Bridges and barriers

The challenges of building external partnerships in low SES school communities

Low Socio-economic Status School Communities National Partnership (Low SES NP) Evaluation, New South Wales, Report No. 5

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Abbreviations

ABS   Australian Bureau of Statistics

AIS   Association of Independent Schools

ATSI   Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

CEC   Catholic Education Commission

COAG   Council of Australian Governments

CRES   Centre for Research on Education Systems

DEC   Department of Education and Communities

ESL   English as a Second Language

ICSEA   Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage

LBOTE   Language Background Other Than English

NP   National Partnership

NSW   New South Wales

PDHPE   Personal Development, Health and Physical Education

SES   Socio-Economic Status

SSNP   Smarter Schools National Partnerships

TAFE   Technical and Further Education

VET   Vocational Education and Training

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Executive Summary

The Low-Socio-economic Status School Communities National Partnership (Low SES NP) has had a positive impact on school external partnerships in low SES NP schools, according to New South Wales' teachers.

This report presents data on teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the types of external partnerships undertaken by their schools under the Low SES NP. The data relate to school external partnership activities implemented by the 636 schools funded under the Low SES NP in both the government and non-government sectors in New South Wales from a survey of teachers conducted in 2013 (details in Appendix A).

The Low SES NP – implemented between 2009 and 2013 – aimed to improve the education and life opportunities of students from low SES backgrounds through six reform areas, one of which focused on strengthening partnership arrangements between schools and their communities, such as parents, local businesses, cultural groups and other education providers (Australian Government 2013: 52-61).

Impact on engagement with parents and carers

Respondents to the teachers' survey nominate many challenges to their school's capacity to engage with parents and carers. Language and cultural barriers were cited most often by respondents from schools in metropolitan areas. Other challenges identified by respondents included low parental interest, parents' ambivalence towards the value of education, parents' time constraints and parents' level of education. School-based issues and lack of contact details for parents were also mentioned as challenges by a small proportion of respondents.

Funding for school external partnerships under the Low SES NP was intended to assist schools serving low socio-economic communities to address these challenges. Over two-thirds of respondents report that since the implementation of the Low SES NP, their school's capacity to address the challenges of engaging with parents and carers has improved.

Three quarters of teachers report that the frequency with which their school engages with parents and carers has increased as a result of the school's participation in the Low SES NP. In addition to more frequent parent and carer engagement in the school, over 75 per cent of respondents reported that their school was engaging more frequently and more effectively with parents and carers from diverse social and cultural groups.

Over 80 per cent of respondents agreed that their school was communicating better with parents and carers as a result of its participation in the Low SES NP initiatives and this was significantly higher in rural and regional areas (83%) than in metropolitan schools (79%).

A slightly lower proportion of teachers (71%) said that the Low SES NP initiatives had resulted in improved parent and carer support for student learning. Nevertheless, 76 per cent of primary teachers and 63 per cent of secondary teachers said that parents and

carers support for student learning was a little or a lot better because of their school's participation in the Low SES NP initiatives.

Seventy per cent of respondents reported a positive impact from their schools participation in the Low SES NP on their role as a teacher, both in terms of communicating with parents and carers from diverse social and cultural backgrounds; and involving parents in their children's learning.

On five of the seven indicators relating to parent-school engagement, a significantly higher proportion of respondents from primary schools reported a positive impact of the low SES NP than from secondary schools. These findings are consistent with the lower levels of parent-school engagement reported by secondary school principals in a previous survey, and suggest the need for a continuing policy focus on strengthening school-parent partnerships in secondary schools, particularly at the junior secondary level.

Impact on school-community partnerships

Eighty per cent of respondents indicated that the frequency of their school's links with the wider community had increased due to Low SES NP initiatives and this was more likely in regional and rural schools (83%) than in metropolitan schools (79%). A higher proportion of respondents from regional and rural schools (81%) also reported that their school was now more engaged with the wider community since the low SES NP, compared to only 76% in metropolitan schools, and 78 per cent overall.

Eighty-three per cent of teachers said they were better able to explain the goals of their school to colleagues, parents and others as a result of the school's participation in the Low SES NP.

Participation in the Low SES NP has led to increased provision of additional programs and services for students in Low SES NP schools. Eighty per cent of teachers said that the provision of additional programs and services to promote student well-being – such as counselling and health services – was occurring more frequently since the implementation of the Low SES NP.

Seventy-nine per cent of respondents reported that their school was more frequently providing additional programs and services to support students in their learning – such as homework centres and home-school liaison officers – since the implementation of the Low SES NP. A significantly higher proportion of respondents from secondary schools said that additional programs and services to promote student well-being and to support student learning, had increased. The provision of additional programs to support student learning was also more common in metropolitan schools (82%) than in schools in regional and rural areas (75%).

Differences in teachers' perceptions

There were differences in the responses of teachers to the survey, according to their age, length of service in the school, and their professional role.

Younger teachers, aged between 20 and 39 years and teachers who had been at their current school for less than six years were significantly more likely to report that the Low SES NP had had a positive impact on their school's capacity to engage with parents and its community, than other respondents, on two-thirds of the relevant questions about these issues.

Teachers in executive roles were also more likely to report that the Low SES NP had had a positive impact on their school's capacity to engage with parents and its community, than teachers in non-executive roles, but their responses differed significantly on less than half of the relevant questions.

A significantly higher proportion of younger teachers, teachers who had been at their school for less than six years, and executive teachers reported that the Low SES NP initiatives had had a positive impact on aspects of their role as a teacher, on two of the three relevant questions.

Conclusion

As the fifth report on school external partnerships funded by the Low SES NP evaluation, this report builds on previous studies, and contributes to a growing body of evidence about the effectiveness of school external partnerships and the impact of the Low SES NP on external partnerships in low-SES schools and their communities in New South Wales

1   Introduction

This is the fifth report on school external partnerships in low SES schools prepared for an evaluation funded by the NSW Minister for Education. The evaluation, to be conducted over five years, studies the external partnership activities of 636 schools across the government, Catholic and independent sectors which were funded under the Low SES NP. Data from the 636 low SES NP schools are analysed in this report, particularly data collected from a survey of teachers in low SES NP schools in 2013. Findings from a survey of principals in 2012 are presented in progress report no. 3 (Watson et al. 2013).

The recent policy focus on strengthening school external partnerships is based on international evidence indicating the importance of school-community engagement to students' educational outcomes. As young people's decisions and actions are influenced by their social context, the strength of a school's engagement with its external community has the potential to influence students' attitudes towards education, particularly in regard to participation, attainment and further study. Measures of interaction between schools and parents are linked to student retention rates in secondary school (Teachman et al. 1997; Perna and Titus 2005). Students' aspirations and attitudes towards further education are formed by their early teens and influence their participation rates in higher education (Cardak and Ryan 2009; Holm and Jaeger 2008). Higher levels of educational attainment are increasingly necessary for engagement in lifelong employment (Ryan and Watson 2003) yet Australian students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are underrepresented in all forms of post-compulsory education and training (Bradley et al., 2008; Chesters and Watson 2012, Watson and Pope 2000). As schools serving low SES communities have a potentially critical influence on students' educational aspirations and outcomes, strong and effective school-community partnerships can play a key role in enhancing student educational outcomes in the longer term.

As the NSW DEC notes, strengthening of home, school and community partnerships has 'long been acknowledged as critical elements in supporting improved student learning outcomes and satisfaction in schools' (NSW Department of Education and Communities 2011: 2). While collaborative relationships between schools and external agencies contribute to 'measurable improvements in literacy and numeracy achievement', they also have broader or more diffuse benefits such as enhanced 'community wellbeing' (NSW Department of Education and Communities 2011: 4).

Since the introduction of the Low SES NP, principals of low SES NP schools reported an increase in the extent to which their schools were engaged in external partnerships (Watson et al 2013). In the third report of this series, we provided a comprehensive analysis of the types of external partnerships that schools engage in. School external partnerships were grouped into 10 broad categories: parents and carers; Indigenous parents and communities; English as a Second Language (ESL) parents and communities; employers and the wider community; TAFE and other training providers; universities; secondary schools; primary schools; prior-to-school providers; and partnerships with other education and training providers. Overall, 96 per cent of all principals reported having partnerships with parents/carers. External partnerships with Indigenous communities were the second most common type of partnership in Low SES NP schools, with 83 per cent of

primary and secondary schools, 70 per cent of combined schools and 100 per cent of special schools engaging in this type of partnership. Seventy-one per cent of Low SES NP schools are engaged in external partnerships with employers and the wider community. However principals of secondary schools (85%) and combined schools (75%) are more likely than primary schools (67%) to report having these types of partnerships (Watson et al. 2013).

This report draws on a survey of teachers in Low SES NP schools conducted in early 2013 which collected data on respondents' perceptions of the effectiveness of the types of external partnerships being undertaken by Low SES NP Schools. Valid responses were received from 2,235 teachers in 341 of the 637 Low SES NP Schools surveyed. The 341 schools from which teachers responded were distributed between the government and non-government sector in similar proportions to the distribution of the 637 Low SES NP schools. Details of respondents' characteristics are provided in Appendix A. The survey questions are provided in Appendix B. Differences in responses by regional/rural and metropolitan schools are shown in Appendix C.

While this report explores teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of school external partnerships in Low SES NP schools, the authors recognise that such partnerships comprise only one element of a school's multi-dimensional approach to addressing the various factors associated with low socio-economic status that impact on student outcomes.

The first section introduces the report and is followed by a section on the impact of the low SES NP on parent and carer engagement in Low SES NP schools. Section three explores the impact of the low SES NP on school-community partnerships and on the provision of additional programs and services for students. In section four, the report explores differences in the perceptions of teachers who responded to the survey.

2 Impact on engagement with parents and carers

Partnerships with parents and carers are the most common types of partnerships undertaken by Low SES NP schools. Ninety-six per cent of Low SES NP schools were involved in partnership activities with parents and carers in 2012, up from 91 per cent prior to the Low SES NP (Watson et al. 2013: 23 - 27).

