationship between the school and the university. Recently, the university's psychology department invited the school to participate in the Memory Project. The University's education students delivered a new reading program to Year 2 and Year 3 students, under the supervision of academic staff. The school will be informed about the outcomes in the future.

Further, the school participated in a trial to deliver the Open Foundation program, a tertiary preparation initiative, off campus in a classroom at the school. A retired teacher was employed to tutor a number of parents and a past school student. The past student pursued further study at the university after completing the program.

Future directions

Hunter Public School has formed its partnership with the University of Newcastle to run several programs which aim to help address the needs of a large number of students with language difficulties at the school, and to help raise the aspirations of students for university as a post-school option. Under the SPinS program trainee speech therapists and a clinical educator from the university provide weekly assessments and support for students with language difficulties. The school has also worked with the university to develop a program through reading which focuses on building the university aspirations of students, a program that is now being offered by the university to other schools.

This is an example of a ‘service’ model of partnership in which the school has been very active in the partnership and the university responsive and interested in addressing individual school and community needs, such as developing the program to address the needs of students with language difficulties, or a program that has been jointly developed to promote university aspirations. This type of partnership is more aligned to individual school needs and circumstances, and one in which research and specialist services support the school while providing training and research benefits for the university.

Relative to how the school’s university partnership has worked previously, it is not clear how sustainable this partnership will be. The University of Newcastle is not able to maintain a long term commitment to the delivery of the SPinS program at Valley Primary School, with the SPinS funds and resources now being reallocated to other schools. As a result, Hunter Public School has had to employ a speech pathologist, independently, to maintain the services delivered through the program. Moreover, although the impetus for the establishment of the *Careers Through Reading* program came from the school, the university’s investment in the program has not been sustained as its focus has been on the expansion of the service to other schools.

The challenge for the school is to continually negotiate partnership arrangements that increase the capacity to drive program and service development from within the school to ensure that the specific needs of students and the school community are met.

7. Northern Non-Government School

Northern Non-Government School has been working with Charles Sturt University (CSU), Port Macquarie Campus staff, since the beginning of 2012, through the:

- *Future Moves pre-entry program designed to build student aspirations and awareness of higher education as well as assisting them to gain entry into university through a non ATAR pathway.*
- *Darrambal³⁰ skill assessment program for ATSI students, administered by CSU's Indigenous Student Services (ISS), which undertakes assessments of students' existing skills, abilities and attributes and matches these against entry requirements for preferred courses. Upon completion, Aboriginal students are able to gain entry into the university through a supported process.*

Aboriginal Education Workers (AEWs) funded through the Low SES NP program perform a critical role. They liaise between students, teachers and CSU Future Moves and Darrambal program staff and assist with student identification, assessment preparation and workshop delivery.

According to the school, the partnership has led to some positive outcomes; several Aboriginal students have been offered a place at the university. College and university staff report that these programs have increased parental awareness of post school pathways and the role of the university.

The partnership arrangement with universities for Northern Non-Government School is an example of what might be termed an 'outreach' model of school-university partnership in which the university offers a variety of outreach services to a range of schools including Northern Non-Government School. The services include provision of assessment services, students' workshops and training programs, teaching and learning resources, and school organised visits.

School Profile

Northern Non-Government School is a non-systemic community based education and training provider located in the North Coast region. It caters for less than 100 students in Years 9 to 12. Seventy-seven per cent of students in 2012 identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, compared with the state average of six per cent for secondary schools. There were no students from language backgrounds other than English.

Introduction

Northern Non-Government School entered into a partnership arrangement with Charles Sturt

³⁰ Darrambal is a Wiradjuri word meaning 'footmarks' or 'roadway' and is used to represent the life-long journey of learning travelled by people.

University in 2012. The university's capacity to offer relevant services to ATSI students provided the incentive for Northern Non-Government School to enter into the partnership arrangement, with a focus on two key programs: (1) *Future Moves* and (2) *Darrambal*. These programs were considered to be relevant to the needs of the Year 9 to Year 12 students at the school. Most of the students had been suspended or expelled from traditional education settings or exiting juvenile detention. About 80 per cent of the enrolled students (i.e. a total of 70 students) are ATSI (most of who are male).

Future Moves is a pre-entry program designed to build student aspirations and awareness of higher education as well as assisting them to gain entry to university through a non-ATAR pathway. The program involves a range of activities delivered by the university in support of program aims. The activities include:

- *in-school workshops* based on activities mapped to the school curriculum and the Australian Blueprint for Career Development
- *on-campus events* including workshops for students aged 10 - 18 contextualising the ideas and information introduced in the school workshops
- *student real time* where Year 11 and 12 students can spend a day with a student Leader on campus to experience the life
- *mentoring* of students in schools can make contact with and be mentored by student Leader by connected classroom technology
- *teacher professional development* where teachers are provided with opportunities to hear from specialists and practitioners in the higher education sector to raise their awareness and provide strategies to encourage aspiration
- *skills fix* where opportunities are provided for students to participate in workshops that cover learning styles, time management and other strategies to assist with learning.

The *Darrambal* program is designed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and is administered by CSU's Indigenous Student Services group (ISS). It is a skill assessment program that provides assessments of students' existing skills, abilities and attributes and matches these against entry requirements for preferred courses. Upon completion, Aboriginal students are able to gain entry into the university through a supported process.

The school-university partnership is designed to facilitate the creation of positive futures for students by utilising the services and facilities of the newly established university campus at Port Macquarie and providing positive role models. CSU's Port Macquarie campus began operation in February 2012. It offered four courses initially and has expanded to eight face to face courses with options to access additional courses through distance learning.

Partnership Activities

Joint college and CSU meetings

A CSU ISS staff member meets with the Aboriginal Education Workers (AEWs) at Northern

Non-Government School twice a term to identify students that may benefit from participating in the *Future Moves* and *Darrambal* programs. The AEWs facilitate informal discussions between CSU ISS staff and potential students enrolled at the college. These discussions occur over an extended period of time to support student/staff relationship building and to increase awareness about pathways to university.

I want to let kids and families know that university is not just for white kids or rich kids. It's for them too, and to show them the pathways to make it happen. (CSU ISU staff Member)

Delivery of *Darrambal* program

AEWs work with college staff and liaise with the college regarding participation of students in the *Darrambal* program. A CSU ISS staff member delivers the *Darrambal* course in the college. Through a series of assessments, there is profile developed of student literacy and numeracy skills as well as other attributes. Recommendations are made to the Head of College at CSU and if accepted students receive an offer to study at the university. Students that are not recommended are assisted to explore alternative strategies, such as, enrolment in a TAFE course or short courses to support development of specific competencies.

Delivery of Future Moves program

The CSU ISS staff member works with Future Moves staff to devise strategies to help raise student awareness of future options post school, to develop career aspirations and demonstrate pathways to higher education. University staff members work with students, to help build on their knowledge of the students as well as strengthen their relationships with them through informal interactions in the classroom and in the playground. They engage students in a range of interactive activities at workshops held at the college, exploring personal preferences, types of occupations, education journeys of famous people, university life and ways of accessing further education.

Plans are underway at the university to incorporate into the Future Moves program content related to jobs that are most likely to be available to students. For example, the pathway into CSU's health science courses is an important focus, given the projected increase in the number of health related jobs in the future (such as, in radiography, rehabilitation and para medicine). In addition, the Future Moves program aims to capitalise on connections with the community through, for example, visitations to hospitals and provision of student access to ATSI health professional role models. Such connections have the potential to assist students to make more informed career choices and to select subjects that support chosen pathways.

The Future Moves program provides students with opportunities to visit the university campus, to participate in workshop activities and to access student mentoring support. Teachers are also able to participate in professional development activities.

Key Outcomes

College and university staff members report that although the partnership is in its early stage, some positive outcomes are evident.

Student pathway to higher education

College staff express support for CSU's hands-on approach with students. They reported that as a result of the university's work with the college, several students had been offered a place at the university. The provision and availability of public transport to the campus has helped enable students to take up the university's offer. Further, two students will undertake the *Darrambal* program in 2014 and as some students were provided with a broader range of occupational role models, they will be able to enrol in certificate three and four courses in the future.

Parental awareness of post school pathways

College staff report that their efforts to support student pathway planning have enhanced collaboration between teachers and parents. They also reported that among some parents there is increased awareness of and knowledge about options available to their children.

Awareness of the university in the community

College staff claimed that as a result of the provision of services through the programs that the university's reputation in the local area had been enhanced and knowledge about its programs, intentions and capacities increased. This, it was claimed, had led to a growth in the university's student enrolment.

I'm on an education forum with the universities but CSU was the one that was prepared to come the next day and talk about a collaborative activity... (It) gained from our links with all the other schools in terms of introducing their programs.
(Principal)

Awareness in the ATSI community

College and university staff claimed that the employment of Aboriginal staff in key roles is changing views about education among many students and building confidence and skills. Aboriginal staff members provide role models for students and relevant support to families. Their role can work to inspire others to innovate and trial new ways of working with ATSI students.

When I grew up there was no opportunity for us here, unless we decided to pack up and leave home. I didn't leave but went back to further education later in life, became a teacher and decided I wanted something better for my kids. (University staff member)

I remember being in Year 2 and she (AEW) was in the classroom talking to the teachers, not with her head hanging the way I was used to, but like she belonged there. And I was amazed. She would stand there with the principal and the other teachers and tell them how it was, and I thought we'd all get chucked out. I was horrified. My parents couldn't read or write and here was this black woman telling them how it was and I thought that was awesome (University Staff Member).

