WHAT THE PROFESSION NEEDS NOW FOR THE FUTURE

DISCUSSION PAPER THREE: SCHOOL STAFF, PARENT, CARER AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS IN VICTORIA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

FEBRUARY 2025

AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION UNION
AEU

MONASH University

SCHOOL STAFF, PARENT/CARER AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS IN VICTORIA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

FIONA LONGMUIR, TIM DELANY, JO LAMPERT, JANE WILKINSON

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

This discussion paper was written on the lands of the Bunurong and Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation and includes contributions from First Nations educators. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first educators of these lands and honour their continuous connection to Country. Sovereignty was never ceded. This always was and always will be Aboriginal Land. We acknowledge and pay our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and Traditional Custodians throughout Victoria, including Elders past and present, and emerging First Nations leaders.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

KEY FINDINGS

This paper presents evidence from school staff and parents and carers about the ways that partnerships between schools, families and communities are, or can, support high-quality education, and student and staff wellbeing, in schools. Informed by national and international evidence, the results from surveys of these key stakeholders illustrate the challenges and opportunities for effective and productive partnerships.

Partnerships between schools, families and communities are important. Research included in this discussion paper and elsewhere shows that productive partnerships enhance a range of social and educational outcomes for children and young people, and bring economic and social benefits to communities, including safer neighbourhoods and enhanced community resilience.

Data collected for this research suggest that those surveyed are supportive of the work of schools and the place of family and community partnerships. Generally, school staff and parents/carers felt that they communicated well with each other and they identified that greater parent/carer participation in school activities, consultation and involvement in decision making, and consultation and connection with First Nations communities were needed.

This research adds further evidence to the urgent need to reimagine and reform schooling in Victoria. The results indicate that school staff and parents/carers are concerned with the increasing prevalence of diverse and complex student needs, challenging behaviours in schools, and the reduced level of respect for education and education professionals. These issues make it difficult for schools to be as effective, supportive and safe as possible. Importantly, these conditions are not experienced equally, with less advantaged communities more severely challenged by access to adequate resources and support as they strive to provide high-quality education.

The challenges faced by schools and communities as they work together to achieve high-quality education and cohesive and supportive communities are underpinned by broader structural and historical conditions that will require significant effort and commitment to disrupt. These include market forces, such as 'school choice' policies and funding policies across private and public schools, which contribute to the marginalisation of some and the advantage of others. Schooling arrangements, including curricula and pedagogy, continue to minimise and deny the sovereign status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Peoples. This is damaging to First Nations children and young people, many of whom continue to be disenfranchised by, and excluded from, schools at concerning rates. Those same arrangements all too often continue to ignore other cultural perspectives, missing the opportunity to genuinely reflect our multicultural community and to be a more successful and productive society as a result.

Our engagement with school staff and parents/carers through these surveys suggest that there is a willingness to work together towards transforming schooling to better meet the needs of students, school staff, families, and communities. The Victorian government has shown some commitment to supporting school/family/community partnerships through a range of programs and initiatives. If the challenges facing schools and communities are to be responded to – and the goal of ensuring educational equity, where public schools set the standard for excellence is achieved – then families, educators, community members and governments need to work together in more collaborative, purposeful, and ambitious ways. To ensure the success of these efforts, the support and commitment of the Victorian government, in particular, will need to be enhanced. We offer the following recommendations for improving partnerships between schools, families and communities in order to advance high-quality education in Victoria's public schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Urgently build on the commitment to fund Victoria's public schools to 100% of the Schooling Resource Standard by delivering the additional resources quickly as a first step to combatting entrenched funding inequity.

2. Review and learn from the variety of school, family and community partnership arrangements in place across Victoria, and scale up through cohesive and comprehensive initiatives. For example, funding a broad trial of family engagement officers to build strong connections between schools and families and ensure parents are fully engaged partners in their children's education.