2.1 Challenges of engaging with parents and carers

Low SES NP schools enrol high proportions of students from diverse family backgrounds, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) students and students with a Language background other than English (LBOTE). A dominant theme in principals' responses to a previous survey about the challenges of engaging with ESL parents and carers was language and cultural barriers. Only 61 per cent of principals of Low SES NP schools with a high proportion of students with LBOTE (25% or more) think their students' parents and carers have the confidence to engage with school staff, compared to 75 per cent of principals of all Low SES NP schools. (Watson et al. 2013). The most common partnership activity reported by principals of Low SES NP schools in 2012 was the dedication of resources and staff to engage with diverse community groups (Watson et al. 2013).

In the survey of teachers conducted in 2013, in response to an open-ended question about the main challenges, if any, that their school faced in engaging with parents and carers, the challenge mentioned most frequently by teachers in Low SES NP schools was language and cultural barriers, as shown in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1   **Challenges in engaging with parents and carers in low SES NP schools**
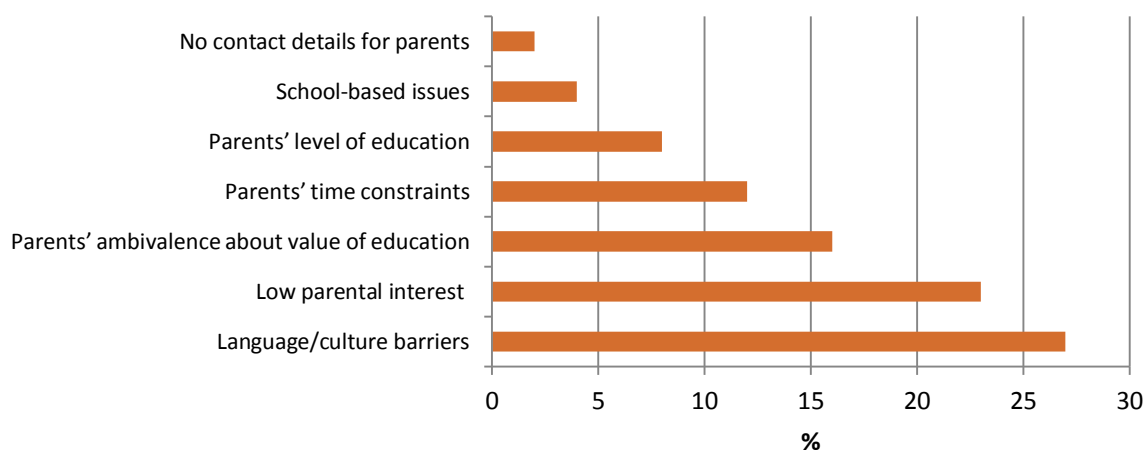
Notes: Coded qualitative responses to open-ended question. See Appendix D for details.
Source: Low SES National Partnerships Survey for Teachers

As shown in Figure 2.1, 27 per cent of all respondents who provided written responses to the open-ended question mentioned language and cultural barriers as a challenge to engaging with parents and carers. Characteristics of parents and carers were the next most frequently cited challenge to engaging parents and carers mentioned by respondents in the qualitative responses, with 23 per cent of respondents citing low parental interest as a

challenge to engaging parents and carers and 16 per cent mentioning parents' ambivalence about the value of education. Further details are provided in Appendix D.

Language and cultural barriers were raised much more often by teachers in metropolitan schools. Almost half (44%) of all respondents from metropolitan schools cited language and cultural differences as a barrier to engagement with parents and carers, compared to only 5 per cent of respondents from regional and rural schools, as shown in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2   Challenges in engaging with parents and carers in low SES NP schools, by region
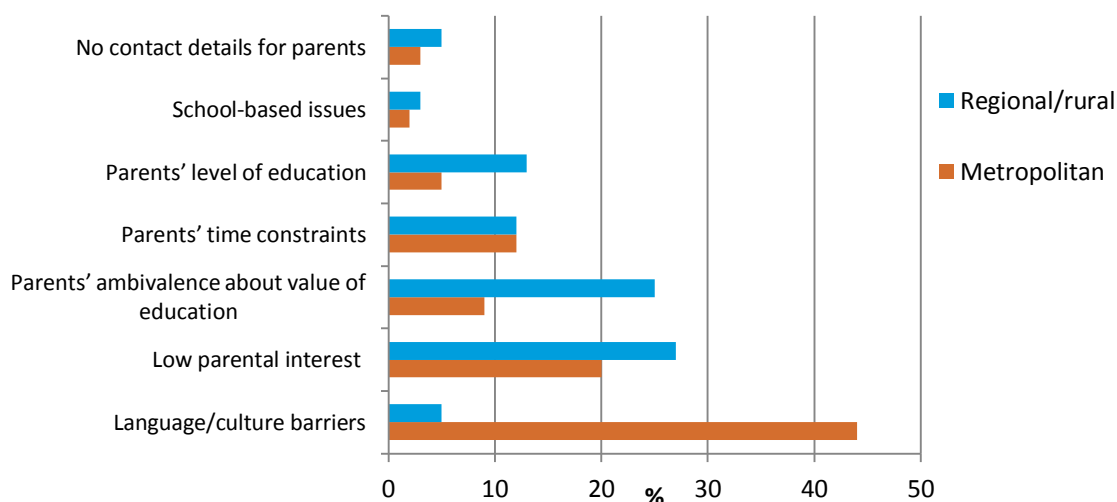
Notes: Coded qualitative responses to open-ended question. See Appendix D for details.
Source: Low SES National Partnerships Survey for Teachers

2.2 More engagement with parents and carers

In 2013, teachers were asked if parent and carer engagement in their school had increased since the implementation of the Low SES NP. Overall, 75 per cent of respondents thought that parent and carer engagement in their school was more frequent since the implementation of the Low SES NP initiatives. The same proportion reported that their school was engaging more with parents and carers from diverse social and cultural groups (including ATSI and LBOTE communities), since the implementation of the Low SES NP. Responses differed between primary and secondary schools. as shown in Table 2.1

Table 2.1   Change in school engagement with parents and carers since the implementation of the Low SES NP initiatives

Indicator	All schools	Primary	Secondary	Combined	Special
% a little more, a lot more frequent	n=1,954	n=1,026	n=691	n=216	n=21
Parent/Carer engagement in the school	75	79*	70*	72	60
Engaging with parents and carers from diverse social and cultural groups	75	76	77	68*	71

The reported level of school engagement with parents and carers since the implementation of the Low SES NP initiatives is significantly higher in primary schools (79%). The proportion of teachers in secondary schools (70%) reporting more frequent school engagement with parents and carers was significantly lower than the average of all other responses.

However a significantly lower proportion of teachers from combined schools (68%) reported more frequent school engagement with parents and carers from diverse social and cultural groups since the implementation of the Low SES NP initiatives at their school, than the average of all other responses.

2.3 Improved communication with parents and carers

Communication between schools and parents has improved since the implementation of the Low SES NP. Eighty-one per cent of respondents agreed that their school communicates better with parents and carers as a result of its participation in the Low SES NP initiatives. A significantly higher proportion of teachers in primary schools (82%) agreed compared to the average of other responses. The positive responses from teachers in secondary schools (78%) were significantly lower than the average of all other groups, as shown in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2   Impact of participation in Low SES NP on communication and effectiveness of engagement with parents and carers

Indicator	All schools	Primary	Secondary	Combined	Special
% agree, strongly agree	n=1,954	n=1,026	n=691	n=216	n=21
The school communicates better with parents and carers	81	82*	78*	80	88
The school is more effective in engaging parents and carers from diverse social and cultural groups	77	77	76	77	84

Respondents from all types of schools reported agreed that their school was more effective in engaging parents and carers from diverse social and cultural groups (including ATSI and LBOTE communities) as a result of participating in the Low SES NP initiatives. There were no significant differences in the rate of agreement between respondents by type of school or region.

There is a significant difference between metropolitan and regional schools in the reported impact of the Low SES NP on communication with parents and carers. Respondents in non-metropolitan schools (83%) were more likely to agree that participation in the Low SES NP had resulted in better communication with parents and carers, than respondents from metropolitan schools (79%). Further details are provided in Appendix C.

2.4 Improvements in parents' and carers' support for children's learning

Almost three-quarters of respondents (71%) indicated that parents and carers' support for student learning has improved as a result of their school's participation in the Low SES NP initiatives. However there are significant differences in the proportion of positive responses between primary and secondary schools. Some 76 per cent of respondents from primary schools reported a positive impact from the Low SES NP on parents' and carers' support for student learning, compared to only 63 per cent in secondary schools, as shown in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3 **Impact of Low SES NP initiatives on parents' and carers' support for student learning**

Indicator	All schools	Primary	Secondary	Combined	Special
% a little better, a lot better	n=1,954	n=1,026	n=691	n=216	n=21
Parents' and Carers' support for student learning	71	76*	63*	71	62

Notes: *Significantly different from the average of other school groups at the 5% level. Table values indicate the proportion of respondents reporting 'a little better' or 'a lot better' to Q 12 (See Appendix B for all response categories).
Source: Low SES National Partnerships Survey for Teachers

2.5 Enhanced teachers' role in engaging parents and carers

Respondents were asked about the impact of the Low SES NP initiatives on aspects of their role as a teacher. Specifically, they were asked if, 'because of your school's participation in the Low SES NP initiatives, as a teacher you are now (better or worse) at: communicating with parents and carers of diverse social and cultural backgrounds; and involving parents in their children's learning'. Responses are shown in Table 2.4.

Table 2.4 **Impact of Low SES NP initiatives on teachers' capacity to engage parents and carers**

Indicator	All schools	Primary	Secondary	Combined	Special
% a little better, a lot better	n=1,954	n=1,026	n=691	n=216	n=21
As a teacher, I am now communicating with parents/carers from diverse social/cultural backgrounds	71	75*	65*	69	60

As a teacher, I am now Involving parents in their children's learning	70	77*	59*	69	67

Notes: *Significantly different from the average of other school groups at the 5% level. Table values indicate the proportion of respondents reporting 'a little better' or 'a lot better' to Q 11 (See Appendix B for all response categories).
Source: Low SES National Partnerships Survey for Teachers

Over 70 per cent of all respondents reported that the Low SES NP initiatives had had a positive impact on their role in communicating with parents and carers from diverse social and cultural backgrounds (75%) and in involving parents in their children's learning (70%).

