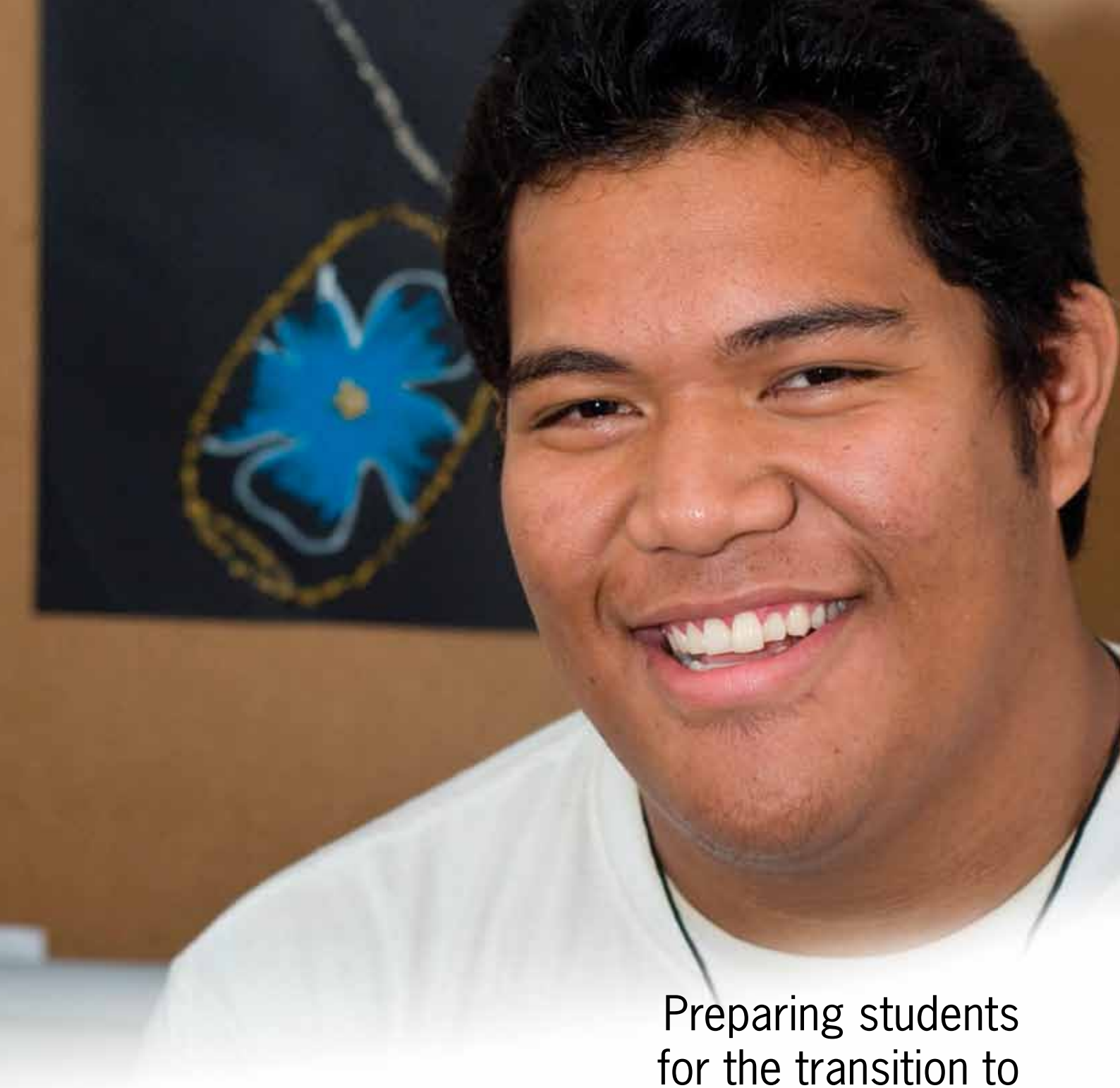

Preparing students for the transition to work or further study

Engaging Students: Building Aspirations

AMP

THE SMITH FAMILY

everyone's family

Preparing students for the transition to work or further study

Engaging Students: Building Aspirations

By Dr Irene Williams

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Acknowledgements

We wish to thank and acknowledge the contributions of The AMP Foundation for its support

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Executive summary

This literature review provides a comprehensive analysis of national and international research to assist with the development of an evidence-based model to better support students in Years 8-10 (13-16 years) as they progress through school and into work or further study. The literature review addresses two key questions:

- What are the essential skills, capacities, relationships and attributes that Year 8-10 students require in the family/home, community and secondary school settings that prepare students for the transition into further education/work?
- What are national and international examples of best practice initiatives that support and prepare students in Years 8 and 9?

What does the research tell us?

Adolescent development

- If a young person's health and wellbeing needs are not met this impacts upon their ability to form positive and supportive relationships. On a basic level this influences an individual's ability to concentrate and be fully engaged in their education and this in turn affects their aspirations.
- Positive parent and peer relationships have an important impact upon social and emotional development (Cripps & Zyromski, 2009). Research also highlights the importance of regular school communication with parents to promote positive interactions (Ma, 2007).
- There are no widely agreed indicators of social and emotional wellbeing (Hamilton & Redmond, 2010). Wellbeing is shaped by physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual factors. The social, material and natural contexts surrounding an individual contribute to their wellbeing (ABS, 2001).
- However, applied research on social and emotional wellbeing tends to focus on negative behaviours of individuals including substance abuse and risk taking behaviour (Hamilton & Redmond, 2010).
- Mental health is one of many aspects influencing wellbeing and an individual's wellbeing is also linked to their mental health.

Education, health and disadvantage

- Young people from families without regular, adequate incomes are at greater risk of experiencing poor health and educational outcomes (AIHW, 2008).
- Recent statistics highlight that 16% of people in the "most disadvantaged areas" had a "mental or behavioural problem" compared to 11% of people in the "least disadvantaged areas" (ABS, 2010, p.3).
- Problems associated with youth mental disorders include "school failure, impaired or unstable employment, and poor family and social functioning, leading to spirals of dysfunction and disadvantage that are difficult to reverse" (McGorry, Purcell, Hickie & Jorm, 2007, p.S5).
- Australian PISA results highlight the impact of disadvantage on education – almost a quarter of students in the lowest socioeconomic quartile "failed to achieve" the minimum proficiency levels in "scientific, reading or mathematical literacy" (Thomson & De Bortoli, 2007, p.15).

Young people's skill development

- Proficiency in literacy and numeracy directly influences participation in post-compulsory education (Khoo & Ainley, 2005).
- The National Curriculum emphasises: literacy and numeracy, communication technologies, logical thinking, evaluating evidence, creativity and the ability to solve problems (MCEETYA, 2008).
- The Compact with Young Australians aims to ensure that young people are learning or earning (DEEWR, 2009).

Developing realistic aspirations

- 11-14 years is the time young people tend to shift to "more realistic ambitions" (Cuthbert & Hatch, 2009, p.7).
- Academic achievement has a significant influence on student aspirations. Leaving school early is linked with poor academic performance (Lamb, Walstab, Teese, Vickers & Rumberger, 2004).
- There is evidence of a gap between aspirations and education outcomes. Disadvantaged young people are more likely to experience this gap (Gutman & Akerman, 2008; DCSF, 2008; Bowden & Doughney, 2010).
- Some young adolescents possess unrealistic career aspirations and have limited knowledge about how to achieve these aspirations (Atherton, Cymbir, Roberts, Page & Remedios, 2009).

Facilitating the engagement of young people

- Student engagement drops during adolescence (13-16 years) (Thomson, Wernert, Underwood & Nicholas, 2007).
- Disengagement is a result of cumulative challenges that students face in the home, school and community (Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes & Milburn, 2009).
- Intentions have stronger associations with continuing to Year 12 than any aspect of student background. Intentions are influenced by both attitudes to school and academic achievement (Khoo & Ainley, 2005).
- Quality relationships formed at school with peers and teachers are positively linked to student engagement (Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes & Milburn, 2009).
- Involvement in extra-curricular activities can positively influence engagement (Taylor & Nelms, 2006; Fullarton, 2002).

Disadvantaged students: barriers to aspirations and engagement

- The costs associated with full participation in public education are a significant obstacle for low-income families and their children, effectively excluding them from some extra-curricular activities and also impacting upon academic performance (Bond & Horn, 2009).
- Parental influence in shaping the aspirations and engagement of young people is mediated by socio-economic status including their: level of education, attitudes to school and the broader community context (Cuthbert & Hatch, 2009).
- Communities with limited social networks contribute to the limited aspirations of disadvantaged young people (Cuthbert & Hatch, 2009).
- Young people's attitudes and behaviours appear to have a stronger impact on their education outcomes than both parental attitudes and behaviours, and material resources in the home (Chowdry, Crawford & Goodman, 2009).

Recommendations:
What are the implications of the research for policy and practice?

In developing a model to better support students in Years 8-10 as they progress through school and into work or further study, it is critical to address the social and financial obstacles to engagement and academic achievement that young people face, which often excludes them from full participation in public education.

In particular, positive and supportive relationships are important for a broad range of factors associated with young people's development including their academic achievement, engagement, aspirations, retention and career planning. An overview, drawn from the literature, follows, highlighting the essential skills, capacities, relationships and attributes that Year 8–10 students require to prepare them for the transition to further education/work.

Skills

- Address student achievement particularly literacy and numeracy in the middle years to facilitate improved higher education outcomes for disadvantaged students (Khoo & Ainley, 2005).
- Address the needs of younger disadvantaged students by targeting academic performance through initiatives such as homework assistance (Maani & Kalb, 2007).
- Promote young people's career planning skills and facilitate their development of career aspirations.
- Develop young people's optimism and self-esteem to help them become confident young people who feel equipped to achieve their goals and cope with disappointments (Cuthbert & Hatch, 2009).
- Equip students (13-16 years) with effective social skills, coping and problem solving strategies to help them develop and maintain positive relationships with peers, parents and teachers.
- Assist students to develop their time management, organisational and study skills to cope with an increasingly demanding curriculum and assessment tasks.

Capacities

- Develop young people's resilience, an essential requirement to help them cope with major changes and events in life (Knight, 2007).
- Facilitate the development of young people's intentions to continue to Year 12.
- Develop student confidence, self-esteem, perceptions about their abilities, general health and motivation because of their associations with academic performance. Physical health includes sufficient physical activity and a healthy diet including adequate consumption of fruit and vegetables.
- Address career ignorance early in secondary school to enable students to develop their capacity to understand the link between school success and post-school options (Frigo, Bryce, Anderson & McKenzie, 2007; Sullivan, Mornane, Prain, Campbell, Deed, Drane et al., 2009).

Relationships and attributes

Family/home

- Inform parents about the impact of their parenting style on their children's development and academic achievement during adolescence. In particular, an adolescent's degree of confidence and security in their other relationships is shaped by relationships with their parents (Cripps & Zyromski, 2009).
- Assist parents with the development of their children's aspirations and attitudes from an early age (Atherton, Cymbir, Roberts, Page & Remedios, 2009).

- Provide students and their families with access to quality career guidance to inform them about opportunities, alternative pathways and the consequences of not completing school (Curtis & McMillan, 2008).
- Assist low-income families and their children to meet the costs of full participation in the public education system.

School and community

- Recognise the links between favourable attitudes to school, intentions for continuing in education and actually continuing in education (Fullarton, 2002).
- Provide students with effective, targeted and accurate career education. Ongoing support for disadvantaged young people is vital. They may also require a tutor or mentor to assist with motivation and aspiration development (Janeiro, 2010; Curtis & McMillan, 2008; Gutman & Akerman, 2008).
- Offer a range of enjoyable extra-curricular activities to help foster student engagement (Taylor & Nelms, 2006).
- Address student engagement by nurturing the development of positive attitudes to school in the middle and early years of high school (Fullarton, 2002).
- Provide students with access to supportive adults in the broader community through initiatives such as mentoring and parental education programs that develop parents' knowledge and skills (Woolley & Bowen, 2007).
- Help communities to develop social networks that reach out beyond the local neighbourhood to provide disadvantaged children and young people with a diverse range of contacts, inspiration, information and opportunities to help develop their aspirations (Cuthbert & Hatch, 2009).
- Provide learning opportunities that are supportive, relevant to students' lives and challenging to give students opportunities to succeed, stay engaged and work towards their aspirations (Maras, 2007).

The research highlights that young people from families without regular, adequate incomes are at greater risk of experiencing poor health and educational outcomes. Further, the costs associated with full participation in public education are a significant obstacle for low-income families and their children, effectively excluding them from some extra-curricular activities and also impacting upon academic performance. It is clear that positive and supportive relationships are important for the development of a broad range of young people's skills, capacities, relationships and attributes. However, the most effective approaches for supporting students in Years 8-10 as they progress through school and into work or further study will be multi-dimensional and multi-faceted.

Introduction

This literature review provides a comprehensive analysis of national and international research to assist with the development of an evidence-based model to better support students in Years 8–10 (13–16 years) as they progress through school and into work or further study. The focus is Years 8–10 because there is evidence of a decline in student engagement for some young people during adolescence (13–16 years). Further, 11–14 years is the time young people tend to shift to "more realistic ambitions" (Cuthbert & Hatch, 2009, p.7). The emphasis on the middle years is reinforced by recent research which asserts that interventions in Years 11–12 are too late because by then patterns of young people's academic performance are harder to change, aspirations are probably fixed and students may have made subject choices that place them on pathways that restrict or prevent access to higher education (Gale, Tranter, Bills, Hattam & Comber, 2010).

The literature review addresses two key questions:

- *What are the essential skills, capacities, relationships and attributes that Years 8–10 students require in the family/home, community and secondary school settings that prepare students for the transition into further education/work?*
- *What are national and international examples of best practice initiatives that support and prepare students in Years 8 and 9?*

The literature review has the following structure:

- Part 1 discusses the developmental changes and challenges of early adolescence (13–16 years) including health and wellbeing issues. The particular barriers and challenges facing disadvantaged young people during this period of development are also explored.
- Part 2 outlines the educational skills that students in Years 8–10 are expected to develop. Consideration is then given to the aspirations and level of engagement of students in this age group. A central focus throughout Part 2 is the particular education related barriers and challenges facing disadvantaged young people.
- Part 3 focuses on international and national examples of best practice initiatives designed to enhance student engagement and increase educational aspirations among young people many of which emerged to address perceived needs in specific communities. The focus of this section is programs developed for students in Years 8–9 as well as programs that could potentially be adapted for this age range.
- Part 4 provides an overview of key research findings. The recommendations consider the implications of the research for policy and the development of a model to provide a comprehensive network of support for students (Years 8–10) to prepare them for the transition to work or further education. It therefore links the research to The Smith Family's national participation framework in particular the skills, capacities, relationships and attributes that Year 8–10 students require in the family/home, community and secondary school settings to prepare them for the transition to further education/work.

Part 1: Adolescent development

Part 1 discusses the developmental changes and associated challenges of early adolescence including health and wellbeing issues. The particular barriers and challenges facing disadvantaged young people during this period of development are also considered. This section highlights the importance of emotional literacy to prepare young people for their transition to work or further education. Specifically, the following skills, capacities, relationships and attributes are needed: resilience, social competence and the development of positive relationships with peers, parents and teachers.

Adolescent development 13–16 years

Adolescence is a time of significant change and development both physically, psychologically and socially in the transition from childhood to adulthood. It is a period of maturation and identity formation. Historically, adolescence was characterised as a time of "storm and stress"[1] attributed to fluctuating hormones but more recent research highlights the inadequacies of this approach for understanding the complexities of adolescent development (Nagel, 2007, p.11).

Social developments in the middle years are associated with the broadening of "social networks", students may transition to larger high schools, participate in activities and possibly undertake casual employment (Rudzinskas, 2008, p.25). The *Life Chances Study* observed that work was becoming part of the lives of the 15 year old participants who generally viewed part-time work as "a source of immediate income and of future savings" but did not feel their job interfered with school, rather, friends were viewed as "the main distraction from homework" (Taylor & Nelms, 2006, p.41).This quest for independence and autonomy is also reflected in *The National Survey of Young Australians 2009* which revealed that approximately one third of young people (11–14 and 15–19 years) "highly valued being independent" (Mission Australia, 2009, p.10). This desire for independence also contributes to changes in the relationship with the family. Consequently, for most adolescents, the peer group becomes a primary source of support and informal education. Current survey data of young people aged 11–24 years indicates that "over 82% of respondents in each age group identified friends as an important source of advice" (Mission Australia, 2009, p.15). Group members negotiate and develop shared values and attitudes in response to a variety of issues such as popular culture, teachers and the

formal curriculum and threat of exclusion from the group serves to reinforce group values, attitudes and behaviours.

Adolescence is characterised by transience of peer groups as individuals shift between groups in search of peers that are more compatible with their developing interests and values as part of their identity development and experimentation. In short, "young adolescents are unique because this period of their lives is characterised by a search for belonging, identity and unique relationships with peers who play an important part in that search" (Rudzinskas, 2008, p.25). The media may be an additional influence on identity development through the "endorsement of particular values and by allowing adolescents to vicariously experience various social behaviours and associated outcomes" (Bahr, 2007, p.179).

Adolescent psychological development, specifically brain development, has emerged as a focus of research over the last decade. Although much is currently unknown it is clear that the adolescent brain is different to the brain of both children and adults and "there are significant changes in the brain during adolescence" that influence "emotion, behaviour and cognition" (Steinberg, 2010). Emotion can significantly impede an individual's "ability to think clearly", negatively affecting learning (Nagel, 2007, p.12). Negative attitudes can also impact upon mental health. In particular, the inability to accept oneself, when it takes the form of "self-deprecation" can contribute to "anxiety, depression, rage" (Bernard, 2009, p.7). This is further explored below.

Developmental challenges of early adolescence

Social and emotional wellbeing

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, "social and emotional development encompasses a number of skills that children need to develop in order to succeed at school, and in life in general" (AIHW, 2009, p.60). This view implies a concern with young people now and in the future, as adults (Hamilton & Redmond, 2010, p.5). It also implies a concern with the whole person "that she is resilient in the face of adversity, and is positively thriving". Similarly, the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth emphasises "the whole child/young person, her positive health and wellbeing, and the role of Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) in contributing to her overall wellbeing" (Hamilton & Redmond, 2010, p.5).

According to the ABS, wellbeing is shaped by numerous factors including "physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual aspects of life" that interact contributing to "a state of health or sufficiency in all aspects of life". More broadly, "the social, material and natural environments surrounding each individual" all contribute to an individual's wellbeing (ABS, 2001). According to the World Health Organisation, mental health is not simply being free of mental disorder, "it is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community" (WHO, 2007).

However, applied research on social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) does not focus on the whole person. Instead, it tends to adopt a negative outlook focusing on "socially problematic" behaviours of individuals such as "drug use or other risky behaviour", linking them to other problems including "hyperactivity, low self-esteem, anxiety or depression" (Hamilton & Redmond, 2010, p.6) and exploring the circumstances that "protect against the problems" outlined (Hamilton & Redmond, 2010, p.56). It is important to note that applied research also often fails to differentiate between the child as "being" with the child as "becoming" (Hamilton & Redmond, 2010, p.56).