Future directions

Through the 'outreach' model of school-university partnerships, barriers to higher education will continue to be addressed providing students with increased access to university courses.

CSU staff members are collaborating with other universities to develop new outreach models. Such an approach would improve the university sector's capacity to implement a coordinated whole of community approach to service delivery.

The College is seeking to open up opportunities to students with interrupted schooling and social and emotional difficulties. It wants to connect with universities which can place practicum students at the college to provide mentoring support to students and give assistance to teachers. Additionally, the college is exploring other ways for university students to undertake community engagement service placement at the college, for example, students enrolled in paramedic studies.

Like other case study schools involved in 'outreach' models of school university partnerships, the challenge for the College is to negotiate models of service that are continually responsive to the new and emerging needs of students.

8. Tablelands High School

Tablelands High School engaged academics from the Bathurst Campus (Faculty of Education, School of Teacher Education) of Charles Sturt University to facilitate feedback from the school community, particularly parents, on the school and its effectiveness. The feedback was also seen as relevant to the overall evaluation of the Low SES NP program at the school.

Since 2009, university staff members have conducted annual focus group interviews with parents, students and teachers. The purpose of this exercise is to gather views from the community on the effectiveness of the school and to ensure that the school's decision making is informed by evidence. Low SES NP funding covers costs associated with the implementation of focus group interviews, including organization, callouts, transcriptions and report writing.

School and university staff report that the collaboration between the school and the university has contributed to enhancements in the relationship between the school and parents. They claim that parents have welcomed the opportunity to be heard, included and informed about matters impacting on their children's learning. The school has reported benefits from parent feedback, enabling a better understanding about issues impacting on learning, such as, disruption in classrooms and meeting the needs of 'middle' students.

The trust that has built over time between school and university staff has led to the establishment of other collaborative initiatives. For instance, university staff conducted research on student effort and learning in mathematics. They have provided individualised assistance to students and staff. Similarly, school leaders participate in tutorials at the university associated with university student course work.

The partnership arrangement with the university for Tablelands High School is an example of what might be termed a 'service' model of school-university partnership in which universities partner with schools to provide research support and expertise to address an agreed issue or set of issues of the school or its community.

School Profile

Tablelands High School is a Year 7 to 12 Government public school in the Western New South Wales region catering for around 800-900 students. The school's ICSEA value in 2012 was 940-950, compared to a state average of 997 for secondary schools. Six per cent of students in 2012 identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, compared with the state average of six per cent for secondary schools. Three per cent of students were from language backgrounds other than English, against a state average of 27 per cent.

Introduction

The school's approach to school improvement is multi-pronged. It highlights the importance of the development of better quality relationships with students, parents and the broader community, including feeder primary schools, in order to achieve goals and performance targets. To that end, the school invited two university researchers to facilitate and capture

input from a range of parent and community groups. Involving external personnel to collect the views of community members was seen as preferable to using school staff because the university researchers, as 'neutral' or 'impartial' participants, would be more able to encourage participants to freely express their views and establish a constructive relationship with parents.

Trying to engage more effectively with parents is a priority for the school, given the negative experiences of education that many of the parents and grandparents in the community have had in their own schooling. The focus group interview initiative was designed to provide a platform for building a stronger partnership with parents. Baseline data on parent satisfaction was collected in order to monitor changes in parent perspectives and evaluate the impact of parent engagement strategies.

University staff indicated that they welcomed the invitation by the Principal to work with the school. The invitation was made in response to an informal discussion at a Principals' dinner about interest in collaboration with schools and supporting the university's mission to connect with local communities. The benefit of collaborative partnerships perceived by university staff was access to students and schools, enabling them to be better informed and prepared for their work in teacher education.

Conducting focus group interviews

Three focus group interviews have been conducted with parents since 2009 by the university staff. A random sample of parents was selected (i.e. every twentieth family) to participate in the interviews. The sample also included representation of Aboriginal families and the Parents' and Citizens' (P&C) Association. Participants were assured of anonymity and informed that key themes emerging from the responses would be reported to the school community.

The focus interviews were one hour in length and consisted of semi structured questions relating to:

- areas of strength and areas requiring improvement
- school communication
- School's involvement with parents and the local community.

University staff conducted focus interviews with teachers and student groups in 2012 to further explore themes emerging from parent focus meetings and the impact of Low SES NP on the school. The researchers built on feedback provided by teachers in previous surveys undertaken in the school – Quality of School Life Survey, Longitudinal Quality Teaching Surveys and school based evaluations of programs and specific initiatives.

Reporting findings

University staff produced reports for the school based on an analysis of data collected during interviews and transcription of taped focus interviews. For example, the report identified for the first year a number of strengths:

- commitment to communicating with parents and the wider community
- broad recognition of student achievement

- teacher dedication and commitment in many areas
- outstanding achievement in creative and performing arts
- extensive subject choice.

A persistent and growing issue arising from the parent focus groups over the years had been the school efforts in catering for ‘middle-achieving’ students. Other issues related to school student engagement, welfare and discipline; teaching, learning and curriculum; school grounds and facilities; communication and parental involvement with the school; and involvement of the school with the community.

Areas for improvement included:

- improved provision for middle students
- high expectations to be set for all students across all curriculum areas
- ensuring strong/consistent classroom discipline with a corresponding focus on hard work and learning in all classrooms
- increased attention to bullying amongst students and longer-term follow-up of bullying incidents.

The key challenge for university staff was the accurate delivery of parent messages, including negative ones to school staff. University staff also recorded the results of the staff and focus group interviews for the school community.

Reflecting on findings

The principal informed staff, P&C members and the broader community (via the School Annual Report) of the focus group interview findings with parents. The school evaluation team (represented by staff, students and P&C members) was also provided with a copy of the report. In addition, the executive was provided with each year’s detailed report and with the executive summary, prepared for wider distribution.

University and school staff acknowledged parent views:

Parents had an extremely good grasp of what was going on in the classroom. They showed that they are extremely astute. They were hard hitting in delivering the information – felt that they could speak out. (University Staff Member)

The student and staff focus interview results were also presented to the P&C. The Executive had input through a structured workshop and academic partners made a presentation to a group of staff at a school development day. The whole school staff will be presented with the focus group interview results at the Term 3 School Development Day. The results will also be presented to the School Evaluation Team of staff, parents and students in Term 3 prior to school evaluation and planning for 2014.

Acting on recommendations

The school has implemented a number of strategies to address concerns about student

disruption in classrooms and improve provision for ‘middle-achieving’ students.

Minimizing disruption

An important area of response was addressing disruption to classroom learning. The key strategies implemented were:

- employment of teacher aides to provide personalised assistance to students
- establishment of a withdrawal class to support students in making a transition back to the classroom. This strategy was successful for about one third of the students.

Catering for middle students

Another area of response has been related to the provision for middle students in the school as well as in classes. Every faculty is currently undertaking action research into curriculum differentiation. Faculty Head Teachers have identified five students who are underperforming ‘middle’ students. Teachers have worked on identifying strategies to engage and lift performance of ‘middle’ students. The action research results will be presented at a development day to be held in term 4³¹. Results from the Quality Teaching survey, undertaken every three terms in parallel with parent focus interviews, suggest some improvements. According to the school, an analysis of data over the past five surveys shows an increase in the use of student-centred learning and an improvement in learning growth by middle students.

Outcomes

Discussions with school and university staff suggest that the partnership arrangement has produced some positive results for the school and the university.

Enhanced home – school partnership

School and university staff members claim that the focus interview method has worked well to provide the school with a mechanism for effectively working in partnership with parents. They pointed to the importance of engaging independent researchers in order to facilitate more open and effective communication with community members and to ensure that participants are able to freely express their views.

School and university staff report that as a result of focus group interviews the school has been able to come to a better understanding of the views of parents and others, including the Parent and Citizen Association:

Before, the only parents we heard from were from the angry parents. The focus interviews allow us to hear from the full range of parents - invite them to come in and have a say, to be heard (Principal)

³¹ The action research work builds on the work undertaken by a consultancy firm on student centred- learning. The firm assisted with the restructuring of the curriculum to create a consistent scope and sequence to high expectations 7 – 12 and the establishment of specific programs, such as, ‘Crack the Code’ for senior students. To date this program has produced positive results for bottom and top range students.

Parent feedback and anecdotal observations by school and university staff suggest that there has been an increased level of parental trust in the school as a result of participating in the focus interviews. Staff observed that parents appear pleased to have the opportunity to provide feedback and to do so in the forum that is provided.

The school has reported an increase in the number of parents attending parent information/curriculum nights at the school. For example, in the first year of the Low SES NP an average of 15 parents attended information night, whereas now parents attend in large numbers, often filling rooms. They are not only turning up but also staying longer after meetings to chat with other parents and school staff.

School staff also suggest that parents express an appreciation of the school's efforts to respond to their concerns, by considering and implementing recommendations arising from focus group interviews. They note that the dialogue at parent and teacher meetings has become more positive and focused on student learning.

The place changed from being a closed school with the drawbridge up (You did not talk to the community. You kept the community out. What would they know anyway!) to a school that is more open and enables participation. (Principal)

Increased parent and teacher communication

School staff report that feedback from parent interviews has challenged teacher views of parent perceptions. They suggest that parent feedback has proven to be insightful and valuable, at times highlighting new issues and at other times confirming priority areas for action. For instance, the importance of addressing the needs of 'middle' students was identified as a key theme in the focus interviews undertaken in 2009.