However the proportion of positive responses from primary school teachers was significantly higher than the average of other groups on both questions whereas the positive response rate from secondary school principals was significantly lower. Only 65 per cent of secondary teachers responded that they were communicating better with parents and carers from diverse social and cultural backgrounds (compared to 75% of primary school teachers). And only 59 per cent of secondary school teachers said they were better at involving parents in their children's learning (compared to 77% in primary schools).

2.6   Less impact in secondary schools

The apparently lower impact of the Low SES NP on parent engagement in secondary schools is a concern, in light of the evidence that measures of interaction between schools and parents are linked to student retention rates in secondary school (Teachman et al. 1997; Perna and Titus 2005) and that students' attitudes and aspirations towards further study are formed by Year 9 (Cardak and Ryan 2009).

On five of the seven measures reported above, respondents' perception of the impact of the Low SES NP on parent-school engagement was significantly lower among secondary school teachers than primary school teachers. This is consistent with differences in levels of parent-school engagement reported by principals of secondary and primary schools in the first survey of Low SES NP schools (Watson et al. 2013, Section 2).

These findings imply a need for further monitoring and investigation of the barriers to building partnerships with parents and carers in secondary schools. A continuing policy focus on strengthening school-parent engagement at the junior secondary school level could be beneficial, given that student attitudes and aspirations towards further education appear to be formed by Year 9 (Cardak and Ryan 2009).

Summary

Respondents to the teachers' survey nominate many challenges to their school's capacity to engage with parents and carers. Language and cultural barriers were cited most often by respondents from schools in metropolitan areas. Other challenges identified by respondents included low parental interest, parents' ambivalence towards the value of education, parents' time constraints and parents' level of education. School-based issues

and lack of contact details for parents were also nominatedmentioned as challenges by a small proportion of respondents.

Funding for school external partnerships under the Low SES NP was intended to assist schools serving low socio-economic communities to address these challenges. Over two-thirds of respondents report that since the implementation of the Low SES NP, their school's capacity to address the challenges of engaging with parents and carers has improved.

Three quarters of teachers report that the frequency with which their school engages with parents and carers has increased as a result of the school's participation in the Low SES NP. In addition to more frequent parent and carer engagement in the school, over 75 per cent of respondents reported that their school was engaging more frequently and more effectively with parents and carers from diverse social and cultural groups.

Over 80 per cent of respondents agreed that their school was communicating better with parents and carers as a result of its participation in the Low SES NP initiatives and this was significantly higher in rural and regional areas (83%) than in metropolitan schools (79%).

A slightly lower proportion of teachers (71%) said that the Low SES NP initiatives had resulted in improved parent and carer support for student learning. Nevertheless, 76 per cent of primary teachers and 63 per cent of secondary teachers said that parents and carers support for student learning was a little or a lot better because of their school's participation in the Low SES NP initiatives.

Seventy per cent of respondents reported a positive impact from their schools participation in the Low SES NP on their role as a teacher, both in terms of communicating with parents and carers from diverse social and cultural backgrounds; and involving parents in their children's learning.

On five of the seven indicators relating to parent-school engagement, a significantly higher proportion of respondents from primary schools reported a positive impact of the low SES NP than from secondary schools. These findings are consistent with the lower levels of parent-school engagement reported by secondary school principals in a previous survey, and suggest the need for a continuing policy focus on strengthening school-parent partnerships in secondary schools, particularly at the junior secondary level.

3   Impact on school-community partnerships

The Low SES NP aimed to support schools in building partnerships with the wider community. This includes partnerships with community organisations, particularly the ATSI community, other schools or prior-to-school providers, post-school providers such as TAFE institutes and universities, community organisations, employers and business groups as well as external service providers.

External partnerships with the wider community include links with other schools, vocational education and training (VET) providers; higher education providers; community organisations and business groups. These partnerships aim to support students' transitions between levels of education, support students' transition into the labour market, support student learning and help to raise students' expectations and aspirations regarding opportunities beyond school (Watson et al., 2013).

3.1   More links with wider community

Teachers were asked if the implementation of the low SES NP initiatives had impacted on the frequency of links between their school and its wider community, such as other schools, community organisations and business groups. Overall, 80 per cent of respondents indicated that the frequency of links with the wider community had increased due to Low SES NP initiatives, as shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1   Links between school and its wider community since the implementation of the Low SES NP initiatives

Indicator	All schools	Primary	Secondary	Combined	Special
% a little more, a lot more frequent	n=1,954	n=1,026	n=691	n=216	n=21
Links between the school and its wider community	80	80	84*	70*	78

Notes: *Significantly different from the average of other school groups at the 5% level. Table values indicate the proportion of respondents reporting 'a little more' or 'a lot more' frequently to Q 9 (See Appendix B for all response categories).
Source: Low SES National Partnerships Survey for Teachers

Secondary school teachers (84%) were significantly more likely to report that the frequency of these links had increased. On the other hand, teachers in combined schools were significantly less likely to report that participation in the Low SES NP had increased the frequency of the links between their school and its wider community (70%). This is consistent with previous findings that secondary schools are more likely to report links with the wider community than primary schools (Watson et al 2013)[1].

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[1] The principals' survey indicated that 65% of secondary and combined schools collaborated with employers to provide work experience opportunities for students; 64% invited employers and/or community members to talk to students about work and careers; over 40% of secondary, combined and special schools offer VET Certificate courses in school; 40% of combined schools and 50% of special schools invite teachers from training providers to teach students at their school; and 39% of secondary and combined schools were engaged in school-university partnership activities (Watson et al 2013).

Respondents from schools in regional and rural areas were also more likely to indicate that links with the wider community had increased since the Low SES NP (83%) respondents from metropolitan schools (79%).

3.2   More engagement between schools and wider community

Teachers were asked if their school was more engaged with the wider community since the implementation of the Low SES NP initiatives. Over three-quarters of respondents (78%) agreed that their school was more engaged with its wider community as a result of its participation in the Low SES NP initiatives. There were no significant differences in the rate of agreement by type of schooling, as shown in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2   Impact of participation in Low SES NP on school's engagement with wider community

Indicator	All schools	Primary	Secondary	Combined	Special
% agree, strongly agree	n=1,954	n=1,026	n=691	n=216	n=21
The school is more engaged with its wider community	78	77	80	76	95

Notes: No responses were significantly different to the average of all other responses at the 5% level. Table values indicate the proportion of respondents reporting 'agree' or 'strongly agree' to Q 10 (See Appendix B for all response categories).
Source: Low SES National Partnerships Survey for Teachers

Respondent from schools in regional and rural areas were more likely to indicate that the school was now more engaged with its wider community (81%) than respondents from metropolitan schools (76%).

3.3   More effective communication of school goals

Teachers were also asked whether they felt that they were better at explaining the goals of the school to their colleagues, parents and other community members, because of their school's participation in the Low SES NP.

At least four out of five respondents (83%) reported that they were better at explaining the goals of their school to colleagues, parents and others, as a result of the Low SES NP initiatives, as shown in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3   Impact of Low SES NP initiatives on teachers' capacity to explain the goals of their school to colleagues, parents and others

Indicator	All schools	Primary	Secondary	Combined	Special
% a little better, a lot better	n=1,954	n=1,026	n=691	n=216	n=21
Able to explain the goals of my school to colleagues, parents and others	83	88*	77*	79	85

The proportion of positive responses from primary school teachers was significantly higher than from other groups. Eighty-eight per cent of primary school teachers reported that they were better at explaining their school's goals since the Low SES NP, compared to 77 per cent of secondary school teachers, as shown in Table 3.3.

3.4   Increased provision of additional programs and services

Under the Low SES NP, schools were encouraged to form partnerships with external service providers for the purposes of promoting student well-being as well as for supporting student learning. These partnerships, intended to expand schools' services, include activities such as: employing specialist support services, including allied health services, counselling services, home school liaison officers and partnership officers; providing before and after school care, homework centres and other services at school.

Eighty per cent of respondents said that the provision of additional programs and services to promote student well-being – such as counselling and health services – was occurring more frequently since the implementation of the Low SES NP. A significantly higher proportion of teachers in secondary schools (82%) reported increased provision, than other groups, as shown in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4   Provision of additional programs and services since the implementation of the Low SES NP initiatives

Indicator	All schools	Primary	Secondary	Combined	Special
% a little more, a lot more frequent	n=1,954	n=1,026	n=691	n=216	n=21
Additional programs and services to promote student well-being	80	78	82*	78	73
Additional programs and services to support students in their learning	79	71*	91*	78	62*

Seventy-nine per cent of respondents reported that their school was more frequently providing additional programs and services to support students in their learning – such as homework centres and home-school liaison officers – since the implementation of the Low SES NP. Ninety-one per cent of secondary school teachers indicated that these programs were more frequent- a significantly higher response than all other groups. The proportion of teachers from primary and special schools who reported an increase in the frequency of additional programs to support students in their learning was significantly lower than other groups, as shown in Table 3.4.

Respondents from metropolitan schools were more likely to indicate that there had been increased provision of additional programs and services to support students in their learning since the implementation of the Low SES NP (82%) than respondents in rural and regional areas (75%).

Summary

Eighty per cent of respondents indicated that the frequency of their school's links with the wider community had increased due to Low SES NP initiatives and this was more likely in regional and rural schools (83%) than in metropolitan schools (79%). A higher proportion of respondents from regional and rural schools (81%) also reported that their school was now more engaged with the wider community since the low SES NP, compared to only 76% in metropolitan schools, and 78 per cent overall.

Eighty-three per cent of teachers said they were better able to explain the goals of their school to colleagues, parents and others as a result of the school's participation in the Low SES NP.

Participation in the Low SES NP has led to increased provision of additional programs and services for students in Low SES NP schools.

Eighty per cent of teachers said that the provision of additional programs and services to promote student well-being – such as counselling and health services – was occurring more frequently since the implementation of the Low SES NP.

Seventy-nine per cent of respondents reported that their school was more frequently providing additional programs and services to support students in their learning – such as homework centres and home-school liaison officers – since the implementation of the Low SES NP. A significantly higher proportion of respondents from secondary schools said that additional programs and services to promote student well-being and to support student learning, had increased. The provision of additional programs to support student learning was also more common in metropolitan schools (82%) than in schools in regional and rural areas (75%).