Positive psychology has emerged partly in response to this negative, applied research focus on the problems of the individual. On a basic level, positive psychology seeks to prevent mental illness, on a deeper level it seeks to improve people's "quality of life" (Hamilton & Redmond, 2010, p.6). In conjunction with this shift away from negative approaches, research has also been influenced by Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of child development which emphasises the context of young people's lives. Ecological theory is central to the current focus on the whole child approach to social and emotional wellbeing (Hamilton & Redmond, 2010).

Nevertheless, it is clear that positive psychology and ecological theories are deficient, neither of them offers a picture of the "whole child". While philosophical and social perspectives can potentially link

"SEWB to material wellbeing, to physical health, and more generally to the Aristotelian idea of 'the good life'", there are difficulties associated with reconciling philosophical/social theories with applied research. Consequently, most research that directly explores SEWB remains focused on negative indicators such as "anxiety, low self-esteem, or conduct problems" (Hamilton & Redmond, 2010, p.23), and SEWB is thought to generally overlook the broader aspects of wellbeing discussed above. To date, there are no widely agreed upon indicators of social and emotional wellbeing that relate specifically to children's development (Hamilton & Redmond, 2010). It is also clear that these different perspectives on social and emotional wellbeing have existed independently of one another (Hamilton & Redmond, 2010). This needs to be remedied; it is clear that indicators of wellbeing must focus on "the good life" and incorporate the whole person including "physical, social and material" contexts (Hamilton & Redmond, 2010, p.ix). The primarily negative research focus on "mental illness, depression, anxiety, self-esteem" (Hamilton & Redmond, 2010, p.viii) is reflected in the overview of current research discussed below.

Mental health

Mental health is one of many aspects influencing wellbeing, and an individual's wellbeing is also linked to their mental health. The onset of many mental health disorders occurs during adolescence, a time of "major physical and psychological maturational changes as well as complex adjustments within the family and society" (McGorry, Parker & Purcell, 2006, p.10). These disorders include "mood, psychotic, personality, eating and substance use disorders" (McGorry, Purcell, Hickie & Jorm, 2007, p.S5) and there is evidence that these disorders are linked to stress.[2]

"Mental health disorders are the leading cause of disability among young Australians aged 15–24", making mental health a national priority. In the 2004–05 *National Health Survey*, 1 in 10 Australians aged 15–19 reported a "mental or behavioural problem" (AIHW, 2008, p.31). It is impossible to determine the causes of mental health disorders, however, some influences include "family and social factors, school context, life events and situations" (AIHW, 2008, p.31).

Significantly, data indicates that the incidence of self-reported "mental or behavioural" problems increases with socioeconomic disadvantage (AIHW, 2008, p.31). (This issue is further explored in the next section). Although there are connections between poor mental health and disadvantage, the causal relationship is unclear. However, recent statistics highlight that 16% of people in the "most disadvantaged areas" had a "mental or behavioural problem" compared to 11% of people in the "least disadvantaged areas" (ABS, 2010, p.3). These problems include "emotional disorders, dependence on drugs or alcohol, feeling anxious or nervous and depression", all of which can affect an individual's wellbeing (ABS, 2010, p.3) and engagement in education. It is apparent that changes during adolescence "whether rapid or gradual, create a vulnerability that is accentuated by poverty" (Dashiff, DiMicco, Myers & Sheppard, 2009, p.23).

Depression is a national health priority but it can also have negative impacts upon education, particularly student engagement, resulting in "poor schoolwork, reduced achievement, impairments on cognitive task, and acting out behaviours". One study concluded that "it is possible to accurately predict depression in early adolescence" using data collected as early as the third grade (Ward, Sylva & Gresham, 2010, pp.2; 6) this is significant given the current emphasis placed on early intervention. Another Australian study reported temporary improvement in the "mental health literacy of the participants"[3] but no improvement in their ability to identify depression (Robinson, Gook, Yuen, Hughes, Dodd, Bapat et al., 2010, p.21).

It is important to note that although 1 in 10 Australians aged 15–19 reported a "mental or behavioural problem" in 2006–07, the number of young people (13–19 years) requiring hospitalisation for mental health and behavioural disorders was low (973 per 100,000) (AIHW, 2008, p.31). Current emphasis is on preventative approaches to mental health through a focus on wellbeing. Improving the wellbeing of young people by developing their resilience, social competence and emotional literacy has the potential to benefit all young people not just those at risk of developing a mental health disorder. "Secondary and post-school education", "a good transition from school to work" as well as "economic and social participation" are some of the factors that have been identified for their contribution to the wellbeing of young people (AIHW, 2008, p.29).

Some of the problems associated with youth mental disorders include "school failure, impaired or unstable employment, and poor family and social functioning, leading to spirals of dysfunction and disadvantage that are difficult to reverse" (McGorry, Purcell, Hickie & Jorm, 2007, p.S5) as well as "violence and poor reproductive and sexual health" (Patel, Flisher, Hetrick & McGorry, 2007, p.1302). Adolescent mental health should not simply be the concern of educators and families, "the suffering, functional impairment, exposure to stigma and discrimination, and enhanced risk of premature death that is associated with mental disorders in young people" makes it a significant public health issue (Patel, Flisher, Hetrick & McGorry, 2007, p.1306).

Financial disadvantage, stress and resilience

In addition, adolescent perceptions about parental financial hardship are directly associated with poor mental health, particularly "adolescent mood states" as well as a "sense of helplessness, and feelings of shame and inferiority" (Dashiff et al., 2009, p.25). Research has reported links between ongoing exposure to poverty and increased risk of mental problems, such as depression and behavioural problems such as substance use (Fergusson et al., as cited in Dashiff et al., 2009, p.25). In particular, substance abuse during adolescence can compound disadvantage by negatively effecting health in the long term. Currently, "one in four teenagers regularly risk short-term harm to their health from alcohol consumption; 1 in 10 are at risk of long-term harm" (AIHW, 2008, p.33).[4]

Developing resilience is an essential requirement of adolescence to help young people cope with major changes and events that could create stress and compromise their wellbeing.[5] Resilience is broadly understood as "social-emotional competence and emotional literacy" (Knight, 2007, p.544). Research has documented the presence of internal and external "protective factors" that can help preserve wellbeing. Internal factors include "social competence, problem-solving skills, mastery, autonomy, and a sense of purpose and future"[6] (Tilling, 2008, p.4). External factors include "family stability and support, good peer relationships, involvement in community activities, and a sense of connectedness to family, friends and the community in general" (Mathews, 2005, p.21) including school (Tilling, 2008, p.4).

Stress during adolescence can be caused by a variety of factors including "family conflict and instability, divorce, any type of substance abuse, poor body/self image resulting in low self-esteem, underdeveloped social, relational or academic skills" (Nagel, 2007, p.13).The impact of stress may be heightened during adolescence (Nagel, 2007) making it important to teach adolescents "coping strategies such as assertiveness, anger management, goal setting and time management" to help promote their mental wellbeing (Tilling, 2008, p.6). It is prudent to do this in the middle years to equip students with skills that can help them deal with problems they may encounter in later adolescence, a time when research has observed the use of more "non-productive strategies" such as "feeling helpless, worrying" or "ignoring problems" (Frydenberg, 2009, p.27).

Research also suggests that poverty can strain parent-adolescent relationships and may contribute to the development of "negative parenting practices" and conflict. (The impact of financial disadvantage on young people's education is further explored in Part 2 in the sections: *Community characteristics associated with low aspirations and Family characteristics associated with education and behavioural outcomes, p20).* "Increased parent-adolescent conflict often leads to an increase in adolescent risk-taking behaviours" such as "early sexual debut, substance use, and criminal activity" that can facilitate the continuation of a "cycle of social disadvantage" (Dashiff et al., 2009, p.27). In addition, "student disengagement from school can be exacerbated by lack of opportunity for community involvement, family poverty and low parental engagement with education" (Butler, Bond, Drew, Krelle & Seal, 2005, p.7).

Physical health

Critical areas of physical health that impact upon adolescent development include "high rates of overweight and obesity, insufficient physical activity and poor eating habits" in particular, insufficient consumption of fruit and vegetables, which was more pronounced among older children aged 12–15 and 16–17 years (AIHW, 2008, p.274; ABS, 2009). In Australia, the prevalence of children 5–17 years who are overweight or obese has increased from 21% in 1995 to 25%, or one quarter of all children in 2007–08[7] (ABS, 2009, p.7).

Also 15% of children (0–14 years) resided in a jobless family in 2006[8] and children from families without a regular, adequate income face "increased risk of poor health and educational outcomes, both in the short and long-term" (AIHW, 2008, p.10). In 2005–06, "20% of all households with independent children under 20 years were low-income" (AIHW, 2008, p.10). Living on a low income can negatively affect child nutrition and "access to medical care" (AIHW, 2008, p.10) as well as development generally (Toumbourou, Hemphill, Tresidder, Humphreys, Edwards & Murray, 2007, p.186).

Poor physical health also impacts negatively upon adolescent development. A recent study demonstrated that "children from lower socio-economic backgrounds in Australia have a more negative experience of health and wellness" (Spurrier, Sawyer, Clark & Baghurst, 2003, p.30). Specifically, disadvantaged Australians experience higher rates of obesity, "children living in the areas of greatest relative disadvantage had higher rates of being overweight (20%) compared with children living in lower relative disadvantage areas (14%)" they also had "more than double the rate of obesity (12%)" compared with children in areas of lowest disadvantage (5%) (ABS, 2009, p.7). This has serious implications for adolescents, including an increased risk of developing asthma and Type 2 diabetes. In addition, overweight and obese children may be susceptible to bullying and "victimisation" leading to negative peer interactions and experiences of school (AIHW, 2009, p.75), all of which can detrimentally affect health, mental health and learning.

Food insecurity, "the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods" (Kendall, as cited in Nolan, Rikard-Bell, Mohsin & Williams, 2006, p.247) is one factor that contributes to poor nutrition and inadequate diet. The link between access to food and food security was reinforced in an Australian study of three disadvantaged communities in south-western Sydney which found that the "ability to access shops" and the cost of food impact upon food insecurity (Nolan et al., 2006, p.252; see also Temple, 2008, p.662–3). It is alarming that "households with no capacity to save money were five times more likely to be food insecure than households that could save" (Nolan et al., p.252). The cost of food means that low-income families "may be forced to choose cheaper rather than healthier foods" (Nolan et al., p.252), and is one of the reasons why "food insecurity is associated with poor health" (Booth, as cited in Nolan et al., 2006, p.247).

A recent Canadian study exploring diet quality and academic performance identified "dietary adequacy and variety" as factors impacting upon academic performance. The study highlighted that "children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to have poor diets and poor academic performance resulting in lower levels of educational attainment". Research suggests that in the short-term, nutrition can affect "behaviour" and "concentration", which can potentially impact upon "school performance", peer interactions and "self-esteem". Poor nutrition may also negatively affect immunity, contributing to increased sickness and absence from school (Sorhaindo & Feinstein, 2006, pp.21–3).

Adolescence is also a time when some young people begin experimenting with alcohol and other drugs. Recent data indicates that the average age young men reported consuming their first alcoholic drink was approximately 15 years. The reported age of first drink for young women was higher[9] (ABS, 2008, p.1). Over half of 15–17 year olds surveyed reported drinking alcohol. Of this group, 55% of males and 30% of females "consume 5 or more standard drinks when they usually drink" (HILDA 2007, as cited in Muir, Mullan, Powell, Flaxman, Thompson & Griffiths, 2009, p.104–5). *The National Survey of Young Australians* (2009) revealed that drugs was the number one concern of young people 11–14 years, followed by suicide and "bullying/emotional abuse" (Mission Australia, 2009, p.13).

For some, particularly girls, adolescence is marked by preoccupations with body image (Ma, 2007). A recent study reported that teenage girls were motivated by "concerns about maintaining a slim body shape" and faced "pressure to conform to social stereotypes". Many teenage girls viewed "impressing boyfriends and other peers" as "more important than physical activity". These image-driven concerns created an "increased interest in non-active leisure" (Allender, Cowburn & Foster, 2006, pp.826, 829, 831, 832). These concerns can sometimes manifest themselves in more extreme responses such as the development of eating disorders including anorexia nervosa and bulimia.

Sleep is a central aspect of health and wellbeing, however, research indicates that sleep patterns change during adolescence. A recent international review of adolescent sleep patterns spanning 30 years found that sleep reduces with age, creating "significantly reduced time in bed" in older adolescents

particularly on school days (Olds, Blunden, Petkov & Forchino, 2010, pp.375–7). Numerous intrinsic and extrinsic factors have been nominated for their contribution to this trend (Dewald, Meijer, Oort, Kerkhof & Bogels, 2010). However, it seems likely that decreased sleep time during adolescence is due to the interplay of intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Dewald et al., 2010).

In relation to intrinsic factors, research suggests that the delay in melatonin secretion associated with puberty, the hormone involved in regulation of the "sleep/wake cycle", increases the tendency for later sleep onset (Olds et al., 2010). Other studies emphasise that puberty and associated physiological changes influence the circadian rhythm, leading to delayed onset of the "sleep period" (Laberge, Petit, Simard, Vitaro, Tremblay, Montplaisir, 2001, p.64). Evidence from Australia highlights that the processes in the body associated with circadian timing help determine the quantity and quality of sleep, this in turn influences "mood, and daytime functioning" (Warner, Murray & Meyer, 2008, pp. 595, 605–7).

Research also indicates that extrinsic factors such as increased time spent on activities including sport, employment and social pursuits as well as young people's "media usage" have reduced the time available for sleep. In addition, in some lower socioeconomic status households, room sharing may be necessary and this could negatively influence sleep quality and quantity (Olds et al., 2010, pp.375–7).

It is important to explore the impact of reduced sleep on young people's wellbeing. Research indicates that going to sleep later, along with the need to regularly wake early to attend school, results in young people trying to catch up on sleep during weekends and holidays (Olds et al., 2010). A recent longitudinal study investigating the sleep patterns of over 300 Australian senior secondary students in holiday and term time attributed a "significant sleep debt" to "the impact of the school schedule" (Warner et al., 2008). The study found that students were not getting enough sleep to meet their needs, primarily because school schedules required students to wake up approximately 2½ hours earlier on school days. The results highlight the negative impact of school schedule on mood; students surveyed during term time reported increased unhappiness and more negative thoughts about themselves (Warner et al., 2008, pp. 595, 605–7).

Evidence also suggests that not having enough sleep can compromise learning, memory, information recall and problem solving (Warner et al., 2008; see also Dewald et al., 2010). All of which can hinder "young people from reaching their potential academically" and negatively influence their "emotional and social development" (Warner et al., 2008, pp. 595; 605–7). Similarly, a recent clinical review of 16 studies found a significant relationship between sleep quality, sleep duration, sleepiness and school performance. Interestingly, sleepiness had the strongest relation to poorer school performance and sleep quality had a larger association with school performance than sleep duration (Dewald et al., 2010). It is clear that the quality of sleep matters. Another research review of adolescent sleep patterns concluded that "self-reported shortened total sleep time, erratic sleep/wake schedules, late bed and rise times, and poor sleep quality are negatively associated with academic performance" (Wolfson & Carskadon, 2003, p.502).[10]

Given that research highlights a link between reduced sleep and academic performance during adolescence, it is essential that strategies are developed to minimise the impact of inadequate sleep on wellbeing and academic performance. Some schools have responded to this by implementing a later start time for older students and the media has highlighted the initiatives of some of these schools. For example Edmund Rice College in Wollongong (NSW) has a start time of 11.30 am for senior students (Carbonell, 2010); Glenunga International High School (SA) currently has introduced a late start day for senior students as part of a research trial (Simos, 2010); and Berengarra School in Glen Waverley and the Victorian P-12 College of Koorie Education in Mildura (VIC) have also introduced later start times (Critchley, 2007). Conversely, perhaps in recognition of the difficulties associated with implementing widespread delayed school start times across education systems and sectors, research tends to advocate educating adolescents and parents about the importance of sleep and encouraging earlier bed times for adolescents (see for example Wolfson & Carskadon, 2003; Dewald et al., 2010).

Building positive relationships

It is clear that if a young person's health and wellbeing needs are not met this impacts upon their ability to form positive and supportive relationships with others. The significance of relationships with parents and peers is reflected in *The National Survey of Young Australians* — family relationships was the number one thing valued by young people aged 11–14 and 15–19 years, and friendships was ranked second in both age groups (Mission Australian, 2009, p.10). Encouragingly, recent research indicates that among adolescents (12–18 years), 70% of males and 62% of females were "very satisfied with their relationship with their parents" (Weston, Qu & Soriano, 2006, p.51).

Developing and maintaining positive relationships with peers, parents and teachers can positively influence a young person's wellbeing including their health[11] and relationships (Ma, 2007, p.232). In particular, positive parent relationships have an important impact upon social and emotional development, and these relationships help determine "how adolescents will self-evaluate and interact with others" (Cripps & Zyromski, 2009, p.2). Further, an adolescent's degree of confidence and security in their other relationships is shaped by relationships with their parents (Cripps & Zyromski, 2009, p.3). If this is not achieved it can lead to poor relationships, feeling unsafe and even bullying, all of which can contribute to poor motivation and disengagement from school (Butler, Bond, Drew, Krelle & Seal, 2005, p.7).

Peer relations also impact upon wellbeing, particularly "physical and mental health" (Ma, 2007, p.228). In addition, wellbeing influences peer interactions (Doughtery, as cited in Oberle et al., 2010, p.2). For example, positive aspects of wellbeing including "optimism" are "significantly and importantly related to peer acceptance" (Oberle et al., 2010). Positive social interactions can also effect engagement in education including an individual's ability to concentrate. Research indicates that children who have positive interactions with peers "tend to be more motivated in school and perform better on academic tasks" (Wentzel, as cited in Oberle et al., 2010, p.2). Research demonstrates that "peer environment, academic pressure, and a sense of belonging to school" influence "physical and mental health, self-perception and interpersonal relationships" (Ma, 2007, p.232).

Broader benefits of a quality parent relationship include "closer peer relationships, better school progress, and a greater sense of community belonging (Smart, Sanson & Toumbourou, 2008, p.25). One study found associations between positive parent relationships and "fewer problems such as antisocial behaviour or depression" (Smart, Sanson & Toumbourou, 2008, p.25) (refer to the section on *The impact of parents' aspirations, education and parenting styles, p.19*). It is therefore imperative that parents understand the impact they can have on adolescent development and education and that students also understand the impact of these relationships upon them (Cripps & Zyromski, 2009, pp.9–10).

Recent research has emphasised the importance of school based parent education in the middle years to inform parents about the impact of their parenting styles on "student personal, social, and academic achievement" and to promote and facilitate positive relationships (Cripps & Zyromski, 2009, p.11). Other research has highlighted the importance of regular school communication with parents to promote positive interactions (Ma, 2007, p.228).

