



Engaging Parents in the Career Development of Young People

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A Research Report for the
Career Industry Council of
Australia (CICA)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarises the findings of a scoping exercise to identify strategies in use throughout Australia to increase parental engagement in young people's career development, and to produce a series of case studies outlining identified instances of effective practice.

Miles Morgan was contracted by CICA in late 2011 to undertake this research, which consisted of a survey sent to CICA member associations, and additional online research to identify current examples of national and international parental engagement strategies.

The responses and findings of the research indicate a significant amount of activity occurring in the parental engagement space both nationally and internationally, activity which has grown significantly in the last ten years.

A number of governments around the world—including in the U.S, U.K and Canada—have even built requirements for parent engagement into legislative and policy initiatives designed to enhance the learning and transition outcomes of young people. The extent to which this has had a clear and effective impact on the positive involvement of parents in young people's career development, however, is somewhat less than clear.

Generally, there is a lack of definitive international research or data that demonstrates effective types of parental engagement strategies, and their positive impact on the learning or transition outcomes of young people. It is repeatedly demonstrated throughout the literature that parental engagement is clearly important to these outcomes, but evidence of effective ways to solicit and harness that engagement is notoriously difficult to come by, and even more so in specific relationship to young people's career development.

A similar situation obtains in Australia, where the importance of parental engagement to young people's learning, achievement and successful transition is widely recognised and acknowledged, and embedded in such national frameworks as the Family-School Partnerships Framework. But the extent to which this official recognition is effectively cultivating strategies to engage parents at the level of local learning institutions is far from clear.

Most parental engagement in career development strategies pursued in Australia to date have tended to take their lead from initiatives pursued in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. Most are designed to assist parents to understand education, training and work choices so that they can support their older children's transitions from school to work. They typically fall into one of four major categories:

- Information sessions/workshops¹
- Career exhibitions/expos
- Print-based or digital career information materials²
- Dedicated web pages for parents on education, training and career information websites.

By and large, the focus of these strategies is concentrated at the latter end of the educative cycle, when students are in the final 2-3 years of high school, and must make decisions regarding subjects to enable entry to post-secondary education or other pathways.

¹ This includes PACTS, PACP and Lasting gifts workshops

² This includes JobGuide and the range of downloadable print materials made available on government websites ("Parents Talking Career Choices", etc).

However, general (i.e. non-career-focused) parental engagement strategies designed to engage parents in their children's schooling and learning process more broadly are pursued at all levels of schooling via a range of methods, and this has indeed been an area of significant focus and growing concern for national and state/territory education and schools policy over the last decade or so. This is in response to national and international research that has for some time been making a clear link between improved student motivation, achievement and transition outcomes as a result of parents being involved in their child's learning and developmental process. Such strategies—while they might not have an explicit careers focus—can be seen as potentially contributing to beneficial career and transition outcomes.

On the whole, however, it would seem that the pursuit of parental engagement strategies throughout Australia—with regard to career development—is still in an early state of development, with parental engagement strategies—where they do exist—being some way behind the recognised standard of international “best practice”: mainly reliant on passive information and one-way modes of communication, and without an explicit careers focus.

As the literature review included later in this report indicates, current accepted definitions of “best practice” parental engagement generally entail movement away from over-reliance on passive forms of parent “information” (newsletters, information sessions, etc), towards actively involving parents in interactive forms of dialogue and collaborative decision-making.

Furthermore, more sophisticated parental engagement strategies have multiple elements in play, and attempt to engage parents through a range of methods, thereby increasing their chances of reaching parents at different points in time. Pursuing a multitude of simultaneous channels of engagement is clearly identified in the literature as a feature of successful strategies.

However, of all the factors of parental engagement explored in the literature, the factor seen as having the most decisive impact on student learning and achievement is that of parents' level of educational aspiration for their children. This is what Hill and Tyson call “academic socialisation”: “communicating parental expectations for education and its value or utility, linking school work to current events, fostering educational and occupational aspirations, discussing learning strategies with children, and making preparations and plans for the future” (742).

Therefore, strategies which aim to raise parents' awareness of education and training opportunities, and which raise the value attributed to those opportunities by parents, are characterised as having the most beneficial impact on learning and transition outcomes for young people.

The possibility of realising best practice in parental engagement in Australia therefore pivots on the need for a more general shift in career development awareness and consciousness that would enable parents to recognise their role, *and* be empowered to be involved by the institutions charged with delivering learning to young people.

This is the current benchmark for understanding “best practice” in parental engagement strategies, and this study suggests that most schools and other learning institutions in Australia do not as yet possess the capacity or means to implement such strategies in a systematic way.

This report, and its accompanying case studies, therefore reveals a range of approaches to parental engagement being pursued by various learning institutions, but also evidence of a culture of parental engagement very much in the process of development, with considerable variation and unevenness in the extent to which institutions are able to articulate or demonstrate a strong culture of parental engagement in relation to careers. It would seem that while there is evidence of much activity and intent in this space there is, in many instances, also much room and opportunity for improvement.

1 INTRODUCTION

In late 2011, Miles Morgan was contracted by the Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA) to undertake a survey of current practices in engaging parents in the career development of young people throughout Australia.

The research primarily took the form of a survey questionnaire sent by CICA associations to their members, inviting them to share their experience of successful parental engagement strategies in a range of contexts. This survey was supplemented by a brief scan of the latest national and international resources and initiatives, to put the findings of the survey within a broader context.

The outputs of the research are the creation of a series of 12 case studies demonstrating “good practice” in parental engagement strategies across Australia—to be made available via the CICA website (www.cica.org.au)—and the production of this report. The report brings together the key themes of the survey responses, and analyses these in light of the broader context of parental engagement strategies in operation in other countries. The aim of the report is to enable some implications to be drawn as to the current state of development of parental engagement strategies in Australia.

2 SUMMARY OF THE SURVEY RESPONSES

In consultation with CICA, Miles Morgan developed a survey form for collecting information on effective parental engagement strategies being pursued in schools and other learning institutions across Australia. The survey form is attached as Appendix A.

The surveys were distributed to all CICA member associations, who then distributed them via email to their members.

Overall, 33 responses to the call for case studies were received.³

26 respondents returned completed surveys (or equivalent), and of these responses, 12 were suitably detailed to be developed into case-studies.⁴ However, the information from all survey responses was considered and forms part of the findings of this report.

The remainder of this report details the overall findings from the survey, and analyses these in relation to the findings of our research into the national and international context of parental engagement strategies.

2.1 Provider Types

Of the 30 unique responses received, 16 were from schools, 3 from employment/career service providers, 5 from training organisations, 3 from universities, 2 relating to career-related initiatives rather than a specific institution, and 1 submission from an education association representative.

³ Of these, 3 were multiple submissions from the same organisation, so only 30 “unique” respondents.

⁴ One of the case studies was a joint initiative between a school and a university, and so is actually a combination of 2 different survey responses.

Of the total responses (16) received from schools, 2 were private schools, 8 public schools and 6 Catholic schools.

16 responses received were from metropolitan institutions, while 11 were from regional or rural areas.⁵

The most responses received were from Queensland (10), followed by Victoria (7), WA (5), SA (4), NT (2), NSW (1).⁶ No responses were received from the ACT or Tasmania.⁷

Sizes of learner cohorts ranged from small regional/rural schools with student populations as low as 70, ranging to major universities with student populations as high as 40,000.

By far the largest proportion of respondents (81% or 21 of the 26 respondents to this question) catered exclusively to secondary age students and above, reflecting the preponderance of high schools (13 [50%]) and other institutions, such as trade centres, career agencies etc [5 (19%)] that catered to high school age students. A small number of respondents (3 [12%]) also catered to younger, primary age students and the remaining five [19%]) to 18+ and mature age learner populations.

5 respondents (19%) identified their cohorts as having a significant proportion of culturally diverse students (CaLD, NESB and/or international students). 5 identified as having a significant proportion of Indigenous students (19%), and 3 as catering to students from lower SES backgrounds (12%).

2.2 Features of Parental Engagement Strategies

The most immediately apparent feature of the sites surveyed was considerable variation in the extent to which respondents were able to clearly articulate evidence of a coherent and proactive strategy for engaging parents in the career development of young people.

There was clearly a range of types and degrees of parental engagement in effect across the different sites. Some respondents could not demonstrate strong evidence of parental engagement activity at present, but these often had intentions to pursue more active strategies in the future.

“At present there is not much engagement in our school, however I would like to have more parents involved.”

“As some of our student's families are dysfunctional and have difficulty assisting their young people in all areas of development. For some families the concept of career may be distant.”

“There does not seem to be a real parental engagement strategy, it is largely left to the device of the school, the family or the individual student to engage between each other within their family unit.”

Where parental engagement strategies were articulated, most common were strategies that were heavily reliant on information provision activities:

⁵ 3 responses were excluded from this count due to not being able to be attributed a specific metro/regional location.

⁶ 1 response was excluded due to not being attributable to a particular state.

⁷ As of 22nd Feb 2012 a response was received from Tasmania, unfortunately too late to be included in the findings of this report.

- 18 respondents (69%)⁸ cited use of parent information sessions, often in the form of “information evenings” or “parent education” events;
- 12 respondents (46%) indicated reliance on the school newsletter to send career messages to parents;
- 10 respondents (38%) indicated use of online information posted on the school or other website to convey career-related messages to parents.

However, more interactive activities were also cited, including:

- Career-related interviews conducted by careers teacher or guidance counsellor involving both parents and students (62%);⁹
- Careers expos or “markets” exploring post-secondary education pathways, usually held in conjunction with local tertiary providers (42%).

Other parental engagement strategies cited included:

- Inviting parents as guest speakers (23%)
- The use of work experience programs to involve parents (19%)
- Holding open days (8%), and
- Compulsory volunteering schemes (4%).

Only 3 (12%) respondents mentioned the use of workshops (including PACP and PACTS), clearly indicating low take up of these workshop resources within this small survey sample.

On the whole, the survey revealed a reliance of most institutions on fairly traditional “information provision” strategies that have been in use for quite some time: newsletters, “information” or “parent education” sessions, and parent-teacher interviews. Truly innovative and proactive approaches to parental engagement were few and far between.