School staff members consider parent feedback to be an important component of school and teacher performance reviews. Teachers have become more aware of the significance of parent feedback and the school's accountability to its community. For instance, staff members stated that teachers have become more aware of the importance of adhering to published programs and school policies as parents are becoming increasingly interested in learning about the school's educational provision and are more aware of non-content expectations in curriculum areas.

Staff members reported that increased parent interest in the operation of the school has facilitated the expansion of the parent handbooks. Parents are now provided with additional information about curriculum content and methodology as well as student assessment and reporting. Additionally, the content of parent meetings is being adjusted to reflect a growing parent level of interest.

Improved school decision making

The school suggested that identification of strategic priorities and determination of overall future direction have been informed by the insights gained from listening to parents, teachers and students through the focus interview initiative. The focus interview input/feedback has helped the school to consider and reflect on management of student behaviour, attendance management and the delivery of programs. The focus interview data have also been valuable in helping the school to assess the effectiveness of initiatives, such as transition to TAFE

programs.

A product of the research process developed through the partnership with the university has been a building up of the school's research capacity. The school is now able to apply the same procedures to select representative samples of parent and community members and use data to identify critical themes and areas of action. Moreover, the school has established solid baseline data on parent satisfaction, enabling it to track changes over time. University staff members, too, highlighted the importance of school data:

we have learnt about the value of local data. The benefit of using data directly derived from the school or from the wider region to influence decision-making. Local data is also tremendously important in informing the university (University Staff Member).

According to school leaders, the school is now well placed to implement the 'Empowering Local Schools' initiative, designed to support schools to better respond to the needs of students and the local school community and provide services designed to assist their students to achieve their best educational outcomes. This initiative complements reforms being delivered through the Low SES NP and aligns with and builds on the broader schools reform agenda.

Expanded school – university relationship

University and school staff report that additional collaborative initiatives have arisen from the ongoing school–university partnership. These include initiatives related to research efforts and to directly supporting student learning.

Implementation of two research studies

- *Student effort study:* Tablelands High School, along with three other high schools, funded a research project to explore how teachers and students view effort and ability as well as their relative roles. The aim of the study was to build knowledge about classroom cultures and to develop strategies for increasing students' motivation and effort. University researchers and their assistants observed Years 8 and 9 English and mathematics classes over four weeks. A workshop was held for teachers participating in the project, designed to inform them about the key insights, issues and future strategies. University staff members are currently working with the schools to inform teacher professional learning.
- *Mathematics study:* University staff members wrote a report on the findings of a school-wide survey on students' attitudes, beliefs and performance in mathematics. This report provides the basis for further work with the school's Mathematics Faculty. A project has been established to devise strategies for addressing barriers to achievement in mathematics, in particular for girls. It is anticipated that the Mathematics Faculty will meet university staff early in Term 3, following faculty consideration of the report, to implement strategies to enhance positive student engagement.

Additional services to staff and students

University staff members have contributed to the school in other ways. For example, they

provided assistance to a teacher undertaking a Masters course with Charles Sturt University, through discussion during school breaks about the teacher's research project.

University staff members were also invited to assist a Year 11 Society and Culture class. They invited the class to attend a university sample lecture on research methodology to assist students with their projects and provided input on qualitative and quantitative research methods. They assisted students with their individual projects and organised a tour of the university for the class. University staff also provided each student with a university sample bag and met with the university's transition team to discuss strategies for facilitating an effective transition from school to university.

School engagement in university learning

School leaders were also invited to speak with university students on areas related to their teacher training coursework, such as curriculum negotiation and expectations in secondary schools and the framework within student and teacher timetables, are negotiated with a whole-school curriculum.

School staff presentation at the university was fantastic. It showed how curriculum is delivered in a school setting (University Staff Member).

According to university staff, the catalyst for the expansion of the school-university collaborative efforts has been the trust developed over time. This trust has enabled both the school and the university to explore common areas of need or interest and commit to initiatives that provide benefits for both partners.

Future directions

The partnership between Tablelands High School and CSU has provided various types of support and expertise for the school. As a result of the partnership arrangement, the collection of quality parent input and feedback has become core business for the school. In addition, the relationship between the school and the university has strengthened through the partnership. University staff members have become better informed about the school, given their extensive data base collected over the last four years. The school aims to continue to utilise the expertise of university staff in order to implement the Low SES NP reform agenda.

The school has indicated that it will continue to listen and respond to parent concerns and needs, using the established methodology. An area of challenge for the school relates to development of student reports. Feedback data indicates that parents are interested in reports that provide more specific information about their children's progress, yet the school's concerted efforts to achieve that outcome have not been recognised or valued by parents in their feedback.

PART B: Parent partnerships

9. Introduction

Part B revisits the six parent engagement school case studies conducted in 2012, with a view to identifying further developments and outcomes arising from the implementation of their initiatives. The key initiatives being implemented are outlined in Progress Report 2, published on the NSW DEC website.³²

Before presenting each school's progress report, a brief introduction to parent engagement is provided and case study findings are presented.

Significance of parental engagement

Reform area 6 of the Low SES NP program advocates for the establishment of external partnerships, in particular with parents and the local community. The significance of this area of reform is supported by the school effectiveness literature dating back to the 1980s.

Henderson and Mapp's (2002) synthesis of research on parent and community engagement found that 'all families can help improve their children's performance in school and influence other key outcomes that affect achievement' (p. 61). In reviewing research specifically involved with low SES communities, the findings were that in high-performing schools in low-income areas parents, carers and communities are typically highly engaged within the school. Furthermore, most low-income families were 'willing and able, with training, to implement practices linked to improved achievement' (pp. 61-62).

Likewise, a review from the United Kingdom found that 'targeted family learning programs where children and parents learn together' are powerful agents in improving the attainment levels for children from vulnerable groups (Kendall et al. 2008: 13). This finding also correlates with a key principle of institutional effectiveness, identified by Epstein over two decades ago, that 'connections and shared responsibilities are important between social institutions, and that schools and families will be more effective organisations if they work together to identify and achieve common goals' (Epstein 1987: 134). Changes in the family unit over the past decades have also increased demand for collaboration between schools and families (Simon and Epstein 2001; Department of Education and Skills 2007).

There is widespread acknowledgement of the powerful association between parental engagement and student achievement emerging from empirical evidence, (Harris and Goodall 2007: 21), particularly in the case of those least likely to be engaged due to socio-economic circumstances. The recent Productivity Commission Staff Working Paper (McLachlan et al 2013:103) highlights this association and confirms the formal enshrinement of parental partnership in government policy.

The Low SES NP program promotes strategic action designed to build the overall school community's capacity to support student learning. A range of targeted strategies to increase the engagement of parents, carers and families have been reported to this end, including : parent education classes, parent sessions, Aboriginal Elders and community members providing classroom support, drop-in centres or parent cafes (Smarter Schools National

³² See: http://www.cese.nsw.gov.au/images/stories/PDF/SSNP/Ext_Partnerships_Report_final-amended_%20280513-APPROVED.pdf

Partnerships 2012).

The critical importance of taking a non-deficit approach when seeking to engage low-SES parents, carers and communities is stressed. Communication is central to the task of building trusting, collaborative relationships among teachers, families, and community members. (Harris and Goodall 2007) . The critical significance of communication to the engagement of students' families and carers is evident in the Family-School Partnership framework, developed for schools servicing families in low SES communities (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008). Other success factors identified by Kruger et al. (2009) include the importance of bringing key stakeholders together for a common purpose, a focus on learning and the allocation of resources to build school capacity.

Case study schools

Six parent partnerships school case studies were undertaken in 2012, to identify initiatives developed by schools with the aim of breaking down barriers with low-SES families and communities. These schools were revisited to identify any developments and changes since mid-2012.

Table 2 provides information relating to school type, sector, region, enrolment number, student characteristics and the ICSEA score. The names of schools have been changed to ensure anonymity and enrolments have been rounded to the nearest 50 to minimise potential for identification.

Table 2: List of case study schools and characteristics

School Name	Sector	Region/Diocese	Type	Enrolments
Independent College	Non Government ³³	S W Sydney	K-12	>900
Western High School	Government	W Sydney	7-10	600-650
North Coast Public School	Government	N Coast	K-6	400-450
Valley Public School	Government	Hunter CC	K-6	<250
South Coast High School	Government	Illawarra SE	7-12	700-750
Catholic Primary School	Non Government	Sydney	K-6	650-700

School case study developments

A range of parent partnership initiatives were implemented by case study schools that are related to *six key elements*: establishing a strategic focus; effectively communicating with parents; increasing parent participation; developing parent knowledge about student learning,

³³ The authors accept this and other changes in this table. They note, however, that these changes are a variation from the 2nd progress report on external partnerships in which these schools are identified as 'Independent' and 'Catholic' respectively.

engaging targeted groups; and facilitating home-school collaboration.

Each school's initiatives related to these elements and identified in 2012 are presented in the first column of Table 3. The second column reports on the status of initiatives – whether an initiative continued (✓), was further developed or discontinued. The table also identifies new initiatives that have been introduced by schools since mid-2012.