4 Differences in teachers' perceptions

This section explores differences in responses to survey questions by selected characteristics of the respondents, in particular, their age, their length of service in the school and their professional role.[2] Further details are provided in Appendix E.

4.1 More younger teachers report impact

Respondents between 20 and 39 years of age were more likely to indicate that the Low SES NP initiatives had a positive impact, compared to respondents who are 40 or older. In response to six of the nine questions about the impact of the Low SES NP on external partnerships in their school, a significantly higher proportion of younger teachers reported a positive impact, than older teachers, as shown in Figure 4.1

Figure 4.1   Impact of Low SES NP initiatives by age of respondent
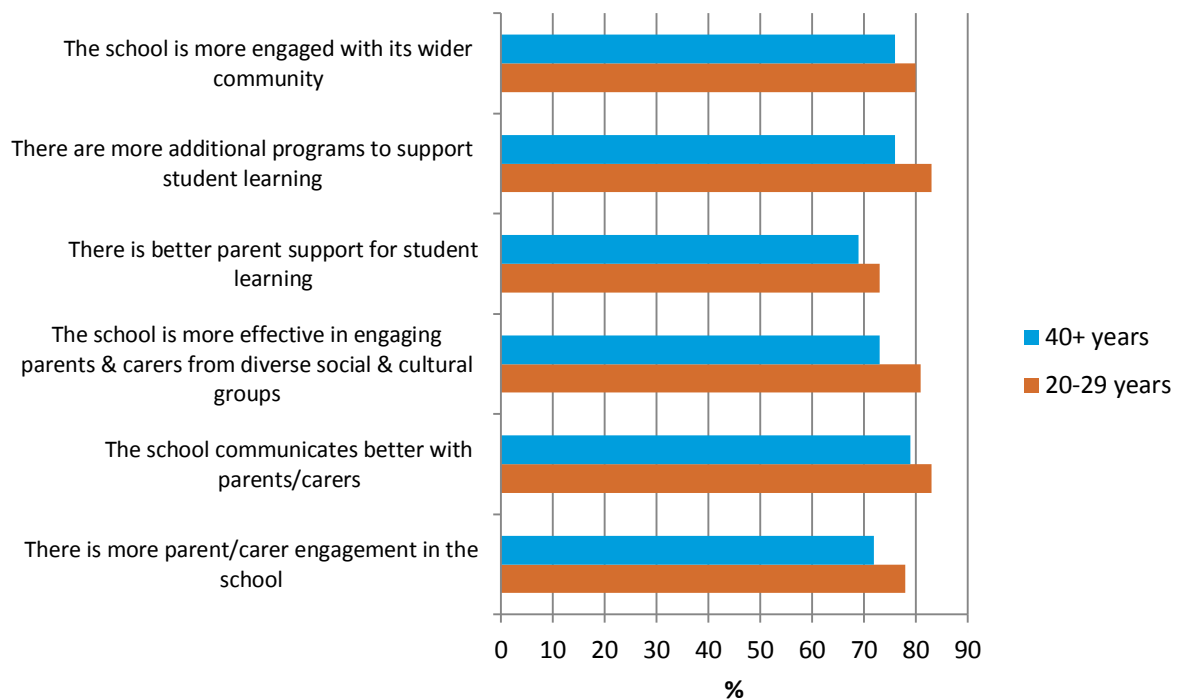
Note: Only significant differences are reported. All responses are provided in Appendix E.
Source: Low SES National Partnerships Survey for Teachers

Respondents in the older age group were less likely to agree that the school communicates better with parents/carers or that the school was more effective in engaging parents/carers from diverse social and cultural backgrounds. Compared to younger teachers, older teachers were also less likely to report that Low SES NP initiatives had led to better parent/carer support for student learning; or were associated with additional programs and services to support students in their learning; or that their school was more engaged with its wider community.

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[2] The percentages of respondents in each category of the selected characteristics are presented in Table A.4 in Appendix A.

The three areas in which there was no significant difference in the responses by age of teachers were: the frequency of engagement with parents and carers from diverse social and cultural groups; the frequency of links between the school and its wider community; and the frequency of additional programs and services to promote student well-being. All response rates are provided in Appendix E.

Younger teachers were also more likely than older teachers to report that the Low SES NP had had a positive impact on aspects of their role as a teacher, as shown in Figure 4.2

Figure 4.2   Impact of Low SES NP initiatives on teacher's role, by age of respondent

Note: Only significant differences are reported. All responses are provided in Appendix E.
Source: Low SES National Partnerships Survey for Teachers

Seventy-three per cent of younger teachers reported they were better at involving parents/carers in their children's learning as a result of the Low SES NP, compared to 67 per cent of teachers aged 40 or above. Seventy-four per cent of teachers aged 20 – 39 reported they better at communicating with parents and carers from diverse social and cultural groups compared to 68 per cent of teachers aged 40 and above.

There was no significant difference in the responses of teachers in each age group to the question about being better able to explain the goals of their school to colleagues, parents and others. A high proportion of all teachers (83%) reported they were better at doing this, because of their school's participation in the Low SES NP initiatives.

4.2   Perceptions differ by length of service in school

Responses to two-thirds of the questions varied significantly between teachers who had been in service at the school for less than six years and those who had been there for six years or longer.

Respondents who had been at the school for less than six years were more likely to indicate that the Low SES NP initiatives had had a positive impact. Eighty-one per cent of respondents who had been at the school for less than six years agreed that that their school was more engaged with its wider community since the Low SES NP compared to 75 per cent of those who had been at the school for six years or more. Significant differences between the responses of these two groups were also found in regard to perceptions about improvements in the provision of additional programs for student learning and student well-being, better parent support for student learning, the effectiveness of the

school in engaging parents and carers from diverse social and cultural groups, and the school's communication with parents/carers. In all cases, the respondents who had been at the school for less than six years had a significantly higher proportion of positive responses about the impact of the Low SES NP initiatives, as shown in Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3   Impact of Low SES NP initiatives by length of service at this school
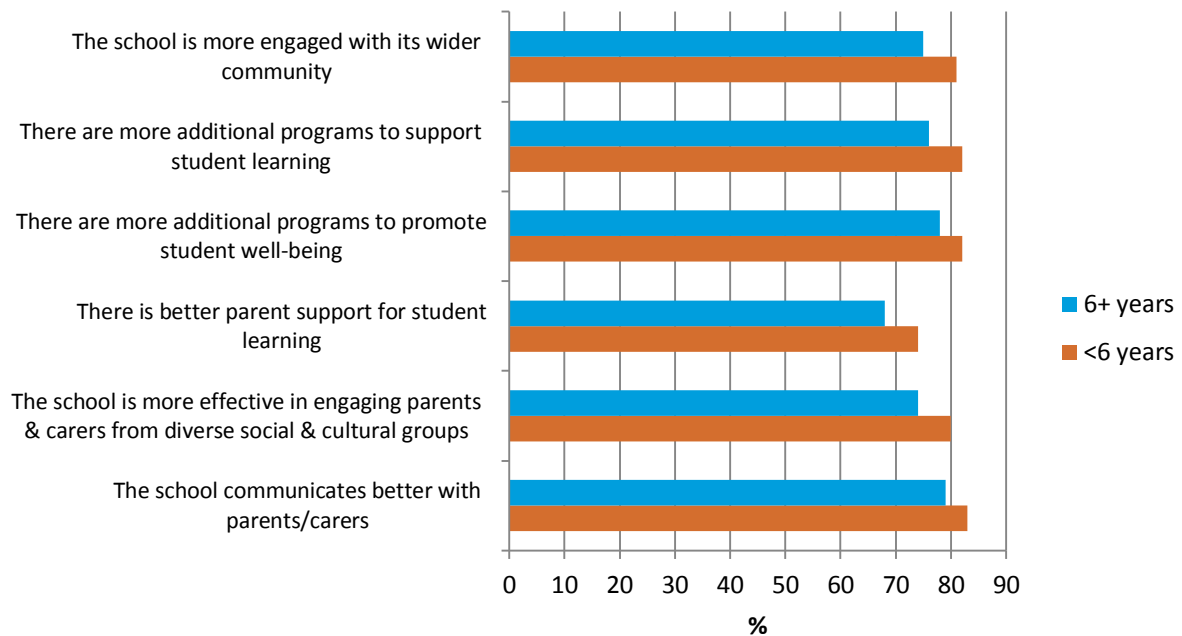
Note: Only significant differences are reported. All responses are provided in Appendix E.
Source: Low SES National Partnerships Survey for Teachers

The three areas in which there was no significant difference in the responses by length of service were in terms of: the frequency of parent and carer engagement in the school; the increased engagement of parents and carers from diverse social and cultural groups; and the frequency of links between the school and its wider community.

Teachers who had been at the school for less than six years were also more likely to report that the Low SES NP had had a positive impact on aspects of their role as a teacher, as shown in Figure 4.4

Figure 4.4   Impact of Low SES NP initiatives on teacher's role, by length of service

Notes: Only significant differences are reported. All responses are provided in Appendix E.
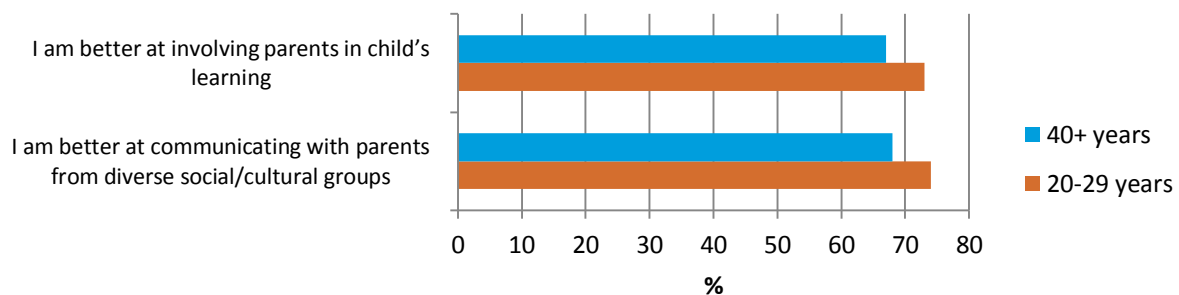Source: Low SES National Partnerships Survey for Teachers

Seventy-four per cent of teachers who had been at the school for less than six years reported they were better at involving parents/carers in their children's learning as a result of the Low SES NP, compared to 66 per cent of other teachers. Seventy-five per cent of teachers serving less than six years at the school reported they were better at communicating with parents and carers from diverse social and cultural groups, as a result of the Low SES NP compared to 66 per cent of other teachers.