Some examples of innovative practice that could be found within the survey response, while rare, included those which:

- involved parents in organising work experience opportunities;
- involved parents as guest speakers at career events, including “careers breakfasts” where parents, students (including alumni) and teachers would share career stories;
- involved parents in running a mentoring program;
- partnered with tertiary institutions (i.e. universities, VET providers) to engage parents.

As the literature review included later in this report indicates, current accepted definitions of “best practice” parental engagement generally entail movement away from over-reliance on passive forms of parent “information” (newsletters, information sessions, etc), towards actively involving them in interactive forms of dialogue and decision-making, thereby effectively “engaging” them in undertaking structured activities to potentially assist in the career

⁸ Percentages from this point on refer only to those respondents who provided positive data against survey questions, so the figures are calculated against a total of 26, for reasons of data integrity.

⁹ Although it should be noted that in some cases these “career-related interviews” were in fact subject selection interviews.

development of not only their own child, but an entire cohort of similarly placed young people. This is the current benchmark for understanding “best practice” in parental engagement strategies, and this small sample suggests that schools and other institutions in Australia do not as yet possess the capacity or means to implement such strategies.

In some instances, it appeared as though providers working with VET and apprenticeship-related pathways were sometimes better placed to liaise with parents, since managing the school-apprenticeship-workplace interface requires more active involvement and input of parents than conventional academic pathways.

“As our students are undertaking employment as school based apprentices, we have additional responsibilities for their welfare. Part of this is that we regularly liaise with their parents through our industry services team. This involves informing parents of employment opportunities, advising parents of work conditions and addressing any concerns parents may have about their child's employment. Additionally, we provide information evenings and open days for parents to learn more about school based apprenticeships and the implications for their children.”

In another case, a well-organised parents’ association was integral to engaging parents, being the primary mechanism used to ensure the appropriateness of guest speakers, events and work experience opportunities.

Another valuable model cited as part of the survey was that of a specific partnership between a school and a university, whereby the careers teams from the school and the prospective students office at the university worked together to develop workshops tailored to parents of Year 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12 students. This partnership model is seen as having a number of advantages, in that it takes some of the pressure off school staff to be solely responsible for engaging parents, and also draws upon the knowledge and expertise of university staff with direct experience and understanding of post-secondary pathways.

On the whole, however, evidence of the experience, knowledge and abilities of parents being actively and directly harnessed in the direction of supporting the career development of a whole cohort of young people, was generally quite rare.

2.3 Who Engages?

As with the extent and sophistication of engagement strategies, considerable variation can be observed in the way responsibility for parental engagement strategies is distributed, and the nature of the qualifications and experience of those charged with undertaking and coordinating parental engagement activities.

For some respondents, a dedicated careers teacher/practitioner was charged specifically with engaging parents in career development issues. This careers-related engagement might form part of a broader program of parental engagement involving a whole range of staff. The extent to which this nominated career teacher/practitioner actually held career development-specific qualifications was quite often also open to variation, however.¹⁰

¹⁰ 31% of respondents reported either holding or working towards career development qualifications.

In some contexts, responsibility for parental engagement was more broadly distributed across a range of staff: e.g. classroom teachers, VET coordinators, careers advisors, curriculum coordinator, parents on the school committee.

Both arrangements can be seen to have their advantages and disadvantages. Having a dedicated staff member responsible for organising and coordinating career-related parental engagement activities means that the role of such activities is highlighted and made an explicit part of the staff complement; it also potentially means that, particularly in the school environment where careers education is not part of the curriculum, such activities may become marginalised as the sole work of the careers practitioner and therefore less important than core curriculum work.

If responsibility is spread across all or a range of staff, the possibility of career-related parental engagement being marginalised is reduced, and yet responsibility for its delivery is possibly obscured by being “buried” across a variety of roles. In this way the specific function and purpose of parental engagement for career development purposes may be lost:

“The engagement of parents is facilitated by many staff in our college and it is in fact an expectation that all staff be ready and willing to assist parents whenever necessary.”

Such an informal, ad-hoc approach to engaging parents cannot—in any real sense—be called a strategy.

Clearly, making parental engagement an explicit responsibility of staff, and having in place clear structures and channels for engaging parents, is integral to any effective parental engagement strategy. The extent to which this is better achieved by devolving responsibility to one person, or distributing it across a range of persons, cannot be definitely established, but in order for the *careers content* of any such engagement to be based upon current best practice, it would seem to be of some benefit that this content be authorised by someone with appropriate qualifications.

However, it would seem that in the case of most responding organisations, having someone with specific career development qualifications guiding parental engagement in career activities has not to date been accorded a high priority.

2.4 Resources

The following resources were cited as being used as part of career development related parental engagement activities. Often it was not clear exactly how they would be used with parents, other than they might engage in career exploration activities using them with their child: i.e.: *“Each child has access to these tools and parents are informed in their use to help support their child.”*

The most frequently cited career development resource used as part of parental engagement activities—with 4 respondents citing its use in their program—was Jiigcal Career Voyage,¹¹ a software tool designed by a private company that schools can obtain a license to use at a cost of around \$2 per student, or \$8 per individual student. Also receiving multiple mentions were *myfuture* and Job Guide (both funded by the Australian government and provided free of charge) and Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs), a planning tool developed by the Victorian state

¹¹ <http://www.careervoyage.com.au/>

government.¹² Again, it was not always specifically clear how these resources were used to engage parents, other than to say that parents might be encouraged to use these with their child.

Other resources mentioned include:

- My Resume¹³;
- WOW program run through Foundation for Young Australians¹⁴;
- Studyskills handbook¹⁵;
- Information packages (provided by school on subject selection);
- PLP resources funded from careers budget revised and reprinted 2005;
- Parents Help with Careers (brochure produced by the Australian government in 1998);
- Career-wise testing¹⁶;
- Marketing tools used to reach both prospective students and their parents;
- Career works software is freely available to students¹⁷;
- In 2012 will be trialling the use of Career Fast Track's career management system with Yr 10 cohort¹⁸;
- Career development workbooks;
- OneSchool SET plan¹⁹;
- QTAC prerequisite books and vocational information;
- Internet accessible websites which are free, Cert I in Career Development, teaching expertise, visiting roadshows, industry experience;
- National Career Development Week²⁰;
- Mission Australia Youth Survey²¹;
- OZJAC²²;
- SATAC Guides, University Guides and TAFE Guides plus industry information which is regularly provided;
- UniSA career match profile tool;
- Marketing Materials, company Website;
- Apprenticeships and Traineeships info website;
- Informative reference materials given to parents at information sessions.

¹² <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/sensecyouth/careertrans/mips/default.htm>

¹³ <http://www.myresume.org/>

¹⁴ <http://www.fya.org.au/initiatives/worlds-of-work/>

¹⁵ <http://www.studyskillshandbook.com.au/>

¹⁶ <http://www.career-wise.com.au/>

¹⁷ <http://www.careersolutions.com.au/>

¹⁸ <http://www.careersfasttrack.com.au/>

¹⁹ http://education.qld.gov.au/oneschool/release_two.html

²⁰ <http://www.nationalcareerdevelopmentweek.com.au/>

²¹ <http://www.missionaustralia.com.au/downloads/national-survey-of-young-australians>

²² <http://www.ozjac.com.au/ozjacweb/>

It is interesting to note that the frequency of use of government funded, publicly available resources is on par with the use of privately or commercially-produced resources, with 38% of respondents citing the sole use of public resources, 38% citing sole use of private/commercial resources, and 24% using a combination of both.

Levels of quality assurance in place to measure the effectiveness of resources against established benchmarks could also vary considerably. 35% of respondents mentioned using the *Australian Blueprint for Career Development* to assure the quality of resources used, and 2 respondents indicated their intention to use the *Blueprint* in the future. Only 2 respondents mentioned using the *Guiding Principles for Career Development Services and Career Information Products*. This indicates reasonable take-up and awareness of the *Blueprint* throughout various sectors of learning, but little awareness or take-up of the *Guiding Principles*.

Other tools mentioned that were used to quality assure resources include:

- My future
- Personal Learning (by Peter Hopkins)
- Curriculum council requirements
- Employability skills
- Check sheet for SET plan interviews
- National framework as embedded in Cert I

Some respondents indicated an absence of current quality assurance measures in relation to career development resources used, often citing a lack of time and dedicated staffing to be able to perform such detailed work.

2.5 Key Messages

Respondents were also asked to detail what were the specific key messages that their strategies sought to convey to parents regarding the career development of young people.

A number of possible examples were provided to prompt responses as to the messages that might be contained within parental engagement in career development strategies. These were:

- *The importance of modelling positive career management skills in their own approach to life, learning and work;*
- *Encouraging the direct involvement of parents in learning/career exploration activities with their child;*
- *The value of understanding labour market information to help their child make career choices;*
- *The power of parents using their own experience of career development to assist the career development of young people.*

Some or all of these points were often affirmed by respondents. In addition to these points, however, a number of others were cited as key messages of parent engagement strategies, which can be categorised under a number of general themes:

Providing general support and encouragement:

- *Support for individual pathways;*
- *Encouraging exploration of opportunities;*

- *Parental engagement is essential for aiding the transition from year to year and exit from school;*
- *Importance of supporting children in their journey.*

The importance of labour market information:

- *Keeping up to date with education/training and labour market info;*
- *Importance of labour market info, direct parent involvement in exploring career options, accessing appropriate career development websites;*
- *Encouragement of information gathering from expos and industry opportunities;*
- *Pathways and options; understanding the labour market and post school options in order to make the best decisions through school.*

Involvement in career exploration:

- *Encouraging the involvement of parents in career exploration activities;*
- *Exploring careers, self and world;*
- *Direct involvement of parents in assisting with career development, and giving them tools to research with their children;*
- *Emphasis on exploring career options rather than defining “what are you going to do when you leave school”?;*
- *Exploring the jobs market both locally and nationally.*

Involvement in Work Experience and Collaborative Activity:

- *Providing opportunities for work placement/work experience for VET students and OP (Overall Positions) students; encouraging students to access workplace “wisdom” from a variety of sources (including parents); developing a well-rounded resume; opportunity to explore local university options;*
- *Importance of information, work experience and visits and to workplaces;*
- *Own employment and encouragement of exposure to different workplace practices;*
- *Importance of working in collaboration with school to facilitate outcomes for students.*

Broad Statements of Principle:

- *Keeping lines of communication open;*
- *Focus on strengths of child rather than weaknesses;*
- *Lifelong learning, parental participation; connections within the family as a resource;*
- *High 5 principles; NCDW “Get the Life You Love”;*
- *Social networking skills; employability skills; work experience benefits;*
- *Importance of parents and students understanding educational and behavioural outcomes and how this can affect future employment outcomes;*
- *Transferring school results into Employability Skills.*

Overall, the messages cited as key to parental engagement in career development activities ranged from very broad-ranging statements about “awareness raising” and questioning entrenched assumptions about careers, down to very practical and concrete messages about the importance of using up-to-date labour market information and gaining exposure to a range of workplaces and work experiences.