Part 2: Education

Part 2 outlines the educational skills that students in Years 8–10 are expected to develop. Consideration is then given to the aspirations and level of engagement of students in this age group. A discussion of the numerous things students must learn to manage and master as they progress through high school follows. A central focus throughout Part 2 is the particular education related barriers and challenges facing disadvantaged young people. Part 2 highlights that the following skills, capacities, relationships and attributes are needed to prepare young people for their transition to work or further education: literacy and numeracy, logical thinking, problem solving, organisational and communication skills, creativity, innovation, teamwork, initiative and proficiency in the use of information and communication technologies.

Managing high school

Managing high school requires students to successfully negotiate a curriculum that becomes increasingly competitive and assessment driven. This means that students must take greater responsibility for their learning and behaviour, manage their time effectively and seek help from teachers. This requires the development of positive relationships with numerous teachers and peers. Students also need to make subject choices that could impact upon future work and study choices.

One of the biggest challenges students face in the middle years within a school context of "ever-increasing accountability" and concerns about "preparing for the future" is the pressure of standardised, external assessment which makes school "increasingly competitive, assessment-oriented and task/test driven" and contributes to stress among adolescents (Nagel, 2007, p.14). The curriculum also becomes more "compartmentalised and content driven" and "disconnected from many students' lives" (Gale, Tranter, Bills, Hattam & Comber, 2010, p.40). Consequently, "many students begin to self-select out of schooling" (Gale, Tranter, Bills, Hattam & Comber, 2010, p.40). Research also documents teacher concerns about the impact of the competitive academic curriculum; Australian teachers report concerns about "pressure to teach to the test" and conform to "narrow provisions of assessment and reporting practices" (McInerney, 2009, p.30). Negotiation of the competitive academic curriculum (Connell, 1996) requires students to take responsibility for their learning. Part of this involves effective time management as well as being attentive in class and seeking help from teachers where required.

For some young people, effective time management may also require maintaining a balance between school work and involvement in out-of-school activities such as tutoring, part-time work, sport, music and the performing arts; "for many high school students working part-time is a normal aspect of their hectic lives, which needs to be fit in amongst school, study, sporting activities and family commitments" (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2007). Recent research from the NSW Commission for Children and Young People reveals that of nearly 11,000 participants surveyed (12–16 years), 56% had combined part-time work with school in 2004.[12] There is also evidence that involvement in work increases as students get older and progress through high school. Significantly, students from the least disadvantaged parts of NSW were "more than twice as likely to work" compared to children from the "most disadvantaged areas"; this contradicts beliefs about children working out of financial necessity. It also suggests that children from the most disadvantaged areas may have greater competition from adults in the workplace, or experience greater difficulty "accessing the informal networks" associated with "early work opportunities" (Fattore, 2005, p.2).

Research suggests that working less than ten hours per week can be positive for children. Benefits of young people working while at school include the "opportunity to exercise autonomy, develop skills and obtain some form of income" (Fattore, 2005, pp.5; 9). However, 9% of participants in the *Children at Work* survey worked more than 15 hours per week, which could "compromise their school performance and their capacity to participate in social activities" (Fattore, 2005, pp.5, 9). Those without the motivation to pursue post-compulsory education may immerse themselves in part-time, paid work during high school. For these students, family background as well as the level of engagement at school can contribute to "negative associations between intensive employment and school achievement" (Zimmer-Gembeck & Mortimer, 2006, pp.544, 548).

As they progress through secondary school, adolescents are also required to successfully negotiate the teaching styles of multiple teachers and take greater responsibility for their behaviour and its impact upon others at school. They are also required to take greater responsibility for their learning as they work on tasks both independently and collaboratively with peers who may not be their friends. Other developmental challenges of adolescence include "identity formation" and the "development of an autonomous self", which may be partially realised through work experience initiatives (Zimmer-Gembeck & Mortimer, 2006, p.548). Many students rely on their friendship groups to help them cope with these increasingly demanding tasks (Holland, Reynolds & Weller, 2007, p.102).

The middle years are also a period when students with learning difficulties tend to fall behind academically;[13] two of the main difficulties students face are in the areas of reading and mathematics. Research has found a link between negative thoughts and academic performance. Students with learning difficulties tend to lack self-efficacy, resulting in beliefs that "their performance will be judged poorly". They may also believe that their academic success is prevented by "factors beyond their control" creating reduced levels of "participation, engagement and performance" at school. In short, "students with learning difficulties face significant obstacles to learning, including basic skills deficits, social/emotional difficulties and cognitive inefficiencies" (Bellert & Graham, 2006, pp.4–5, 7).

What educational skills are students in years 8–10 expected to develop?

The skills young people are expected to develop can be categorised into short-term and long-term abilities. The *National Assessment Program–Literacy and Numeracy* (NAPLAN) clearly signals that young people are expected to develop literacy and numeracy skills. The National Curriculum also emphasises literacy and numeracy as well as logical thinking, creativity and problem solving skills. In the long term, the *Compact with Young Australians* signals that students in this age group are expected to develop skills through education attainment. In addition, the proposed *Job Ready Certificate* for students involved in vocational education and work experience highlights communication, problem solving and organisational skills as indicators of readiness for post-school employment.

Literacy and numeracy

The NAPLAN tests conducted annually for Australian students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 assesses student abilities in the following areas: "Reading, Writing, Language Conventions (Spelling, Grammar and Punctuation) and Numeracy" (NAPLAN, 2009, p.2). Analysis of the *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA) data, which has 57 participating countries and assesses students aged

approximately 15 years, observed that, generally, much work is needed to develop "comparable levels of motivation, interest or self-confidence in different areas among male and female students" (OECD, 2009, p.48).[14] Research indicates that Australian students' skills in maths and science are lacking and there are "significant levels of educational disadvantage" (Thomson & De Bortoli, 2007, p.15), "students in the lowest socioeconomic quartile scored, on average, two and a half years lower than students in the highest socioeconomic quartile". Further, almost a quarter of students in the lowest socioeconomic quartile "failed to achieve" the minimum proficiency levels in "scientific, reading or mathematical literacy" (Thomson & De Bortoli, 2007, p.15). This has serious implications leaving "an unacceptable proportion of 15-year-old students at serious risk of not achieving levels sufficient for them to participate fully in the 21st century work force and to contribute to Australia as productive citizens" (Thomson & De Bortoli, 2007, p.15).

In addition, the *Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study* (TIMSS) which measures the mathematics and science achievement of students in two cohorts, Year 4 and Year 8, in 59 countries including Australia[15] found that, in 2007, Year 8 mathematics results indicate that "11 per cent of Australian Year 8 students failed to achieve the low benchmark" and "Australia was outperformed by all of the Asian countries other than Indonesia" (Thomson, Wernert, Underwood & Nicholas, 2007, p.v).

Skills promoted by the National Curriculum

"Education must address the intellectual, personal, social and economic development of young Australians" (National Curriculum Board, 2009, p.5). *The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (2008) is currently the most significant document influencing education reform and the development of the National Curriculum in Australia. Agreed to by all Australian Education Ministers, it is a key document in determining the skills Australian school students are expected to develop. The *Melbourne Declaration* acknowledges the importance of education for young people and the new demands placed on Australian education including "globalisation and technological change", the growing influence of "Asian nations", "complex environmental, social and economic pressures" and "rapid and continuing advances in information and communication technologies (ICT)" (MCEETYA, 2008, pp.4–5). Focused on improving the educational outcomes of all young Australians, the *Melbourne Declaration* has identified two goals. The first goal is that "Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence". The second goal is that "all young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, active and informed citizens" (MCEETYA, 2008, p.7).

"Successful learners" are characterised in vague terms including the ability to "make sense of their world", be motivated and "make informed learning and employment decisions" (MCEETYA, 2008, p.8). However, some emphasis is placed on skills namely: "literacy and numeracy", the productive use of ICT, the ability to "think deeply and logically, and obtain and evaluate evidence", creativity, innovation, resourcefulness and the ability to solve problems (MCEETYA, 2008, p.8).[16]

These goals are supported by "a commitment to action" that emphasises working with schools and the community and "enhancing middle years development".[17] Significantly, its commitment to equity emphasises "improving educational outcomes for Indigenous youth and disadvantaged young Australians, especially those from low socioeconomic background". In particular, there is a commitment to "close the gap" for Indigenous youth, support disadvantaged students and "focus on school improvement in low socioeconomic communities" (MCEETYA, 2008, pp.12, 15).

The *Melbourne Declaration* was a significant influence in the formation of the Australian Curriculum.[18] Particular emphasis has been placed upon literacy, numeracy, ICT, thinking skills and creativity in the draft Australian curriculum.[19] In addition, three cross-curriculum perspectives: Indigenous perspectives, "sustainable patterns of living" and "skills, knowledge and understandings related to Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia" will be incorporated into the learning areas (Australian Curriculum Assessment & Reporting Authority, 2010a). In December 2010, Federal, State and Territory Education Ministers endorsed the first four learning areas of the Australian Curriculum (English, Mathematics, Science and History) up to year 10 (Australian Curriculum Assessment & Reporting Authority, 2010b). In 2011, The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and MCEETYA are scheduled to sign off on the implementation of the national curriculum (K-12) in the key learning areas of English, Mathematics, Science and History (COAG, n.d., p.B-19). All Ministers have agreed to substantial implementation of

the first phase of the national curriculum by 2013[20] (Australian Curriculum Assessment & Reporting Authority, 2010b).

Preparing for work

In 2009, COAG announced a range of education and training measures to address predicted increases in youth unemployment including: "a Compact with Young Australians; a National Youth Participation Requirement until they reach age 17" and COAG's target of "90 per cent Year 12 or equivalent attainment" by 2015 (COAG, 2009). In addition, the Federal Government has set a target of 40% of 25–34 year old Australians attaining a "bachelor level or above" qualification by 2025. This is tied to a second goal that by 2020, "20 per cent of higher education enrolments at undergraduate level should be people from low SES backgrounds" (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p.13).

The *Compact with Young Australians* (COAG, 2009) seeks to encourage young people's participation in work or further study and makes clear the Government's expectations about education attainment and skill development. The compact aims to ensure that young people are learning or earning — all young people are required to "participate in schooling (or an approved equivalent) to Year 10, and then participate full-time (at least 25 hours per week) in education, training or employment, or a combination of these activities, until age 17".[21]

Nationally, plans are also underway to develop a Job Ready Certificate[22], which will report on the "key employability skills" of young people transitioning directly from school to the work place. It will be a voluntary, stand alone certificate for those in Year 12 involved in work experience as part of "school vocational education programs" (Sweet, 2008, p.1). The agreed upon "employability skills" give insight into the skills students are expected to develop to be deemed job ready, they are "communication, team work, problem solving, initiative and enterprise, planning and organisation, self-management, learning and technology" (Sweet, 2008, p.5).

Characterising student aspirations

Defining aspirations

Aspirations can be defined as the goals young people develop as well as their motivation to work to achieve these goals (Cuthbert & Hatch, 2009, p.1). Research from England found that the following factors were strongest in predicting young people's aspirations, "the value they attach to school; their ability beliefs and prior attainment; mother's aspirations for their child to go to university; and a family's socio-economic status" (Cuthbert & Hatch, 2009, p.1). Aspirations can develop from an early age; recent research from the U.K revealed that 85% of Year 7 participants could name the specific occupation they aspired to and 65% of these students had these aspirations for more than two years (Atherton, Cymbir, Roberts, Page & Remedios, 2009, p.1). However, the aspirations of students are context specific, varying according to gender and the degree of disadvantage experienced.[23]

Four criteria have been identified for their impact on the development of high aspirations amongst 11–14 year olds; the need for:

- "inspiration" derived from a variety of people and experiences
- "information" that is accurate and reliable to help young people and their parents make decisions and understand what is needed to help them achieve their goals
- "self-esteem" to help develop self-confident young people who feel equipped to achieve their goals and cope with disappointments
- "self-efficacy" or young people's belief that if they work hard their goals can be achieved (Cuthbert & Hatch, 2009, p.2).

Conversely, research demonstrates that students who think their achievement is below average are less likely to aspire to tertiary education (Beavis, Curtis & Curtis, 2005b).

Describing student aspirations: diverse and transient

A recent Australian study observed that "conventional" and "enterprising" jobs were least aspired to by high school students. Students aspired to four categories of occupation: "investigative", "social",

"artistic" and "realistic". Significantly, 30% of participants (100 students) reported a career expectation that differed from their aspiration; these students were "more career indecisive, held expectations for lower status jobs, had lower self-esteem, lower career goals and poorer career development attitude" (Patton & Creed, 2007, pp.51, 56). Further, the study found that female students were "less likely to aspire to realistic occupations, and more likely to aspire to investigative, artistic and social occupations"[26] whereas over 50% of males "aspired to and expected jobs in the realistic category"[25] (Patton & Creed, 2007, p.55). Overall, students had "significantly higher occupational aspirations than occupational expectations"[26] and had "higher status aspirations than status expectations" (Patton & Creed, 2007, p.56). The study also found a link between aspirations and "school achievement" whereby "students who reported achieving well at school, were more career mature and had higher self-esteem" making them "more likely to aspire to professional status occupations" (Patton & Creed, 2007, p.56). In short, "being better career-informed is a consistent predictor of academic achievement, higher self-esteem and higher status occupational aspirations" (Patton & Creed, 2007, p.56).

Although it is important that aspirations are developed in the early years of life (Gutman & Akerman, 2008), 11–14 years is the time young people shift to "more realistic ambitions" (Cuthbert & Hatch, 2009, p.7) informed by new experiences and information[27] (Gutman & Akerman, 2008). This highlights the need to assist young people in the middle years with the development of "ambitious, achievable aspirations" and to support them as they endeavour to achieve these goals (Cuthbert & Hatch, 2009, p.7). The importance of the middle years is also emphasised by The Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) who assert that interventions in Years 11–12 are too late because by then patterns of young people's academic performance are harder to change, aspirations are probably "well established" and students may have made subject choices that place them on pathways that restrict or prevent access to higher education. Ideally, interventions should begin as early as primary school and continue throughout secondary school (Gale, Tranter, Bills, Hattam & Comber, 2010, p.71).

Evidence also suggests that aspirations in the middle years change over time. This "decline in aspirations" is particularly pronounced for young people who face multiple barriers such as an absence of mentors and insufficient opportunities and resources (Gutman & Akerman, 2008, p.2). In the case of higher education, it seems that when students think that obstacles to university, primarily "availability, accessibility and achievement", can't be overcome they adjust their aspirations (Gale, Tranter, Bills, Hattam & Comber, 2010, p.51).[28]

A recent Australian study of over 400 students primarily drawn from Years 8–9 in South Australia found that students were strikingly optimistic about their future and aspired to a diverse and specific range of careers that were often tied to their interests (Maras, 2007, p.21). In expressing what was required to achieve these aspirations the most frequent response was "support, encouragement, help and guidance from family members and teachers" (Maras, 2007, p.23). Many students indicated the need to "study hard" (Maras, 2007, p.23). Approximately one third of respondents indicated they would need to undertake tertiary study, which challenges notions about financially disadvantaged students not possessing high aspirations in the middle years (Maras, 2007, p.24). Indeed, students were eager to convey that "they are smart, they want to succeed and they have high aspirations", leading to the conclusion that students disengage in the middle years not because they can't or won't work, but because "they come to see that school will not work for them" (Maras, 2007, p.28). It is clear that teaching and learning needs to be supportive, relevant to students' lives and challenging to give students opportunities to succeed and work towards their high aspirations (Maras, 2007, p.28).

Recent research has considered the link between ethnicity and student aspirations and found that students from ethnic minorities generally have higher aspirations than their "white peers" (Cuthbert & Hatch, 2009, p.3). A recent Australian study found that students drawn from "more recently arrived non-English speaking groups from Africa, Asia and the Middle East" had the strongest preference for tertiary study. The weakest preference for tertiary study was among students born in New Zealand, the Pacific Islands and Australia (Bowden & Doughney, 2010, p.122). Similarly, another Australian study found that Asian students had stronger aspirations for university study than their Anglo, Lebanese and Aboriginal peers (McInerney, 2008, p.877).

The impact of student academic achievement, attitudes and perceptions

Academic achievement has a significant influence on student aspirations. "Successful learning" is "the most important intrinsic motive for staying on at school", it is no coincidence that "early leavers are drawn disproportionately from the ranks of low achievers" (Lamb, Walstab, Teese, Vickers & Rumberger, 2004, p.1).[29] Other research illustrates a positive relationship between maths and science achievement and the aspirations of Australian Year 8 students (Thomson, Wernert, Underwood & Nicholas, 2007).

DEEWR also acknowledges the importance of improving student achievement in the middle years to contribute to improved "higher education outcomes for students from disadvantaged backgrounds" (Gale, Tranter, Bills, Hattam & Comber, 2010, p.39). The importance of academic achievement highlights the need for programs that facilitate "effective learning and personal growth", as well as "early intervention strategies" geared towards improving student achievement[30] (Lamb, Walstab, Teese, Vickers & Rumberger, 2004, pp.10–11).

In addition, aspirations have a significant influence on academic achievement. TIMSS data highlights that 31% of Year 8 Australian students indicated the intention to "gain at least an undergraduate degree" and this group had higher average achievement in maths and science (Thomson, Wernert, Underwood & Nicholas, 2007, p.172). Similarly, analysis of the LSYPE reveals that students who believe it likely they will apply and be accepted to university "tend to have higher Key Stage test scores than young people who want to work full-time at age 16 or who think it unlikely that they will apply to university" (Chowdry et al., 2009, p.40).

Research indicates that a student's perception of their academic achievement in Years 8 and 9 also influences their career and study preferences (Simons, Beavis, Niola & Considine, 2005). Young people who believe they are able to achieve and attribute their success to hard work generally have higher aspirations. Attribution theory, or the way people interpret their successes and failures[31] at school has a significant impact upon motivation. Further, student motivation will be enhanced if students are able to attribute their failures to factors they have most control over, namely, "personal effort or strategy use" (McInerney & McInerney, 1998, p.184). Conversely, if students believe that their educational performance is determined by external factors, they feel powerless and "learn to be helpless" rather than associating success with effort and developing realistic perceptions of their abilities (McInerney & McInerney, 1998, p.185).

Young people's aspirations and attitudes to school are also shaped by their socio-economic status. A recent longitudinal study exploring the gaps in "education and behavioural outcomes" between the richest and poorest young people[32] in England emphasised "very large differences in young people's own attitudes and behaviours". These attitudes may be shaped by the home, school and broader neighbourhood contexts. In comparison to young people from richer backgrounds, young people from poor families are "typically less likely to think they are good at school work", "less likely to find school worthwhile and enjoy school", "have somewhat lower aspirations and expectations for their own future education at age 14 (including their post-16 and higher education outcomes), and considerably lower aspirations and expectations by age 16". They are also "more likely to experience bullying at school, especially at age 14" and "have less positive relations with their teachers, and slightly lower participation rates in positive activities, such as sport or reading" (Chowdry, Crawford & Goodman, 2009, p.82). Refer to the sections entitled *Mental health and Physical health* in Part 1for a discussion of the impact of disadvantage on young people's health and development.