3. Enhance mutual respect between parents/carers and school staff. This should include: identifying common ways for schools to better incorporate parents/carers' knowledge of their children to support student learning and well-being; enhancing school staff and parent/carer awareness of the need for, and benefit of, greater involvement of parents/carers with their child's education; improving the recognition of school staff as key educational experts; and better valuing the rich cultural and social capitals of families and communities.

4. Identify common, system-wide ways in which schools could enable improved involvement of parents/carers in their children's school education. This should include investigation of the barriers to involvement and ways to overcome these.

5. Develop processes for inviting families and community members into conversations about the modernisation of schooling arrangements (eg. school hours/days/term/year lengths) in Victoria in order to better meet the needs of students, staff and families.

6. Listen to – and act on – what First Nations teachers, school leaders, education support personnel, researchers, the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria, and Traditional Owners say about building partnerships on unceded sovereign lands.

7. Reset system-wide expectations for respectful and appropriate conduct for all stakeholders in Victoria's public schools. This should investigate the ways that policies and resources support responses to challenging behaviours (for example, the impact of class size and/or access to appropriate specialist support staff). This should also consider how expectations of respect and appropriate conduct enhance the status of the profession and contribute to improved learning outcomes for students.

8. Re-establish system-wide processes that apply to all schools to provide a common basis from which to work with students with complex and challenging behaviours.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is the third of a series that aims to generate important discussions to reimagine Victoria's public school system. Since the upheavals in Victoria's education landscape in the 1990s, much has changed for teachers, school leaders, and education support staff in our public schools. These changes – which have been framed by trends in digital technologies, globalisation, neoliberal education policy approaches, social and political transformations, commodification of education, and evolving climate and health emergencies – have fundamentally altered school work and community expectations of schools and school employees. These changes have seen school leaders, teachers, education support staff, students and families challenged to provide and engage in high-quality education in Victoria's public schools. They have also challenged and altered the ways in which schools communicate with parents/carers and others in their communities.

This third discussion paper considers challenges and possibilities for effective and productive partnerships between schools and parents/carers and communities.

The work that has informed this paper consists of a survey of over 8,000 AEU Victorian branch school-based members, including teachers, principals, and education support staff, as well as engagement with research literature and policy from other national and global settings. As well, AEU Victoria commissioned consultant research company *Essential Research* to survey Victorian public school parents or carers. This research was undertaken in 2024 and consisted of a survey of 1,661 public school parents/carers (Essential Research, 2024). The data from the parent/carer survey are presented along with data from the school staff below to inform this discussion paper. (Please see *Discussion Paper 1* for full details of the member survey participants in Appendix A. Further details about the methods of both the member and parent surveys, and the parent survey participants are included in this paper in Appendix A).

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS WITH PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES

Schools are central social institutions in Victoria. They are fundamentally connected to families and contribute to the prosperity and cohesion of communities (Wilkinson, et al., 2018). Research from around the world has shown that when schools and families work together, there are benefits to children's learning and development, including: enhanced social-emotional development, reading enjoyment and proficiency, general academic success, greater school engagement, and secondary school completion (Harvard Family Research Project, 2014; OECD, 2024a). Effective partnerships also have significant economic benefit. For example, according to research in the USA in 2008, schools would need to spend, on average, an additional US$1,000 per student to match the gains in achievement that parental involvement brings (Houtenville and Smith Conway, 2008).

Quality partnerships between schools, families and communities support safer neighbourhoods and a healthy learning environment for children (OECD, 2024a). Further, in a fast-paced and often volatile world, family, school and community connections are essential to ensure that education keeps pace with the evolving needs of children, families and communities. "Stronger family, school, and community partnerships help ensure relational trust is at the foundation of schools, and that all the actors can work together toward a shared vision of education in their communities" (Morris & Nora, 2024).