Indeed, sometimes respondents tended toward one or the other of these extremes—the philosophical and the practical—although the most well developed parental engagement strategies exhibited a combination of both of these perspectives.

2.6 Mechanisms to Facilitate Communication With Parents

Respondents were also asked to cite what communication mechanisms were in place to facilitate regular contact with parents, and to encourage and facilitate their engagement in young people’s career development.

A range of communication mechanisms were mentioned, ranging from more passive forms of “information distribution” via newsletters, websites, and information sessions, through to more interactive modes of communication that actively invite the input of parents and create the possibility of a two-way dialogue.

As argued by the international literature, creating channels for two-way communication is essential to actively *involving* and *engaging* parents, as opposed to merely *informing* them.²³

18 respondents (69%) cited the use of information sessions as a key mechanism for communicating with parents, although the extent to which such information sessions constitute a two-way exchange, or a simple imparting of information, is not clear. As the research literature indicates, such events have historically been predominantly one-way exchanges, with teachers/staff constituted as speakers and parents as passive audience.²⁴

12 (46%) respondents cited the school newsletter as a key channel by which parents were communicated with, often supported by information posted on the school website (a further 7 of those 12). Overall 10 (38%) respondents cited the use of online information to engage parents.

Email appears to be an increasingly popular means of communicating with parents, as 8 (31%) of respondents indicated use of email as part of their parental communication channels. Although, the extent to which this meant two-way email correspondence, or simply bulk information mailouts, was more unclear, as only one respondent reported receiving feedback from parents via email.

One on one parent/teacher meetings were also mentioned 6 times (23%) as a communication channel, although the extent to which such events were *mandatory* or were simply available as an option, varied from site to site. This could mean that parents were not necessarily guaranteed the option of face-to-face contact with a staff member to discuss their child’s career development needs, but merely that such support was available if requested.

Hard copy mail-outs were mentioned by 4 respondents (15%).

²³ Spry and Graham 2009; Raihani and Gurr; “Parents in Partnership” 2010; Saulwick Muller 2006; Hughes and Thomas 2003.

²⁴ Educational Transformations 2007; Harris and Goodall 2006; Saulwick Muller Social Research 2006.

On the whole, the continued reliance on passive information distribution, when research over the last ten years has clearly questioned the effectiveness of such techniques in engaging parents, is a matter of some concern. Unfortunately, such communication methods are shown by the literature to have the least impact upon parental *engagement*.

2.7 Difficult to Engage Parents

Respondents were also asked to indicate if there were any specific groups of parents they found difficult to engage. A number of different parent groups were identified, with varying degrees of preciseness:

- *Those with troubled family circumstances;*
- *Nearly all parents;*
- *International students and students from isolated communities;*
- *Parents who do not use/access emails;*
- *Those with limited English/those without access to computers (possibly low SES);*
- *Those for whom education is not a priority;*
- *CaLD, NESB, Indigenous, refugees;*
- *Those of disengaged students;*
- *Indigenous and lower socio-economic parents, who rarely come to school events;*
- *Parents who have not had positive school/educational experiences or who have only had negative communications with schools in the past themselves;*
- *Families in remote areas and Aboriginal communities.*

In terms of engagement strategies to target these hard to reach groups, a range of strategies and methods were cited, including:

Proactive outreach strategies:

- *one-to-one strategies such as phone calls and in-person visits;*
- *attending gatherings of ATSI families to enhance role of ATSI liaison staff;*
- *coordinators and house parents are often used to contact these families and explain the importance of career education and planning;*
- *indigenous coordinator works closely with these students and parents;*
- *proactive in identifying and updating families regarding the work of organisations who provide a range of support services to disadvantaged learners/jobseekers;*
- *offer various scholarship opportunities to further encourage families from low socio-economic backgrounds to consider the college for their child, by relieving the financial pressure;*
- *linking with other service providers (eg transition support) which links students from remote communities with boarding schools;*
- *regular case conferences with parents of students with special needs; organised in liaison with the school psychologist, learning support coordinator and relevant Year coordinator.*

Flexible Information Provision:

- *having letters and newsletters printed in multiple languages for parents from non-English speaking backgrounds;*
- *having sessions during the day instead of night for shift workers;*
- *keeping all programs, courses and presentations free of charge;*
- *notes in diaries;*
- *individually addressed communications (hard copies) given personally to students or mailed home;*
- *using government agencies such as DCD, mediators and interpreters;*
- *reminders in school newsletter;*
- *checking the appropriateness of materials delivered to parents with children who have special needs.*

Alternative or “Informal” Engagement Activities

- *alternative program provision to include work experience opportunities and enrichment projects, which require parental participation to work;*
- *for indigenous students, inviting local elders to come and discuss their career pathway;*
- *provide BBQ or pizza as a “carrot” to get them to come to the school for after hours meetings;*
- *begin communication with the parents early and in positive settings, such as college events or information evenings. Also aim to build rapport with parents in order to be able to have all the information we need.*
- *working closely with the local CATS group to access the latest information on local opportunities and possibilities;*
- *all enquiries must be responded to within 48 hours, which promotes confidence in the parents as it shows our efficiency and dedication to achieving the best outcomes for their child.*

A range of strategies to target hard to reach parents are in evidence, most of which entail direct action to communicate with parents one-on-one or in non-formal, community or other non-school settings. Moving beyond newsletters, conventional interviews, information sessions and even workshop-style events seems to be the most common method for reaching hard to reach parent groups, and this is true for Indigenous and NESB parents in particular.

2.8 Successful Aspects of Strategies and Evidence of Success

Respondents were also asked to identify what they believed were the most successful aspects or outcomes of their parental engagement activities and to indicate any available evidence for that success.

The majority of responses related to effective communication strategies:

- *improved communication, and taking time to build relationships with families;*

- *keeping lines of communication open; means parents feel comfortable with liaising with relevant personnel to improve career and educational outcomes;*
- *direct individual verbal contact;*
- *parent information presentations;*
- *students and parents talking about the future, involved in subject selection and eventual employment or training;*
- *being there when needed, sometimes after hours; empowering by giving information re career development issues;*
- *providing accurate information which is precise and concise;*
- *the regular communication between our industry services team and the parents of our students is key in the effectiveness of our parental engagement;*
- *SET plan interviews and involving the parents in the child's choices;*
- *being a presence at as many parental gatherings as I can (e.g. parent/teacher meetings); subject selection meetings, social occasions at the college; also targeting parents with newsletters;*
- *having an indigenous representative to build relationships with parents; working as part of a multi-disciplinary team;*
- *flexibility and responding to needs;*
- *the year level contact points with parents to include them in the discussions and development of their child's learning program as their child progresses through Yr 8, 10 and 12;*
- *the most effective aspects are the ability to collaborate and gain the best outcome for each and every student; guest speaker sessions at Career Breakfast, assemblies or in class; career expos which parents/students can attend; career emails and newsletters.*

In relation to these reported successful aspects of parental engagement, a number of indicators of evidence of success were also cited, which included indicators of:

Increased Parent Efficacy and "Social Capital":

- *growing data base of potential work experience placements; parent and teacher agreement on pastoral care and career exploration;*
- *parents who attend are grateful and able to assist their child in making decisions;*
- *parents are fully informed and can assist their child in making informed decisions. These decisions are also taken collaboratively to ensure that the expertise of all parties involved is utilised. This models the decision making process for our students as it encourages them to consider multiple factors when deciding on career choices;*
- *shown by increased parental feedback in PLP; increased parent participation in work experience program; industry visitors Year 9.*

Enhanced Pathways and Academic Outcomes:

- *evidence of success can be shown by our 100% graduation rate, with 70% of students entering university, 20% going to training institutes, and the remainder entering employment. Further evidence is the increasing number of students taking up VET and increasing numbers of parents offering work experience opportunities/work placements;*
- *the evidence for this is the fact that students have a clearer pathway with parental support;*
- *successful completion rates and clarified career pathways and frequently part time work or apprenticeships for those students;*
- *reduction in subject changes;*
- *tailored transitions;*
- *students achieving their proposed pathway with parental support; parents attending events and sharing their stories;*
- *evidence of outcomes are marked increase in Yr 12 career counselling interviews, students applying the tertiary pathway knowledge gained in Yr 10, 11 and 12, and already having mapped out appropriate post-secondary pathways for themselves, often in consultation with their parents;*
- *several students who have struggled with mainstream learning have successfully gained School Based Apprenticeships which has kept them at school and engaged in learning;*
- *reporting has shown that our students have higher rates of employment immediately following the completion of secondary school when compared to other schools and the state in general. This suggests that our method of engaging parents in career development and our model of training students is effective in young people gaining employment and continuing in that industry.*

Positive Feedback from Parents and Students:

- *happy parents, positive feedback from Principal regarding satisfaction of parents and students;*
- *main evidence is positive feedback from parents;*
- *large numbers of attendees at career expos, parent info nights; ongoing contact with Careers Advisor; positive emails from parents and staff; personal conversations.*

Of course, these indicators of success are generally either anecdotal or broad indicators of academic engagement and learning success that can't necessarily be attributed to parental engagement activities alone.

It is possible to suggest that feedback on parental engagement strategies—where these exist—could be more systematically collected to demonstrate outcomes more clearly. Of course, while many educators would feel—possibly quite rightfully—that their parental engagement work is

having an impact on learning outcomes, it is not currently possible with any rigour to attribute improved academic or career outcomes to any particular model of parental engagement activity identified as part of this survey.