There was no significant difference in the responses of teachers by length of service in the school to the question about being better able to explain the goals of their school to colleagues, parents and others.

4.3 Fewer differences between teachers by professional role

Twenty-nine per cent of respondents to the survey were teachers performing executive roles in their school. On four of the nine relevant questions, a significantly higher proportion of executive teachers indicated that the Low SES NP initiatives had a positive impact, than other respondents.

Executive teachers were more likely to report that since the implementation of the Low SES NP, there had been more parent and carer engagement in the school (78%), compared to 73 per cent of non-executive teachers. A significantly higher proportion of teachers in executive roles (74%) reported that parent support for student learning was better as a result of the Low SES NP initiatives, compared to 69 per cent of other respondents. Executive teachers were also more likely to report that the Low SES NP had resulted in more additional programs to support student learning (82%) and more links between the school and its wider community (85%) than other teachers, as shown in Figure 4.5.

Figure 4.5   Impact of Low SES NP initiatives by professional role of respondent
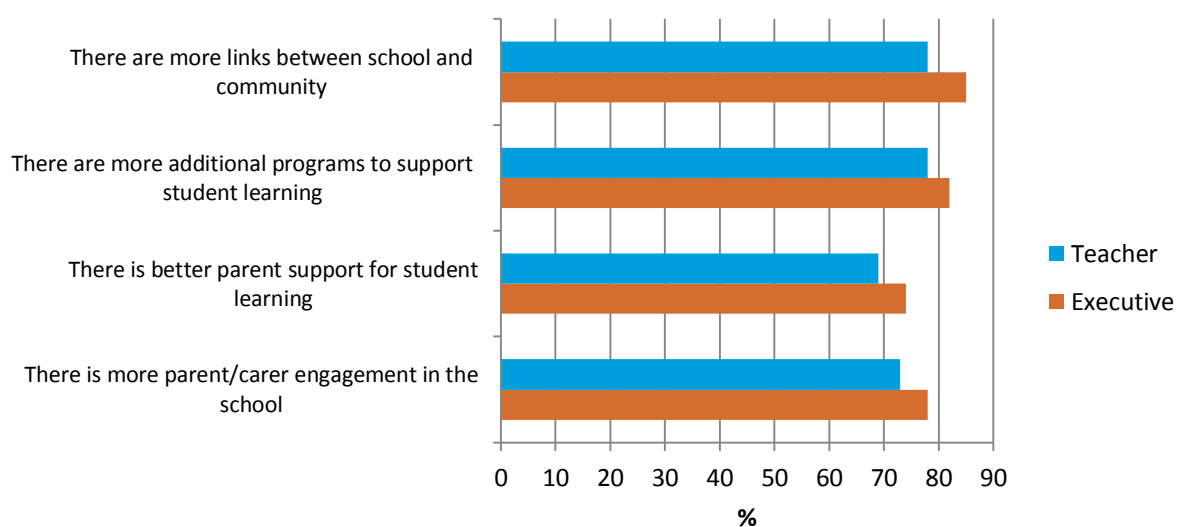
Note: Only significant differences are reported. All responses are provided in Appendix E.
Source: Low SES National Partnerships Survey for Teachers

However there were no significant differences in the responses between executive and non-executive teachers to the other five questions about the impact of the Low SES NP. These were questions about: the frequency of engagement of parents and carers from diverse social and cultural groups; the school's communication with parents and carers; the school's effectiveness in engaging with parents and carers from diverse social and cultural groups; the provision of additional programs to support student well-being; or the school's engagement with its wider community.

Executive teachers were more likely to report that involvement in the Low SES NP had made them better at communicating with parents from diverse social and cultural groups(76%), than other teachers (69%). Executive teachers were also more likely to report that they were better able to explain the goals of the schools to colleagues, parents and others, since the implementation of the Low SES NP. Eighty-seven per cent of respondents in executive roles said they were better at this, compared to 81 per cent of other respondents, as shown in Figure 4.6.

Figure 4.6   Impact of Low SES NP initiatives on teacher's role, by professional role

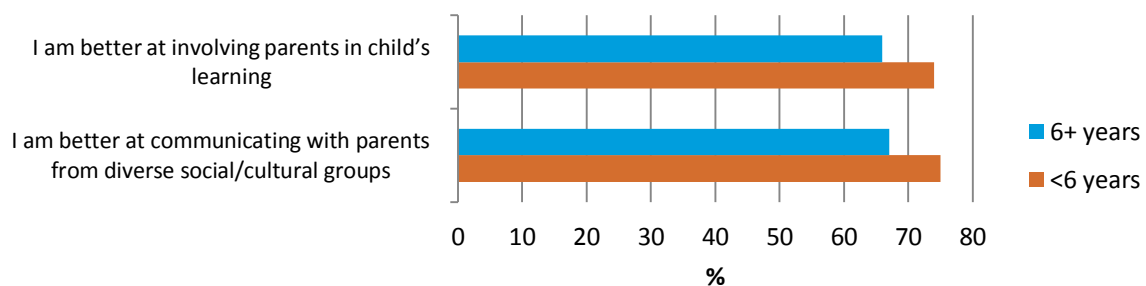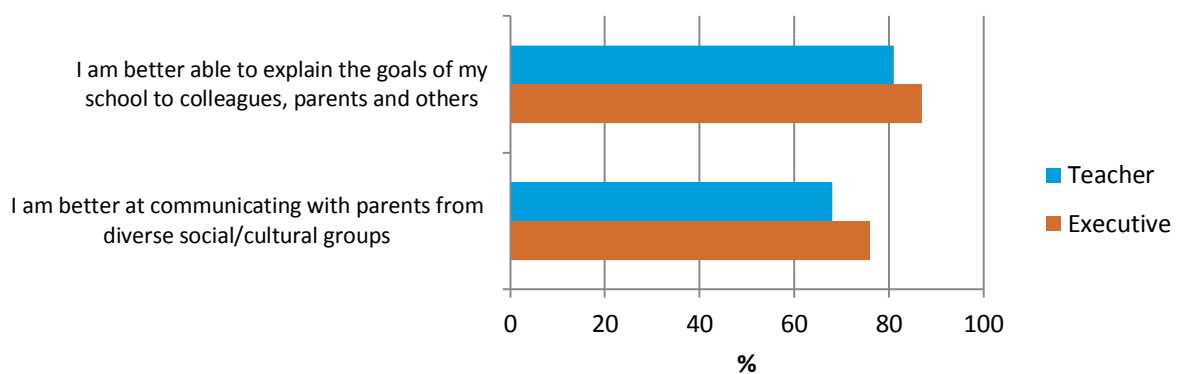Note: Only significant differences are reported. All responses are provided in Appendix E.
Source: Low SES National Partnerships Survey for Teachers

Summary

There were differences in the responses of teachers to the survey, according to their age, length of service in the school, and their professional role.

Younger teachers, aged between 20 and 39 years and teachers who had been at their current school for less than six years were significantly more likely to report that the Low SES NP had had a positive impact on their school's capacity to engage with parents and its community, than other respondents, on two-thirds of the relevant questions about these issues.

Teachers in executive roles were also more likely to report that the Low SES NP had had a positive impact on their school's capacity to engage with parents and its community, than teachers in non-executive roles, but their responses differed significantly on less than half of the relevant questions.

A significantly higher proportion of younger teachers, teachers who had been at their school for less than six years, and executive teachers reported that the Low SES NP initiatives had had a positive impact on aspects of their role as a teacher, on two of the three relevant questions.

Conclusion

This is the fifth in a series of 13 reports, to be conducted over five years to explore the impact of School External Partnerships in New South Wales schools. Four of the 13 reports are focus studies of specific categories of partnerships. To date, focus studies have been completed on partnerships with parents and carers (report no. 2) and school-university partnerships (report no. 4).

This report builds on previous studies and identifies the continuing challenges faced by schools serving low SES communities to engage with parents and carers, particularly in addressing persistent language and cultural barriers in metropolitan areas.

The findings indicate that the Low SES NP has had a positive impact on low-SES schools' capacity to engage with parents and carers and the wider community on a number of indicators. However the findings also indicate that levels of school-parent engagement in secondary schools remain lower than in primary schools, and this should be a concern for policy.

The report also illustrates differences in the challenges faced by low-SES schools in metropolitan and regional areas.

Teachers' perceptions of the impact of the Low SES NP also differ, according to their age, length of service in their current school, and their professional role.

Overall, the findings contribute to a growing body of evidence about the effectiveness of school external partnerships and the impact of the Low SES NP on external partnerships in schools and their communities in New South Wales.

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Appendix A   The survey of school teachers

In this section, we provide an overview of the survey instrument and its administration and discuss the representativeness of the schools which participated in the survey.

The purpose of the Low SES NP was to improve the education and life opportunities of students from low SES backgrounds through six reform areas, one of which focuses on strengthening partnership arrangements between schools and external groups, such as parents, local communities and the higher education sector (NSW 2010: 89-90). Low SES NP schools were identified using a national methodology based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage (IRSD), constructed from the 2006 Census and additional criteria relevant to the government and non-government school sectors in New South Wales (NSW 2010: 71-73). The process for the selection of Low SES NP schools resulted in the over-representation of students living in remote areas, students on refugee visas and students who have LBOTE. Primary schools, combined primary and secondary schools, small schools, remote schools and government schools were also more likely to be selected. The characteristics of students and schools are mostly correlates of disadvantage, although the over-representation of primary and combined schools partly reflects the greater social heterogeneity in secondary schools because of their often larger size and broader catchment areas.

Data collection

The questionnaire was designed to collect data for two projects: the evaluation of school external partnerships; and the evaluation of school staffing, management and accountability initiatives. Rather than burden schools with two separate questionnaires, CRES and the Education Institute developed a joint questionnaire, for reasons outlined in the main body of the report. The sections of the questionnaire relevant to the School External Partnerships Evaluation are provided in Appendix B.