2.1 STRONG PARTNERSHIPS REQUIRE ONGOING SUPPORT

In Victoria, a range of family and community partnerships initiatives have been supported by the Victorian state government over the past decade. At a system level, two iterations of the Framework for Improving Student Outcomes (FISO and FISO 2.0) have shaped the work of Victoria's public schools since 2015. The place of family and community partnerships was explicit in the original version with 'Building Communities' – one of the six focus Improvement Initiatives for schools. Although FISO 2.0 has less explicit attention to partnerships, the importance of this area of work for schools remains evident. Implementation guidance for *Building Communities* is available for Victorian public schools to support the development of strong local partnerships. The Department of Education formed the Education State in Schools Guiding Coalition (Guiding Coalition) in 2017, which aimed to "improve student outcomes across the government school education system" (State Government of Victoria, 2024a). This group includes partners from across the school and community sector. Representatives from the AEU have been joined in this Coalition by representatives from Parents Victoria, the Victorian Student Representative Council, the School Governance Network, and the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc (VAEAI). It seems that the Guiding Coalition was active and participants reported constructive early dialogue until 2022, but in recent years there appears to have been less engagement with this group (State Government of Victoria, 2024a).

The Victorian Department of Education reports on a range of other key partnerships focused on communities and families, including: the Municipal Association of Victoria partnership agreement; the Victorian Community sector partnership agreement; and the Strategic Partnerships Program, which for the 2024–2025 funding period is supporting 84 programs prioritising disadvantaged and marginalised student groups (State Government of Victoria, 2024b).

Within this broad partnership work of the Department is a notable example of the *Our Place* project which began at Doveton College and is now also operating in numerous other sites across Victoria. This initiative with the Coleman Foundation works to support disadvantaged communities by focusing on whole-of-life education, employment, and effective community services (Glover, 2020, pp 4–5). Doveton was an important first context for this project as one of Victoria's most disadvantaged communities. The Doveton College regeneration that commenced around 2010 brought together early childhood and school education, as well as family and community services, to address the disadvantage that was becoming entrenched at that time. According to Glover (2020, p.21) there have been measurable improvements in education and employment outcomes for students and their families:

Families are getting the help they need to overcome their sometimes serious problems. Children are leaving the college's Early Learning Centre and starting school better prepared to learn. The foundations of future success at school – literacy and numeracy – are being created. Students are taking up wider interests – sport, the arts and multimedia and others – that we know are important to their development and self-confidence and contributing to keeping them out of trouble. They are looking forward with greater ambition to their later years of schooling and the possibility of further education at TAFE or university. Their parents are ending their isolation, becoming more proficient in English, making connections, learning how to help their children, becoming better role models, obtaining formal vocational qualifications and even getting jobs.

It is important to note that this project has benefited from significant philanthropic support, particularly through the Coleman Foundation, as well as state and federal government support. The positive and effective partnerships between Doveton College and the Doveton community have only been possible because of this uncommon level of financial commitment to the required physical and human resources. This case illustrates the centrality of reasonable and ongoing resourcing support if effective school, family and community partnerships are to be productive. The importance of adequate provision, including funding and resourcing for Victoria's public schools, is discussed in detail in *Discussion Paper 2*.

2.2   SCHOOL COMMUNITIES IN VOLATILE TIMES

In Victoria and elsewhere, social, climatic, economic and health volatilities have put additional pressure on families and schools (Wilkinson et al., 2018). For example, over the past five years, significant fire and flooding events have disrupted schools and their communities in locations such as East Gippsland and the Goulburn Murray districts. Many of these events also overlapped with the COVID-19 pandemic, which interrupted education programs over 2020 through to 2022. The long-term impacts of the pandemic are the subject of much research, with many concluding that the interruptions have resulted in longer term wellbeing, engagement and attendance concerns for students (see, for example, Fray et al. 2023).

In such challenging times, partnerships between schools, families and communities are important, and schools are often seen as central community hubs (see, for example, Longmuir 2023). However, conditions of broader social, economic and political volatilities can also contribute to the breakdown of school, family and community relationships. In a recent analysis of teachers' perceptions of their work in Australia, Longmuir et al. (2024) found that threats of violence from students and parents represented a significant safety threat. Teachers noted that schools and systems provided limited support for managing threats to safety, and their "responses included descriptions of incidents with students and parents that made [teachers] feel unsafe physically and/or psychologically" (Longmuir et al., 2024, p. 10).