2.9 Key Barriers

Respondents were also asked to describe any particular barriers they observed to effective parental engagement in young people's career development. The following areas were cited:

Communication, time and other logistical barriers:

- *language barriers; and parent unwillingness to be involved due to less than positive schooling experiences;*
- *time; parents and career advisors do not have time to meet; and parents have low attendance at career info sessions;*
- *time to speak with them; need more staff to do the work; need more interesting programs; i.e. engaging video clips and other info;*
- *lack of good communication between young people and their parents generally; lack of commitment to career development by the college;*
- *time, busy lives etc.;*
- *apathy, language, role models;*
- *time;*
- *time poor parents, shift work rosters which preclude some parents from attending events;*
- *transport to school;*
- *both parents working; social commitments; break down of family relationships; time availability;*
- *the key barriers in engaging parents in the career development of young people is their availability (many families spend little time together due to work commitments).*

Lack of awareness of career development, career information and pathways:

- *the idea that uni is the be all and end all; and time constraints;*
- *parents themselves having had poor career assistance makes them particularly hard to reach;*
- *lack of knowledge of current labour market information; lack of understanding of what career development is; some parents see this as responsibility of school, not their responsibility;*
- *lack of knowledge about diverse educational options and pathways;*

- *parental awareness of the depth of the concept of career development as opposed to career;*
- *the opportunity to ensure that parents get the latest and most up-to-date information about career choices. This includes awareness of tertiary pathways and training/entrance pathways/fees; and understanding of current labour markets/trends/opportunities;*
- *high expectations and sometimes unwise choices for their children; opening their eyes to occupations other than Medicine, Physiotherapy, Law and Engineering;*
- *multi-generations of unemployment;*
- *parental level of education;*
- *ignorance, attitudes that have not grown with the times;*
- *lack of knowledge about existing and emerging opportunities in the workforce. Many parents believe their children should follow the same path as they did and will exclude other possible options, simply as they do not know how the system of training and education currently works and the alternative methods for achieving similar outcomes.*

Evidently, significant barriers exist to effective parental engagement for a number schools and learning institutions. Not surprisingly, the chief of these barriers is perceived to be time and the busy-ness of parents, whose working life or other responsibilities preclude them from being able to be present at school events or to engage with various messages that schools might try to communicate to parents by a range of means.

The other chief barrier seems to be the level of career development awareness of parents themselves, whereby activity or involvement in their child's learning and transition process is eschewed as irrelevant, or at least occurs in potentially misguided and unhelpful ways. The tendency in the responses to focus on parental deficits (i.e. *lack of knowledge and awareness, ignorance etc.*) is obviously an indicator of some frustration in this area, but is also potentially unhelpful in trying to formulate solutions to problems of parental engagement.

Some of the ideas suggested on how to address these barriers included:

Increasing staff, time or resources dedicated to career development:

- *full time careers advisor positions;*
- *more time and staff in careers; and more great resources;*
- *a more formalised approach to career development in the college curriculum; difficult to do given the demands of all the other subjects;*
- *access to resources;*
- *more information sessions and interviews from Yr 8 to structure career development; improved focus on career development in primary schools;*
- *more information evenings so that parents can attend and feel comfortable in seeking further information.*

General Awareness Raising of Career Development Issues:

- *need first to engage students to help engage parents;*
- *advertising campaigns to promote importance of career development; funding to allow schools to promote CD; make career education part of the national curriculum;*
- *change of attitude amongst the community;*
- *more publicity about other careers;*
- *ultimately parental engagement is by individual choice. The availability of all information is easily accessible to those who choose to become involved. There is a lot of information and education around the benefits of early engagement for better career outcomes, available from a wide variety of industries, advertising and information providers;*
- *the only way to address this barrier is through education. Parents need to be educated on how to best assist their child to make career choices and need to understand the range of options available. One way to deliver this would be to involve parents in the SET Plan process in schools and have specific sessions with career advisors to have the options and process explained.*

Improving Access to Parents through Partnership and Enhanced Information Strategies

- *possibly a community service that families are already connected with to communicate with parents, rather than always relying on schools;*
- *being able to access parents when their children are in high school to provide them with basic career education tools/skills;*
- *repetition of information dissemination;*
- *a discussion paper citing best practice examples would be good. Even doing this survey has helped me reflect on my practice;*
- *provide relevant and engaging information, run sessions over a range of times, provide time for individual appointments;*
- *maybe focusing on the development of positive rapport with students so that they carry these memories into their own parenting lives and are willing to engage in positive and proactive ways with school career programs. Positive relationships are the stimulus for best educational outcomes;*
- *the area of parents not having the time to engage with their children is beyond the scope of an educational institution, although, engagement with parents can be increased through the use of technology as an alternative form of communication.*

Raising awareness and the profile of career development, and providing more information and resources to enhance parents' role within that, is seen as key to the addressing of barriers to engagement. Although the issue of time is largely seen as unyielding, it seems that raising awareness and changing attitudes could also help encourage more parents to prioritise engagement with their child's learning and transition, but there are also perhaps limits to how much control many parents may or may not have over their time to begin with. It is surprising in

this sense that not more mention was made of the use of technology—particularly digital and social media—as a way of engaging parents who are time poor.

But it is also possible to argue that without a shift in awareness or consciousness of career development, that even the use of technology will not be able bridge the gap to engagement for many parents.

2.10 Bandaid or Deficit Model

There was some evidence in the returned surveys to suggest that a band-aid model of parental engagement still predominates in most Australian schools and other places of learning.

These are approaches that are focused on discrete, one-off events or interventions, typically targeted at points of potential stress in the schooling or transition process, and in the case of students who are seen to be “at-risk” of not making a successful transition from school to further learning or employment.

Most parental engagement strategies were concentrated in the middle-upper years of high school, usually from Year 9-10 onwards. The rationale for this focus was due to the issues of subject selection for university that pertain around this time:

“Our career program starts in Year 7, but parental engagement does not start until Year 10 (as this is when parents start having interest in child’s future pathway).”

“Main focus is Year 10 (15-16) with parents invited to be part of SET plan process.”

“The target has been to provide information for Year 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12 so that both the students and parents can understand how tertiary study can assist in future career decisions.”

This discrete, limited approach to parental engagement—that is, involving parents only at critical points of subject selection or transition—is shown in the literature to be considerably under-utilising the potential resources and capital that parents could bring to young people’s career development (Hartung, Porfeli and Vondracek 2005).

Such a model of parental engagement—while no doubt better than nothing—is seen in the international literature as representing rather outdated and “deficit” model thinking, rather than a “strengths-based” model which would seek to fully harness the talents, knowledge and experience of parents, whereby they have the opportunity to contribute to not only the career development of their own child, but an entire cohort of similarly placed young people.

Some respondents did, however, also indicate the *need* for a broader understanding of the role parental engagement could play in relation to career development issues:

“It is necessary to target all age groups: we believe it is critical that parents are aware of what their children are talking about career wise.”

“It is important to start the engagement process at around 12-13, well before the subject selection process: parents role modelling an active interest in the importance of learning and development of learning pathways is an important stimulus for student motivation and commitment to their learning program in secondary schooling.”

“As parents are predominantly responsible for providing their child's education, parents are involved from the earliest interaction with our college. We begin engaging parents when their child is in the early stages of high school, as this is the time when many of the subject choices that lead to apprenticeships need to be made.”

“Some programs will be explicitly ‘parental engagement programs’, others will be part of the culture and behaviour of the school – fulfilling many of the educational objectives mentioned but existing without the formality of a program title.”

There is clearly an awareness of the need for more comprehensive and holistic parental engagement strategies, but in many cases it seems as though most institutions simply do not have the time, resources, capacity, structures or the means to engage parents meaningfully, beyond the conventional channels of “information provision” (newsletters, information sessions, etc).

3 INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

The foregoing account of parental engagement strategies, limited in scope though it is, provides perhaps a broad snapshot of the current development of parental engagement strategies in Australia. The purpose of this section is to put that snapshot within the broader context of international parental engagement strategies and research.

Given the relative newness of outcomes research into the effectiveness of career development practices internationally, it is hardly surprising that systematic research into strategies of parental engagement that aim to enhance career development outcomes is still in a state of considerable infancy: “there is very little to be found on the combined topics of parent/community involvement, college/career readiness, and student achievement” (SEDL, 1; 2012).

However, more prevalent as a subject of research, and the investment of considerable resources and effort on the part of governments, is the general issue of the involvement of parents in young people’s learning and developmental process more broadly.

The general theme of parental involvement in young people’s learning and development shares a number of areas of concern that are of relevance to the career development agenda. And while there are a number of parental engagement programs, initiatives and resources throughout the world that do specifically target career development issues, there are also many jurisdictions in which the concept of “career” can be seen as included within broader issues of young people’s engagement with learning, emotional and psychological well-being, community connectedness, and successful transition from school to further education and training or work. Of course, many of these aspects of parental engagement are connected with career development, but in some cases may not be explicitly characterised as such.

There is a well-established body of international knowledge, stretching back to the 1960s, which demonstrates a positive link between parent involvement and enhanced academic performance and learning outcomes for young people (Nye, Turner and Schwartz 2006).

Numerous studies have been conducted in the past 20 years which have shown that “students with involved parents, no matter what their income or background”, are more likely to:

- earn high grades and test scores and enrol in higher level programs
- pass their classes, earn credits, and be promoted
- attend school regularly; and
- graduate and go on to postsecondary education (US Department of Education, 2004, 1).

Moreover, a range of recent research regarding the creation of learning cultures that effectively cultivate student preparedness for further learning and career orientedness often mentions the important role played by family (Bangser 2008; Bottoms, Young and Han 2009; Cunningham, Erisman and Looney 2007; Dounay 2006; Hattie 2009; Krieder, Caspe, Kennedy and Weiss 2007; MacDonald and Dorr 2006; McDonough 2004; Rowan-Kenyon, Bell and Perna 2008; Wimberley and Noeth 2004).