Parental expectations and aspirations for their children have a significant impact upon the education outcomes of young people. Research demonstrates that parents of students from poorer backgrounds tend to have lower educational aspirations for their children,[33] are less involved in "school and family life" and "divert fewer material resources towards education in the home" (Chowdry et al., p.29). On average, their children go to "lower quality schools" with a greater proportion of students from "poor and ethnic minority backgrounds". These young people also have "lower aspirations and expectations for their own future education, less positive relations with their teachers, and lower participation in positive activities" (Chowdry et al., 2009, p.9). The influence of financial disadvantage and the school attended upon student engagement is echoed in PISA data, which concluded that students attending schools with a large proportion of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds or who come from low

socioeconomic backgrounds are "more likely to be disaffected". Students with both factors "especially at risk of poor school performance" (Willms, 2003, p.48).

Clearly, the role parents play in shaping the aspirations of young people is mediated by socio-economic status and the broader community context to the extent that "young people's aspirations are being indirectly influenced by their environment from before birth" (Cuthbert & Hatch, 2009, p.5). In particular, analysis of the *Longitudinal Study of Young People in England* (LSYPE found that young people with the lowest aspirations were found in neighbourhoods with "poor households" whose inhabitants felt trapped and "unable to break out of living in deprived areas" (Cuthbert & Hatch, 2009, p.4). In short, community deprivation is associated with young people being less likely to "develop ambitious educational aspirations" (Cuthbert & Hatch, 2009, p.7). For example, evidence of an "aspiration gap" has emerged from the United Kingdom whereby young people with a lower socio-economic status tend to have lower aspirations for their own future[34] (The Panel on Fair Access to the Professions, 2009, p.25; see also Bowden & Doughney, 2010).

Although there is compelling evidence of disadvantaged young people having low aspirations, other research conflicts with this and highlights the ambitious aspirations of disadvantaged young people. This is not problematic but highlights the diverse range of aspirations held by disadvantaged young people. What is troubling is the evidence that disadvantaged young people are not realising their aspirations regardless of whether they are high or low.

The aspiration-achievement gap: low education outcomes

There is a well-documented gap between the aspirations and academic achievement of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (Gutman & Akerman, 2008). The "aspiration-achievement gap" is the space between student aspirations and the education outcomes needed to realise them. Some young people are more likely to experience this gap, particularly "ethnic minorities" and those from disadvantaged backgrounds (DCSF, 2008, p.9; Bowden & Doughney, 2010, p.127). This is perhaps because of the influence of socio-economic status on young people's ability to realise their post-school plans (Beavis, Murphy, Bryce & Corrigan, 2004). In contrast, research suggests that students from high socio-economic backgrounds have an advantage in realising their aspirations for tertiary study because their "socio-cultural" background is "more closely aligned" to the higher education sector (Bowden & Doughney, 2010, p.119).

The aspiration-achievement gap was documented in a recent analysis of the 2006–07 *Aspirations Online* survey of over 2000 students (Years 9–12) in a region of Melbourne containing many suburbs with the lowest level of socio-economic status in Melbourne . The researchers observed that although participants had strong aspirations to attend university, alarmingly, "enrolment levels fall considerably short of aspirations (by about 20%)" (Bowden & Doughney, 2010, p.127). Similarly, *The Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth* indicate that youth (15–16 years) held "strong expectations" about pursuing post-school education and training with approximately 60% of students intending to "undertake university study" (Underwood & Rothman, 2008, p.5). Similarly, research from the U.K reveals that over 75% of Year 7 participants expressed a desire to go to university (Atherton, Cymbir, Roberts, Page & Remedios, 2009). Having established the existence of a gap between high aspirations and education outcomes, more research is needed to begin to understand the multiple and complex factors that contribute to this gap which leaves some young people without the education level needed to achieve their goals.

Research has also observed a gap between the high aspirations "minority parents" hold for their children and the actual education attainment of individuals from within their ethnic group (Spera, Wentzel & Matto, 2009, p.1149). It is important to reiterate that additional factors contribute to the education outcomes of students and note the combined impact of ethnicity and disadvantage. That is, high parental aspirations, in isolation, do not necessarily guarantee the realisation of student academic achievement or aspirations. Nor does belonging to an ethnic minority group necessarily negatively influence education attainment, research suggests that an affluent background minimises the "ethnic group differences in attainment" (Marjoribanks, 2005, p.110). In short, affluence provides a level of protection to students from ethnic minority groups, whereas financial disadvantage combined with ethnicity appears to present a double disadvantage for young people's education outcomes.

It is clear that simply having high aspirations is insufficient to overcome financial and social barriers. Additional ongoing support for disadvantaged young people is also vital, the positive impact of parent aspirations on achievement, retention and career planning is explored below. Parents need to be assisted and informed about their role in facilitating the development of aspirations and positive attitudes from the early years. The importance of parental support for aspirations is echoed elsewhere (for example, Atherton, Cymbir, Roberts, Page & Remedios, 2009). Teachers also need to be reminded about the importance of providing meaningful feedback to students to help shape and guide their aspirations (Gutman & Akerman, 2008). In addition to age appropriate information and advice, disadvantaged young people may also require a "tutor, youth worker or mentor" to help motivate them and develop their aspirations (Gutman & Akerman, 2008).

The impact of parents' aspirations, education and parenting styles

Young people need to be nurtured and encouraged to develop early aspirations and to transform them into career choices. The biggest influence for both of these tasks is a young person's parents. Research reflects the important role of the family in shaping post-school aspirations (Bryce, Anderson, Frigo & McKenzie, 2007; see also Beavis, 2006; Frigo, Bryce, Anderson & McKenzie, 2007). Research has also found evidence of high parental aspirations among a diverse range of ethnic groups which suggests that additional factors contribute to the education outcomes of students (Spera, Wentzel & Matto, 2009) and the realisation of aspirations.

There are numerous factors involved in the interplay between aspirations and academic achievement including a young person's abilities, occupational goals, beliefs about their ability and parental beliefs about their ability. While the link between the aspirations and educational attainment of young people is complex, the positive impact of parent aspirations on achievement is clear (Gutman & Akerman, 2008). Research from the United Kingdom suggests that generally, students who have higher aspirations (or whose parents do) tend to achieve better educational outcomes. This has a mutually beneficial impact on subsequent student aspirations and achievement (Gutman & Akerman, 2008).

Clearly, parents are a central influence in their children's experience of school. However, this influence is shaped by parental experiences of school (this issue is further explored in the section entitled *Student engagement: family and community risk factors, p.25*). Considering the attitudes of parents are shaped by their own school experiences, it is not surprising that recent research observed that Aboriginal students appeared to experience "more negative parent and peer influences" and had a "significantly lower self-concept" than other students (McInerney, 2008, p.878).

"Parental aspirations" and those of peers as well as "the quality of teaching and features of school climate" can also influence school completion (Lamb, Walstab, Teese, Vickers & Rumberger, 2004, p.7). Research has found that certain parenting styles including "active engagement in their children's career development ... and openness to children's needs and concerns, have been positively associated with favourable career development progress" (Hughes & Thomas, 2003, p.44). It seems clear that "there may be important cultural differences in how families think about and construct their home environment that influence the success of children" (Davis-Kean, 2009, p.290).

There is limited Australian research on the interplay between ethnicity, culture and the family on student aspirations (Frigo, Bryce, Anderson & McKenzie, 2007). However, a recent Australian study exploring the motivation of four ethnic groups: Anglo, Aboriginal, Lebanese and Asian (Years 7–9) in 11 high schools[35] observed that for all groups, "students' mastery goal and sense of purpose", or the degree of internal motivation, appeared to be "significant predictors" of student intention to pursue further education. The study also found evidence of differing levels of student engagement (refer to the previous section, *The aspiration gap* for a discussion on the influence of parents). For example, the Anglo students generally displayed a "reluctance to be publicly seen doing well at school" (McInerney, 2008, p.878).

Community characteristics associated with low aspirations

Community characteristics including "close-knit social networks, a sense of isolation from broader opportunities and a history of economic decline appear to be associated with low aspirations" (Cuthbert & Hatch, 2009, p.7). LSYPE data confirmed that both peer influences and the mother's social networks affect young people's educational aspirations (Cuthbert & Hatch, 2009, p.5), partly because an

individual's behaviours and attitudes tend to conform to those of the peer group. The other significant factor is the link between "low aspirations" and high levels of "bonding social capital" — these strong bonds among friends or family can limit the choices of young people (Cuthbert & Hatch, 2009, p.4). This explains why communities with low levels of "bridging social capital" are disadvantaged. They lack access to a diverse range of contacts beyond their neighbourhood and restricted social networks. This influences expectations, which in turn implies limited aspirations since these young people are potentially deprived of "valuable sources of inspiration, information and opportunity" (Cuthbert & Hatch, 2009, p.5). In addition, research suggests that the decisions made by young people about further study are dependent on their socio-economic status, in particular, "different decisions arise in part due to the different social and economic costs associated with obtaining higher levels of education" (Bowden & Doughney, 2010, p.119).

Family characteristics associated with education and behavioural outcomes

Research has identified some factors that stand out for their impact upon the education or behavioural outcomes of young people:

- family/child interactions – positive interactions such as eating together are "strongly related" to education and behavioural outcomes
- computer and internet access in the home – at 14 years appears to be "strongly positively associated with educational attainment at age 16"
- neighbourhood deprivation — deprived youth living in deprived areas are more likely to be "not in education, employment or training" at 17 years (Chowdry, Crawford & Goodman, 2009, pp. 37, 83).

Household income has a clear and direct impact on young people's education, "cost remains one of the barriers preventing children from low-income families from receiving the education taken for granted by most Australians" effectively excluding them from some extra-curricular activities and also impacting upon attendance and academic performance since "disadvantaged students often lack essential items like books and uniforms and are sometimes kept home as a result" (Bond & Horn, 2009, p.27). Recently, there has been growing interest in estimating the cost of full participation in the public education system. The *Left Out and Missing Out* project which surveyed clients of three organisations[36] and people from the general community to determine the essentials for Australian life found that participants emphasised the importance of children having current school books or participating in school and extra-curricular activities. However, 36% of clients surveyed were unable to give their children school books and "new school clothes". Further, 27% of clients revealed that their children did not attend "school activities or outings" and 37% said their children were not involved in a hobby or "leisure activity" (Social Policy Research Centre, 2007, p.1).

The impact of parents' education is central to explaining the poorer performance of adolescents from economically disadvantaged families (Chowdry et al., 2009, p.63). Young people with parents who have a high level of educational attainment tend to perform better academically than young people whose parents have low qualifications, however, the association between highly educated parents and academic achievement appears to be exhausted by age 14 (Chowdry et al., 2009, p.37). Specifically, the authors observed a causal link between the mother's education and the child's academic performance, "the higher education of the mother causes the higher test scores" that were observed (Chowdry et al., 2009, p.83). Refer to the section in Part 1on *Building positive relationships* for a discussion of the impact of positive parent relationships on children's health and social interactions.

Aspirations and career knowledge

The Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth observed a pattern of young people aged 15 years holding unrealistic work aspirations when asked the type of job they expected to have at 30 years of age (Curtis & McMillan, 2008, p.29). Responses were categorised into nine occupations.[37] Significantly, 46% of survey participants "expected to be in a professional occupation by age 30" whereas approximately 20% of the labour force is "employed in these occupations" (ABS, as cited in Curtis & McMillan, 2008, p.29). Similarly, 18% of survey participants expected "clerical, sales or elementary occupations" whereas these occupations comprise 45% of the labour force (ABS, as cited in Curtis & McMillan, 2008, p.29).

A recent study highlighted that 7% of young people did not know what they would do to achieve their career aspirations (Curtis & McMillan, 2008, p.30).[38] Some indicated a pathway that would leave them over qualified for the career they sought, almost one third of participants expected a clerical or labouring position but planned to study at university. There was also evidence of "planned under-education". Twenty per cent of participants aspiring to professional careers and one third of people aspiring to trade occupations expressed an intention to pursue qualifications "below the level typically required for these occupations" (Curtis & McMillan, 2008, p.38; see also Beavis, Curtis & Curtis, 2005a; Beavis, Curtis & Curtis, 2005b). Similar evidence of young adolescents possessing unrealistic career aspirations and limited knowledge about how to achieve these aspirations has emerged from the U.K (Atherton, Cymbir, Roberts, Page & Remedios, 2009).

Research indicates young people's career ignorance can be linked to their parents. Parents influence their children's career planning and aspirations, however, not all parents feel sufficiently informed or capable of assisting young people with their aspirations and career planning (Frigo, Bryce, Anderson & McKenzie, 2007). There is evidence that some students are uninformed about what is required to enter into particular fields of future study or work, this was also reflected in a recent report prepared for The Smith Family (Beavis, Curtis & Curtis, 2005a).

This career ignorance illustrates an absence of adequate and accurate career information for young people (Beavis, Curtis & Curtis, 2005a). It is advantageous to support students early in secondary school (Frigo, Bryce, Anderson & McKenzie, 2007) to enable students to develop "more explicit understanding of the relationship between school success and post-school choices" (Sullivan, Mornane, Prain, Campbell, Deed, Drane et al., 2009, p.188). Deficiencies in appropriate career guidance are also reflected by Lamb et al. (2004) who advocate the provision of "case-management" and "transition mentoring" in contrast to the provision of career information (Lamb, Walstab, Teese, Vickers & Rumberger, 2004, p.11).

Consequently, *The Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth* recommend the provision of "high quality career guidance" to students and their families to inform them about "career opportunities" as well as the "different pathways available and the implications of school non-completion" (Curtis & McMillan, 2008, p.47). This may not necessarily be provided by schools but perhaps through schools, particularly in light of research that school career programs and work experience had little impact on guiding or informing young people's career development and planning (Yates & McLeod, as cited in Loch and Makar, 2008). Research supports the need for career initiatives that provide information to assist young people with their subject choices in the middle years, however, this information should be general and exclude specific information about entrance and application requirements that older students need (Loch & Makar, 2008). Other research advocates the provision of "vocational alternatives to post-compulsory schooling" and work opportunities particularly for those who are disadvantaged and "most at risk of early leaving" (Curtis & McMillan, 2008, p.47).

The need for career guidance initiatives that are tailored to the needs of young people is also reflected internationally. A recent Portuguese study exploring career development attitudes of students in Years 9 and 12 concluded that in Year 9, activities should promote planning and help "students to establish and clarify their career goals" which is "crucial to motivate students". Whereas students in Year 12 require information to assist them with "realistic career planning". The study also found that perceptions of control over "career decisions" positively influence self-esteem which contributes to "an optimistic way of thinking about the future and the establishment of short and long-career goals" (Janeiro, 2010, p.176).

What is the level of engagement from students in the middle years?

Defining engagement: dynamic and context specific

Engagement can be defined as "students' participation and efforts around academic tasks of attending school, paying attention and behaving in class, completing homework, and turning in assignments on time" (Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes & Milburn, 2009, p.157). Typically, school engagement is divided into "behavioural, emotional and cognitive aspects". Behavioural engagement includes "attendance" and "participation in school activities", emotional engagement includes a student's "sense of belonging and value" and cognitive engagement relates to beliefs about the importance of school, or that "school is for me" (Taylor & Nelms, 2006, p.39).

Undoubtedly, classroom environment plays a significant role in facilitating adolescent motivation and engagement (Ryan & Patrick, 2001, p.454). The *Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth* revealed that approximately 41% of students felt it was difficult for teachers to maintain student interest in their subject area (Underwood & Rothman, 2008, p.3). In Australia, student disengagement in the middle years is a "longstanding problem" (Tadich, Deed, Campbell & Prain, 2007, p.258). However, disengagement cannot be attributed exclusively to teachers. It develops over a period of time as a result of cumulative challenges that individual students face in the "community, at school, and within the family" (Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes & Milburn, 2009, p.157). Longitudinal survey data of over 15,000 Australian students in Year 9 indicates that when students are positive about their school and "actively engaged in its academic work and other activities" they are more likely to "develop the intention to continue through school and beyond".

Engagement varies and is influenced by numerous factors

However, engagement is not static, it varies according to a young person's circumstances. Generally, the engagement of young people in their learning may be influenced by "a young person's self esteem and their perception of their abilities", "their life experiences" and general health. Research indicates that "young people who are struggling with physical and mental health issues that affect their abilities may have greater difficulties in engaging with learning in traditional classrooms" (Social Inclusion Board, 2007, p.9). Engagement also changes over time, the Brotherhood of St Laurence's *Life Chances Study* found that 15 year old students were less engaged than they were at 11–12 years and generally, those from "the low income group were less engaged than those from high-income families". Further, they were "less likely to look forward to school than they had been when aged 11 and 12" (Taylor & Nelms, 2006, p.40).

Other Australian research has observed that although the particular school attended and the level of "whole-school engagement" matters, numerous variables have "a significant effect on individual engagement". These variables include, "gender, parents' educational level, perceptions of school climate, self concept of ability, and intrinsic motivation" (Fullarton, 2002, p.32). Similarly, an Australian study exploring teacher views of student engagement in the middle years identified the following factors: "lack of confidence, apathy, boredom, poor attitudes, absenteeism, disruptive behaviour" and not comprehending the importance of developing goals for the future (Tadich, Deed, Campbell & Prain, 2007, p.262). A recent US study concluded that although many factors including poverty affect education engagement and outcomes, at-risk students with "supportive and caring adults" in their lives reported "higher levels of school engagement". Consequently, the authors advocate the provision of supportive adults at home and the broader community through initiatives such as mentoring programs and parental education programs that develop parenting knowledge and skills (Woolley & Bowen, 2007, p.103).

An Australian study into engagement and alienation among Australian youth in four senior secondary schools within an "industrial region characterised by relatively high levels of social dislocation, unemployment and poverty" is critical of the tendency to view alienated youth as lacking the "motivation and social capital to function effectively in school", this perspective problematises the individual and disregards "deeper social and educational concerns" (p.25). The study also reported the difficulties teachers experienced including "motivating and engaging significant numbers of seemingly apathetic students, and dealing with the fractured lives of young people and intrusions of violence and antisocial behaviour in their classrooms" (p.29). It emerged that the greatest challenge teachers faced was engaging students in "intellectually demanding and relevant learning", they also reported "pressure to teach to the test" and conform to "narrow provisions of assessment and reporting practices" (McInerney, 2009, p.30).

There is also a relationship between student engagement and ethnicity. Research derived from the *Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth* has observed that students with a "language background other than English" tend to have "higher levels of engagement" than students from an "English-speaking background or with parents born in Australia" (Fullarton, 2002, p.13). Other research suggests that although the majority of students receive parental encouragement, students from a non-English speaking background tend to "perceive stronger levels of parental support" than those from English speaking backgrounds (Bowden & Doughney, 2010, p.124).