Part B: Partnerships with parents

Table 3: External Partnerships: 2012 Schools

Key elements	Initiative type	North Coast PS		Valley PS		Western High School		South Coast HS		Catholic PS		Independent College	
		Initiative	In 2013	Initiative	In 2013	Initiative	In 2013	Initiative	In 2013	Initiative	In 2013	Initiative	In 2013
<i>Establishing a strategic focus</i>	Making PP a strategic priority embedded in policies and practices	Whole school approach to parent engagement	√			Developing whole school policies to support home and school collaboration	Strengthened significance of PP in school policies and operations		New initiative - whole school approach to parent partnership				New initiative - Policy "parents can make a difference to their children's education"
	Increasing PP in the roles of executive staff	Incorporating Parent Partnership functions into the Assistant Principal's role	√				New initiative – embedding PP in faculty staff functions				New initiative - incorporation of PP functions in role of senior staff		
	Improving parent liaison and communication	Employing a Community Education Officer	√	Employing a Community Education Officer	Established PP structures and processes	Establishing a Parent Engagement Coordinator position	initiative discontinued end 2012			Appointment of a Parent Engagement Co-ordinator	Partially discontinued – due to staff turnover		
<i>Effectively communicating with parents</i>	Creating a physical space for parents to interact with the school	Staffing of the Learning Community Centre (LCC)	√										
	disseminating information to parents		√		New initiative – enhancing school dialogue with parents		New initiative - facilitating positive communication with parents	Providing information to parents	√	Providing newsletters	√	Informing parents of educational developments	√

Part B: Partnerships with parents

Key elements	Initiative type	North Coast PS		Valley PS		Western High School		South Coast HS		Catholic PS		Independent College	
		Initiative	In 2013	Initiative	In 2013	Initiative	In 2013	Initiative	In 2013	Initiative	In 2013	Initiative	In 2013
Increasing parent participation	engaging parents in school activities	Engaging parents in teaching and learning activities	√			Encouraging parent attendance at assemblies and other events	√			Encouraging parents to assist in classrooms	√	Encouraging parents to volunteer	No longer a planned initiative
	supporting P&Cs	Improving the effectiveness of the P&C	√	Improving the effectiveness of the P&C	√	Linking to primary schools and their parent P&Cs	√					Encouraging parents to participate in the Parent and Community Committee	√
	engaging parents in school decision making and planning	Seeking parent feedback and input	√	Encouraging parents to provide feedback and make suggestions	√								
Developing parent knowledge about student learning	Providing parent education activities	Providing parent information sessions and workshops	√	Providing parent information sessions and workshops	√	Providing parent forums	√	Holding parent meetings	√	Delivering parent forums	√	Providing parent workshops and forums	√
Engaging targeted groups	engaging parents of Aboriginal students	Responding in a more targeted way to Aboriginal parents /community	√					Working Aboriginal families	√				
	engaging parents of refugee students									Using brokered programs to support delivery	√		
	engaging parents of pre-school children / early years										√	Supporting parents to prepare children for kindergarten	√

Part B: Partnerships with parents

Key elements	Initiative type	North Coast PS		Valley PS		Western High School		South Coast HS		Catholic PS		Independent College	
		Initiative	In 2013	Initiative	In 2013	Initiative	In 2013	Initiative	In 2013	Initiative	In 2013	Initiative	In 2013
Facilitating home-school collaboration	engaging parents in parent and teacher meetings				New initiative - enhancing the three way conference process				New initiative - promoting parent and teacher meetings				
	engaging parents in supporting their children's learning at school - for example, attendance, PLPs, and accessing student support services							Involving parents in attendance, retention and student intervention programs	√			Encouraging parents to support student tutoring programs	√
	engaging parents in the welfare of their children			Engaging parents in student discipline	√			Taking a whole of family approach to student welfare	Initiative discontinued due to staff turnover	Using brokered programs to support delivery	√		
	involving parents in transition from school			Engaging parents in student transition to the high school.	√								

Table 3 shows that primary schools report the implementation of a higher number of parent partnership initiatives, with North Coast Public primary school recording the highest number of initiative types (i.e. 10).

The following conclusions are drawn from an analysis of case studies and discussions with school leaders relating to the six elements:

- *Establishing a strategic focus on parent partnership* – all schools reported the implementation of at least one initiative aimed at driving significant change in the school. Two schools discontinued employment of community liaison positions, choosing instead to incorporate parent partnership functions in the roles of senior staff. Discussions with schools underline the importance of the support of school leadership for the establishment and maintenance of a strategic focus on parent partnerships.
- *Developing parent knowledge about student learning* - all schools report the provision of a range of parent education activities, for example, workshops, seminars and briefing sessions.
- *Effectively communicating with parents* – five schools addressed the need to build parent capacity to work in partnership with the school and better inform parents about school events and developments through dissemination of information. Discussions with schools indicate recognition of the importance of promoting two-way communications between schools and families to the establishment of trust and reciprocity.
- *Increasing parent participation* – five schools described the implementation of a range of initiatives aimed at increasing parental participation in school activities, including assemblies, school events, teaching and learning activities, and the P & C.
- *Engaging targeted groups* – four schools reported the implementation of initiatives designed to engage targeted groups in the school community – for instance, Aboriginal parents (2 schools), refugee parents (one school) and parents of kindergarten students (2 schools).
- *Facilitating home-school collaboration* – four schools reported the implementation of strategies to support the facilitation of agreed understandings and joint actions for families and schools, each seeking to support students in their learning, welfare, engagement, school attendance and transition from school support. Discussions with schools indicate the importance of avoiding ‘deficit approaches’ and of building on the strengths of the local community. Also noted was the importance of providing for parents as learners alongside their children.

The case studies also address the question of sustainability of parent partnership initiatives beyond the Low SES NP program. Three schools note their intention to explore ways to develop and sustain the parent partnership strategies and relationships, including the continued employment of community liaison personnel. .

The other three schools suggest that they have developed sustainable models of parent partnership, through working to integrate parent partnership perspective in school policies

and practices and to incorporate parent partnerships functions in the role of school staff. The challenge for these schools will be to maintain a strategic focus on the importance of and to be continually responsive to new and emerging needs of the parents and families.

10. Independent College

Independent College has pursued a parent engagement strategy with identified initiatives as below. The school notes improvements in progress in the following areas

- *Establishing a strategic focus on parent partnerships* through the policy ‘parents can make a difference in their children’s education’ (new initiative)
- *Effectively communicating with parents* by informing parents of educational developments
- *Increasing parent participation* by encouraging parents to participate in the Parent and Community Committee
- *Developing parent knowledge about student learning* by providing parent workshops and forums
- *Engaging a targeted group* by supporting parents of kindergarten students to facilitate induction for families in the life of the college
- *Home-school collaboration* by encouraging parents to support the after-hours student tutoring programs.

The college reports that it has shifted its emphasis away from *promoting parents as volunteers* in the college to promoting parental involvement in the education of their children. This shift reflects recognition of the limited time that parents have due to work and life commitments. Consequently, the school has not been actively encouraging parents to do voluntary work at the college.

Establishing a strategic focus on parent engagement

The college reports that it has been placing increased emphasis on the significance of parental engagement in their children’s education, seeking to “[send] out a strong message to parents that they can make a difference and influence their children’s level of educational attainment” (College leader).

The college has sought to promote a better understanding for staff of the role that parents play in the education of their children, and to encourage staff to support the college’s commitment to work in partnership with parents. The college reports a positive response to its efforts to involve parents in their children’s learning, including efforts to encourage parents to exert their influence and to collaborate with teachers on the best ways to support students to achieve at school.

Effectively communicating with parents

Dissemination of information about educational developments to support parental involvement in their children's learning has been actively pursued through a range of media, the college reports, these include:

- college website, including the introduction of MOODLE (Modular Object Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) early in 2013. The college has evidence that an increasing number of parents are using the student management system to access information about classroom work and homework.
- college Facebook page, developed at the end of 2012, provides parents with information on workshop activities and other parents events
- SMS messaging, introduced at the beginning of 2013, facilitates the provision of timely communication. Parents have expressed appreciation for the SMS notifications informing them of college developments and events.
- newsletters and notes to parents. This service continues to cater for parents without access or confidence in using ICT parent and teacher meetings are held over two nights, to provide greater flexibility for parents.
- telephone calls and /or meetings at the year level are organised by year level advisors/coordinators, welfare officers and teacher to discuss student attendance and performance.

The college reports plans to install a Liquid Crystal Display (LCD) screen in the reception area as well as a notice board in the playground to promote events and its educational service to the college community.

Increasing parent participation

The college reports that its P & C has played a significant role in engaging parents to participate in school activities. As part of the P&C process, all parents are invited to attend parent sessions and to become involved in fundraising activities, whole school activities and school excursions.

The P&C has also been instrumental in providing feedback and some input into college operations. For example, expressions of parental concern about limited parking for school pickup resulted in the organisation by the college of a teacher to be on duty to provide practical assistance. The school noted that parent input had contributed to the development of an efficient strategy for managing traffic after school.

Help with future planning was requested of 30 parents at a College event at the end of 2012. These parents, who had provided a high level of assistance throughout the year, were briefed on key achievements and given an opportunity to meet in groups, explore new ideas and go into solutions for issues. The college advised that it intended to increase the number of parents attending the next event in order to strengthen parent input to college planning.

The college also invites parents to attend NAPLAN meetings and celebrations. Parents in attendance are provided with presentations on annual results, and their engagement is sought in discussions of achievements and future challenges and directions.