The questionnaire was administered on-line. Teaching staff were advised by sector representatives about the survey.

A total of 2,408 people responded to the survey and of those 2235 had valid responses on the variables of interest for this report. The representativeness of the schools in which the teachers were located at the time of completing the survey is illustrated in the following tables.

Table A.1   Responses to the Low SES National Partnerships Survey for Teachers

	% of schools	Schools n=
Schools in the Low SES NP	---	636
School contacted *(target population)*	100%	556
All responses		
Responses with valid data on external partnerships		341

Table A.2 provides descriptive statistics for the respondent schools, that is, schools from which valid responses from at least one teacher were received. As shown in Table A.2, the percentage of respondent schools located in each region is broadly similar to the percentage of all Low SES NP schools located in each region. For example, 7% of the 637 schools involved in the Low SES NP are located in the Hunter/Central Coast region as are 7% of the respondent schools. Schools in the South Western Sydney region are over-represented: 24% of respondent schools compared to 20% of all Low SES NP schools; schools in the New England region are under-represented: 6% of respondent schools compared to 10% of all Low SES NP schools; and schools in the Western NSW region are under-represented: 12% of respondent schools compared to 16% of all Low SES NP schools.

Government schools were under-represented accounting for 86% of Low SES NP schools and 79% of respondent schools. Catholic schools were over-represented accounting for 10% of Low SES NP schools and 15% of responding schools. Independent schools were also slightly over-represented accounting for 6% of responding schools and 4% of Low SES NP schools.

Primary schools have enrolments in grades K-6; secondary schools have enrolments in grades 7-12; combined schools have both primary and secondary enrolments; while special schools meet the educational needs of students with physical, intellectual or behavioural challenges. Secondary schools are over-represented: 22% of respondents schools compared to 17% of all Low SES NP schools; primary schools are slightly under-represented: 67% of respondent schools compared to 68% of all Low SES NP schools; combined schools are slightly under-represented: 8% of respondent schools compared to 9% of all Low SES NP schools; and special schools are slightly under-represented: 3% of respondent schools compared to 5% of all Low SES NP schools.

Funding for the Low SES NP was rolled out over a period of four years beginning in 2009. Consequently, Low SES NP schools are divided into four cohorts: 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012. The proportions of Low SES NP schools and respondent schools differ in three of the four funding cohorts. The 2009 funding cohort accounts for 22% of all Low SES NP schools and 15% of responding schools. The 2010 funding cohort accounts for 30% of all Low SES NP schools and 33% of responding schools. The 2011 funding cohort accounts for 30% of all Low SES NP schools and 34% of responding schools.

To estimate levels of educational disadvantage, ACARA created the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA). The index includes information about students' family backgrounds especially the occupations of parents and their school and non-school education attainment. Where these data were not available, ICSEA uses ABS census data on the family backgrounds of persons residing in the districts where students live. ICSEA includes two school characteristics—whether a school is in a metropolitan, regional or remote area and the proportion of Indigenous student enrolments. In the analyses, ICSEA scores are divided into four approximately equal categories. The quartiles reflect the underlying the number of schools. Schools in the lowest two ICSEA quartiles are slightly under-represented accounting for 21% and 22% respectively, whereas schools in the

highest ICSEA quartile are over-represented accounting for 32% of responding schools. The percentage of responding schools in the third ICSEA quartile is 25%.

We include two measure of school size: number of teachers and number of students. Schools with less than 20 teachers were under-represented accounting for 51% of responding schools and 60% of low SES NP schools whereas the other three groups were over-represented. Schools with less than 200 students were under-represented accounting for 38% of responding schools and 48% of low SES NP schools whereas mid-size schools, those with between 200 and 499 students were over-represented accounting for 34% of low SES NP schools and 40% of responding schools.

Table A.2   Low SES NP schools and respondent schools by location

	Low SES NP schools n=637		Respondent schools n=341	
Region/Diocese	n=	%	n=	%
Hunter/Central Coast	47	7	23	7
Illawarra and South East	43	7	25	7
New England	64	10	21	6
North Coast	102	16	50	15
Riverina	47	7	25	7
South Western Sydney	129	20	82	24
Sydney	7	1	5	1
Western NSW	101	16	41	12
Western Sydney	35	5	19	6
Diocese of Armidale	3	0	1	0.3
Diocese of Bathurst	4	1	4	1
Diocese of Broken Bay	1	0	1	0.3
Diocese of Canberra and Goulbourn	4	1	2	1
Diocese of Lismore	6	1	6	2
Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle	7	1	5	1
Diocese of Parramatta	4	1	4	1
Diocese of Sydney	19	3	18	5
Diocese of Wagga Wagga	5	1	5	1
Diocese of Wilcannia-Forbes	6	1	1	0.3
Diocese of Wollongong	3	0	3	1
Sector				
Government	551	86	271	79
Catholic	62	10	50	15
Independent	24	4	20	6
School category				
Primary	436	68	230	67
Secondary	111	17	73	22
Combined	60	9	27	8
Special	30	5	11	3
Cohort				

2009	138	22	51	15
2010	193	30	112	33
2011	191	30	115	34
2012	115	18	63	18
ICSEA mean*				
<870	154	26	71	22
870-922	144	24	69	21
923-964	152	25	82	25
965+	152	25	105	32
School size: teachers#				
1-19	379	60	173	51
20-39	152	24	94	28
40-59	63	10	46	14
60+	40	6	27	8
School size: students^				
<200	306	48	127	38
200-499	212	34	135	40
500-799	75	12	49	14
800+	39	6	27	8

Note: n= refers to the number of schools categorised in each school category. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number
*responding schools = 327
#responding schools n=340
^responding schools n=338
Source: Low SES NP schools data supplied by DEC; ACARA *MySchool* website

The 341 schools from which teachers responded were distributed between the government and non-government sector in similar proportions to the distribution of the 637 Low SES NP schools. While 86 per cent of Low SES NP schools are in the government sector, 79 per cent of respondent schools were government schools. Ten per cent of Low SES NP schools are Catholic schools and 15 per cent of respondent schools were Catholic schools. Four per cent of Low SES NP schools are in the Independent school sector compared to six per cent of respondent schools.

A total of 2,235 teachers from 341 schools provided valid responses to the survey. Of those, 1,168 (52%) were working in primary schools, 786 (35%) were in secondary schools; 249 (11%) were in combined schools and 32 (1%) were in special schools. Two-thirds of the responding teachers were employed in government schools (67%); 22% were employed in Catholic schools and the remaining 11% were employed in independent schools.

Teachers located in schools in the South Western Sydney region accounted for 38% of respondents and the Catholic Diocese of Sydney provided 14.5% of respondents. Twenty per cent of Low SES NP schools are located in the South Western Sydney region and 3% are located in the Catholic Diocese of Sydney. Teachers located in the New England region account for 3% of responding teachers whereas schools in this region account for 10% of low SES NP schools. Teachers located in the North Coast region accounts for 8% of responding teachers and schools in this region account for 16% of low SES NP schools.

Sixteen per cent of responding teachers were located in schools in the lowest ICSEA quartile, (ie. an ICSEA mean of less than 870) and the second lowest ICSEA quartile (ie. an ICSEA mean between 870 and 922). Teachers located in schools in the third lowest ICSEA quartile accounted for 27% of responding teachers and teachers located in schools in the top ICSEA quartile accounted for 42% of responding teachers.

On the first measure of school size, student enrolments, teachers located in mid-size schools, those with between 200 and 499 students, accounted for 38% of responding teachers. Teachers located in small schools, those with less than 200 students accounted for 17% of responding teachers. On the second measure of school size, number of teachers, responding teachers were more evenly distributed with 25% located in the smallest schools (1 to 19 teachers) and largest schools (60+ teachers); 30% located in schools with between 20 and 39 teachers and the remaining 20% located in schools with between 40 and 59 teachers.

Table A.3   Characteristics of schools by responding teachers

	n=2235	%
Region		
Hunter/Central Coast	136	6
Illawarra and South East	140	6
New England	75	3
North Coast	176	8
Riverina	103	5
South Western Sydney	846	38
Sydney	20	1
Western NSW	166	7
Western Sydney	79	4
Diocese of Armidale	2	0.1
Diocese of Bathurst	9	0.4
Diocese of Broken Bay	14	0.6
Diocese of Canberra and Goulbourn	12	0.5
Diocese of Lismore	51	2
Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle	22	1
Diocese of Parramatta	27	1
Diocese of Sydney	324	14.5
Diocese of Wagga Wagga	9	0.4
Diocese of Wilcannia-Forbes	2	0.1
Diocese of Wollongong	22	1
Type of School		
Primary	1168	52
Secondary	786	35
Combined	249	11
Special	32	1
Sector		
Government	1492	67
Catholic	494	22
Independent	249	11

ICSEA mean

<870	340	16
870-922	340	16
923-964	582	27
965+	920	42

Size: students

<200	366	17
200-499	837	38
500-799	513	24
800+	462	21

Size: teachers

1-19	554	25
20-39	680	30
40-59	436	20
60+	562	25

Note: n= refers to the number of responding teachers. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number

Table A.4   Characteristics of respondents

	All		Prim		Sec		Comb		Special	
Characteristic	n=	%	n=	%	n=	%	n=	%	n=	%
Age										
<40 years	964	43	521	45	285	36	150	60	8	25
40+ years	1,264	57	643	55	499	64	98	40	24	75
position										
Executive	648	29	291	25	270	34	75	30	12	38
Teacher	1,581	71	873	75	514	66	174	70	20	62
Tenure										
1-5 years	1029	46	559	48	303	39	148	59	14	45
6+ years	1206	54	607	52	481	61	101	41	17	55
Location										
Regional	939	42	499	43	337	43	81	33	22	69
Metro Sydney	1,296	58	669	57	449	57	168	67	10	31

Appendix B Survey questions relevant to this report

The survey instrument collected information on the characteristics of respondents (eg. age range, gender, name of school, position held in this school, length of time in current position, length of time at this school, length of time teaching or working in schools, and level of familiarity with Low SES NP initiatives.