In some countries, the growing body of research advocating the link between parental involvement and enhanced student engagement and achievement has led to the development of the implementation of legislation and policy which explicitly requires government funded

schools, and sometimes other civic or learning institutions, to solicit the involvement of parents in young people's schooling and developmental process. Examples include:

- The US' No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 which aims to "support the collection and dissemination to local educational agencies and schools of effective parent involvement practices [. . .] based on the most current research that meets the highest professional and technical standards [and is] geared toward lowering barriers to greater participation by parents in school planning, review, and improvement" (Agronick, Clark, O'Donnell and Stueve: 1);
- England's "Every Child Matters" policy of 2003, which "intends to put supporting parents and carers at the heart of its approach to improving children's lives where support is needed or wanted" (8). Upon its launch in 2003, the policy inaugurated a "Parenting Fund" of £25 million over a period of three years, to assist a range of services in engaging parents, including schools, health and social services and child care agencies;
- In 2006, the Scottish parliament passed the "Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act" to "encourage and support more parents to become involved." The Act seeks to do this by providing more information on what children are learning at school and how this can best be supported at home, providing more opportunities for parents to contribute to the life of the school, and by making all parents automatic members of "the Parent Forum at their child's school and will be entitled to have a say in what happens at the school". The Scottish government has also produced a "Parents as Partners in their Children's Learning Toolkit", which has been sent to every school, school board and PTA, and it contains checklists and activities to help parents and schools work together.
- In Ontario Canada, the Ministry of Education has recently (2010) introduced a Parent Engagement Policy, which articulates a vision for parental engagement in Ontario schools, identifies strategies necessary to fulfil that vision, seeks to identify and remove systemic barriers to parental engagement, promotes effective practices and identifies the roles of education partners in furthering parent engagement across the province.

However, to date, from available research, it is not clear to what extent such legislative and policy measures have had a tangible effect upon local level practices, and particularly the extent to which such investments are actually improving developmental or transitional outcomes for young people, or which types of parental engagement activity are more or less likely to achieve such enhanced outcomes. This is largely due to the lack of clear evaluation outcomes to demonstrate that the implementation of such strategies, while commendable, is actually producing enhanced outcomes for young people.

There is little doubt, throughout the research and resource literature, that parental engagement is important to enhancing student achievement and outcomes. But there is little to no actual concrete evidence to suggest that current international approaches to improving parental engagement are indeed achieving their intended outcomes.

For instance, despite almost ten years since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind policy, enshrining in legislation commitment to support parental engagement strategies in young people's schooling, a recent (2009) U.S. study across 9 urban districts in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and New York found "only a handful of identified programs" which "had at least one of the following characteristics":

- Parent involvement in children’s education and academic achievement as a primary goal.
- Articulated objectives, with specific activities to meet these objectives.
- Sufficient descriptions of activities to support replication.
- Ongoing and coordinated implementation of one or more strategies. (Agronick et al 2009, ii)

Furthermore, the study goes on to conclude that “the programs did not necessarily target parent populations that have been difficult to engage or whose children may be at higher academic risk” (ibid ii; Vaden-Kiernan and McManus 2005).

Therefore, the effectiveness of such measures in making a substantial impact on parental engagement practices at the local level is not at all clear, given such findings and the broader dearth of evaluation results to demonstrate the capacity of such initiatives to effectively raise the status of parental engagement, or to demonstrate positive benefits on student achievement and career-readiness.²⁵

Despite this lack of causal evidence, a survey of international sources reveals a range of local initiatives which provide perhaps some indicative benchmarks of the development of parental engagement strategies internationally.

These accounts of local level initiatives sometimes take the form of “case studies”, similar to those that have been developed as part of this project.

- In Scotland, a high school has introduced monthly parent focus groups, with 20 parents chosen at random and invited to attend the focus groups, which have addressed such key areas as communication, transition and infrastructure issues²⁶;
- In England, the Children and Young People Services Directorate of the Shropshire County Council has developed a Parent and Carers Engagement strategy (2007-2010) to ensure a coordinated approach to involving parents across a range of services targeted at young people, including schools, colleges and a range of community services offered by the council;²⁷
- In Ontario, Canada, under its parental involvement policy, a parent partnership initiative has been implemented to increase the involvement of culturally and linguistically diverse parents. This involved the translation of parent information and welcome packages into nine languages, a guide to multilingual literacy events for schools to use on literacy nights, and parent information forum for Muslim families on various topics such as supporting literacy at home, assessments, evaluations, report cards, and the Ontario curriculum;
- In Texas, a “citizen schools” initiative has been developed to bring community volunteers/”citizens” into schools to share career information and professional expertise

²⁵ To our knowledge no systematic evaluation of parental engagement activity has occurred in the UK or Canada.

²⁶ Other Scottish examples may be found on this site:
<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/parentzone/getinvolved/sharingideas/achangeofculture.asp>

²⁷ [www.shropshire.gov.uk/.../paper-3.2-parent-engagement-strategy- 2...](http://www.shropshire.gov.uk/.../paper-3.2-parent-engagement-strategy-2...)

with students. The initiative is designed to promote the support of “many caring adults” for each student, and to build a relationship with the community surrounding the school via ongoing communication and partnership.²⁸

- Also in Ontario Canada, a parent engagement audit has been designed and implemented to identify barriers to, and increase opportunities for, parent engagement. The audit, designed as a system survey, is distributed to parents and staff at the end of the school year. The audit takes the needs of families and the surrounding community into account, with the goal of increasing parent engagement in a variety of ways;²⁹
- The state of Ohio in the US has adopted the Ohio Parent Involvement Law, which requires that each Board of Education located in the state of Ohio adopt a policy to provide parents an opportunity to be “actively involved in their children’s education.” The law also states that parents must be informed of: the importance of parental involvement in directly affecting the success of their children’s educational efforts; how and when to assist their children in and support their children’s classroom learning activities; techniques, strategies and skills to use at home to improve their children’s development as future responsible adult members of society. (Bitsko et al 2)
- In San Diego, the development of “Dad’s Clubs” in over 25 area elementary schools, where male caregivers “are encouraged to participate in classrooms and in school related activities [. . .] This program developed out of research by the US Department of Education that shows that a father’s involvement plays an equally important and powerful role in the academic success of children as a mother’s involvement”.³⁰
- In Kentucky, the formation of an institute “to train parents on how to be leaders in educational issues”; participants in this program self-select to be involved, and represent a diversity of socioeconomic backgrounds. At the training session, “participants acquire the necessary knowledge and skills needed to advocate for educational reform in Kentucky. In particular, participants become informed about Kentucky’s educational system, their rights as parents to be active participants and decision makers in their children’s education, how to become advocate for the academic success of children, and how to motivate other parents to become involved and to take on leadership roles in educational issues. Participants are required to develop and lead projects designed to improve school conditions.”³¹
- A New Mexico statewide collaborative organisation called “ENLACE” (Engaging Latino Communities for Education Initiative), in which community members help other parents assist their children’s learning and transitions, via three main themes:

²⁸ <http://www.citizenschools.org/texas/>

²⁹ For more examples of parental engagement occurring under Ontario’s parental engagement policy, see: Parents in Partnership: A Parent Engagement Policy for Ontario Schools, Ministry of Education 2010.

³⁰ For more info see: <http://www.saysandiego.org/programs/programdetails.asp?id=24>

³¹ www.gaappleseed.org/docs/other_notable_strategies.pdf

- Strengthening supports for students through mentoring, tutoring, and leadership development
- Changing educational institutions by engaging families and communities in partnerships
- Creating a seamless pathway to college through improved cultural literacy and teacher preparation to ensure smooth transitions

As of 2009, involvement in ENLACE family centres reached a peak of 56 schools, 74 workshops, and 30, 000 family member contacts.³²

- In New Zealand, a strategy employed by a rural school to engage with the “whanau” (local Maori culture and community), which they do by holding social evenings at the school one day every week, with a special community “marae” (meeting space) complex built for this purpose, and involvement of parents in a range school activities, including “waka ama” (traditional canoe sports) and traditional celebrations.
- Also in New Zealand, an inner city school has developed a home-school-community partnership initiative to help the school connect with local Maori and Pasifika families, and the new and emerging Somali community. In this initiative, staff, students and families share their visions for the future at family nights, students undertake volunteer activities within the community, and parent conversation days are held where teachers are available for conversations with parents and students.³³

This is just a sample of the many programs and initiatives that can be found to be in operation in various local jurisdictions around the world.

The evidence of initiatives underway in English-speaking first world countries would therefore seem to indicate that there is a considerable amount of activity occurring in the parental engagement space. However, there is a decided lack of evidence to suggest the effectiveness or otherwise of these strategies, beyond anecdotal self-reporting. Indeed, a recent US synthesis of existing research on parental engagement strategies concludes:

there is [. . .] limited rigorous research evaluating the impact of parental or community involvement programs beyond elementary school (Agronick, Clark, O’Donnell and Steuve 2009; Castambis 2001). As is often the case in the field of education, existing literature consists primarily of descriptive or correlational studies rather than robust experimental research. (SEDL 1)

Also, the extent to which these strategies are explicitly *career-specific* strategies varies considerably, in the sense of using recognised career development frameworks or rationales as part of their engagement strategy. Nevertheless, most of these initiatives target areas of concern that have clear relevance to advancing the career development agenda: increasing access to education and training for disadvantaged groups, fostering commitment to learning throughout entire communities to support young people, and spreading information and awareness of learning and career pathways deeper throughout the population.

³² For more info see: <http://enlacenm.unm.edu/>

³³ For further examples NZ examples see: <http://www2.careers.govt.nz/educators-practitioners/planning/engagement/case-studies/>

4 THE AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT

4.1 Overview

Unlike the United States and the UK, in Australia national legislation is not employed as a means to ensure the involvement of parents in the schooling, learning and career development of young people.

The development of parental engagement in Australia has instead focused on the promotion of advisory and guidance approaches that provide tools and frameworks that try to underpin a culture of parental engagement. This culture of parental engagement has grown alongside the development of a career development culture over the past 10 years, which includes programs and resources designed to engage parents in thinking about career development issues, and which provide advice and information on how they can be of assistance in supporting their child's career transitions.

However, in many cases parental engagement and career development initiatives and resources have been developed in isolation from one another, and specifically designed "parental engagement in career development" programs or resources are relatively rare throughout the Australian context.

Most parental engagement *in career development* strategies pursued in Australia to date have tended to take their lead from initiatives pursued in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. Most are designed to assist parents to understand education, training and work choices so that they can support their older children's transitions from school to work. They typically fall into one of four major categories:

- Information sessions/workshops³⁴
- Career exhibitions/expos
- Print-based or digital career information materials³⁵
- Dedicated web pages for parents on education, training and career information websites.