With the rise of far-right politics both internationally and here in Australia, narratives that promote division have gained traction. Such narratives often incorporate discussion about actual or perceived government policy failures. In education, policy and curricula efforts, such as the Safe Schools program and cultural safety training, have sought to counter such divisions. These programs are often well received by schools but their potential effects are limited and at times they have become targets of concern for reactionary political groups and parties (Gerrard, 2020). There is increasing suggestion that divisive and negative discourses impact on interactions that parents and community members have with school staff. Research has indicated that this influence can include conspiracy narratives and aggressive disagreement with school decisions and decision-making processes (Allen, et al., 2023; Wilkinson, et al., 2020).

For some public school staff, particularly school leaders, responding to complex parent and community concerns is further complicated by school resource challenges. For example, significant staffing shortages continue across Victorian public schools and, despite significant investment by the Victorian government since 2015, too many schools have waited decades for capital works upgrades, while more advantaged schools, and private schools in particular, benefit from significant capital works funding (Australian Education Union, 2024). This sees disadvantaged schools more keenly impacted by resourcing challenges, as they

are more likely to be managing with fewer and less stable staffing as well as smaller budgets and less adequate facilities (see *Discussion Paper 2* for further information). These ongoing resource inequalities reinforce perceptions that some communities are abandoned by governments, while others are able to flourish. This is not simply a public versus private divide; unevenness within the public system in Australia occurs in different ways, including through the use of so-called voluntary fees, and the fundraising capacities of the local communities (Rowe & Perry, 2022; Thompson et al., 2019). Further, school choice policies, which

incorporate schools across public and private sectors, have resulted in higher levels of social and cultural capital in school communities that are located in more advantaged areas, embedding structural inequalities that benefit socially advantaged students and schools (Rowe & Perry, 2019; Yoon, 2020). Given the power of politically and economically determined school, family, and community relationships, it is important that policy settings offer reasonable and equitable support for all Victoria's public school communities so that volatilities are navigated in safe and productive ways.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS ADDRESSING VOLATILITY AND SHAPING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS IN IRELAND

The United Nations sustainable development goals (SDGs) represent a global context within which school and family partnerships can be viewed. Murphy el al. (2022) step though an examination of how the development of global, national and local partnerships can engage with intersecting volatilities relating to climate crises, poverty, conflict and inequality. They argue that while implementation of the SDGs, including goal four, which demands inclusive and equitable education, is officially the responsibility of national governments, all domains of society have a role in implementation. Local partnerships built for the purpose of achieving SDG aspirations often centre schools and education on efforts to build or rebuild community infrastructure,

sustainability and social cohesion. Murphy et al. (2022) spotlight Dundrum, located in the Dún Laoghaire Rathdown administrative area of Dublin on the east coast of Ireland, and the Dundrum 2030 and related *Imagine Dundrum* partnerships. The *Dundrum 2030* community sustainability framework includes a range of targets connected to the SDGs. The partnership is supported by government and research academics and seeks to understand how local, social and built environments can contribute to sustainable futures. Among the *Imagine Dundrum* campaign activities was the elevation of community voice in local planning, including the voices of school students and their parents in planning a future vision for Dundrum.

3. EDUCATOR AND PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF PARTNERSHIPS IN VICTORIA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Currently in Victoria's public schools a great many families, teachers, school leaders and community members are working together with a focus on providing the best experiences for students, both in schools, and more broadly in communities. The data collected for this research suggest that there is significant support and goodwill towards the work of schools and the place of family and community partnerships. In this section, we unpack some of the findings from the survey of staff in Victoria's public schools and from the survey of parents/carers.