We have seen a really big change. Parents feel more accountable. They now feel that they are a part of their children's education. (College leader)

Developing parent knowledge about student learning

A large number of parents are attending workshops. For example, 70 parents attended literacy workshops organised by the Teacher Librarian. 85% of participants were female. . Strategies for engaging students, especially boys, in reading were modelled and explained. Parents were also invited to use the college library. Parents in attendance indicated that these sessions were most helpful in giving them the confidence and skills to assist their children to read.

The college reports that the digital literacy workshop was also a success. About 60 parents attended this session in order to gain assistance in the use of ICT, and in particular to use MOODLE. The college noted that most parents of kindergarten students attended three orientation session designed to provide information on the college's expectations of parents and strategies for helping children learn at home.

School leaders indicate that an increasing number of parents are attending the annual NAPLAN workshop. The number of parents has grown from five in 2009 to 90 in 2013. The annual NAPLAN workshop is held on a Saturday morning, in Term 1, prior to the four NAPLAN tutoring sessions organised to provide help to students preparing for the test. The workshop is delivered in an informal manner. Morning tea is provided and parents in attendance are shown examples of test questions and assisted in the understanding of what is required of their children. Parents are also invited to participate in problem solving group activities and handouts are provided to help them at home. Resources are made available in Arabic for families for whom this is the first language. Further information is posted on the college Facebook such as information on answers to group activities or further test items.

Parent feedback suggests that parents value the NAPLAN workshops as they provide them with an understanding of the college's expectations. The college also advises that many parents are tracking and noting improvements made by the college in NAPLAN on the 'MySchool' website, and that parents are aware of the college's commitment to improve students' NAPLAN performance in the area of writing.

The college reports that some parents who had attended previous years' session/s (to support their older children) attended the 2013 workshop. It reports that these parents benefit from the ongoing improvement in the delivery of the workshops, derived in part from parent suggestions, including that the length of the workshop be shortened. It has been shortened to 50 minutes, and activities are varied from year to year.

The college notes that feedback from students indicates that parents are discussing NAPLAN testing in the home and encouraging them to prepare for the test, for example, students report that at times they are asked to inquire about getting access to previous years' exam papers or copies of course materials.

It's hard to get the evidence to show a direct link between our dramatic improvement in NAPLAN results and parental involvement. But I believe that parent involvement is one of the most important factors associated with our college's improvement in NAPLAN results (College leader).

Engaging kindergarten parents

Senior staff at the college note the effectiveness of its strategies in inducting families of kindergarten students into the college, helping settle students, and creating and maintaining family engagement with the college. Strategies cited include offering support to parents preparing their children for kindergarten, providing opportunities for parents to interact informally with teachers and opportunities to participate in a range of school orientation activities. Information is provided on how to support children's learning at home.

Facilitating collaboration on student intervention support

The college reports increased home-school collaboration through dialogue about student intervention learning strategies. Parents whose children are considered to be experiencing difficulties with their learning are invited by year advisors, coordinators or classroom teachers to attend a meeting at school to discuss the issues and possible solutions.

Many of these students are offered intervention support through the student *After School Tutoring Program*, delivered twice a week, the college reports. Access is available through this program to individual support, including strategies to assist them with NAPLAN testing. Parents are informed about the purpose of the tutoring program and invited to support their children with learning at home. Parents are invited to provide consent for students' participation in the tutoring program as well as a financial contribution to cover salary and other operational costs.

Staff members report that parents value the additional support provided by the college and that the financial contribution gives parents the incentive to ensure that their children attend the tutoring sessions.

Future directions

The college's commitment to actively engage parents in their children's education through the Low SES NP program parental engagement initiatives has resulted in such improvements as increased rates of parent participation, heightened parent awareness about student learning, and enhanced collaborations between home and school.

The college acknowledges the contribution that the Low SES NP program has made in providing the college with additional time release for staff to implement parent partnership initiatives and financial resources to purchase materials and provide workshops. The college reports that it will ensure ongoing development and long term sustainability of the parent partnership strategy by resourcing the strategy through its global funds.

11. North Coast Public School

North Coast Public School has sought progress in its parent engagement strategies through initiatives outlined below:

- *Establishing a strategic focus on parent partnerships* through a number of means: enacting a whole of school approach to parental engagement; staffing the Learning and Community Centre (LCC); incorporating parent engagement functions into the Assistant Principal's role; employing a Community Education Officer; and providing intercultural communication skill training to staff
- *Increasing parent participation* by seeking to engage parents in teaching and learning activities, taking steps to improve the effectiveness of the P&C, and seeking parent feedback and input
- *Developing parent knowledge* about student learning by providing parent workshops and opportunities for parent involvement s in decision making
- *Engaging a targeted group* by undertaking a more focused approach to engaging Aboriginal parents/community.

Establishing a strategic focus on parent partnerships

The school reports that initiatives associated with making parent engagement an important focus in the school have been successful.

- The whole school approach to parental engagement is reported to have enabled the successful integration of parent participation perspectives into school planning, policy development and program implementation.
- The employment of a Community Education Officer has enhanced the school's capacity to interact with parents, build trust, and assess and respond to need.
- The engagement of parents, families, and community groups with North Coast Public school has been expanded by a range of successful measures, the school reports. The LCC, which has been moved to the connected classroom block, has provided parents with opportunities to interact with the school and participate in activities. Joint activities have been developed with community groups, such as the inter-generational reading program (with residents from the aged care facility) and the Men's Shed project. A workshop for community groups was hosted to provide a forum for school staff, parents and community personnel to share information about student needs and services available in the community to meet these needs.
- The incorporation of parent engagement functions into the Assistant Principal's role has highlighted the importance of parent engagement to the school community and increased parents' access to school leadership.
- School leadership commented that the provision of intercultural communication

skills training for staff has improved staff skills, providing opportunities to develop new knowledge and deepen cultural awareness. At the end of 2012, teachers participated in the *Connecting to Country* program delivered by the school's Aboriginal Education Officer. Staff spent time in the local community, visiting culturally significant sites and meeting with Aboriginal people and representatives of key organisations.

What this did for my staff in terms of their morale but also their deep understanding of local Aboriginal culture was just fantastic. My core belief has always been about relationships, so if you can invest time in that and take people into a relaxed environment and give them something definite it will often lead to good things. (Principal)

Increasing parent participation

The school reports that there are increased numbers of parent and community members participating in school events, class programs, education week, book parades and hat parades. The number of people attending assemblies and open days has increased.

When we do an assembly now, it is just an amazing event – with a level of professionalism that's gone up a notch. (Principal)

Parents attend the LCC and participate in activities such as Reading Eggs, Wii dancing, visits to a local aged care facility, intergenerational reading, homework initiatives and gardening, the school reports. It also notes that the P& C has become very active, become very active, with a large number of parents involved in the work of the various committees, such as, fundraising, school policies and programs and school canteen staffing.

Feedback on policies and practices has been provided to the school through parent participation in focus group discussions and school surveys. This feedback can assist with the identification of strategic priorities for the future.

Developing parent knowledge about student learning

Continued attendance by parents at workshops in language, literacy and numeracy development, understanding NAPLAN testing results and strategies for supporting students, e-learning and positive parenting programs has been noted by the school.

The school reports that increasing numbers of parents are taking up the opportunity to develop their understandings of school curriculum and policy and the use of ICT.

Responding to Aboriginal parents/community

The school reports that the Aboriginal community has become actively supportive of the school, demonstrating strong appreciation for the support provided to their children. Parent surveys undertaken in 2012 indicated that Aboriginal parents are highly satisfied or satisfied with the staff, including the Principal and the overall leadership of the school. All of the Aboriginal parents surveyed also indicated that they hold the school in high regard and are satisfied with the school image.

The school reports a number of significant achievements:

- early assessment and identification of kindergarten students and the provision of early intervention and support strategies to assist Aboriginal students – for example, providing literacy support to Aboriginal students, including tracking of students' progress. The school recorded that all students improved their reading skills by three reading recovery levels as a result of participation in the intervention program.
- provision of home school liaison support, including school attendance management. The school noted that the number of referrals to the program increased due to the proactive intervention program and rigorous monitoring by the Aboriginal Education Officer, the Aboriginal Education Worker and the Assistant Principal.
- delivery of the kindergarten program, staffed by an Aboriginal tutor (who formerly attended a local primary school). The program is delivered in the classroom and aims to facilitate effective student and teacher relationships.
- introduction of the Aboriginal Language program across the whole school. This highly successful program has been used as a best practice example by the Board of Studies to assist in the development and delivery of other Aboriginal education programs.
- involvement of parents in the development of Personalised Learning Plans (PLPs). PLP completion rates rose from 35 per cent in 2011 to 87 per cent at the end of 2012. The school undertakes the reinvention of the PLPs every year to promote the involvement of parents. In 2013, the PLPs were digitized into a notebook form, enabling continuity from year to year.
- delivery of three focus days for the Aboriginal community and parents. Eight parents attended the first forum, 12 attended the second forum and 27 attended the final forum. The school also seeks to provide opportunities for Aboriginal students and their families to participate in cultural awareness (i.e., *Connecting to Country*, Reconciliation Week, NAIDOC celebrations, Gondwana Choir, Leadership opportunities and traditional ATSI games).