By and large, the "career" focus of these strategies is concentrated at the latter end of the educative cycle, when students are in the final 2-3 years of high school, and must make decisions regarding subjects to enable entry to post-secondary education, or the consideration of other pathways as appropriate. As we saw earlier in our current survey of schools, the issue of subject selection still seems to be the main impetus to parental engagement in career for many schools.

Prior to this time, most parental engagement activities are focused not upon career development *per se*, but rather upon areas such as building literacy and numeracy, emotional resilience and/or contributing to the maintenance or increase of the school's "social capital."

The focus of career-development related parental engagement upon the later years of schooling has long been the subject of criticism by career development theorists, who insist that the concept of career development should be extended to earlier stages of child education and

³⁴ This includes PACTS, PACP and Lasting gifts workshops

³⁵ This includes JobGuide and the range of downloadable print materials made available on government websites ("Parents Talking Career Choices", etc).

development and—by implication—parental engagement strategies targeting those developmental stages (Watson and McMahon 2003).

However, general parental engagement strategies designed to engage parents in their children's schooling and learning process more broadly are pursued at all levels of schooling via a range of methods, and this has indeed been an area of significant focus and growing concern for national and state/territory education and schools policy over the last decade or so. This is in response to national and international research—as outlined above—that has for some time been making a clear link between improved student motivation, achievement and career outcomes as a result of parents being involved—in some way—in their child's learning and developmental process.

4.2 The Family-Schools Partnerships Framework

Indeed, one of the key policy directions of the COAG reform agenda in relation to boosting young people's attainment and transitions has been to pursue strategies for boosting parental engagement. A key national framework document that has arisen out of this agenda is the Family-Schools Partnership Framework (2008), which was developed by the Australian Government in consultation with the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO), the Australian Parents' Council (APC), Principals' Associations and government and non-government school authorities throughout Australia.

The Framework contains:

- A vision for improved partnerships between Australian families and schools;
- A set of principles to guide families and schools in developing partnerships;
- Seven key dimensions of effective family-school partnerships;
- A set of strategies providing practical guidance to school communities and school systems in implementing and fostering family-school partnerships. (3)

It is intended to provide schools and school leaders (both staff and parents), families and other interested parties with ideas and possible strategies on how to work together more effectively. The latest (2008) version of the Framework has not yet been subject to formal evaluation, and so its impact is at this stage unclear.³⁶

However, an earlier evaluation (2005/06) of a draft form of the Framework—which forms the basis for the current framework—found that partnerships between families and schools can:

- Improve educational outcomes for students
- Positively alter school culture
- Stimulate self-growth among parents
- Contribute to the building of social capital in the community
- Enhance the professional rewards for principals and school staff (Lonergan 4-5).

While not explicitly focused on career development *per se*, the vision, principles, dimensions and strategies of the Family-School Partnership Framework share a clear affinity with the career development agenda, with their emphasis upon engagement in learning, creating “learning

³⁶ Although it is interesting to note that none of the survey respondents mention using it.

communities”, encouraging lifelong learning, and creating connections between the various stakeholders in young people’s learning. While not always couched in the language of career development, the Family-School Partnerships Framework can be very much seen as compatible with a career development perspective on enhancing young people’s learning, development and transitions.

4.3 Parental Engagement and Career Development

The growth of the parental engagement agenda has covertly introduced career development values into the broader marketplace of educational ideas. At the same time, the development of a career development culture throughout Australia in the past ten years—with the development of the *Australian Blueprint for Career Development*, the putting in place of professional standards and guidelines, the growth of career development services at schools and in other institutions—has effectively also “built in” parental engagement to the delivery of career services to young people. These quality frameworks emphasise the relational nature of career development, and the need to access one’s “allies” (which significantly includes parents) in the process of exploring learning, work and career options.³⁷

The parental engagement and career development agendas are therefore very much intertwined, and although resources designed specifically to engage parents in career development are rare, the many generic parental engagement initiatives and resources that exist throughout Australia can still be seen as having important career development implications in terms of engaging parents in young people’s learning, development and transitions. A scan of recent literature from the various states and territories in Australia thus reveals considerable activity and research occurring in the parental engagement space, but—with only a handful of exceptions—no substantial presence of *career development focused* parental engagement strategies or resources.

The Family-School Partnerships Framework itself contains a number of case studies that demonstrate a range of approaches to parental engagement being pursued throughout Australia, which have implicit career development benefits:

- A school in south-western Sydney where 90% of families are from NESB backgrounds, where measures have been taken to overcome language and cultural barriers to engagement for many parents. This was pursued through a combination of English language assistance and parent excursions, which contributed to building the social networks and capital of the parents, enabling them to feel empowered and confident in interacting with the school. (22-23)
- A middle class Melbourne school with a high proportion of professional parents with limited time and capacity to contribute to school activities, where a Family Maths program was developed to enable working parents to attend four sessions over four nights to help them to assist their children with maths homework: “By skilling up parents in the way maths is taught these days, coupled with encouraging parents to teach their children in ways they themselves had learnt maths, the school presented parents with an enticing mixture of respect for their own learning and a chance to learn something new, while at the same time fulfilling their desire to give their children the best start in life” (24-25).

³⁷ Guiding Principles for Career Development Services and Career information Products, Principle 6: collaborate with other facilitators of career development (11); The “high five of Career Development includes the principle: “access your allies”.

- A secondary school in one of Perth’s most economically and socially deprived areas, which sought to bridge significant cultural divides in the school community through a combination of social events and parent forums, the former a series of breakfast events at which traditional foods are served, “giving those who attend a small taste of the other cultures with whom they share the neighbourhood”, and the latter sessions run by the school psychologist “where parents can discuss issues relating to their children and raise any matters they wish about what is happening in the school”. In addition to providing a bridge between parents and the school, it has evolved into a source of educational advancement for parents, with some parents expressing a wish to renew their own schooling, and referrals provided to the local TAFE (28);
- A secondary school in an isolated WA community, where 40% of students come from Indigenous families and another 10% from Muslim families. Reliance on the mining industry, the isolation of the town and the harshness of the climate creates a transient population amongst both students and teachers, making effective parental engagement a challenge. This is done through a breakfast program, visiting Indigenous communities to show parents what children have done in school (rather than conventional parent-teacher meetings), holding parent forums to discuss communication issues, and employing a number of Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers to maintain relationships with Indigenous parents. (30-31);
- A highly multicultural school community in the suburbs of Adelaide, which sought to create social networks among parents via a two-tier “Buddy system”, personal contact with parents by the project coordinator, and “cook/talk/share” activities where different cultural groups host culinary events for the school community: “the project has enabled this rich multicultural environment to create effective linkages that appear to be relevant and stimulating higher levels of participation” (32-33).

These examples demonstrate a range of approaches to parental engagement that have clear implications for career development outcomes, in that engaging parents in young people’s education itself is widely believed to yield career development benefits.

4.4 Identified State-Based Strategies

While most states and territories have information or web resources designed to assist parents in helping their children at school³⁸, information on specific state-based parental engagement strategies is not particularly in evidence in most jurisdictions in Australia, nor has much systematic research into state-level parental engagement activities been undertaken to date. Parental engagement workshops have been developed and promoted in a number of state jurisdictions in the past (WA, SA, Victoria), but uptake of these materials by schools has been on a voluntary basis, and information on uptake and use of these materials has not been clearly documented—at least in a publicly available form—and little is known about their current use

³⁸ <http://www.det.nt.gov.au/parents-community>

<http://det.wa.edu.au/schoolsandyou/detcms/navigation/helping-your-child-learn/before-school/?oid=Category-id-4002292>

<http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/portal/community.asp?group=matters&id=beinginvolved>

and impact at the local level. This is clearly an area in which further work remains to be done, in order to gain a clearer picture of what is actually happening in terms of parental engagement strategies and practices at the state and local level.

Unique in this respect is a recent survey—conducted in 2011 by LLEN providers in the Central Ranges area of Victoria—investigating in some detail the current parental engagement strategies being pursued by 54 schools in the region. While its findings cannot be extrapolated wholesale, they are perhaps suggestive of the current state of Australia’s development in terms of forming a culture of parental engagement.

The survey found that, of the 54 schools surveyed:

- 43% had a parent involvement plan;
- 19% had one in process;
- 21% were unsure if they had such a plan;
- 17% said they did not currently have a parental involvement plan (Central Ranges LLEN 3).

While no baseline data exists to allow comparison for estimation of growth since the introduction of the Family-Schools Partnership Framework or the introduction of the *Blueprint*, these figures would seem to suggest that a “culture” of parental engagement is still very much in the process of development in schools in this region, with less than half having in place a formal approach to parental involvement. And while it is clearly a localised study, one might surmise with some confidence that a similar situation might apply in many regions throughout Australia.

When asked to specify their methods of parental engagement, the most widely employed strategy was a weekly newsletter, with 95% of respondents indicating that this was a key part of their parental involvement activities.

Other high rating parental engagement features in the survey were parent representation on school council (87.8%) and information sessions held once during the school term (79%). The next highest rating activities were yearly guest speaker sessions involving parents (57%), parent involvement in yearly school fete/festival (55%), parents’ clubs (55%). PACTS workshops were used by only around 40% of respondents (ibid 6).

When asked to rate the perceived usefulness of these strategies on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being most effective and 5 being the least, the PACTS workshops were rated moderately ineffective, with over half of those who used the workshops rating their effectiveness between 3-5 (i.e. moderately effective to least effective) (ibid 8).

The most effective identified form of parental involvement was seen as parent representation on the school council, with 45% of respondents scoring this strategy as being 1 (most effective) (ibid 8).

This is an interesting finding, since most of the research literature into effective parental engagement strategies is equivocal or even negative about the impact of such “involvement in school governance” activities upon student achievement and transition outcomes: “No evidence has identified a relationship between parental engagement in school decision-making processes and improved student outcomes” (Educational Transformations viii; also Desforges and Abouchaar 2003).