Student attitudes and intentions: a key influence on school engagement

Intentions for continuing in education expressed in junior secondary school are "important indications of actually continuing in education" making it necessary to nurture the development of "favourable attitudes to school" in the middle and early years of high school. Further, students who plan tertiary study are more highly engaged than those who plan leaving school to work (Fullarton, 2002, p.v). Research indicates that intentions have stronger associations with continuing to Year 12 than any aspect of "student background" (Khoo & Ainley, 2005, p.11).

However, intentions are influenced by both attitudes to school and academic achievement. In particular, literacy and numeracy directly influences participation in post-compulsory education. The *Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth* documents a pattern whereby students with "mastery of literacy and numeracy are more likely to complete Year 12, continue in education and find jobs to earn higher incomes" (Khoo & Ainley, 2005, pp.17–18). Conversely, repeated low achievement in literacy and numeracy and poor attendance contributes to young people's disengagement (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2008).

Recent Australian research into student engagement advocates focusing on student beliefs, attitudes and achievement in order to address disengagement (Tadich, Deed, Campbell & Prain, 2007, p.260). In an Australian study, students who "disagreed a lot" in response to the statement, "I like being in school", had significantly lower maths and science achievement than other Australian students in Year 4 and Year 8. Thomson et al. (2007) found that student self-confidence was positively linked to achievement in maths and science. Student confidence "in their ability to learn mathematics and science" and by extension, engagement in maths and science is shaped by the interplay between past experience in the subject and "perceived difficulty of the subject". Students at the high level of self-confidence in learning mathematics had the "highest average mathematics achievement". Similarly, science achievement was highest among Australian Year 8 students who reported the highest "level of self-confidence in learning science" (Thomson et al., 2007, pp.167–8).

It is important to note that although 75% of Year 8 Australian students stated they liked being in school, the "percentage of Year 4 students agreeing a lot that they liked being in school (44%) was almost double that of the percentage of Year 8 students (24%)". This finding lends weight to claims about a drop in engagement in the middle years (Thomson et al., 2007, p.171). The LSYPE revealed that young people who stopped liking school or "finding it worthwhile" between ages 14–16 "tend to score lower". Conversely, students who like and value school (14 years) tend to make more academic progress and are "less likely to play truant" (Chowdry et al., 2009, p.37).

Significantly, analysis of the LSYPE revealed that young people's attitudes and behaviours appear to have a stronger impact on their education outcomes than both parental attitudes and behaviours and material resources in the home. At 14 years, 77% of young people from the richest families in England reported they were "likely to apply to university" and get in compared with 49% of 14 year olds from the poorest families. A significant proportion of young people from the poorest families stopped believing they would apply to university between 14–16 years; these students also tended to score lower academically and "make less progress"[39] whereas "young people who started thinking it likely that they will apply to university" tended to achieve better academic scores and make more progress (Chowdry et al., 2009, p.38). This compliments Australian research findings that students with "higher socioeconomic backgrounds and those with professional parents" had the highest levels of school engagement (Fullarton, 2002, p.v). It also illustrates strong associations between attitudes and academic achievement. However, it is likely that socioeconomic status may also influence the school a student attends and the learning environment they are exposed to (Fullarton, 2002, p.31). Significantly, maintaining belief in the likelihood of successfully applying to university is associated with "higher educational attainment and lower participation in risky behaviours" (Chowdry et al., 2009, p.3).

Links between engagement, academic achievement, motivation and Year 12 completion

To reiterate, school engagement predicts academic achievement (Woolley & Bowen, 2007, p.96). Recent Australian PISA data has observed associations between student confidence, motivation and academic performance (Thomson & De Bortoli, 2007, p.15). One consequence of disengagement from school is non-completion of Year 12. According to *The Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth*, the following

factors are linked with "an increased likelihood of non-completion", "not having an intention to complete school, coming from a non-nuclear family, being a below average academic achiever, being male, having an unfavourable attitude towards school and perceiving student-teacher relations as poor". The "intention to complete Year 12 is the single most powerful influence" on school completion but positive mathematics and reading performance is also significant (Curtis & McMillan, 2008, p.45). Importantly, those leaving school for positive reasons, namely to undertake an apprenticeship, had more successful transitions to work or study compared to those who left for negative reasons such as "not liking school" (Curtis & McMillan, 2008, p.45).

A recent New Zealand study found that the decision not to pursue post-compulsory schooling is shaped by numerous factors that accumulate over time. These factors include "academic performance, parental income, and school and peer effects" (Maani & Kalb, 2007, pp.371–2). Disengagement is "particularly evident" among students from low socio-economic backgrounds (Tadich, Deed, Campbell & Prain, 2007, p.259). The study observed the influence of "parental income and resources" as well as "early childhood income resources" on academic performance at 15 years. Clearly, "personal ability and socioeconomic background" influence a young person's decision to leave school but the impact of early childhood resources on school retention necessitate strategies that cater for younger disadvantaged students (Maani & Kalb, 2007, pp.371–2).

Decisions made about school leaving are influenced by students' interests and the information they can access through family, school and peers (Maani & Kalb, 2007, pp.371–2) highlighting once again the need for effective, targeted career education (as emphasised by Janeiro, 2010; Curtis & McMillan, 2008). Refer to the discussion in the earlier section entitled *Aspirations and career knowledge, page 21*. Given the importance of academic performance, strategies might also target academic performance through initiatives such as homework assistance for disadvantaged students (Maani & Kalb, 2007, pp.371–2).

Recent analysis of TIMSS data observed a link between student engagement or "motivation to learn" and perceptions about maths and science as "advantageous to their future education" and work (Thomson et al., 2007, p.164). Specifically, 75% of Year 8 Australian students surveyed placed a "high value on mathematics" these students also had "significantly higher average science achievement" than those placed at the medium and low levels in the index of students valuing mathematics (SVM).[40] Similarly, Year 8 Australian students at the high level of the students valuing science index (SVS) had higher average science achievement than students at the medium and low levels. Significantly, much lower levels of Australian students highly valued science (42%) in contrast to those who valued mathematics (75%).[41]

Other research confirms that the absence of physical equipment in the home can present barriers for disadvantaged students. Current TIMSS data suggests that students in Year 4 and Year 8 with "abundant literacy resources" in the home have on average higher achievement in maths and science. In Australia, although 22% of Year 8 students reported having more than 200 books at home, this figure decreased from 2003 and there was a rise in the proportion of students reporting "25 or fewer books in the home". In 2007, a high percentage of Australian students (97% in Year 8) reported having a computer at home whereas 77% of Year 8 students "reported using a computer both at home and at school". Maths and science achievement was "significantly higher among students that reported using a computer at home and school" compared to students who only used a computer at home (17% of students) (Thomson et al., 2007, p.156).

Student engagement: family and community risk factors

Having established that parents influence their children's aspirations (refer to the earlier section on *The impact of parents' aspirations, education and parenting styles, p.19*), it is clear that parents can also influence their children's engagement. In particular, parent attitudes to school, shaped by their own experiences as students may influence their children's attitudes and level of engagement. For example, parents from low socio-economic backgrounds may have fewer years of education and more negative associations with school. Parental negative feelings and attitudes to school may also inhibit their active involvement in their children's school.

Similarly, the *Social Science Research Unit* identified school, community and family risk factors associated with 16–18 year olds in England not being engaged in education, work or training. Family

risk factors include; "family conflict", "low income" and "having caring responsibilities". School risk factors include; "low achievement", "aggressive behaviour", "lack of commitment" and "disorganisation". Community risk factors include; "alienation" and residing in "disadvantaged neighbourhoods" (Thomas, Vigurs, Oliver, Suárez, Newman, Dickson & Sinclair, 2008, pp.35–6).

Further, some low SES parents who are also from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may encounter language difficulties. This presents an additional obstacle to parent involvement in their child's school (Berthelsen & Walker, 2008; Spera, Wentzel & Matto, 2009). The working conditions of some parents with "lower levels of formal education" may present an additional obstacle to actively helping their children with their education (Spera, Wentzel & Matto, 2009, p.1149). In addition, it seems that parents from ethnically diverse backgrounds may have a diverse range of understandings about what being "educationally helpful" to their children means (Berthelsen & Walker, 2008, p.35).

In addition, migrant and refugee adolescents face a unique set of obstacles as they deal with the transition into adolescence and beyond as well as the transition to a new culture. Adolescents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may face pressure to perform academically and help at home. Trying to meet family expectations may cause frustrations leading to "poor concentration, under-achievement, school non-attendance or withdrawal and depression". In addition, because they may know more than their parents about the education system, these young people may be forced to make important decisions about their education on their own (O'Sullivan, 2006, pp.14–17).

The Brotherhood of St Laurence's *Life Chances Study* found that 15 year old students from "the low-income group were less engaged than those from high-income families". Further, they were "less likely to look forward to school than they had been when aged 11 and 12". For some 15 year olds, cost proved an obstacle to involvement in school activities such as camps and excursions. However, friends were an important part of their enjoyment of school and some of the 15 year old students with "limited emotional and behavioural engagement in school"[42] still articulated that school was important perhaps because of beliefs expressed that "a good education would lead to a good job" (Taylor & Nelms, 2006, p.40).

Facilitating student engagement

A recent longitudinal US study[43] into the academic engagement of newly arrived immigrant youth found that "relational engagement" was positively associated with academic engagement and achievement (Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes & Milburn, 2009, p.155). Quality relationships formed at school with peers and teachers serve numerous functions including the provision of "a sense of belonging, emotional support, tangible assistance and information...and positive feedback" (Sarason & Pierce, as cited in Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes & Milburn, 2009, p.155). The importance of quality relationships as a means of coping with school is echoed elsewhere in a study of 300 students in Years 9–10 in rural Victoria (Maras, 2007, p.21). The study concluded that "adolescents who were more connected to their peers, teachers and school expressed more control over their thoughts, feelings and behaviours" and reported using "productive coping strategies" such as "solve the problem, work hard, focus on the positive" (Cunningham, Werner & Firth, 2004, p.146).

Like Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes & Milburn, the *Life Chances Study* provides evidence for the importance of relationships with peers and "teachers who they felt they got on well with", subjects and extra-curricular activities they enjoyed and beliefs about the importance of school for their future for engagement with school. Conversely, disengagement was influenced by being unable to do school work, boredom, feeling excluded, not having a voice or experiencing discrimination. The way disadvantaged students deal with difficulties with school work seems to be mediated by their "temperament" and "relationship with their teachers". That is, some students would decide they dislike the subject and not try whereas others would work with their teacher to try to improve their understanding (Taylor & Nelms, 2006, p.40).

As suggested earlier, some 15 year olds reported that involvement in extra-curricular activities facilitated their engagement, however, for some, cost provided a barrier to participation in these activities. In addition, parents revealed their difficulties meeting "basic costs such as uniforms, books and subject fees as well as 'extras'" (Taylor & Nelms, 2006, p.40). School disengagement can be thought of as a complex cycle that involves numerous factors and is difficult to break out of, "missing school may lead to not understanding the work, to conflict with teachers and in turn to missing more school". In addition, peer conflict, feeling excluded and struggling financially with "school costs" may lead to more absence and disengagement (Taylor & Nelms, 2006, p.42).

Young people need to engage positively with school both for their wellbeing and "future completion of school". Therefore, from a policy perspective, a priority for schools is the provision of an inclusive school community that listens to students, addresses absenteeism and helps disadvantaged students deal with school associated costs (Taylor & Nelms, 2006, p.43). Other research highlights the importance of providing and actively encouraging young people's participation in a variety of extra-curricular activities to develop student connectedness to the school and increase their engagement (Fullarton, 2002, p.32).

Part 3: Best practice initiatives

Unsurprisingly, many of the initiatives addressing student engagement and aspirations have a strong focus on schools and teaching practice (Pendergast, 2009; Almond, Bishop, Hamill, Laing & Varcin, 2007; NSW DET, 2006) as well as student-centred learning (Black, 2007; Milne, 2003). The following review of best practice initiatives does not include programs with a strong school focus because The Smith Family will not be attempting to develop programs that directly address teaching practice or school reform. This approach is consistent with the agreed strategies of the *MCEETYA four year plan*,the focus of which is to increase access to "coordinated support and assistance for young people likely to disengage or those who have disengaged from education and training" (MCEETYA, 2009, p.12). Many of the programs have emerged to address perceived needs in specific communities and are not formally evaluated. The focus of this section is programs developed for students in Years 8–9 as well as programs that could potentially be adapted for this age range. The importance of tailoring programs to suit the local context is emphasised by the *Brotherhood of St Laurence* who stress the need for "youth-focused services that are readily identifiable and locally accessible, will listen to and understand the complexity of the young people's lives...and can provide or refer to practical assistance" (Taylor, 2009, p.viii).

Best practice initiatives: tertiary

Early interventions focused on developing student aspirations can generally be categorised as "the expose, the taster and the combo" (Gale, Tranter, Bills, Hattam & Comber, 2010, p.42). The *expose* aims to expose students to knowledge and information about tertiary settings, courses and associated careers. The *taster* enables students to sample life at university and is therefore highly activity based. The *combo* combines aspects of the expose and the taster and focuses on information and experience (Gale, Tranter, Bills, Hattam & Comber, 2010, p.46).

DEEWR has identified characteristics of interventions that contribute positively to increased participation in higher education particularly for disadvantaged students (Gale, Tranter, Bills, Hattam & Comber, 2010, pp.70–3). The characteristics are:

- collaboration between schools, the tertiary sector, families and the broader community
- early, long-term and sustained support for children possibly beginning as early as primary school
- people-rich ongoing mentoring to provide guidance to young people
- cohort-based interventions that target classes of larger cohorts of youth in schools or regions
- communication and information including digital resources, however, this must be supplemented with specific guidance
- familiarisation/site experiences in conjunction with "ongoing conversations" about study choices have proven effective
- recognition of difference – universities should appreciate the assets of "low SES communities" such as "linguistic diversity" and "specific cultural knowledge"
- provide financial supports and/or incentives in conjunction with other support are important. Most interventions provide some form of financial assistance.

Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP), (USA)

GEAR UP is run by a non-profit organisation that receives significant government funding. Grants are awarded to collaborations to provide school based interventions in disadvantaged schools. These collaborations must involve school, universities and community groups. Part of the emphasis is the provision of financial incentives to schools to improve student performance. Programs are required to include advice on preparing college applications as well as mentoring, tutoring, counselling and opportunities for parent involvement and teacher professional development. To achieve this there is a reliance on existing college students to provide support and advice to participants. Although the long-term impact is unclear, a recent evaluation at the end of Year 8 found that attendance at a GEAR UP school was positively linked with: parent and student knowledge of tertiary education opportunities; parent involvement in the school; and parents' higher expectations for their child's academic performance (Gale, Tranter, Bills, Hattam & Comber, 2010, p.31–2).

Upward Bound, (USA)

Upward Bound is the biggest, longest running program in the United States with over 700 programs currently offered to high school students from low-income families. Government grants are awarded over approximately four years to community groups to run programs that cater for 50 to 100 students per year. To be eligible to participate, students must be in Year 9 or above, from a "low-income background" and/or be "potential first-generation college students". Generally, students begin the program in Years 9 or 10 and continue until the completion of high school (Gale, Tranter, Bills, Hattam & Comber, 2010, p.58). Upward Bound focuses on academic preparation for post-school study through two elements. Firstly, there is a "college preparation" and work experience summer school at a college campus. All projects must include the following subject areas, "mathematics, laboratory science, composition, literature and a foreign language". Secondly, there is a weekly follow up with students during the year that generally includes tutoring in high school subjects. Students are also given assistance with preparing for college entrance exams and opportunities to visit museums and college campuses. Evaluation of Upward Bound has observed an association between remaining in the program and improved student outcomes (Gale, Tranter, Bills, Hattam & Comber, 2010, p.58).

Advancement via Individual Determination, (USA)

Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) targets "C grade students" in Years 6–12, (most of whom are Latino or African-American) and uses "academically rigorous college preparation programs" to prepare them for entrance to tertiary institutions. As part of AVID, students attend a class each day where they learn: "organisational and study skills"; "critical thinking and writing". They also participate in motivational activities. Two additional days per week are designated "tutorial days" where students work in groups in a particular subject area assisted by college students who are trained as tutors. A higher

proportion of AVID participants (99%) who take part for a minimum of three years graduate from high school and are accepted to college; whereas (82%) of the general population gain entry to college. In addition, approximately 75% of AVID students gain entry to the more prestigious "four-year universities" which is almost three times the national average. AVID has been widely reviewed, an evaluation after the first three years of the program in 10 Texas schools (1999–2002) found that AVID students outperformed their classmates and had higher school attendance rates (Gale, Tranter, Bills, Hattam & Comber, 2010, p.31–3).

Up for It – University of Portsmouth, (UK)

Up for It is an initiative of the University of Portsmouth that targets 11–16 year olds, and aims to inform them about course and career options. The initiative involves joining an informative website that gradually develops participants' "awareness, understanding and enthusiasm" for higher education opportunities. A quarterly magazine with articles on courses and careers and student profiles is also sent to members. There is also a Schools Liaison team that develops workshops on numerous topics. In addition, the Up for It team also attends careers days, parent evenings and delivers presentations at school assemblies. Although there has been no formal evaluation of the program it has received widespread support and was awarded a gold award from the United Kingdom's Higher Education Information Services Trust (Gale, Tranter, Bills, Hattam & Comber, 2010, p.43).

Progression Partnerships – Nottingham Trent University, (UK)

Progression Partnerships is part of Nottingham Trent University's Aimhigher program developed to widen participation in higher education. The model has several parts:

- *Schools and Colleges Work* is an initiative that attempts to inform participants about the career opportunities and broader benefits that higher education offers. University activities are adjusted to meet student needs in a program including speakers and university visits for primary school students. Secondary students are offered activities such as: "workshops, career sessions, parent sessions, exam preparation and revision sessions, and a summer school for student in Year 11". Undergraduate students generally assist with the activities simultaneously serving as a role model/mentor and assist secondary students to increase their aspirations (Gale, Tranter, Bills, Hattam & Comber, 2010, p.48).
- *Admissions Compact Scheme* guarantees students a place or interview for a place at a local university.[44] These students receive financial support and advice, enrolment assistance and regular information sessions targeted at pre and post 16 year olds, parents and school staff. Students may also use the university library in their final year of high school which can assist with the transition to higher education. This scheme is positively associated with increased attainment of students (Gale, Tranter, Bills, Hattam & Comber, 2010, p.48).

Pathways to Education – Pathways Canada, (Canada)

Pathways Canada, a charitable organisation, provides academic, social and financial support to students involved in the Pathways to Education program. Students participate in: tutoring in core subjects four nights per week, group mentoring in Years 9 and 10, specialised career mentoring in Years 11–12, financial support and a bursary for tertiary education (up to $4000 per student). Evaluation of the program revealed a number of positive outcomes for participants: absences halved, the proportion of "academically at-risk students dropped by 60 per cent" and tertiary enrolment increased from 20% to 80%.[45] Significantly, 90% of these college/university enrolments were the first in their family to matriculate. There were also reductions in youth crime, violence and pregnancy rates (Gale, Tranter, Bills, Hattam & Comber, 2010, p.55).