Feedback from Aboriginal parents via the 2012 Parent survey indicates their overall satisfaction with support provided to Aboriginal students. The school noted that the key initiatives supported by Aboriginal parents included:

- Aboriginal Education and Culture Awareness initiative implemented at the school
- Aboriginal staff provided with professional and career development support
- five Aboriginal paraprofessionals encouraged to enrol in teacher training courses.

The school's 2012 NAPLAN results for Aboriginal students are positive, with Year 5 Aboriginal students performing

- within state level in numeracy, data and measurement and space & geometry (444.4 compared to 438.4 for the state).
- above state level in reading (school 461.4 compared to 430.2 for the state), writing (461.4 compared to 430.2 for the state), grammar & punctuation (463.9 compared to 431.8 for the state) and numeracy (448.5 compared to 438.5 for the state)
- above state level in spelling (508.9 compared to 454.3 for the state).

The Year 3 NAPLAN results also indicate that Aboriginal students performed within the state level for both spelling (school 358.1 compared to 366.4 for the state) and grammar (school 339.1 compared to 355.2 for the state).

Future directions

Improvements achieved through North Coast Public School's SES NP program parental engagement initiatives have been noted in the establishment of a strategic focus on parent partnerships, parent participation, parent knowledge about student learning, and the engagement of Aboriginal parents. The school has reported particular success in effective responses to Aboriginal parents and the community, leading to improved student learning outcomes; and in the integration of the parent participation perspective through a whole of school approach.

The school seeks to boost student attainment through learning that connects students to their family and community. It aims to increase parent and student rates of satisfaction with its initiatives to this end from 90.9 per cent to 95 per cent by the end of 2013, building on its existing commitment to increasing engagement of parents with the school, in particular in the area of decision making.

The school reports that the Low SES NP program has improved its relationships with parents. It reports that it is exploring ways to ensure the sustainability of its parental engagement strategies, including through the support of initiatives identified as critical to its success, such as the ongoing employment of the Community Education Officer.

12. Valley Public School

Valley Public School has pursued a parent engagement strategy with identified initiatives as below. The school notes improvements in progress in the following areas:

- *Establishing a strategic focus on parent partnerships* through the employment of a Community Education Officer. The CEO position was put in place to assist teachers, parents and students to establish and extend relationships within the school community, to better support student attainment
- *Effectively communicating with parents* by seeking active engagement in dialogue with parents (new initiative)
- *Increasing parent participation* by taking measures to improve the effectiveness of the P&C and by seeking to encourage parents to provide feedback and to make suggestions
- *Developing parent knowledge about student learning* through the provision of parent information sessions and workshops
- *Facilitating home-school collaboration* by undertaking the improvement of three way conferences (new initiative) and seeking the engagement of parents in students' discipline as well as their transition to high school.

Establishing a strategic focus on parent partnerships

The school reports that the work of the Community Education Officer (CEO) has facilitated cultural change supporting parent partnerships through:

Mediation between parents and teachers, and continuously identifying matters that need addressing

- Implementation of regular parent surveys which can inform the development of parent strategies, such as the content of workshops
- holding parent focus group meetings seeking parent input into school decision making
- attendance at P&C meetings, listening to parental concerns and suggestions, and providing school reports
- participating in action research projects – for example, the CEO's role in the transition to high school project is to consult with parents about their views, concerns and suggestions.

Staff members interviewed reported that positive links with parents promoted in these ways were of benefit to teachers enabling them to better manage their communication and relationships. It notes that teachers have an enhanced understanding of parents' perspectives and capacity to work in partnership with them. Teachers are enabled to collaborate with parents on student learning, both at school and in the home.

Recognising the importance of the CEO position, the P & C at Valley Public School has offered to raise funds to maintain the position beyond the Low SES NP program. The school reports that parents are motivated to participate in school activities and support teachers in educating their children.

Parents are more willing to be a part of the school. People are now approaching the CEO and volunteering to engage in school activities. (P&C Member)

Effectively communicating with parents

According to school leaders, communication with parents has improved as a result of the school's increased dialogue with parents through:

- the presence of the Principal in the playground during mornings and after school. Parents interact informally with the Principal and staff, establishing trusting relationships and conversing about the education of their children.
- the dissemination of information about the school's changed approach through the school's newsletter, with the aim of promoting positive conversations between the school and parents. Parents have responded positively to the new format that profiles student achievements, learning journeys and individual stories.
- the P&C's promotion of parent engagement through informal communication with parents, input into the school newsletter and networking with other P&Cs in the local area.

A school leader noted that parents realize that the school is "listening to them when they are expressing their views". The results of a survey of parents undertaken recently demonstrate positive appraisal of the school. One hundred per cent of survey responses indicated strong agreement with the statement "School events gave me a positive impression of the school."

Parent surveys undertaken at the end of 2012 indicated that 67 per cent of parents reported that the provision of regular communication is adequate, compared to 50 per cent in 2011. The school is implementing strategies seeking to further improve communication with parents. Some examples include: reading and discussion of newsletters on the interactive whiteboard in classrooms, dissemination of term letters for each class and the delivery of additional workshops through the P&C.

Increasing parent participation

The school reports that the culture of the P&C has changed and it operates more effectively. Approximately eight parents now attend each P&C meeting. New people have also joined the P&C and a number of parents have volunteered to work in the school canteen.

Parents have responded to the school's encouragement to provide feedback and make suggestions, the school reports, sharing their thoughts through everyday contact with staff, attendance at focus group meetings and parent forums, and participation in school surveys.

Developing parent knowledge about student learning

The school has continued to provide parent information sessions and workshops with the aim of building parent knowledge about their children's learning. It reports that parents have participated in school orientation activities, and workshops designed to provide them with literacy and numeracy skill development strategies to use at home.

One of the most successful forums was the online literacy forum, where it was noted that a high number of parents observed literacy lessons delivered to their children in classrooms. Twenty-two parents participated in one classroom. Parents expressed a desire for further opportunities to observe teaching and learning in classrooms, in particular to see the use of ICT strategies.

Facilitating home-school collaboration

The school has modified the structure of the Three-Way Conferences which are held in first term. The modification entails the provision of time for parents to meet with the teacher prior to the Three-Way Conference. This innovation has resulted in teachers' noting that they and parents felt better prepared for the meeting with the student. Staff also reported the improved effectiveness of the meetings, which focussed on constructive dialogue, celebration of achievements, finding solutions, making commitments and planning for the future.

The school also invited parents to collaborate with them in improving student behaviour. A large number of parents attended meetings at the school to discuss strategies for improving students' behaviours, and came to assemblies which acknowledged students' achievements and awards. The Principal reports that as a result of parent collaboration in working to improve student behaviour, the suspension rate has dropped to practically zero and that only one child has been suspended to date this year.

In response to parents' concerns, the school invited parents to participate in a working group to explore strategies for assisting students to transition to high school. The school invites all parents whose children are transitioning to Year 7 to attend a meeting at the school to discuss the transition strategy and their role in supporting their children to make the transition to high school.

Future directions

Valley Public School has moved to secure the ongoing sustainability of its parent engagement strategy. It reports that improvements have resulted from a range of Low SES NP program parental engagement initiatives, noting particular success in embedding parent partnerships in the school's overall operation, including through the CEO function, communication with parents, parent participation, parent knowledge about student learning, home-school collaboration, and maintenance of a strategic focus on the partnerships.

To ensure this sustainability beyond the Low SES NP program, the school is exploring strategies for continuing the work of the Community Education Officer, including ongoing funding of the position.

13. Catholic Primary School

Improvements have been identified by Catholic Primary School in the following areas through identified initiatives of its parent engagement strategy:

- *Establishing a strategic focus on parent partnership* through the employment of a Parent Engagement Co-ordinator, the incorporation of parent engagement functions in an executive role (new), providing staff professional development (new)
- *Effectively communicating with parents* by distribution of newsletters
- *Increasing parent participation* by encouraging parents to take up opportunities to assist in classrooms
- *Developing parent knowledge about student learning* by through parent forums, training, and other support, including internet facilities
- *Engaging targeted parent groups* and facilitating *home-school collaboration* by using brokered programs

Establishing a strategic focus on parent partnership

The Principal has identified the establishment of a strategic focus on parent partnerships as a critical initiative. A Parent Engagement Coordinator (PEC) was appointed in 2011 to undertake action to establish and expand the initiative.

When the PEC took a leave of absence, the school modified its approach to the coordination of the parent partnership strategy. Key functions of the position, including the organisation of parent forums and other programs and the distribution of newsletters, were allocated to a number of staff members. This evolving model of delivery, where a range of staff carry out parent engagement strategy activities, is considered to be sustainable beyond the Low SES NP.

Staff members commented that the strategic focus on parent partnership has facilitated cultural change, with a widespread acceptance of a family-centred philosophy of learning. It notes that parents are valued as a resource for the school, with an important 'voice', and the growth of an associated expectation of parent involvement in the school community.

The school has provided professional learning programs to teachers on the principles of parent and community engagement. It reports that this has developed teachers' knowledge and understanding, openness to participation in school community initiatives, and more positive attitudes. An increased number of teachers are participating in whole school and community based events or programs. For example, 20 teachers volunteered to deliver 10 sessions each of SPARK (St Vincent de Paul Assisting Refugee Kids).

Effectively communicating with parents

The school continues to distribute regular newsletters in English and Vietnamese language to parents, aiming to provide them with information about school programs, events, and educational developments, and with strategies for assisting their children at home, in literacy and numeracy skills, for example, and in the use of ICT to enhance learning. The school reports that the newsletters aim to provide encouragement for parents to play an important role in their children's education.