Also of interest is the reliance on newsletters as a main lever of parental engagement, and perceptions of their usefulness (75% rated their usefulness between 3 and 1), which is contrary to the findings of research in this area: “Many schools regularly use these methods to provide parents with up-to-date information about activities and programs. Despite the prevalence of schools using newsletters, there is little international or Australian research to show the impact that this method of communication may have on student outcomes” (Educational Transformations 15-16). Most of the current literature on effective parental engagement activities insists that while newsletters may perform a useful information function for some parents, they do not in themselves constitute an adequate strategy for *engaging* parents:

Effective forms of two-way communication between school and home are central to the successful development of family-school partnerships. Communication needs to change from occasional, one-way and socio-culturally homogenous communication to frequent, two-way and culturally sensitive interaction. It requires much more than informing parents by the school newsletter. (Saulwick Muller Social Research 22)

Also significant is the low level of efficacy attributed—by those who use them—to the PACTS workshops, which are perhaps one of the more developed parental engagement tools in use in Australia currently, particularly in relation to career development. This finding is also in contrast to the only available external evaluation of these workshops—undertaken by Bedson and Perkins in 2006—which found that the workshops did deliver an important service to parents, by informing them of current career development and transition issues to help allay their concerns, although the evaluation did raise questions as to how accessible these workshops might be to more disadvantaged parents in the school community.

This Victorian regional report also found that in terms of day-to-day communication with parents, the most used form of communication was the simple telephone, which garnered a 60% response rate of “most utilised” on a scale of 1-5; next most used was “in person through the office”, which garnered a 38% rate of the #1 “most utilised” rating. Moderately used were parent teacher interviews (33.3% rated #3) and email (28.9% rated #3), while parent/family forums were least used (34.1% rated #5 as being “least utilised”) (Central Ranges LLEN 10).

The Victorian report also asked representatives to identify the barriers to engagement for parents, the chief of which included parent work commitments, lack of information, lack of confidence in ability to assist their child, and prior negative educational experiences (ibid 13).

The findings of this Victorian survey—again, while highly localised—do raise some interesting questions regarding the impacts of the Family Schools Partnerships Framework to date, since it seems as though the predominant tendency in parental engagement strategies is still largely that of passive provision of information, and not particularly proactive or collaborative strategies of engagement. Where more complex strategies are used—such as the PACTS workshops—they have not been attributed a high level of efficacy.

The limited nature of parental engagement strategies currently in use in Australia in relation to *career development* was also demonstrated by a relatively recent (2007) review of parental engagement in Queensland state schools.

Unlike most jurisdictions in Australia, parental engagement is underpinned in Queensland by legislation, as the *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006* makes it a requirement for schools to

provide prospective students and their parents with an ‘enrolment agreement,’ which sets out the mutual rights and obligations of school and home:

the Act recognises the need to involve parents in a closer working relationship with the school and provides for the opportunity of parents meeting with their child’s teachers at least twice a year to discuss the educational progress of their children. (Educational Transformations 3)

The Queensland Government has also developed a number of initiatives “designed specifically to increase involvement by Indigenous Australians from Cape York and Torres Strait in the education of their schools”. *Bound for Success: Education Strategy for Torres Strait*, and *Bound for Success: Education Strategy Cape York*, were released in 2005 and 2006 with the aim of “stimulating ideas on how to overcome the ‘economic and social challenges’ for Indigenous students in far North Queensland” (ibid 4). These legislative and policy initiatives provide the framework for parental engagement activities in the state, and indeed it is interesting to note the high number of responses from Queensland we received to our current survey of parental engagement strategies, in light of this particular policy environment surrounding parental engagement initiatives.

A number of examples of parental engagement are cited as a series of case studies appended to the review:

- A Brisbane high school with a culturally diverse student cohort that is successfully using modern technologies to enhance its engagement with parents, including the use of a 24-hour phone and text message line, “established so that parents can call or send a text message at any time” (72). The school also regularly uses email to contact parents, with the “read receipt” function operating to overcome the concern “that parents may not receive notices when they are sent home in other ways” (72). The school also employs translators and interpreters to communicate with parents from diverse linguistic backgrounds.
- A large primary school on the Sunshine Coast which employs a range of mechanisms to connect with parents, including newsletters, school reports and parent-teacher interviews. The school offers additional meetings to inform parents of any significant school developments, and parents are also invited at least once a term to come to events held for each grade level to showcase the students’ work. Each class also has a volunteer parent representative who facilitates contact between the parents of students in that class and the school administration. Parents report that the parent representative initiative has been highly successful since it enables parents to ask questions or voice concerns to another parent rather than the school administration. (81)
- A secondary school on the outskirts of Brisbane which employs a “parent liaison officer” responsible for assisting new parents, organizing volunteers and arranging monthly parent morning teas, where parents can meet with each other and speak with the principal in an informal atmosphere. The school also employs house group teachers and year level coordinators who also act as a key point of contact for students and parents throughout their entire time at the school: “Many parents indicated that the informal communication with teachers, year level coordinators and house group teachers are more effective than

report cards and parent teacher interviews at keeping them informed about their child's progress." (86)

- A provincial special school for students with a range of needs which range from mild intellectual to multiple severe physical and intellectual disabilities, which uses a range of methods to engage parents, including a daily communication book, collaboration on the design of Individual Education Plans (IEPs), and weekly newsletter. The Parents and Citizen's Association also provides a strong support network for the school and parents. (91)
- A rural secondary school with 38% of students from an Indigenous background, with an Indigenous community liaison officer who plays an important role in maintaining strong relationships between the school and indigenous members of the school community. Members of the school community also present a regular program on local radio to inform members of the community about school activities and events. This last mechanism has been a useful strategy in reaching parents without telephone or internet access. (96-97)

As these examples demonstrate, although schools are engaging with parents in a range of ways, an explicit focus upon enhancing parental involvement in young people's *career development* is not readily evident. This perhaps reflects the way in which career development itself is not explicitly included in the school curriculum, but is more often than not "buried" in other areas of the curriculum or offered as an "extra-curricular" activity. As a result, career development is often not a specific topic of concern within parental engagement strategies.

However, to the extent that increased parental engagement is held to enhance motivation, engagement with learning and achievement, then any strategy which has the ability to increase parental engagement in young people's education will ostensibly enhance career development outcomes, even if the engagement program itself does not incorporate a specific "careers" focus.

Other recent parental engagement initiatives uncovered by our national search include the recent NSW initiative "Positively Engaging Parents"³⁹, which is a parental engagement resource designed specifically for "schools working with parents of students with additional learning needs", but is also cited as "having relevance for all parents" (SLSP 2010, 2).

Again we can note here the tendency to develop parental engagement programs as a response to students with "special needs", rather than seeing parental engagement as a mainstream issue from which all students could potentially benefit. And again, the resource does not have an explicit career development focus, but is rather based upon the citation of evidence "that parental involvement makes a significant difference to educational achievement. When schools and parents are able to work together in constructive and meaningful ways much can be achieved" (ibid 2).

The resource explores the areas of communication, involvement and support "where school teams can promote and encourage the engagement of parents as they work towards building a genuine culture of collaboration" (ibid 3). In each of these areas, the resource provides areas to consider "when evaluating the effectiveness of their current practice in terms of communication" (ibid 4).

³⁹ Positively Engaging Parents. School Learning Support Program, NSW Department of Education and Training, 2010.

While the resource does not have an explicit “careers” focus, the section on “involvement” does include, as one area of consideration, “transition points” which contains the following questions for discussion:

- Are parents actively involved in preparation for enrolment, transfer or transition?
- Does the school recognise and utilise parental knowledge and expertise? How is this conveyed to staff?
- Do parents have an opportunity to meet staff prior to their child’s enrolment?
- Does the school seek information from the student’s previous institution that will assist the student?
- Is there a procedure to ensure that information about a student’s learning needs and support is effectively shared at transition points? (ibid 15)

However, it is not known to what extent this resource has been taken up within schools, or how successful it has been in assisting schools to engage parents in young people’s career development.

Another significant parental engagement resource uncovered as part of our national web search is the Council of Catholic School Parents’ “Partner 4 Learning” website, which provides its own framework and resources to support partnership in Catholic school communities: <http://www.partners4learning.edu.au/>

It has been designed to complement the Family-School Partnership Framework, and is funded through the Australian Government’s Smarter Schools Teacher Quality National Partnership. The site is structured according to the seven dimensions of the Family-School Partnership Framework:

- Communication
- Connecting learning at school and home
- Building community and identity
- Recognising the role of families
- Consultative decision making
- Collaborating beyond the school
- Participating

Each dimension is accompanied by suggestions for activities and downloadable resources, as well as case studies illustrating what schools have done to engage parents. Examples of case studies include:

- A parental literacy program run by a high school, which had the main aim of building the literacy capacity of students, but which had the side-effect of creating a more involved and engaged parent community, and a more open school culture (<http://www.partners4learning.edu.au/connecting-learning/fx-view-case-study.cfm?loadref=8&uuid=28337B09-0B2E-44FB-6FBE3345B1846BDA>).
- A NSW primary school with a “personnel infrastructure” plan designed to support parent and community engagement in the school, which entails a part-time Family Liaison Officer to support parents as partners in children’s learning⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Family Liaison Officers have also been noted as successful strategies utilized in England and Mauritius.

<http://www.partners4learning.edu.au/building-community/fx-view-case-study.cfm?loadref=6&uuid=B41D9B7D-2219-A8B0-B6CD2AE4D7EE53DF>)

- A regional NSW public high school that initiated a “community hub” program to build parental and community capacity and support children’s learning and social and personal development, incorporating playgroup sessions, music lessons, TAFE courses run for parents, and a “homework centre” (<http://www.partners4learning.edu.au/collaborating/fx-view-case-study.cfm?loadref=7&uuid=E84E1DB7-E6D6-0A76-848199710B437121>)

Again, while these case studies demonstrate evidence of further activity occurring in the parental engagement space, the career development focus of this activity is not readily evident. This is perhaps further indication of the extent to which, while parental engagement may be given some priority in frameworks and initiatives surrounding education and training provision, career development is not always accorded the same priority, and certainly the connection between parental engagement and career development is rarely foregrounded and promoted.