Kwong Lee Dow Young Scholars Program – University of Melbourne, (Australia)

This program aims to support "high-achieving" students in Year 11 and 12. Each school in Victoria is asked to nominate their high achievers in Year 10. The university then selects at least one student from each school to participate in the program during Years 11 and 12. During this time participants have access to study skills workshops, on-campus events, a dedicated space on the university website including information on further study and access to the University of Melbourne's library.

After completing high school, participants are guaranteed a place in the course of their choice if they meet course requirements and get a tertiary entrance rank of 95 or above.[46] During their first year of university participants take part in the Kwong Lee Dow First Year Program which aims to develop academic and leadership skills. After completing their first year of tertiary study, participants are also able to apply for a $2500 Study Abroad grant (Gale, Tranter, Bills, Hattam & Comber, 2010, p.19). Currently, no formal evaluation of the Kwong Lee Dow Young Scholars Program exists.

Talk about Uni – University of Melbourne, (Australia)

Talk about Uni is an online resource developed by the University of Melbourne that aims to encourage high school students to consider university as an option. To do this it facilitates links between parents, schools and the community. The site contains numerous links to education and government sites to assist students to plan future study options. The site also contains general information on university entrance processes, special entry schemes, government assistance and managing finances. Parents are provided with information about tertiary study and supporting their children. Inspirational case studies of current university students from disadvantaged backgrounds are also included to help prospective students believe that tertiary study is accessible and a realistic option.

To supplement this information an outreach program is being developed by the University of Melbourne in conjunction with school staff. A pilot program for Years 9–10 students incorporating "school visits, workshops and other activities" that involves suburban and rural schools will be designed and evaluated to help inform subsequent programs (Gale, Tranter, Bills, Hattam & Comber, 2010, p.45).

Aim for Adelaide Program – University of Adelaide, (Australia)

Aim for Adelaide invites students in Years 9–10 from over 30 disadvantaged schools to university "taster days". Students take part in "hands-on inspirational activities" in faculties and can chat with current students over lunch. Familiarisation with the university and gaining accurate information are important aspects of the day, however, evaluation reveals a very small increase in aspirations to attend university as a result of participation in the program. This raises questions about the effectiveness of taster programs such as these (Gale, Tranter, Bills, Hattam & Comber, 2010, p.45).

University Orientation Program – University of South Australia, (Australia)

The University of South Australia conducts a collaborative orientation program for students in Years 10–11 attending schools in "the highly disadvantaged northern suburbs of Adelaide". The program runs over six to nine weeks[47] and includes a series of lectures and tutorials from numerous disciplines. Students also complete and present a small research project. An evaluation of the year 2008 participants revealed that 65% of students now believed they were more likely to go to university. This program changed the initial perceptions of many students that "university seemed inaccessible" because of concerns about cost, difficulty of work and "family pressures" (Gale, Tranter, Bills, Hattam & Comber, 2010, p.47).

Student Action Research for University Access – Queensland University of Technology, (Australia)

Student Action Research for University Access was developed by Queensland University of Technology and has worked with almost 30 schools to increase the participation of low socio-economic students in tertiary study. Generally, students in Year 10 who tend to be "at risk of disengagement with school" work with teachers and the university[48] to develop an action research project to explore factors inhibiting student transition to higher education. They then develop and evaluate activities to address this problem. Some initiatives that have been developed at various schools as a result of action research include the development of an Indigenous room, a homework centre and a senior study space. No detailed evaluations have been conducted but a second university in Western Australia has implemented the program (Gale, Tranter, Bills, Hattam & Comber, 2010, p.45).

Best practice initiatives: school-based

School based initiatives may involve a range of collaborations between school, families and the community. It is important that these collaborations share responsibility for the education and

development of young people since "high levels of parental and community involvement" are linked to "improved student learning, attendance and behaviour" (DEEWR, 2008, p.2).

New Media Le Fevre High School – South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services, (Australia)

This is a media project for Indigenous students. In groups, students select a topic of interest and make a film. No formal evaluation exists but anecdotally, it was reported that students appeared to demonstrate greater "confidence and stability at school" and retention increased (Social Inclusion Board, 2007, p.22). However, a 2005 review concluded that the this project has been "successful in engaging young Aboriginal people in learning through film studies and film-making, particularly in conjunction with encouraging the students to explore their identities and links with the local Aboriginal community at Port Adelaide" (Social Inclusion Board, 2007, p.22).

Retention and Participation Program Engagement and Enrichment Through the Arts and Sport Re-engagement Centre – DEEWR Case Study, (Australia)

These programs were developed to address the reluctance of younger students to attend school, deal with "anti-social behaviour" and address student engagement issues. The participating secondary school is located in an isolated mining town with a population of over 700 students . Combinations of "economic disadvantage, ethnic diversity and transience" contribute to disengagement and "seriously disruptive behaviour among" a small minority of students (DEEWR, 2008, p.30). To date, there are no evaluations of the program. Each program consists of a number of elements:

- retention and participation program – includes a "come to school bus run", "morning nutrition program", a parent room, student mentors and "volunteer reading scheme"
- engagement and enrichment program – includes music and sport activities and a reconciliation garden[49]
- re-engagement centre – at-risk students are re-located to a house next to the school where they participate in small group lessons and "employment related activities". The re-engagement centre is still in the development phase but is not viewed as an easy option or a reward for bad behaviour (DEEWR, 2008, p.30).

Best practice initiatives: families

Research emphasises the need to support parents as their children move through adolescence into adulthood. Parenting styles can negatively affect adolescent development if they are too restrictive or too laid back, emphasising the need to assist some parents with their parenting approach. In particular, parents or families characterised by high levels of stress might benefit from strategies that enable them to improve these relationships (Asmussen, Corlyon, Hauari & La Placa, 2007). Initiatives that focus on parent and student engagement and help schools work with families to "support student learning, resilience and wellbeing" form part of the agreed strategies of Australian governments (MCEETYA, 2009, p.5). Although parents require a combination of support and advice, services must be suited to the needs of parents and be approachable that is, not demeaning or condescending (MCEETYA, 2009, p.5). They also need to be offered locally at times that are convenient to parents (MCEETYA, 2009, p.5).

Current research from the UK advocates a collaborative approach that involves young people, families and communities. This research has informed a new *Inspiring Communities* initiative that will run locally created programs and activities to "inspire young people" and help them to achieve "realistic, ambitious goals and to improve their educational attainment" in 15 communities. There is no discussion of what these programs might look like, however, the authors outline what the programs should focus on:

- "Broadening young people's horizons
- Providing advice and inspiration to young people
- Raising parents' own aspirations and self-confidence so that they can support their children
- Developing strong social networks in and beyond communities, raising community pride in young people and drawing out the talents of the community to support young people" (Cuthbert & Hatch, 2009, p.7).

Parents as Career Transition Supports – Brotherhood of St. Laurence, (Australia)

Parents as Career Transition Supports (PACTS) is a pilot program that was run in Melbourne in 12 secondary schools over a two year period. It aimed to try to better cater for the transition needs of disadvantaged young people by assisting parents. Parents of students in Years 8–9 were targeted for the program which stemmed from an understanding that careers and transition programs could help parents to "understand careers and the labour market", learn to access resources, understand the importance of their role in their child's transition and provide positive support to their children. The importance of parental support was also highlighted in survey data of over 100 secondary students which found that 78% would like the help of their parents to decide what to do beyond school (Bedson & Perkins, 2006, p.iii). The PACTS program identified and addressed three key issues:

- The majority of participants wanted to support their children but over three quarters felt "ill-equipped".
- Many parents were concerned that their children may make poor decisions that would impact upon their transition from school to work; 79% of parents concerns related to decision making including "having enough information" and "not being ready to make a decision" (Bedson & Perkins, 2006, p.9).
- Parents with lower levels of education were less likely to have discussed "careers and transitions" with their children.

The program consisted of three, two-hour workshops held over three weeks at the school. The workshops were small groups with a maximum of 18 parents and delivered by a professional trainer. Parents had the option of attending one, two or all three workshops. Generally, parents were sent an invitation to attend the workshop, which was followed by a phone call encouraging parents to attend. Schools also promoted the program via the school newsletter or senior staff.[50]

The small group approach enabled the workshops to focus on discussion and the active participation of all parents. This also allowed workshops to be more inclusive, catering for a diverse range of parent abilities (Bedson & Perkins, 2006). Some of the topics included: "communicating with your teenager about careers", "apprenticeships and traineeships" and "preparing for interviews" (Bedson & Perkins, 2006, p.5). Parents also received a handbook containing useful information they could discuss with their children. Evaluation revealed that after involvement in the program, parents felt they had greater awareness of the "education and training" options available to young people, better equipped to support their child's decision making and more confident discussing options with their child (Bedson & Perkins, 2006, p.20). Parent participants recommended involving students in the workshops in some way. This might mean developing a program to be delivered to students simultaneously or adapting the workshops for students to attend. Other suggestions included the provision of childcare, holding the workshops at "neutral venues" outside of school grounds and running mini-workshops on particular transition topics (Bedson & Perkins, 2006, p.28).

The project provides additional evidence of a link between parent confidence and their willingness to discuss and support their child's transition decisions. Although too early to measure "transition outcomes" of the program, evidence suggests that it has contributed to "more successful transitions". Further, it is not clear that the program targets the most disadvantaged parents, nevertheless, it is effective in reaching "parents with limited education" (Bedson & Perkins, 2006, p.31). Evaluation highlighted seven factors considered essential to the success of the PACTS program (Bedson & Perkins, 2006):

- participatory, small group workshops
- relevant and current information
- knowledgeable facilitators
- intensive recruitment of parents
- targeting specific parents
- responding to parent feedback
- fostering relationships to facilitate program delivery.

Developing home, school and community partnerships – NSW Department of Education, (Australia)

This working paper was designed to support schools involved in the *NSW Priority Schools Funding Program*.[51] It emphasises building partnerships between the school, home and community through the consideration of seven strands. For each strand schools are invited to reflect on the discussion prompts and consider numerous suggested "opportunities for action". The seven strands are (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2003, p.11):

- communication among home, school and community
- school and classroom practices
- parents helping their children to learn
- the role of students in linking home and school
- parents as volunteers
- parents learning about children's learning
- working with the community.

Guiding and Supporting Teens: Taking a Triple Focus, Girls, Boys and Parents – DEEWR Case Study, (Australia)

This program targeted twelve girls and nine boys in Year 9 at a Queensland secondary school where numerous parents experienced financial difficulties. Students were selected because of "social problems or isolation or they demonstrated challenging behaviour problems" and teachers thought they were at risk of becoming further disengaged. It had three strands:

- Girls Going Great – 7 week program, 2.5 hours per week held during school time. Focussing on "craft, companionship and learning behaviour strategies" to improve their interactions with others.
- Boys Bouncing Back - 7 week program, 2.5 hours per week held during school time. The program aimed to help boys "develop resilience, improving their communication, setting goals and practising anger management".
- Teen Triple P – 4 week program, 2 hours per session. This parenting program aimed to assist parents with common difficulties including "aggression, peer relationship problems, school-based difficulties" (DEEWR, 2008, p.26). Many parents had to be personally persuaded by school staff to participate, this was viewed as an effective strategy.

No formal evaluations were conducted but the following observations were made by a researcher. Project goals were achieved and the project enabled the school to reach out to "disaffected parents" who were not regularly involved at school (DEEWR, 2008, p.27).

Parent Institute for Quality Education: Raising awareness and concern about student achievement among immigrant and culturally diverse communities, (California, USA)

Currently funded by California State University, the Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE) is an independent organisation whose mission is "to connect families, schools and community as partners to advance the education of every child through parent engagement" (PIQE, 2010). It has been effective in including parents who have felt unwelcome or uncomfortable in their children's schools. PIQE informs parents about their right to be involved in their children's education as well as the benefits of being involved. Staff emphasise that they share parental goals of getting their children into tertiary study.

The 9 week program, available in 16 languages, aims to inform, motivate and help parents to work on improving factors associated with child development. Class content includes:

- negotiating the education system
- communicating with school staff
- requirements to enter college
- supporting the "emotional, social and academic development" of young people (p.6).

In just over 20 years, 450,000 parents have participated in the program in 160 Californian districts. Program evaluation found that PIQE made a positive impact in the following areas: educating parents about the education system, assisting parents to support their children with schoolwork and motivating parents to encourage their children to aspire to tertiary study, increased "school persistence" and a reduction in "dropout rates" (p.6). Obstacles to immigrant parents' involvement in their children's schooling can be overcome with sound programs that facilitate the development of "respectful interpersonal relationships, demystifying the school system, establishing college as a goal, and providing concrete parent-child interactions to support learning" (Duran, Foster, Henderson, Jordan, Mapp, Mediratta et al., 2010, p.6).

Campaign for College and Career Readiness – New Visions for public schools, (New York City, USA)

New Visions is an organisation dedicated to improving the education of young people in New York public schools. It relies on a combination of donations and government funding. In 2008 the Campaign for College and Career Readiness was launched. It consists of three elements; "increasing parental engagement, developing community resources to accelerate school progress" and "tracking student progress at the high school and post-secondary levels". The parental engagement element targets parents of Year 9 students, emphasises "the importance of post-secondary education and what students need to do to get on the path to college and careers" and focuses on "student data to monitor academic performance"[52] (Duran, Foster, Henderson, Jordan, Mapp, Mediratta et al., 2010, p.9). To do this, New Visions developed "the school data snapshot", a colour coded "student achievement tracking tool"[53] and a "student tracker" to allow parents to quickly see their child's progress and compare it with benchmarks for Year 9 students. Once student data has been understood, the other element of the program concentrates on improving academic achievement through parent involvement with schools. This primarily involves school staff serving on committees, "grade level teams", monitoring attendance and working with the Parent Association (Taveras, Douwes & Johnson, 2010, p.10). No evaluation exists because the program is quite new, however, New Visions won a contract to cater for 76 schools and over 34,000 students in New York City, highlighting the confidence placed in the program (Duran, Foster, Henderson, Jordan, Mapp, Mediratta et al., 2010, p.9).

The Parent Academy: Using family engagement to reform low-performing schools, (Florida, USA)

The Parent Academy is a "family engagement strategy" that exists to educate parents thus empowering them to "become active partners in their children's learning" and support their "educational attainment". In 2008, the academy held Saturday sessions for parents in 9 of the "lowest-performing schools" in Florida. The focus of these sessions was training parents to help them assist their child and "improve learning outcomes". During this time, students attended extra classes that were also focused on improving learning outcomes.

In the first three years of existence, the Parent Academy held over 3,000 events for more than 100,000 parents. Although it is difficult to distinguish the impact of the Parent Academy from other initiatives run concurrently, education officials assert that it made a valued contribution to "increased achievement" of students. Further, school administrators observed improved communication between home and school, improved parent attendance at school events and a rise in "parent advocacy". The Parent Academy has attracted a large, diverse group of parents to the Saturday sessions. The popularity of the program has been linked to its focus on developing "family friendly" schools and connecting families in a supportive atmosphere (Duran, Foster, Henderson, Jordan, Mapp, Mediratta et al., 2010, p.13). The district self-evaluated the impact of the Parent Academy, conducting one and two year qualitative evaluations using a combination of surveys, interviews and document reviews to assess participants' and administrators' perceptions of the program.

Best practice initiatives: after-school programs

There are also growing expectations placed upon after-school programs, consequently, program providers are pressured to deliver on a range of areas including "academic achievement, support

positive youth development, discourage risky behaviour, and ensure participants' physical and psychological safety" (Hirsch, Mekinda & Stawicki, 2010, p.4). Research shows that "using after-school hours constructively and productively can ensure the success of students by keeping them engaged and preventing them from dropping out" (MetLife Foundation, 2009, p.4). The value placed on after-school programs is reflected in MCEETYA's *Four Year Plan* which includes the availability of services such as "out of school activities", particularly to "low socio economic status schools" as an agreed, national strategy (MCEETYA, 2009, p.12). This reflects the Federal Government's focus on "fostering overall student wellbeing and encouraging better connections with families and the local community" as part of the Smarter Schools National Partnerships which is focused on improving achievement in disadvantaged schools (DEEWR, 2010, p.3).

A US study confirmed the link between participation in after-school activities and "greater school connectivity and retention". Significantly, the study found that sport, as an extra-curricular activity, attracted a diverse range of participants from different ethnic backgrounds and had the ability to maintain student interest. Involvement in sport appears to be associated with "greater attraction and retention for minority students". Given the links between participation in extra-curricular activities and school connectedness, there is a need to develop after-school programs that are "inclusive and attractive to all students" (Brown & Evans, 2002, pp.52–3).

A recent Campbell Review of after-school programs and outcomes for young people conducted an extensive review of the literature and found only five programs that met their criteria for inclusion. Analysis of the five programs found no evidence that one program more effectively improved "academic" or "behavioural outcomes". These results could be a reflection of the length of the programs (5–9 months) or the low number of participants. Although there was insufficient evidence from these studies to enable recommendations to be made about future programs, the *Cooke Middle School After-School Recreation Program* had some success with aspirations. Participants had "significantly higher college aspirations" and this was thought to be linked to "the relationship participants developed with a college student volunteer...who shared many background characteristics with the youth" (Zief, Lauver & Maynard, 2006, p.24).

Cooke Middle School After-School Recreation Program, (USA)

This program is offered to students in Years 5–8, five days per week from 5pm till 7pm. It is run by teachers and tertiary student volunteers. The goal of the program is the promotion of "physical, emotional and social well-being" (Zief, Lauver & Maynard, 2006, p.50). Program activities include: dance program, computer games, basketball, fitness centre, board games, the provision of a quiet area for reading/homework and art and craft activities.

The program was externally evaluated by the University of Pennsylvania using a survey of participants and control group students. The following positive effects of the program were found. A higher proportion of young people who participated in the program spent an hour or more on homework each week compared to non-participants. Further, 94% of young people who participated in the program aspired to go to university compared to 85% of non-participants. Also, a higher proportion of young people who participated in the program (80%) spent an hour or more exercising in a fitness centre compared to young people who did not participate in the program (61%).

The following suggestions were made to improve the program (Zief, Lauver & Maynard, 2006, p.51):

- "Strengthen staff recruitment and retention
- Promote regular attendance
- Incorporate a homework assistance program
- Negotiate access to greater school space
- Provide transportation."

After School Matters, (Chicago, USA)

After School Matters is a non-profit organisation in Chicago that offers after-school programs to disadvantaged young people (13–19 years). It draws on "a network of public and private partnerships" and is one of the largest initiatives of its kind in the United States (After School Matters, 2008, p.6). This represents more than 25,000 opportunities for young people in 715 programs across 57 campus sites in 2009–2010. Programs offered fall into the following categories: science, technology, words (communication) and gallery (visual and performing arts). There are three types of program models:

- Clubs – are programs with no attendance requirements, they allow young people to explore their interests and mix with peers.
- Apprenticeships – are generally conducted during the school year (10 weeks) and over the summer holidays (135 hours). Young people receive a stipend and tuition from "industry experts" in small groups of 15 students. Students must apply and pass an interview. Successful applicants must also meet attendance requirements. Completion of some apprenticeships enables young people to gain summer employment.
- Internships – are opportunities for young people to work in business or government settings and gain further experience.