They were then asked a series of questions about the impact of the Low SES NP initiatives in their school. The questions relevant to external partnerships are indicated below.

Q9 Please indicate whether each of the following is occurring more or less frequently since the implementation of the Low SES NP initiatives in your school.
Is each of the following occurring more or less frequently since the implementation of the Low SES NP initiatives at your school? (response categories: a lot less; a little less; no change; a little more; a lot more; not an NP goal for this school):

> e. Parent/carer engagement in the school

> f. Links between the school and its wider community (e.g., other schools, community organisations or business groups)

> g. Engaging with parents and carers from diverse social and cultural groups (including ATSI and LBOTE communities)

> h. Additional programs and services to promote student wellbeing (e.g., counselling, health services)

> j. Additional programs and services to support students in their learning (e.g., homework centres, home-school liaison officers)

Q 10 To what extent have the Low SES NP initiatives affected the following?
As a result of your schools participation in the Low SES NP initiatives: (response categories: strongly agree; agree; disagree; strongly disagree; not an NP goal for this school):

> f. The school communicates better with parents and carers

> g. The school is more effective in engaging parents and carers from diverse social and cultural groups (including ATSI and LBOTE communities)

> h. The school is more engaged with its wider community

Q 11 To what extent have the initiatives affected the following aspects of your role as a teacher?
Because of your school's participation in the Low SES NP intitiatives, as a teacher you are now: (response categories: a lot less well; a little less well; no change; a little better; a lot better; not an NP goal for this school):

> b. Communicating with parents and carers from diverse social and cultural backgrounds

> d. Involving parents in their children's learning

> f. Able to explain the goals of your school to colleagues, parents and others

Q 12 To what extent do you feel that the Low SES NP initiatives have affected the following?

Because of your school's participation in the Low SES NP initiatives (response categories: a lot worse; a little worse no change; a little better; a lot better; not an NP goal for this school):

  e. Parents and carers support for student learning is:

Open Response Questions

Q 13   In your view, what are the main challenges if any, that this schools faces in engaging with parents and carers?

Q 15   Please provide any additional comments on Low SES NP initiatives in the area of school external partnerships (Q 15)

Appendix C   Quantitative Responses by region

Quantitative respondents were divided into two groups: those working in Sydney metropolitan schools and those working in regional/rural schools. We were able to code all respondents into a region. In Table C.1 we present the results of chi-square tests to determine whether differences in the responses of the two groups to selected questions are statistically significant. A p-value of 0.05 or less signifies statistical significance and is denoted by a 'yes' in the final column.

Table C.1   Differences between regional and metropolitan schools

Indicator	Regional/ rural		Sydney metropolitan		Statistically significant difference
	n=	%	n=	%	
Since the implementation of the Low SES NP initiatives there is more parent/carer engagement in the school	879	74	1189	75	no
Since the implementation of the Low SES NP initiatives there is more engagement with parents/carers from diverse social and cultural groups	874	75	1182	76	no
Agree/strongly agree that the school communicates better with parents/carers	850	83	1157	79	yes
Agree/strongly agree that the school is more effective in engaging parents/carers from diverse social/cultural groups	823	77	1144	76	no
Better parent support for student learning	825	70	1129	71	no
Teacher is better at communicating with parents from diverse social/cultural groups	827	71	1150	70	no
Teacher is better at involving parents in child's learning	844	71	1147	69	no
Since the implementation of the Low SES NP initiatives there are more additional programs to promote student well-being	867	78	1182	81	no
Since the implementation of the Low SES NP initiatives there are more additional programs to support student learning	862	75	1186	82	yes
Since the implementation of the Low SES NP initiatives there are more links between school and its wider community	882	83	1186	79	yes
Agree/strongly agree that the school is more engaged with its wider community	844	81	1155	76	yes
Teacher is better able to explain school goals	862	84	1146	82	no

Source: Low SES National Partnerships Survey for Teachers

Appendix D   Qualitative Responses

In the 2013 survey of teachers, respondents were given an optional open-ended question asking 'What, in your view are the main challenges, if any, that this school faces in engaging with parents and carers?'.

Of the 2235 individuals who completed the survey, 1249 provided codeable responses to this question. Table D.1 lists the characteristics of all respondents and of the respondents who answered this question. As the table shows, the subsample of respondents who provided a response was broadly similar to the whole sample.

Table D.1   Characteristics of the whole sample and the subsample

Characteristic	total sample	Sub-sample
School type	%	%
Primary	52	52
Secondary	35	37
Combined	11	10
Special	1	1
Sector		
DET	67	69
DEC	22	21
AIS	11	9
Region or diocese		
Hunter/Central Coast	6	6
Illawarra and South East	6	7
New England	3	3
North Coast	8	9
Riverina	5	5
South Western Sydney	38	36
Sydney	1	1
Western NSW	7	8
Western Sydney	4	3
Diocese of Armidale	0.1	0.1
Diocese of Bathurst	0.4	0.6
Diocese of Broken Bay	0.6	0.3
Diocese of Canberra/ Goulbourn	0.5	0.4
Diocese of Lismore	2	2
Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle	1	1
Diocese of Parramatta	1	1
Diocese of Sydney	14	14
Diocese of Wagga Wagga	0.4	0.2
Diocese of Wilcannia-Forbes	0.1	0.2
Diocese of Wollongong	1	1
School ICSEA mean		

<870	16	18
870-922	16	18
923-964	27	27
965+	42	37
Teaching staff		
<20	25	27
20-39	30	30
40-59	20	18
60+	25	25
Enrolments		
<200	17	19
200-499	38	38
500-799	24	23
800+	21	19
Position		
Executive	29	33
Teacher	71	67
Tenure		
1-2 years	16	15
3-5 years	30	28
6-10 years	23	25
more than 10 years	32	33

Source: Low SES National Partnerships Survey for Teachers

Coding the responses

Responses to the open-ended question were coded in two different ways by two different researchers. The first researcher manually coded the responses and came up with eight broad themes. A second researcher independently coded the responses using a computer software program, NVIVO, and came up with the same eight broad themes. Consequently, the responses were coded into eight categories to allow for a content analysis to be conducted. If respondents mentioned multiple themes, they were coded according to the first theme mentioned in their response. Table D.2 lists the eight categories and provides examples of the responses coded within each category.

Table D.2   Examples of responses assigned to each category

Main challenges	Examples
Language & culture barriers	language barriers and cultural expectations; need for translators on continuing basis; Many parents have difficulty with English so communication is hard for them; language and cultural barriers regarding educational value; Newsletters are posted home in English to a parent body where most parents have little English.
Low parental interest	Getting parents involved in their children's education; lack of parental interest; Engaging parents with their parental responsibility; The main challenge is trying to motivate enthusiasm for learning and trying to encourage parents to take an active role in caring for their child - basic care

	like feeding, cleaning and ensuring their child is healthy and well slept; Parents don't seem to care about their child's education.
Parents' ambivalence about value of education	Parents don't necessarily see the value of education for their children; Still a reluctance to see the importance of schooling and an education; Many parents don't value education; Parents recognising their role in their child's education; Town culture...poor historical perception of the school as an educational enhancer amongst some of the parents, many parents went to the school and were taught by the same teachers
Parental time constraints	Time is a major issue. Parents work and have other responsibilities and are unable to attend various school events; Time restraints for working parents to be involved; Having large families means parents are busy with toddlers. Parents are often unavailable to participate due to work commitments; Many working parents who cannot attend school for many events
Parents' level of education	The level of education that some parents have is extremely low; Parents disengagement with any school situation as a result of poor literacy (especially) and numeracy skills. Many are semi-illiterate; Parents lack of education in majority of cases and lack of interest; Literacy levels of the parents. Very young parents who have limited parenting skills; Encouraging them to come into the school and addressing fears and concerns they may have based on their own educational experiences.
No contact details for parents	Constantly changing contact details (eg phone numbers) that are not updated; Out of date phone numbers; Actually getting parents on the phone as numbers change regularly and are not updated; Non contactable due to phones being cut off.
School-based issues	Lack of leadership communicating information. Staff not knowing what is available for parents to feed into. Initiatives are purely the sole domain of the Executive; Parents are not listened to, staff has a generally low opinion of many parents; limitations in snr exec' ability to engage parent groups; Parents continue to feel disconnected to the school environment. OH & S requirements and a large fence with restricted access are just two elements which [in my view] prevent familiarity and easy access and create an environment of division between school and parent; Many teachers, especially new teachers, lack the necessary life experience and interpersonal skills and do not have a sound grasp of the stages of learning of children and how the psych of different children develop and affected by prior experiences and situations from which the children emerge.
Other	Gaining trust and building an environment of open communication; High transient population; senior college so students are sometimes parents themselves; Unmet mental health concerns. Personal disability; Distance. We are a regional college with students travelling up to an hour to and from school in some cases. We use electronic, in person engagement and written communication but it is a challenge to have regular face to face interactions.

Source: Low SES National Partnerships Survey for Teachers

Responses by category

Table D.3 lists the percentages of responses in each category. The most frequently mentioned theme was 'language and cultural barriers' which was cited by 27% of respondents as the main challenge to engaging parents/carers. However this response was more commonly cited in metropolitan (44%) than regional/rural schools (5%). Characteristics of parents and carers were the next most frequently cited challenge as shown in Table D.3.

Table D.3   Challenges to engaging parents and carers by category

Category	n=	%
Language/culture barriers	334	27
Low parental interest	288	23
Parents' ambivalence about value of education	203	16
Parental time constraints	150	12
Parents' level of education	103	8
School-based issues	45	4
No contact details for parents	26	2
Other	100	8
Total	1249	100

Source: Low SES National Partnerships Survey for Teachers

Responses by school type

There were some differences in the types of challenges reported according to type of school. Table D.4 shows that for teachers located in primary and secondary schools, the most frequently reported challenge for engaging parents/carers were language and cultural barriers, followed by Low parental interest. On the other hand, for teachers located in combined schools, the main challenge was Low parental interest. Staff members at special schools were most likely to cite that Parents' ambivalence about value of education and parental time constraints as the main challenges to engaging with parents and carers.