4.5 Conclusion

This overview of parental engagement strategies in operation in Australia possibly only scratches the surface in terms of the breadth, depth and diversity of parental engagement activities currently occurring throughout the country. It has been limited to evidence of examples that have been made available via reports or other publicly available documents, and perhaps provides an indicative illustration of some of the approaches that are currently being taken to improve the engagement of parents in young people’s learning and thereby potentially contribute to enhanced career development outcomes.

On the whole, however, it would seem that the pursuit of parental engagement strategies throughout Australia—with regard to career development—is still in an early state of development, with parental engagement strategies—where they do exist—being inconsistent, patchy, uncoordinated, mainly reliant on passive information and one-way modes of communication, and without an explicit careers focus.

At any rate, this overview provides a context within which to appreciate the findings of the current survey and case studies, which reveals a range of approaches to parental engagement being pursued by various learning institutions, but also evidence of a culture of parental engagement very much in the process of development, with some variation and unevenness in the extent to which institutions are able to articulate or demonstrate a strong culture of parental engagement in relation to careers. It would seem that while there is evidence of much activity and intent in this space there is, in many instances, still much room and opportunity for improvement in this area.

5 CONCLUSION: BEST PRACTICE IN PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT

The findings outlined above indicate a range of approaches to parental engagement in operation nationally and internationally which aim to achieve enhanced learning, career and life outcomes for young people. The extent to which these approaches are consistent with recognised “best practice” tends to vary, however, depending on the level of development, sophistication, responsiveness and resourcing of these parental engagement activities.

Perhaps the most commonly accepted framework of best practice principles is that of Joyce Epstein, which is embedded in parental engagement practice in the U.S. as the National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs:

- Standard I: Communicating: Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful
- Standard II: Parenting: Parenting skills are promoted and supported
- Standard III: Student Learning: Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning
- Standard IV: Volunteering: Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought
- Standard V: School Decision-Making and Advocacy: Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families
- Standard VI: Collaborating with community: community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning (Michigan 17-18).

These standards are not dissimilar to the dimensions of the Family-School Partnerships Framework in Australia, e.g.:

- Communicating: is active, personal, frequent and culturally appropriate and is a two-way exchange between families and schools
- Connecting learning at home and at school: understanding the overlap between home and school environments
- Building Community and Identity: activities that improve the quality of life in a community while honouring the culture, traditions, values and relationships in that community
- Recognising the Role of the Family: recognising that as primary educators of their children, parents and families have a lasting influence on their children’s attitudes and achievements at school
- Consultative Decision-Making: emphasising the rights of parents to be consulted and to participate in decisions concerning their own children
- Collaborating beyond the school: identifying, locating and integrating the resources of the wider community
- Participating: ways that families’ time, energy and expertise can support learning and school programs.

Many of the parental strategies identified as part of our survey employ at least some of the dimensions of this framework, even if they are not explicitly aligned to it. However, it was rare to find strategies that covered many or all of these aspects of effective engagement, and it was indeed interesting that not one of the survey respondents mentioned the Family-Schools

Partnerships Framework as a reference point for their parental engagement strategies and activities.

In general, the more developed strategies in evidence both nationally and internationally have multiple elements in play, and try to engage parents through a range of means, thereby increasing their odds of reaching parents at different points of contact, rather than “putting their eggs all in the one basket.” This feature of pursuing multiple and simultaneous forms of engagement is clearly identified in the literature as a hallmark of successful strategies (Hill and Tyson 760):

An effective parent engagement policy must acknowledge the importance of parent voice by providing multiple ways for parents to express their perspectives and to receive responses from other educational partners [. . .] Multiple channels of communication [. . .] need to be in place, and all partners should be encouraged to use them. An effective network includes clear two-way channels for communications from home to school and school to home [. . .] A variety of methods should be used to communicate with diverse parent communities, from newsletters, emails, face-to-face meetings, interactive websites, and online surveys to phone trees, videos and webcasts. (Ontario 11, 26)

Essential to any definition of “best practice” parental engagement, then, is having a multiplicity of elements in play by which to potentially capture the attention of parents and solicit their input and involvement, and indeed many of the examples uncovered as part of our survey exhibit precisely this kind of variegated approach.

In terms of what *types* of parental engagement activity are seen as contributing most strongly to achievement and good transition outcomes, the literature identifies a range of different types of parental engagement activities, which can be characterised under four broad headings:

1. Enhancing the psychological influence of parental aspirations/expectations
2. Encouraging direct engagement with the child in learning and/or developmental activities
3. Soliciting active involvement in school governance
4. Recruiting parents as career development co-facilitators.

The few existing systematic reviews of the effects of parental engagement focus on the extent to which these different types of parental engagement stimulate positive academic/vocational progress. Of the four types, only the first two are significantly and consistently correlated with positive outcomes and value-adding in educative processes (Nye et al 2006; Desforges and Abouchaar 2003; Horn and Chen 1998). One existing review positively discredits the third type as a positive contributor to academic/educative outcomes, arguing that it has no demonstrable effect upon the learning process of students (Desforges and Abouchaar 2003). The fourth type—which is embodied in the recent development of workshops such as PACP, PACTs and Lasting Gifts—is relatively new and has yet to be assessed according to rigorous and systematic evaluation.

According to a recent meta-analysis of literature on parental engagement and its relationship to achievement, the overriding factor seen as having a positive impact on student learning and achievement, is the first attribute cited above: parents’ level of educational aspiration for their children, or what Hill and Tyson call “academic socialisation”: “communicating parental expectations for education and its value or utility, linking school work to current events, fostering educational and occupational aspirations, discussing learning strategies with children, and making preparations and plans for the future” (742).

Catsambis (2001) likewise reports that the most consistent finding in studies of parental involvement was “the importance of parent’s educational aspirations for their children” (151).

Therefore strategies which have a component of raising parents’ awareness of education and training opportunities, and which raise the value attributed to those opportunities by parents, would—according to the research literature—most likely have the most beneficial impact on learning and transition outcomes:

there are two types of parental involvement that are important indicators of college attendance and completion—post secondary planning and parental support and encouragement. These indicators apply across cultural and socioeconomic boundaries, but parents often need assistance with their endeavours due to inadequate information and other barriers. (SEDL 4)

It is interesting in this regard to note the volume of survey respondents who indicated the importance of raising the career awareness of parents as a way of addressing barriers to parental engagement, as this would effectively amount to raising the career efficacy of parents, which would enable them to recognise their critical role and interact positively with their children’s career.

The task of delivering best practice in parental engagement across the board—in Australia as elsewhere—would therefore seem to hinge on a more general shift in career development awareness and consciousness that would enable parents to recognise their role, *and* be empowered to be involved by the institutions charged with delivering learning to young people.

The efforts of the institutions outlined in the case studies in pursuing that task can be seen as helping to facilitate that shift and empowerment and, via their parental engagement activities, facilitating the development of a parent-inclusive career development culture that is in early stages of development, but also admits the promise of considerable evolution and growth.

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APPENDIX A: SURVEY FORM



Survey on Parental Engagement Strategies

The following survey is designed to elicit information on the ways in which parents are being engaged in the career development activities of your school (or other place of learning).

This information will be used to create a series of case studies illustrating effective parental engagement strategies that will be shared across CICA member associations.

Where possible, please provide 1-2 photographs or other supporting visual material to complement your case study. All images supplied should be in JPEG format.

Please note that all information provided will or may be used for the purposes of CICA's research into parental engagement. CICA will use the information to produce a series of case studies, which will be made freely available on the web. By providing information and photographs, you are taken to be providing consent for the use and release of all provided material, including photos, in any publications arising from this research.

To fill in the form click on the shaded text box and begin typing, click on the Tab key to navigate to the next text box.

Your Name:

Position Title:

Contact Details:

address line 1

address line 2

city State/Territory post code

Phone:

Email:

Name of school/other learning organisation:

Approximate size of your learner cohort:

Age range of learner cohort:

Any other relevant characteristics of your learning cohort:

1. Please provide an overview of how parents are engaged in young people's career development in your learning community:

2. At what age or stage in young people's development are parental engagement strategies specifically targeted in your approach?

Is there a rationale for the focus upon this particular group?

3. Who is involved in facilitating the engagement of parents in young people's career development?

- ***Teachers?***
- ***Other school staff?***
- ***Independent career development practitioners?***
- ***Parent group representatives?***
- ***Community or industry organisations?***

Please provide further detail of all persons who provide parental engagement services, their background and qualifications in providing such services, and any other relevant information:

- 4. Please identify any resources or tools used as part of your strategy and provide any available information regarding costs involved in their purchase and use:**

- 5. Who designs the resources or tools used as part of your program or strategy?**

- 6. Please provide details on any measures used to assure the quality of parental engagement resources used in your strategy (i.e. the Australian Blueprint for Career Development, The Guiding Principles for Career Development Services and Information Products)?**

- 7. Please detail the specific nature of the key messages in the resources and information you convey to parents. For example, these might include:**
 - The importance of modelling positive career management skills in their own approach to life, learning and work**

- *Encouraging the direct involvement of parents in learning/career exploration activities with their child*
- *The value of understanding labour market information to help their child make career choices*
- *The power of parents using their own experience of career development to assist the career development of young people.*

8. *What mechanisms are in place to facilitate regular communication between the school and parents on career development issues?*

9. *Are there any particular parent groups you find difficult to engage?*

10. *Are there any specific engagement strategies you use to target these “hard to reach” parents?*

Please provide details of the strategies used to target hard to reach parents in your community, and any evidence that demonstrates their effectiveness:

- 11. Do you have in place any specific strategies for targeting parents**
- a) from diverse cultural backgrounds?**
 - b) who experience issues relating to disability (whether themselves or their children)?**
 - c) from indigenous backgrounds?**
 - d) from low SES backgrounds?**
 - e) other?**
- 12. What do you see as the most successful or effective aspects of your strategy for parental engagement in young people's career development?**
- 13. What outcomes can you cite as evidence for this effectiveness?**

14. What do you see as the key barriers to engaging parents in the career development of young people?

15. What would help you to address these barriers to engaging parents in young people's career development?

Thank you for your time and your willingness to share information.

Please return all questionnaire forms to jaden@milesmorgan.com.au by 9th December 2011.

Any queries regarding this survey may be directed to Christine Haines or Jade Nobbs at Miles Morgan Australia on (08) 9228 8089, christine@milesmorgan.com.au or jaden@milesmorgan.com.au.