Increasing parent participation

The school reports that parents are responding positively to teachers' invitations to participate in classroom activity. The number of parents assisting in classrooms has increased since the establishment of Low SES NP. At the start of 2011, there were six parents helping in the classroom on a regular basis. Currently there are approximately 26 parents participating in classroom activity.

With the parent helpers in the classroom, the students had more opportunities to demonstrate, and enhance, their reading skills working with another adult. (Teacher)

As a teacher I felt supported in the children's learning and the parents appreciated being involved in the classroom environment. Parents also appreciated the opportunity to see what reading (and behaviour) strategies used in the classroom they can employ at home. (Teacher)

The school provides induction training for parents as part of the school's risk management strategy. The induction program provides guidance to parents about working in the school and training in the importance of privacy and confidentiality in the interest of students and their families.

Developing parent knowledge about student learning

The school provides opportunities for parents to develop their knowledge and skills about student learning through parent meetings, parent listening workshops and the Internet Café. Parents are informed about, and enabled to understand, their child's learning progress.

Evening parent workshops are well attended. Recently, 50 parents and 20 staff members attended a session on spelling and mathematics. The content of the workshop is designed to be responsive to their needs and interests. Parents highlight the value of the handouts provided by the school detailing learning strategies for use in the home, the school reports, and indicate that the parent sessions are building their confidence to work with teachers.

The Internet Café also provides support and opportunities for parents to develop their understandings of curriculum and their skill in using ICT for learning. The school notes that parents from diverse backgrounds have shared their knowledge and they have assisted each other to help their children.

The school has implemented parent surveys to collect feedback. Needs can also be identified through informal and ongoing conversations with parents, and through parent listening

assemblies, the school reports. It notes the benefit of listening to parent desires, perceptions and experiences of the school.

Engaging targeted parent groups / facilitating home-school collaboration

The school has sought to engage targeted parent groups and improved home-school collaboration through the use of brokered programs, such as, St Vincent de Paul Society's *SPARK* and CatholicCare's *Sing and Grow* program.

SPARK program

In the second half of 2012, the school introduced SPARK, an afterschool homework and activity club for refugee children from kindergarten to Year 6 and their families. St Vincent de Paul Society (NSW) developed the program using funds provided by the Australian Government Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC). Sessions are held weekly and delivered by teachers and local community volunteers.

The purposes of the SPARK program are the support of students and families who are newly arrived in Australia, to aid refugee settlement through the facilitation of opportunities for social contact and mutual appreciation between refugee and established communities, and to raise mainstream awareness about refugees.

The school reports the following outcomes:

- strong participation of refugee students and parents in the program
- increased awareness of and commitment to refugee settlement in the community
- increased involvement of the school community in the school. Twelve volunteers have been recruited from the community to participate in the program.

Sing and Grow is an international music therapy project with programs focussed on strengthening family relationships, building capacity in parents to support their children's development in the early years and through the critical phase of transition from kindergarten to school. *Sing and Grow* was developed in Australia with Playgroup Queensland. Catholic Primary School has initiated the delivery at the school of a weekly *Sing and Grow* program for families with children less than four years of age. The program provides assistance to parents in supporting their young children, the school reports, and notes that pre-schoolers who attend this program at the school can gain familiarity with the formal school environment, easing transition to school.

Benefits of the program reported by the school include the provision of opportunities for parents to interact with school staff, and to ask questions about the operation of the school and the education of their children (including those already at school). In this context the school can provide parents with advice about how children can develop their fine motor, social and organisational skills in the home. The school notes that parents appreciate the non-threatening environment of the program which enables them to informally interact with each other and with school personnel.

The school has identified the following achievements made through the program:

- barriers have broken down between cultural groups in the community
- rich conversations about learning at home have occurred
- parents report increased harmony at home, including increased interaction between children and their fathers
- levels of motivation to maintain involvement with the school have increased. Some parents have requested the school to provide additional opportunities to support the education of their children.

The school also reports that its utilisation of Restorative Practices approaches has been productive. Restorative Practices in schools is a set of practices focussed on building positive relationships within schools and the fostering of responsibility in individuals of responsibility for their own behaviour and learning. It notes that these practices have helped enable teachers and parents to develop a common approach to anger management. Students respond positively to parent involvement in the school, showing confidence and motivation to learn, the school reports, and they play an important role in encourage parents to participate in school activities.

Future directions

Catholic Primary School reports that its Low SES NP program parental engagement initiatives have led to improvements in establishing a strategic focus on parent partnerships, communication with parents, parent participation, parent knowledge about student learning, engagement of targeted groups and home – school collaboration.

The school reports success in facilitating cultural change, noting that its community has been galvanised into action through the adoption of the strategic focus on parent partnerships, forming a common purpose and building relationships and connections through the adoption of the strategic focus on parent partnerships. The school reports that the outcomes of these actions have been affirming, bringing about an increase in the number of parents participating in classroom and school activities. It notes further that the initiatives have been the springboard for many other ideas.

The parent partnerships developed at Catholic Primary School are sustainable, the school reports, as a result of the incorporation of partnership functions into the roles of school staff and the use of brokered programs. The challenge for the school will be to maintain strategic focus and be responsive to emerging needs of the parents and families.

14. Western High School

Western High School's parent engagement strategy has led to improvements in the following areas as a result of identified initiatives

- *Establishing a strategic focus on parent partnerships* through the development of whole school policies to support home-school collaboration and the incorporation of parent education functions in the role of faculty staff (new initiative)
- *Effectively communicating with parents* by facilitating positive communication with parents (new initiative)
- *Increasing parent participation* by encouraging parent attendance at assemblies, parent and teacher meetings and other events and linking to primary schools and their parent P&Cs
- *Developing parent knowledge about student learning* through the delivery of parent forums

After the resignation of the person holding the *Parent Engagement Coordinator* position, the school discontinued the role on the basis that an integrated model was preferable.

Establishing a strategic focus on parent participation

The school reports that it has integrated the parent partnership perspective in the school's policies and practices. A key integration strategy has been the inclusion of a parent partnership perspective in the roles of faculty head teacher roles.

Effectively communicating with parents

Since the end of 2012, the school has been sending out positive letters to parents on a regular basis. Teachers identify students demonstrating improvement and achievement in all areas of the curriculum. They are assisted, by two staff members who are provided with time release from teaching duties, to facilitate the communication with parents. Teachers' efforts are acknowledged at weekly staff meetings.

The school reports that parents are appreciative of the positive messages communicated by the school. For some, it is refreshing to have a positive reason to interact with the school. Positive letters provide parents with insights into the school's expectations and their children's relationship with the school.

The school also continues to provide regular newsletters to parents. As a result of a survey finding that 72 per cent of parents had internet at home, electronic newsletters are sent to most parents. Hardcopy newsletters are also available to parents.

Increasing parent participation

The school suggests that most parents attend the community evening event held over the last two years. Parents have the opportunity to observe students' work and performances. They interact with faculty staff about information presented on the displays. The various hands-on learning activities organized by the faculties also enable them to experience learning and understanding the curriculum. Students also provide treats to participants (such as cupcakes that are baked and decorated in preparation for the event). The school plans to hold this event earlier in the year and extend the invitation to the feeder primary schools.

A high number of parents attend sporting and cultural events held at the school. Over 500 parents attend the Pacific Islander Dance concert, organized by head teachers. This event builds morale and community cohesion.

The student presentation night held in Term 4 is also well attended. Incentives for parents to attend include: reducing the length of the presentation to just less than one hour, and disseminating awards at the presentation event, unless otherwise arranged with parents.

The school suggests that the attendance rate of parents attending Parent and Teacher meetings has improved. One hundred and fifty parents attended the recent meeting held, compared with about 10 parents several years ago. Parent attendance at these meetings is encouraged through informal conversations with parents, telephone calls to specific parents, student briefings and promotion of the event in newsletters. An effective strategy has been to make student reports only accessible via a face-to-face meeting with school personnel.

Joint primary and high school P&C continue to hold bi-annual meetings to provide parents with an opportunity to connect with other parents. The school reports that parents benefit from learning about matters of concern and interest to parents of students attending schools in the local area. Parents complete surveys at the school, using computers made available to them and /or assistance provided by student leaders. The school is interested in finding out more about parents' needs, interests, assessments and reactions to opportunities the school provides for them. Survey responses indicate that parents support the school efforts to educate their children.

Parent knowledge about student learning

Faculty staff have continued to deliver parent forums that were introduced by the Parent Engagement Coordinator. The school reports that these forums are now more focused on familiarizing parents with the curriculum and assisting them to support their children to complete their homework and undertake projects.

In the second half of 2012, the school invited parents to attend either a morning or evening session to discuss student progress, evident through the NAPLAN test results. Parents were assisted to read NAPLAN results and provided with opportunities for them to follow up with their children's teachers. They were encouraged to work with teachers in order to improve their children's learning outcomes.

Parents also attended Year 6 to 7 transition events at the beginning of the year and interacted with other parents during morning tea and participated in scheduled activities.

Future directions

The school's Low SES NP program parental engagement initiatives have led to improvements in establishing a strategic focus on parent partnerships, communication with parents, parent participation and parent knowledge about student learning.