Table D.4   Challenges to engaging parents and carers by school type

Challenges	Primary	Secondary	Combined	Special
	n=653	n=456	n=120	n=15
	%	%	%	%
Language/culture barriers	29	27	18	7
Low parental interest	23	23	26	13
Parents' ambivalence about value of education	15	18	16	20
Parental time constraints	13	11	9	20
Parents' level of education	1	4	1	7
No contact details for parents	9	6	11	13
School-based issues	3	3	7	7
Other	7	7	13	13

Responses by Region

Respondents from metropolitan schools were more likely than their counterparts located in regional/rural schools to cite language and cultural barriers as the main challenge to engaging parents/carers as shown in Table D.5.

Table D.5   Challenges to engaging parents and carers by region

	Regional/rural	Sydney Metropolitan
	n=549	n=695
	%	%
Language/culture barriers	5	44
Low parental interest	27	20
Parents' ambivalence about value of education	25	9
Parental time constraints	12	12
Parents' level of education	13	5
No contact details for parents	3	2
School-based issues	5	3
Other	10	6

Responses by school ICSEA mean

There was some variation in responses according to school ICSEA mean. As shown in Table D.6, respondents located in schools in the lowest ICSEA mean group were most likely to mention parents' ambivalence about the value of education as the challenge to engaging parents and carers. Respondents from schools in the second lowest ICSEA mean group were most likely to mention low parental interest and those located in schools in higher two ICSEA mean groups were most likely to mention language and cultural barriers.

Table D.6   Challenges to engaging parents and carers by school ICSEA mean

Challenges	<870	870-922	923-964	965+
	n=212	n=215	n=330	n=454
	%	%	%	%
Language/culture barriers	17	7	36	35
Low parental interest	23	29	24	20
Parents' ambivalence about value of education	25	24	13	11
Parental time constraints	7	11	12	15
Parents' level of education	11	14	5	7
No contact details for parents	3	4	2	0
School-based issues	4	3	3	4
Other	10	8	5	9

Responses by school size

Table D.7 shows that respondents from small schools, those with less than 200 students, were more likely to mention parents' ambivalence about the value of education as being the main challenge to engaging parents and carers whereas, staff located in larger schools, those with at least 500 students, were more likely to cite language and cultural barriers.

Table D.7   Challenges to engaging parents and carers by school size

	<200 students	200-499 students	500-799 students	800+ students
	n=231	n=465	n=277	n=235
	%	%	%	%
Language/culture barriers	10	24	31	37
Low parental interest	22	26	22	20
Parents' ambivalence about value of education	24	17	15	10
Parental time constraints	13	11	11	14
Parents' level of education	13	9	7	6
No contact details for parents	2	2	3	0
School-based issues	3	4	3	5
Other	12	7	7	7

These results are likely to be influenced by the regional variations mentioned in Table D.3, as small schools are more likely to be located in regional and rural areas.

Responses by respondents' professional role

Breaking down the responses according to the respondent's professional role revealed little differences in the views of teaching staff and executive staff. As shown in Table D.8, language and cultural barriers were the most often cited challenges for both groups. Executive staff members were more likely than teaching staff to cite parental time constraints whereas teaching staff were more likely than executive staff to mention school-based issues.

Table D.8   Challenges to engaging parents and carers by professional role

	Executive	Teacher
	n=408	n=833
	%	%
Language/culture barriers	25	28
Low parental interest	23	23
Parents' ambivalence about value of education	17	16

Parental time constraints	14	11
Parents' level of education	7	9
No contact details for parents	2	2
School-based issues	2	5
Other	10	7

Source: Low SES National Partnerships Survey for Teachers

Responses by length of service at current school

We divided the respondents into groups according to their length of service at their current school. As Table D.9 shows, language and cultural barriers were the most often cited challenge for each group of respondents. One-third of those who had been at their current school for less than three years cited language/cultural barriers compared to 25 per cent of those who had been at their current school for between three and 10 years, and 27 per cent of those who have been at their current school for more than 10 years. The second most often cited challenge, low parental interest, was mentioned by 18 per cent of those new to their current school, and 25 per cent of those with at least ten years' service at their current school.

Respondents who had been at the school for more than 10 years were more likely than newer staff members to cite parents' ambivalence towards the value of education as the main challenge to engaging parents and carers.

Table D.9   Challenges to engaging parents and carers by length of service at current school

	1-2 years	3-5 years	6-10 years	>10 years
	n=180	n=346	n=310	n=405
	%	%	%	%
Language/culture barriers	33	25	25	27
Low parental interest	18	25	22	25
Parents' ambivalence about value of educ.	14	16	15	18
Parental time constraints	9	10	15	12
Parents' level of education	7	10	9	6
No contact details for parents	4	1	2	2
School-based issues	3	5	3	3
Other	11	8	8	7

Source: Low SES National Partnerships Survey for Teachers

Appendix E   Respondents' characteristics

The percentages of respondents in each category of the selected characteristics are presented in Table A.4 in Appendix A. Due to missing values (which range from a low of 167 to a high of 281), the number of responses included in the analysis for each question varies. As shown in Table A.4, 43 per cent of the respondents were aged between 20 and 39 years; 29 per cent of the respondents were in executive roles; 46 per cent had been located at their current school for less than six years; and 42 per cent were located in regional NSW.

Age of respondents

We divided the respondents into two groups: those aged less than 40 years and those aged 40 years or older. Seven respondents did not answer this question. In Table E.1 we present the results of chi-square tests to determine whether differences in the responses of the two groups to a range of questions are statistically significant. A p-value of 0.05 or less signifies statistical significance and is denoted by a 'yes' in the final column.

Table E.1   Perceptions of impact of Low SES NP initiatives by age

Indicator	20-39 years		40+ years		Statistically significant difference
	n=	%	n=	%	
Since the implementation of the Low SES NP initiatives there is more parent/carer engagement in the school	883	78	1180	72	yes
Since the implementation of the Low SES NP initiatives there is more engagement with parents/carers from diverse social and cultural groups	878	76	1173	75	no
Agree/strongly agree that the school communicates better with parents/carers	862	83	1140	79	yes
Agree/strongly agree that the school is more effective in engaging parents/carers from diverse social/cultural groups	845	81	1117	73	yes
Better parent support for student learning	844	73	1104	69	yes
Teacher is better at communicating with parents from diverse social/cultural groups	857	74	1114	68	yes
Teacher is better at involving parents in child's learning	858	73	1127	67	yes
Since the implementation of the Low SES NP initiatives there are more additional programs to promote student well-being	879	80	1165	79	no
Since the implementation of the Low SES NP initiatives there are more	882	83	1161	76	yes

additional programs to support student learning					
Since the implementation of the Low SES NP initiatives there are more links between school and community	885	79	1178	81	no
Agree/strongly agree that the school is more engaged with its wider community	856	80	1138	76	yes
Teacher is better able to explain school goals	865	84	1137	82	no

Source: Low SES National Partnerships Survey for Teachers

Respondents' length of service at school

Respondents were divided into two groups: those who had been working at their school for less than six years and those who had been working at their school for six years or more. Five respondents did not answer the question relating to their length of service at their school. In Table E.2 we present the results of chi-square tests to determine whether differences in the responses of the two groups to selected questions are statistically significant. A p-value of 0.05 or less signifies statistical significance and is denoted by a 'yes' in the final column.

Table E.2   Perceptions of impact of Low SES NP initiatives by length of service

Indicator	<6 years		6+ years		Statistically significant difference
	n=	%	n=	%	
Since the implementation of the Low SES NP initiatives there is more parent/carer engagement in the school	933	76	1130	74	no
Since the implementation of the Low SES NP initiatives there is more engagement with parents/carers from diverse social and cultural groups	929	77	1122	74	no
Agree/strongly agree that the school communicates better with parents/carers	910	83	1094	79	yes
Agree/strongly agree that the school is more effective in engaging parents/carers from diverse social/cultural groups	891	80	1073	74	yes
Better parent support for student learning	883	74	1068	68	yes
Teacher is better at communicating with parents from diverse social/cultural groups	896	75	1078	67	yes
Teacher is better at involving parents in child's learning	899	74	1089	66	yes
Since the implementation of the Low SES NP initiatives there are more additional programs to promote	929	82	1115	78	yes

student well-being					
Since the implementation of the Low SES NP initiatives there are more additional programs to support student learning	926	82	1117	76	yes
Since the implementation of the Low SES NP initiatives there are more links between school and community	935	81	1129	80	no
Agree/strongly agree that the school is more engaged with its wider community	905	81	1091	75	yes
Teacher is better able to explain school goals	907	85	1097	81	no

Source: Low SES National Partnerships Survey for Teachers

Respondents' professional role

Respondents were divided into two groups: those in executive roles and teachers. Six respondents did not answer the question relating to their role in the school.

In Table E.3 we present the results of chi-square tests to determine whether differences in the responses of the two groups to selected questions are statistically significant. A p-value of 0.05 or less signifies statistical significance and is denoted by a 'yes' in the final column.

Table E.3   Perceptions of effectiveness of Low SES NP initiatives by professional role

Indicator	Executive		Teacher		Statistically significant difference
	n=	%	n=	%	
Since the implementation of the Low SES NP initiatives there is more parent/carer engagement in the school	618	78	1444	73	yes
Since the implementation of the Low SES NP initiatives there is more engagement with parents/carers from diverse social and cultural groups	609	78	1441	74	no
Agree/strongly agree that the school communicates better with parents/carers	599	81	1402	80	no
Agree/strongly agree that the school is more effective in engaging parents/carers from diverse social/cultural groups	586	77	1375	77	no
Better parent support for student learning	585	74	1365	69	yes
Teacher is better at communicating with parents from diverse social/cultural groups	584	76	1388	68	yes
Teacher is better at involving parents in child's learning	595	73	1392	68	no

Since the implementation of the Low SES NP initiatives there are more additional programs to promote student well-being	600	80	1443	79	no
Since the implementation of the Low SES NP initiatives there are more additional programs to support student learning	605	82	1438	78	yes
Since the implementation of the Low SES NP initiatives there are more links between school and community	617	85	1445	78	yes
Agree/strongly agree that the school is more engaged with its wider community	598	80	1395	77	no
Teacher is better able to explain school goals	606	87	1397	81	yes

Source: Low SES National Partnerships Survey for Teachers