External evaluation of *After School Matters* found that adolescents who participated for at least four semesters were "nearly two-and-a-half times more likely to graduate than students who did not participate". In addition, adolescents involved in the "apprenticeships and activities have higher school attendance and fewer course failures than teens who do not participate" (After School Matters, 2008, p.3).

All Stars Curriculum, (USA)

Although designed to prevent adolescent substance abuse and other risky behaviours, evaluation of this program provides useful insights into the importance of the implementation of after-school programs. These lessons can be used to inform future program development. The program was offered at five schools for 3 hours, 3 days per week during the 2006/07 school year. Schools invited to take part had maths and reading scores that were lower than the national results. The program had three elements:

- the *All Stars* drug prevention content (1.5 hours per week)
- homework help (1.5 hours per week)
- a range of fitness and leisure activities.

Results of the study indicate that "staff quality might be the single most important characteristic of program success". Across the five sites, staff who were "highly educated, well trained, and employed long term" seemed better equipped to deliver services to young people. However, employment conditions in this field tend to be characterised by low wages and part-time employment (Brown Cross, Gottfredson, Wilson, Rorie & Connell, 2010, p.9). Although emphasising the importance of the implementation of after-school programs (see also Hirsch, Mekinda & Stawicki, 2010), the researchers concluded that "academic assistance" was least successful in engaging young people. Therefore, programs aiming to develop skills in this area need to develop activities that engage young people (Brown Cross, Gottfredson, Wilson, Rorie & Connell, 2010, p.9).

ICAN Peer Leadership Program – MetLife Afterschool Alliance, (Arizona, USA)

The ICAN program targets disadvantaged youth (13–18 years) and is part of the After School Alliance.[54] The program gets young people involved in the development of "self-run community service projects". In addition, the program offers help with homework, educational outings and "leadership opportunities". In 2006, the focus of participants was preventative youth drinking campaigns (Afterschool Alliance, 2009, p.3). Currently, no formal evaluation of the program exists.

The Food Project – MetLife After School Alliance, (Boston, USA)

Each year, The Food Project accepts nearly 100 young people (14–17 years) to participate in the Summer Youth Program. Young people work in groups of ten for 35 hours per week for almost seven weeks over the summer.[55] They work on the farm to help produce fruits and vegetables and are then

involved with the selling and distribution of produce. Young people can choose to work in specific regions including "farmers' market, kitchen arts and agriculture" (Afterschool Alliance, 2009, p.10). Currently, no formal evaluation of the program exists but informal observations suggest that participants develop valuable skills including "communication skills, self-discipline, cooperation, problem solving, teamwork, dedication, and perseverance". Participants (14–17 years) are then eligible to apply for work with the Academic Year Program to further develop their skills. Successful applicants are paid to work Saturdays (9am–4pm) and can also opt to work after-school (The Food Project, n.d.)

Harlem RBI, (New York, USA)

Harlem RBI is a youth program in East Harlem, New York City. It uses sporting and academic activities as well as team building tasks to "inspire youth to recognise their potential". Young people are required to join a baseball or softball team from January to August, as they progress through the program they are given additional opportunities and responsibilities (MetLife Foundation, 2009, p.15). Currently, no formal evaluation of the program exists.

Best practice initiatives: learning support programs

Learning support programs provide opportunities for assistance with homework and learning, "they have been found to increase student interest in learning and build self-esteem and study routines while reducing risk behaviours" (Bond, 2009, p.v).The United Kingdom's education department ruling that schools must provide all children under 14 years with "dawn till dusk" childcare including a "study support component" is indicative of the value ascribed to after-hours learning support programs, particularly for disadvantaged children (Bond, 2009, p.10).

The Brotherhood of St Laurence Homework Centre, (Victoria, Australia)

This initiative began 20 years ago and offers homework support in Fitzroy Library (4–6pm). Core staff include a part-time coordinator and a paid tutor. Three volunteer tutors also attend each session. The program was self-evaluated by the Brotherhood of St Laurence using interviews with students and staff. Staff observed improvements in "literacy" and the confidence of young people who attended regularly. An important aspect of the centre was that it was located close to students' homes, if it were located far from students' homes, this would provide an obstacle to involvement. One difficulty faced by staff was that some students came to the homework centre with minimal or no work. Staff tried to avoid turning these students away and endeavoured to develop relationships with these students to help them engage with their learning. Another difficulty involved regulating the amount of assistance tutors gave to students, sometimes tutors provided too much help. In addition, tutors do not receive advanced notice of the topics students need help with, this means that they do not have time to prepare (Bond, 2009, p.24).

Melbourne Citymission – Learning Support Programs, (Victoria, Australia)

In 2006, Melbourne Citymission offered 33 after-school tutoring and homework support programs in 26 suburbs of Melbourne. A survey conducted that year found that 74% of programs cater for primary school students, 52% of programs specifically target students from a "refugee or CALD" background and 42% accept any student requiring support. Most programs felt that a tutor:student ratio of 1:1 was ideal but in reality, most programs had a mixture of 1:1 tutoring and group activities (Horn & Fewster, 2007, p.6). Over 1200 volunteers assisted with the programs in 2006, primarily as tutors.

There were a limited number of programs that conducted any formal evaluations which is understandable given the lack of available resources. Generally, programs felt that they provided academic and social development benefits to students that would facilitate a "stronger commitment to learning in the future". Existing evaluations of program outcomes suggest that learning support programs make a "substantial contribution to learning outcomes for disadvantaged students" (Horn & Fewster, 2007, p.7).

One of Melbourne Citymission's programs, *The Footscray Tutoring Program* caters for girls in secondary school who have difficulties with their study. This small program assists 46 students, the majority of whom are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, to "take responsibility for their own learning". Tutoring helps students to "understand the curriculum; organise their schoolwork, assist with homework and study; and help prepare for exams including VCE's" (Horn & Fewster, 2007, p.39). Feedback indicates that participants increased their confidence and improved their "academic performance" and "language skills".

The After-School Corporation, (New York, USA)

There are a diverse range of projects funded by The After-School Corporation (TASC). Projects are not identical in each site but their development must adhere to the TASC *Service Delivery Model:* be delivered by a non-profit organisation in partnership with a public school; serve any grade K–12; activities are provided at the school, free of charge (every school day to approx. 6pm); all students enrolled at the school are eligible to participate; project staff are led by a full-time coordinator and staff/student ratios are approximately 1:10 (Birmingham, Pechman, Russell & Mielke, 2005, p.1).

In addition to "educational enrichment" and homework help, TASC projects typically: focus on healthy development by encouraging positive relationships, focus on a broad range of arts and recreational activities and offer health education, peer counselling, anti-violence training, opportunities to participate in community service as well as college preparation and career training (Birmingham, Pechman, Russell & Mielke, 2005, p.1).

A recent analysis of the performance of Year 9 students in New York City who participated in programs delivered by the After-School Corporation in Years 6–8 highlighted an "emerging trend" linking involvement in TASC programs with positive outcomes including "greater attachment to school". Further, the study indicates that active involvement in "high-quality after-school programs" during Years 6–8 is linked to "higher levels of school engagement and performance during the high school years" (Russell, Mielke, Miller & Johnson, 2007, pp.2, 14). Another longitudinal evaluation of TASC observed a positive link between the program and school attendance rates, which increased between Years 7 and 8 for students on the program, whereas attendance declined for students not involved in the program (Reisner et al., 2004 as cited in Russell, Mielke, Miller & Johnson, 2007, p.8).

Another study analysed TASC student academic performance data to identify ten high-performing TASC programs serving young people (K–8). Analysis was then used to extract shared characteristics of these high performing programs; common features include (Birmingham, Pechman, Russell & Mielke, 2005, p.24):

- A diverse range of "enrichment opportunities" that introduced students to new experiences that could "spark interests and expand their goals for their own schooling, careers, and hobbies"
- Opportunities for "skill building", particularly literacy skills
- "Intentional relationship-building" through "team-building activities for participants" and "regular communication with families".

Best practice initiatives: at-risk youth

Research indicates that it can be particularly difficult to attract and maintain the involvement of at-risk young people in programs. However, some aspects of successful programs have been effective in this endeavour. These aspects relate to meeting the needs and acknowledging the circumstances of at-risk youth through:

- providing supportive adults
- facilitating "a sense of belonging"
- "the engagement of young people in sports, cultural pursuits and other extra-curricular activities"
- "opportunities for paid work"
- "financial incentives"
- work experience that provides a valued community service
- "hands-on" education and training activities
- "training in resiliency skills and opportunities for leadership development" (Ivry & Doolittle, 2002, p.12).

Plan-It Youth Program - NSW Department of Education and Training, (Australia)

The Plan-It Youth Community Mentoring Program is a school program to support young people in Years 9–10 at risk of leaving school early. Volunteer community members are trained as mentors through TAFE NSW to support students with remaining at school or making the "transition from school to work, further education or training". The emphasis of the mentoring relationship is developing the "strengths, skills, abilities and interests of young people" (Erebus International, 2007, p.6). In 2006, 77 schools in NSW participated in the program and almost 800 mentors actively supported over 1000 students (p.6). The program relies heavily on community support to recruit new mentors and for the provision of work experience or visits to local businesses.

At-risk youth are targeted to participate in the program but this presents two challenges. The first is variations in the way at-risk students are defined. For example, at risk of leaving school early could mean the student might be thinking about leaving school, alternatively, it could mean a student's "behaviour, attendance record and demeanour" indicates they have "already disengaged and are likely to drop out". In addition, there is the "strong perception" that a student's "personal or family circumstances" puts them at risk of dropping out (p.9). The second challenge is a lack of standardisation in the way young people are targeted. For example, young people may refer themselves or be selected via a school welfare committee or a "diagnostic tool".

There is a high degree of variation in program content across NSW making it difficult to "describe it as a single program" (p.14). However, the program is most effective when focused on assisting young people to develop goals and devise pathways to achieve these goals. It has the least impact when attempting to improve attitudes to school, "relationships with teachers, or educational outcomes" (p.14). However, the program needs to positively impact upon these things to help students "meaningfully engage in senior schooling" (p.14). The period of time people stay in the program also varies, most students complete the program in a school term whereas others continued with mentoring for over four years.

A significant criticism of the program is that generally, those with serious behavioural problems and poor attendance are not included in the program. This decision is shaped by a desire to include those young people most likely to benefit from the program. It also acknowledges the limitations of mentors; they cannot act as counsellors. However, it does mean that those most at risk of dropping out of school are not catered for.

Evaluation provides a "strong indication" that the program was successful in addressing its goal of "helping students to better understand their options for the future" and to make decisions about future work or study goals (p.9). The success of the program seems to be due to its structure, which helps young people understand the importance of schooling. Survey data indicates that the most significant outcome of Plan-It centres on enhanced understanding of future options. Almost 60% of participants indicated that after mentoring their plans were now clearer (p.8). Over 80% of participants said that the program increased their understanding of their strengths and equipped them with better ways of coping with problems they encountered. Evaluation of the program has identified key qualities of a mentor including: the ability to listen in a "non-judgemental" way, "valuing education", "the ability to set goals" and providing "positive motivation".

The majority of students also felt that the process helped them feel more positive about their future. The program also gave students individualised attention and support from an adult mentor, which may enhance their self-esteem. This is an important consequence of the program given that, among those targeted to participate, self-esteem and confidence are generally lacking. Evidence provided by teachers and Plan-It Youth coordinators indicates the potential for the program to be a "most effective way of re-engaging students", motivating young people through the provision of information about careers and vocations (p.8).

However, one of the obstacles the program faces is that it relies upon schools providing post-program support to young people to assist them to achieve their career goals. If this does not occur, students may feel disenchanted and become more disengaged. Indeed, regions displaying best practice had a strong committee of principals, community members and senior Department of Education staff who provided direction and support for the Plan-It Youth coordinator (Erebus International, 2007).

Harlem Children's Zone, (New York, USA)

Harlem Children's Zone is a 97 block region in Harlem, New York, that combines a network of schools and community services for young people (from birth to college) and focuses on providing a "positive and supportive environment". Harlem Children's Zone delivers over 20 programs and students residing within the zone are actively recruited by staff. Services and initiatives provided include a longer school day and year, after-school programs and "mental and physical health services" (Dobbie & Fryer, 2009, p.21). There are three types of programs: programs available to anyone living within the zone; programs only available to Harlem Children's Zone students and their families; and programs only available to Harlem Children's Zone students (p.21).

Although a recent Harvard evaluation confirmed that "Harlem Children's Zone is enormously effective at increasing the achievement of the poorest minority children" (p.3), this cannot be solely attributed to the programs offered. Evidence from the evaluation is used to justify a collaborative, school and community approach to address the achievement of disadvantaged children, "high-quality schools or community investments coupled with high-quality schools drive these results, but community investments alone cannot" (p.24).

Choice, Challenge, Change – Innovative Community Action Network, (South Australia, Australia)

Choice, Challenge, Change is an Innovative Community Action Network (ICAN) program, it forms part of the South Australian Government's $28.4 million dollar School Retention Action Plan (SRAP). ICAN supports Aboriginal boys in Adelaide in their transition to high school. Its focus is developing peer relationships and team building skills. Many boys in Year 8 who have completed the program go on to act as mentors helping Year 7 boys in their first few weeks of high school. The lead agency, Kura Yerlo is an Indigenous cultural centre; it is supported by local primary and secondary schools, South Australia police and the Department of Justice. Currently, no formal evaluation of the program exists. The program consists of the following elements (Social Inclusion Board, 2007, p.13):

- A barbecue, team games and problem solving activities are held in Term 4.
- The program also includes a three day *Blue Light* camp (an initiative of the South Australian Police Department) in the Adelaide Hills.

Part 4: Key findings

Adolescent development

- If a young person's health and wellbeing needs are not met this impacts upon their ability to form positive and supportive relationships. On a basic level this influences an individual's ability to concentrate and be fully engaged in their education, which in turn affects their aspirations.
- Positive parent and peer relationships have an important impact upon social and emotional development (Cripps & Zyromski, 2009). Research also highlights the importance of regular school communication with parents to promote positive interactions (Ma, 2007).
- There are no widely agreed indicators of social and emotional wellbeing (Hamilton & Redmond, 2010). Wellbeing is shaped by physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual factors. In general, the social, material and natural contexts surrounding an individual contribute to their wellbeing (ABS, 2001).
- However, applied research on social and emotional wellbeing tends to focus on negative behaviours of individuals including substance abuse and risk taking behaviour (Hamilton & Redmond, 2010).
- Mental health is one of many aspects influencing wellbeing and an individual's wellbeing is also l inked to their mental health.
- The onset of many mental health disorders occurs during adolescence; a period of significant growth and development (McGorry, Parker & Purcell, 2006).
- "Mental health disorders are the leading cause of disability among young Australians aged 15–24" (AIHW, 2008).
- Youth mental disorders have a negative impact on a number of areas including academic performance, employment prospects, family and social interactions (McGorry, Purcell, Hickie and Jorm, 2007).
- Poor parental relationships can lead to poor relationships with others, feeling unsafe and bullying (Butler, Bond, Drew, Krelle & Seal, 2005).

Education, health and disadvantage

- Young people from families without regular, adequate incomes are at greater risk of experiencing poor health and educational outcomes (AIHW, 2008).
- There are links between poor mental health and disadvantage. Recent statistics highlight that 16% of people in the "most disadvantaged areas" had a "mental or behavioural problem" compared to 11% of people in the "least disadvantaged areas" (ABS, 2010, p.3).
  These problems can affect an individual's wellbeing and engagement in education.
- Problems associated with youth mental disorders include "school failure, impaired or unstable employment, and poor family and social functioning, leading to spirals of dysfunction and disadvantage that are difficult to reverse" (McGorry, Purcell, Hickie and Jorm, 2007, p.S5).
- Disadvantaged Australian children experience "more than double the rate of obesity (12%)" compared with children living in the areas of lowest disadvantage (5%) (ABS, 2009).
- Australian PISA results highlight the impact of disadvantage on education, "students in the lowest socioeconomic quartile scored, on average, two and a half years lower than students in the highest socioeconomic quartile". Almost a quarter of students in the lowest socioeconomic quartile "failed to achieve" the minimum proficiency levels in "scientific, reading or mathematical literacy" (Thomson & De Bortoli, 2007, p.15).

Young people's skill development

- The National Curriculum emphasises the development of skills in the following areas: literacy and numeracy, communication technologies, logical thinking, evaluating evidence, creativity and the ability to solve problems (MCEETYA, 2008).
- DEEWR's *Compact with Young Australians* (2009) aims to ensure that young people are learning or earning, all young people are required to "participate in schooling (or an approved equivalent) to Year 10, and then participate full-time (at least 25 hours per week) in education, training or employment, or a combination of these activities, until age 17".[56]
- Nationally, the Job Ready Certificate is being developed. It will be a voluntary certificate for those in Year 12 involved in work experience as part of their vocational education (Sweet, 2008, p.1). It outlines the skills students are expected to develop to be deemed job ready: "communication, team work, problem solving, initiative and enterprise, planning and organisation, self-management, learning and technology" (Sweet, 2008, p.5).

Developing realistic aspirations

- Around 11–14 years is the time young people shift to "more realistic ambitions" informed by experiences and feedback from school (Cuthbert & Hatch, 2009, p.7). Research also documents a drop in student engagement during adolescence (13–16 years) (Thomson et al., 2007).
- The aspirations of young people need to be nurtured to develop early aspirations and to transform them into career choices. The biggest influence for both of these tasks is a young person's parents.
- Academic achievement has a significant influence on student aspirations. Leaving school early is linked with poor academic performance (Lamb, Walstab, Teese, Vickers & Rumberger, 2004).
- Parent and peer aspirations as well as teaching quality and the school environment can influence school completion (Lamb, Walstab, Teese, Vickers & Rumberger, 2004).
- There is evidence of a gap between aspirations and education outcomes. Disadvantaged young people are more likely to experience this gap (Gutman & Akerman, 2008; DCSF, 2008; Bowden & Doughney, 2010).
- Evidence from the UK and Australia indicates that some young adolescents possess unrealistic career aspirations and have limited knowledge about how to achieve these aspirations (Atherton, Cymbir, Roberts, Page & Remedios, 2009).