The school reports that the parent partnership strategy will be sustainable beyond the Low SES NP program because it has been mainstreamed into the school's policies and the work of its faculties. Although the Parent Engagement Coordination position built the school's capacity for the school to integrate the strategy into the overall school operation, the challenge for the school will be to maintain strong focus and to be continually responsive to new and emerging partnership needs.

15. South Coast High School

South Coast High School's parent engagement strategy has led to improvements in the following areas as a result of identified initiatives:

- *Establishing a strategic focus on parent partnerships* through a whole school approach (new initiative)
- *Effectively communicating with parents* by providing information to parents
- *Developing parent knowledge about student learning* by holding parent meetings
- *Engaging a targeted group* by working with Aboriginal families
- *Facilitating home-school collaboration* by promoting parent and teacher meetings and involving parents in attendance, retention and student intervention programs.

As a result of the resignation of the Head Teacher Welfare at the beginning of this year, the welfare initiative focused on - taking a whole of family approach to student welfare has discontinued.

Establishing a strategic focus on parent partnerships

The school indicates that parent partnership is now a perspective that is integrated across the whole school. The school has raised the awareness of the critical role of parents in their children's education and stressed the importance of collaborating with parents to support student learning and achievement and pathway planning.

Effectively communicating with parents

The school has continued to provide regular newsletters to parents. The P&C also sends out regular emails to subscribers, informing them of developments, and posts reports on the school website. Parent survey, focus group interview and workshop data is analysed to identify parent feedback and determine parent needs and implications for the school.

Parent knowledge about student learning

The school reports that there has been an increase in the number of parents (of students entering Years 9-12) attending information sessions or workshops. The quality of dialogue at these meetings has also improved. Parents express interest in the operation of the school and its strategic priorities. For example, at a recent meeting parents responded positively to the school's response to their concern about the closure of the school to enable staff to access training in the ALARM methodology. They were assured of the value of the program and the necessity of the training.

The school continues to offer parent education sessions or workshops to assist them to engage more fully with their children's learning at school and at home. Sessions and workshops cover themes such as: family reading; writing and numeracy; positive parenting; understanding reports and student data; student pathways and career options; and student wellbeing and mental health.

Engaging Aboriginal families

The school reports that most Aboriginal parents have been contacted to discuss PLPs for Aboriginal students in the school. Parents or carers are invited to attend a face-to-face meeting organized by the paraprofessional. The principal had attended most of the meetings.

The PLPs have been improved to increase the level of student engagement. A local coach was employed to redevelop the PLPs so that students and their families could use them as a plan that "enabled them to learn". The aim was to move away from a teacher directed approach to one that facilitated student and parent ownership of the process. The emphasis is now on the discussion involving students and parents / carers.

The school has consulted with staff regarding the use of PLPs and plans to incorporate attendance strategies and incentives. PLP guidelines are being developed to assist teachers with their implementation and use in the classroom. The PLPs are available to staff through SENTRAL³⁴. Additionally, the school is working with the Community of Schools (comprising of the local feeder primary schools) to develop consistency and continuity in the approach to PLPs.

The school reports that the new approach to PLPs has been highly effective. Parents welcome the opportunity to engage with the school in a positive way. For many parents it marks a departure from coming into the school as a result of misbehaviors or expulsions. The PLP meeting with parents gives parents a positive reason to come to school, and enables them to provide input.

Through PLP meetings, the school is also able to discuss school key priorities, actions and activities. For instance, it is able to inform parents about:

- in class tutoring assistance, Sista Speak program³⁵
- Djinggi (Aboriginal Teachers in Training) program
- services of an Aboriginal Home Liaison person
- support activities provided through the Parent and Community Engagement program (PaCE)³⁶ (such as mentoring parent programs aiming to support student learning).

³⁴ SENTRAL: a web-based, modular School Administration, On-line Learning and Student Management software suite designed for use in Primary and Secondary schools

³⁵ The SistaSpeak project is an initiative of the North Coast Region DEC. It is specifically designed for and targets young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls to gain valuable knowledge around their educational needs, career aspirations, personal needs and qualities.

³⁶ PaCE is a community driven program for parents and carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. It supports initiatives that assist families and communities to 'reach-in' to schools and other educational settings to engage in their children's education through participation in educational decision making, developing partnerships with education providers and supporting and reinforcing their children's learning at home, with the aim of improving the educational outcomes of their children.

Facilitating home-school collaboration

The school reports that as a result of the extensive promotion of the parent and teacher meetings held early in the year, there was over 30 per cent increase in the number of parents attending parent and teacher meetings from previous years. These meetings were promoted through the website, newsletters and word of mouth.

It was amazing the number of parents that were there! They just kept rolling in, waiting to speak to teachers (School leader)

Unlike previous years whereby parents with high performing students attended parent and teacher meetings, many parents attended this year's meeting to find out how their children were going at school. Their interest was evident through their questions about student learning and school expectations.

Whole school attendance, retention and learning intervention strategies continue to include collaboration with parents. The Learning Support Teacher effectively coordinates learning support activities and the provision of services to an increasing number of students. School leaders, teachers, student support staff, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) support staff and welfare staff play an important role in the day-to-day interactions with parents and carers regarding school strategies to support attendance and retention. Some significant examples include:

- SMS messages, telephone and face-to-face meetings with parents regarding student absence that has led to an improvement in the attendance rate of Aboriginal students by 26 per cent (end of 2012).
- one to one interviews with parents of students (15-18 years old) identified as eligible for the CORE³⁷ program. Parent responses were most positive. All parents provided their permission for their children to participate and expressed support for the program intentions and methodology. Ongoing feedback indicates parent contentment with student progress and attitude to learning. Parents will be encouraged to engage further with this program through the implementation of PLPs for students enrolled in the CORE program in the second half of 2013.
- provision of information about A Learning And Response Matrix (ALARM) to parents. ALARM is a proven method with a strong evidence base that assists teachers, students and parents to understand the learning process and to take responsibility for student learning. The school plans to organize a workshop for parents to inform them about the ALARM method.
- engagement of parents in the School Based Apprenticeship and traineeships programs which has been critical to the success of these programs. Parents have supported the establishment, implementation and review of programs. In particular, many of the parents have been instrumental in assisting students to locate suitable employers and workplaces.

³⁷ CORE is designed for disengaged students, providing them with alternative pathways from school. Programs include TAFE study and work placements components to support school based credentialed learning.

The school reports that these programs have enabled the school to take a more rigorous approach to working with families in an effort to support student learning.

Future directions

The school's Low SES NP program parental engagement initiatives have led to improvements in establishing a strategic focus on parent partnerships, communication with parents, parent knowledge about student learning, engagement of Aboriginal parents and home – school collaboration. The school discontinued the welfare initiative - taking a whole of family approach to student welfare – that was funded through the Low SES NP program.

Of significance has been the school's closer alignment of the parent participation strategy with students' performance and their pathway planning. This has been most evident through parent participation in PLPs and parent and teacher meetings. The school reports that as the parent partnership strategy is not reliant on Low SES NP funding, it will be sustained through its whole school approach. The challenge for the school is to maintain strategic focus and effort in order to achieving parent partnership goals.

Conclusion

The university and parent partnerships case studies are part of the Low SES NP Reform area 6 – establishment of external partnerships. A variety of partnership initiatives are employed in conjunction with other reform areas usually supported by a broader policy framework.

Partnerships are designed to enable schools to engage other relevant stakeholders in order to meet the complex needs of students in Low SES school communities. Given the critical role of parents in the education of students, schools seek to better engage parents by recognising the role of parents in school policy and practice.

Similarly, schools need support in making education relevant and meaningful to student lives. Partnerships with universities, for example, aim to enable schools to work on aspiration building in communities that previously have had low levels of participation in higher education. They work with universities to utilise expert services, programs and resources to support student learning and improve outcomes. They aim to broaden the horizons of students to consider university and higher education as a possible future pathway.

The school case studies demonstrate that successful partnerships:

- are supported by leaders and reflect two-way communication - empowering parents to have a ‘voice’ in the school and schools to ‘negotiate’ relevant and customised services with universities
- avoid ‘deficit approaches’, emphasising instead the importance of building on the strengths of the local community whilst also providing for parents (as learners alongside their children) and for school (as providers of foundational education)
- have a strong focus on student learning, enabling parents to be engaged at the school in order to assist their children with their learning. Likewise, the outreach activities organised by universities working in partnership with schools seek to promote changes in student views about university as a destination by providing activities for students, such as access to workshops and personalised visits, while also providing schools with associated professional development and training for staff and parent development.
- are based on reciprocal trust and provide mutual benefits as a foundation to ensuring ongoing sustainability of partnership arrangements. These mutual benefits are, in the main, associated with achieving better educational outcomes for low SES students and their families, which is important to schools and can benefit families as well as universities through a broader pool of recruits.
- entail the construction of new, enabling structures - for example, the establishment of new positions, the incorporation or clarification of functions in staff role descriptions, the development of school policies and the delivery of additional programs and services (related to parental engagement and transition to university).
- are adequately resourced to enable professional understandings to develop (through

the use of a common language) and teacher and institutional capacity to be built.

To ensure the ongoing development and long term sustainability of partnership initiatives, some schools are exploring strategies for ensuring continuity of developments, including, the use of global school funds.

Other schools suggest that they have developed sustainable models of partnerships, as a result of the integration of partnership perspective in school policies and practices and the incorporation of partnerships functions in the role of school staff. The challenge will be to maintain a strategic focus and to be continually responsive to new and emerging needs of students, parents and school communities.

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