Facilitating the engagement of young people

- Student disengagement develops over a period of time as a result of cumulative challenges that students face in the home, school and community (Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes & Milburn, 2009).
- Disengagement is influenced by being unable to do school work, boredom, feeling excluded, not having a voice or experiencing discrimination (Taylor & Nelms, 2006).
- Engagement of young people may be influenced by self-esteem, perceptions of their abilities, experiences and general health (Social Inclusion Board, 2007).
- Research indicates that intentions have stronger associations with continuing to Year 12 than any aspect of student background. However, intentions are influenced by both attitudes to school and academic achievement (Khoo & Ainley, 2005).
- In particular, proficiency in literacy and numeracy directly influences participation in post-compulsory education (Khoo & Ainley, 2005).
- Quality relationships formed at school with peers and teachers are an important source of support. They are also positively linked to student engagement (Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes & Milburn, 2009).
- Research demonstrates that, among some 15 year olds, involvement in extra-curricular activities facilitated their engagement (Taylor & Nelms, 2006; Fullarton, 2002).

Disadvantaged students: barriers to aspirations and engagement

- The costs associated with full participation in the public education system are a significant obstacle for low-income families and their children, effectively excluding them from some extra-curricular activities and also impacting upon academic performance (Bond & Horn, 2009).
- The role parents play, including their level of education and attitudes to school, in shaping the aspirations and engagement of young people is mediated by socio-economic status and the broader community context (Cuthbert & Hatch, 2009).
- Communities with low levels of "bridging social capital" are restricted social networks that contribute to limited aspirations of disadvantaged young people (Cuthbert & Hatch, 2009).
- Young people's attitudes and behaviours appear to have a stronger impact on their education outcomes than both parental attitudes and behaviours and material resources in the home (Chowdry, Crawford & Goodman, 2009).
- A range of initiatives have been developed that focus on enhancing student engagement and aspirations. These include initiatives focused on: tertiary study, families, after-school programs, at risk youth programs and learning support programs.

Recommendations: What are the implications of the research for policy and practice?

In developing a model to better support students in Years 8–10 as they progress through school and into work or further study, it is critical to address the social and financial obstacles to engagement and academic achievement that young people face which often excludes them from full participation in public education.

In particular, positive and supportive relationships are important for a broad range of factors associated with young people's development including their academic achievement, engagement, aspirations, retention and career planning. However, the most effective approaches to building a comprehensive network of support for disadvantaged young people in Years 8–10 will be multi-dimensional and multi-faceted. A discussion of the essential *skills, capacities, relationships and attributes* drawn from the literature that Years 8–10 students require to prepare them for the transition to further education/work follows.

Skills

The National Curriculum emphasises literacy and numeracy, the productive use of ICT, logical thinking, creativity, innovation, resourcefulness and the ability to solve problems. The proposed Job Ready

Certificate emphasises that the following skills are evidence of students being job ready: "communication, team work, problem solving, initiative and enterprise, planning and organisation, self-management, learning and technology" (Sweet, 2008, p.5).

- Address student achievement particularly literacy and numeracy in the middle years to facilitate improved higher education outcomes for disadvantaged students (Khoo & Ainley, 2005).
- Address the needs of younger disadvantaged students by targeting academic performance through initiatives such as homework assistance (Maani & Kalb, 2007).
- Promote young people's career planning skills and facilitate their development of career aspirations.
- Develop young people's optimism and self-esteem to help them become confident young people who feel equipped to achieve their goals and cope with disappointments (Cuthbert & Hatch, 2009).
- Equip students (13–16 years) with effective social skills, coping and problem solving strategies to help them develop and maintain positive relationships with peers, parents and teachers.
- Offer students opportunities to develop their social skills through community involvement.
- Encourage students to take greater responsibility for their learning and behaviour. This involves seeking help from teachers when required, thinking about future career aspirations and making subject choices accordingly.
- Assist students to develop their time management, organisational and study skills to cope with an increasingly demanding curriculum and assessment tasks. For some young people, effective time management may also require maintaining a balance between school work and involvement in out-of-school activities (NSW DET, 2007).

Capacities

Young people's attitudes and behaviours have a stronger impact on education outcomes than both parental attitudes and material resources in the home. In addition, students need to understand the connections between academic success and post-school options.

- Develop young people's resilience, an essential requirement to help them cope with major changes and events in life (Knight, 2007).
- Facilitate the development of young people's intentions to continue to Year 12.
- Develop students' beliefs and attitudes about the importance of education for their future prospects.
- Develop student confidence, self-esteem, perceptions about their abilities, general health and motivation because of their associations with academic performance. Physical health includes sufficient physical activity and a healthy diet including adequate consumption of fruit and vegetables.
- Address career ignorance early in secondary school to enable students to develop their capacity to understand the link between school success and post-school options (Frigo, Bryce, Anderson & McKenzie, 2007; Sullivan, Mornane, Prain, Campbell, Deed, Drane et al., 2009).

Relationships and attributes

Family/home

Young people need to be nurtured and encouraged to develop early aspirations and transform them into career choices. The biggest influence for both of these endeavours is a young person's parents. However, parents from low socio-economic backgrounds may have fewer years of education and more negative associations with school. Parental negative feelings and attitudes to school may also inhibit their active involvement in their children's school. Positive family interactions such as eating together are positively linked to education outcomes.

- Inform parents about the impact of their parenting style on their children's development and academic achievement during adolescence. In particular, an adolescents' health and degree of

confidence and security in their other relationships is shaped by relationships with their parents (Cripps & Zyromski, 2009).

- Assist parents with the development of their children's aspirations and attitudes from an early age (Atherton, Cymbir, Roberts, Page & Remedios, 2009).
- Inform parents about their role in facilitating the development of aspirations and positive attitudes from the early years.
- Provide students and their families with access to quality career guidance to inform them about opportunities, alternative pathways and the consequences of not completing school (Curtis & McMillan, 2008).
- Assist low-income families and their children to meet the costs of full participation in the public education system.
- Address the social and financial obstacles to engagement and academic achievement that young people face at home and in the community.

School and community

Young people from disadvantaged families need initiatives that address their lower aspirations and engagement, and negative perceptions about their abilities. Initiatives should also recognise the associations between a student's level of engagement at school and their academic achievement.

- Improve student engagement by developing an inclusive school community that listens to students, addresses absenteeism and helps disadvantaged students and their families deal with school associated costs (Taylor & Nelms, 2006).
- Recognise the links between favourable attitudes to school, intentions for continuing in education and actually continuing in education (Fullarton, 2002).
- Provide students with effective, targeted and accurate career education. Ongoing support for disadvantaged young people is vital. They may also require a tutor or mentor to assist with motivation and aspiration development (Janeiro, 2010; Curtis & McMillan, 2008; Gutman & Akerman, 2008).
- Offer a range of enjoyable extra-curricular activities to help foster student engagement (Taylor & Nelms, 2006).
- Address student engagement by nurturing the development of positive attitudes to school in the middle and early years of high school (Fullarton, 2002).
- Provide students with access to supportive adults in the broader community through initiatives such as mentoring and parental education programs that develop parents' knowledge and skills (Woolley & Bowen, 2007).
- Develop high aspirations among 11–14 year olds through initiatives that address the following needs: "inspiration" derived from a variety of people and experiences; accurate and reliable "information" and "self-efficacy" or the belief that if they work hard their goals can be achieved (Cuthbert & Hatch, 2009, p.2).
- Help communities to develop social networks that reach out beyond the local neighbourhood to provide disadvantaged children and young people with a diverse range of contacts, inspiration, information and opportunities to help develop their aspirations (Cuthbert & Hatch, 2009).
- Provide learning opportunities that are supportive, relevant to students' lives and challenging to give students opportunities to succeed, stay engaged and work towards their aspirations (Maras, 2007).

Conclusion

This literature review provides a comprehensive analysis of national and international research to assist with the development of an evidence-based model to better support students in Years 8–10 (13–16 years) as they progress through school and into work or further study. The research highlights that young people from families without regular, adequate incomes are at greater risk of experiencing poor health and educational outcomes. Further, the costs associated with full participation in public education are a significant obstacle for low-income families and their children, effectively excluding them from some extra-curricular activities and also impacting upon academic performance. It is critical to address the social and financial obstacles to engagement and academic achievement that young people face.

Given that research highlights a drop in engagement (or a student's effort, attendance and motivation around school related tasks) for some students during adolescence, it is essential to reiterate that disengagement occurs as a result of cumulative challenges that students face in the home, school and community. For example, research indicates that repeated low achievement in literacy and numeracy and poor attendance contributes to young people's disengagement. In addition, intentions, influenced by both attitudes to school and academic achievement have stronger associations with continuing to Year 12 than any aspect of student background. Quality relationships formed at school with peers and teachers and involvement in extra-curricular activities are also positively linked to student engagement.

Aspirations or the goals young people cultivate as well as their motivation to achieve these goals, develop from an early age and change over time. However, simply having high aspirations is insufficient to overcome financial and social barriers. Research highlights that the decline in aspirations is particularly pronounced for disadvantaged young people who face multiple barriers including an absence of mentors and insufficient opportunities and resources. It is clear that young people need support in the middle years (11–14 years) to develop and realise their aspirations. Ideally, initiatives should begin as early as primary school and continue throughout secondary school.

In addition, research indicates that communities with limited social networks contribute to the limited aspirations of disadvantaged young people. Communities need help to develop social networks that reach out beyond the local neighbourhood to provide children and young people with a diverse range

of contacts, inspiration, information and opportunities to help them progress through school and into work or further study. Research also documents the existence of a gap between student aspirations and education outcomes, disadvantaged young people are more likely to experience this gap.

Positive parent/family relationships are particularly important for their influence on a range of aspects of young people's development including their emotional development and relationships with others, academic achievement, engagement, aspirations, school retention and career planning. Parents exert a significant influence on the aspirations and engagement of young people. This influence is mediated by socio-economic status including parents' level of education, attitudes to school and the broader community context.

In school settings, students need to develop favourable attitudes to school; this can be achieved through an inclusive school community that facilitates the development of positive relationships with peers and teachers and provides relevant and challenging learning opportunities. Research also highlights that some young adolescents possess unrealistic career aspirations and limited knowledge about how to achieve these aspirations. Students need access to targeted and accurate career education as well as a range of enjoyable extra-curricular activities to facilitate their engagement. However, career education may not necessarily be provided by schools but perhaps through schools, particularly in light of research that school career programs had little impact on guiding or informing young people's career development and planning. Young people also need access to supportive adults in the broader community through initiatives such as mentoring and parent education programs.

Literacy and numeracy and career planning skills are essential to help prepare young people for the transition to work or further education. In addition, young people need a broad range of social skills, coping and problem solving strategies that are tied to a sense of optimism and positive self-esteem. Students also need to develop time management, organisational and study skills as they begin to take greater responsibility for their learning and behaviour. The research highlights the following capacities for their positive impact on young people's transition to work or further education: resilience, intentions to complete Year 12, understanding the link between school success and post-school options, student confidence, perceptions about their abilities, general health and motivation.

Best practice initiatives that support and prepare students in the tertiary sector can be divided into three categories. The *expose* aims to expose students to information about tertiary study. The *taster* allows students to sample life at university, and the *combo* blends aspects of the *expose* and the *taster.* Best-practice initiatives that are school-based involve collaborative approaches between schools, families and the community. Similarly, best practice initiatives that target families support parents as their children move through adolescence. They also focus on student and parent engagement through collaborative approaches that involve families, schools and communities. Effective after-school programs can positively contribute to young people's education outcomes by keeping students engaged. After-school programs may focus on a range of areas such as academic achievement, physical activity and preventing risky behaviour. Whereas learning support programs focus on assisting students with homework and learning. When operating at best-practice level, learning support programs can improve student interest in learning and their self-esteem. Although it is difficult to attract and maintain the involvement of at-risk youth, successful programs meet the needs and acknowledge the circumstances of at-risk youth.

It is clear that positive and supportive relationships are important for the development of a broad range of young people's skills, capacities, relationships and attributes. However, the most effective approaches for supporting students in Years 8–10 as they progress through school and into work or further study will be multi-dimensional and multi-faceted.

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Endnotes

[1]This phrase was developed by psychologist G. Stanley Hall (1904); "considered the inventor of our current developmental understandings" of adolescence (Nagel, 2007, p.11).

[2]Along with eating disorders, obesity and substance use (Nagel, 2007, p.13).

[3]Including the ability to recognise helpful strategies to deal with depression (Robinson et al., 2010, p.20).

[4]COAG has signalled the importance of addressing alcohol abuse and binge drinking (AIHW, 2008, p.33).

[5]For example the death of a family member, family breakdown, illness, or job loss (Knight, 2007).

[6]This is also articulated as feeling optimistic and "that one's life has meaning" (Knight, 2007, p.548).

[7]This represents approximately 600,000 children (5–17 years).

[8]In 2005–06 the "mean equivalised income of low-income households with dependent children was $269 less than the average for all households with dependent children" (AIHW, 2008, p.10).

[9]The average age was approximately 17 years for females (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008, p.1).

[10]However, this review emphasised the need for further research that is large scale, longitudinal and incorporates other variables associated with school performance such as socioeconomic status, gender, motivation, anxiety and parent engagement (Wolfson & Carskadon, 2003, p.502).

[11]Physical and mental health.

[12]Including unpaid work, the most common job areas were: "babysitting, food and drink sales, leaflet and newspaper delivery, cleaning and general farm hand work" (Fattore, 2005, p.3).

[13]A useful definition of learning difficulties is the academic underachievement of a student without a diagnosed disability (Bellert & Graham, 2006, p.4).

[14]These conclusions are drawn from PISA which conducts international testing of students who have completed at least six years of schooling (age range 15 years 3months – 16 years 2 months). The main focus of PISA 2006 was science. Clearly these are generalizations that do not apply universally to all males and females.

[15]"In Australia, over 8 000 students in 457 schools participated in the main sample of TIMSS 2007" (Thomson et al., 2007, p.ii).

[16]The other elements of this goal "confident and creative individuals" and "active and informed citizens" relate to personal attributes such as "optimism", "a sense of self-worth" and the ability to value Indigenous cultures and relate to all cultures (MCEETYA, 2008, p.9).

[17]"Supporting senior years of schooling and youth transitions" is another focus of the commitment to action (MCEETYA, 2008, p.12).

[18]After a public consultation process, the draft national curriculum (7–10) English, Mathematics, Science and History has been endorsed.

[19]The emphasis on literacy and numeracy is partly in response to concerns articulated by COAG about current inadequacies in the adult population; "relatively high proportions of working age Australians have literacy and numeracy skills below the minimum level COAG considers is required to meet the complex demands of work and life in modern economies—43.5 per cent for literacy and 49.8 per cent for numeracy" (COAG Reform Council, 2009, p.xviii).

[20]This agreement was made in September 2009 (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2010b).

[21]In addition, 15 to 24 year olds are entitled to a place in education or training "which focuses on attaining Year 12 or equivalent qualifications so young people have the necessary qualifications required to get and keep a job and develop their careers". There are also conditions and obligations tied to the receipt of Youth Allowance and other income support (DEEWR, 2009).

[22]An initiative of the Australian government (DEEWR). Responses to the discussion paper were invited in the period December 2008 until 13th March 2009.

[23]Including socio-economic status.

[24]"they were also less likely to expect a realistic occupation" (Patton & Creed, 2007, p.51).

[25]In response to the question "if you were completely free to choose any job, what would you desire most as a lifetime job?" (Patton & Creed, 2007, p.49).

[26]In response to the question "what kind of job would you like to have when you finish your education?" Choices included: "unskilled, semi-skilled, skilled, semi-professional, and professional" (Patton & Creed, 2007, p.49).

[27]About academic progress from teachers at parent teacher interviews for example (Loch & Makar, 2008).

[28]They are also more likely to be NEET "not in education employment or training" at 17 years (Chowdry et al., 2009, p.38).

[29]The Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth observed a trend from the early 2000's whereby "a large proportion of young people in the lowest achievement quartile" for reading and maths literacy continued to leave school before completing Year 12 (Curtis & McMillan, 2008, p.28).

[30]By tackling literacy for example (Lamb et al., 2004, p.11).

[31]Weiner (1972) devised four causes perceived to be most responsible for success and failure; "ability, effort, task difficulty and luck" (cited in McInerney & McInerney, 1998, p.180).

[32]The gaps are "large at 14 and persist to age 16" (Chowdry, Crawford & Goodman, 2009, p.81).

[33]Compared to wealthier parents (Chowdry et al., 2009, p.29).

[34]For example, only 13% of children whose parents worked in "semi-skilled" occupations contemplated a professional career (The Panel on Fair Access to the Professions, 2009, p.25).

[35]A sample of over 1,800 students.

[36]Anglicare Sydney, Mission Australia and the Brotherhood of St Laurence.

[37]The nine categories were: "legislator/manager, professional, associate professional/technician, clerical, service/sales, skilled agriculture/fisheries, crafts and trades, plant/machine operators, elementary occupations" (Curtis & McMillan, 2008, p.29).

[38]In addition, a small percentage of participants (6% – 14%) "have ceased their education at a point where they are unlikely to achieve their occupational goals" (Curtis & McMillan, 2008, p.38).

[39]They are also more likely to be NEET "not in education employment or training" at 17 years (Chowdry et al., 2009, p.38).

[40]Students responded to four statements about mathematics: "I think learning mathematics will help me in my daily life. I need mathematics to learn other school subjects, I need to do well in mathematics to get into the university of my choice. I need to do well in mathematics to get the job I want". The same statements were used to assess the value students placed upon science. (Thomson et al., 2007, p.164).

[41]75% of participants highly valued mathematics (Thomson et al., 2007, p.164).

[42]For this report, the authors used a school engagement score that incorporated the following elements: "absenteeism", "looking forward to school" and "getting on well with their teachers" (Taylor & Nelms, 2006, p.40).

[43]Median age of participants was 12 years (Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes & Milburn, 2009, p.171).

[44]If it is anticipated they will achieve the necessary marks (Gale et al., 2010, p.48).

[45]Shared equally between colleges and universities (Gale et al., 2010).

[46]Or 90 if students are from a disadvantaged school. Rural/interstate students also receive a $2500 relocation allowance (Gale et al., 2010, p.19).

[47]Divided among two school terms (Gale et al., 2010).

[48]Students generally take part in a 2–3 day workshop and then meet weekly with teachers involved in the project (Gale et al., 2010, p.45).

[49]40% of students at the school were Indigenous (DEEWR, 2008, p.30).

[50]Some participating schools may also employ a Liaison Parent to connect with parents and promote the workshops as well as organise venues for the workshops.

[51]The Priority Schools Funding Program (PSFP) is shaped by four principles, "equity, access, participation and rights". Its focus is improving the education of "students from low SES communities" therefore literacy and numeracy are central elements of the program (NSW DET, 2003, p.3).

[52]The program was informed by recent research from Chicago highlighting "what matters in ninth grade" (Duran et al., 2010, p.9).

[53]Student achievement is allocated one of four categories: "college ready", "on track for graduation", "almost on track" and "off track" (Duran et al., p.5).

[54]The alliance is a combination of government and non-government agencies.

[55]They are paid a small stipend, $200 per week (The Food Project, n.d.).

[56]In addition, 15 to 24 year olds are entitled to a place in education or training "which focuses on attaining Year 12 or equivalent qualifications so young people have the necessary qualifications required to get and keep a job and develop their careers". There are also conditions and obligations tied to the receipt of Youth Allowance and other income support (DEEWR, 2009).

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