3.1 PARTNERSHIPS AND COMMUNICATION
In order to get a sense of the way that school staff were feeling about their connections with parents/carers and the community, a question was posed that covered a range of related ideas. For the items presented in Figure 1, the school staff survey participants answered: '*To what extent do the following statements apply to your school?*'

Figure 1 shows, by a clear margin, that the factor school staff felt to be most evident in their schools was that staff communicate appropriately with families and the community. With communication being a central feature of effective partnerships, looking at how communication flows both ways between schools and families is useful. The results of the survey suggest school staff are more likely to feel that the appropriateness of communication *from* parents/carers is an issue than the appropriateness of communication from school staff *to* parents/carers.

When this factor was further examined, there are some valuable differences to note in school staffs' perceptions of parent/carer communication. Staff working in specialist schools were more likely to rate the appropriateness of parents/carers communication highly (41% *large extent* and *great extent*) than those working in primary schools (38%) or those working in secondary schools (32%). Those working in less advantaged schools were less likely to rate the

appropriatness of parent/carer communication highly (26%) than those working in more advantaged schools (47%). Those working in larger schools (900+ students) were less likely to rate appropriate parent/carer communication highly (31%) than those in small schools (less than 80 students, 49%). There was little notable difference between schools in different locations (city – 35%; inner regional – 31% ; outer regional – 35%). These insights suggest that contextual factors are relevant in perceptions of communication.
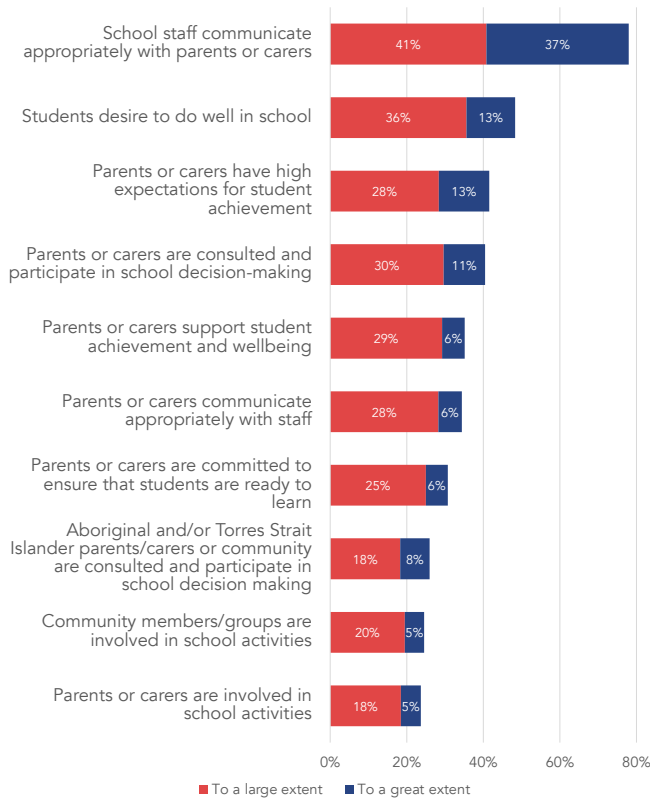

Figure 1: The extent to which school staff felt that school/family/community partnership factors are evident in their schools

Figure 1, above, also shows that few school staff (less than 25%) feel that parents/carers and community members are involved in school activities. Given the importance of the involvement of families and community in the provision of high-quality education for students, this finding suggests an opportunity for improvement.

Figure 2, below, shows most school staff reported that, in their schools, greater involvement of families and community would support the provision of higher quality education and promote improved student and staff wellbeing.

Figure 2 shows that education support staff are most likely to feel that greater support would make a difference. Over half of the principal class respondents also felt that this was important. When looking at the different types of schools, those staff working in secondary schools were more likely to report that greater family and community involvement would be beneficial (58%) and those working in specialist schools least likely (52%). Staff in schools in more

disadvantaged communities were more likely to report that greater family and community involvement would be beneficial (59%) than those in more advantaged communities (44%).
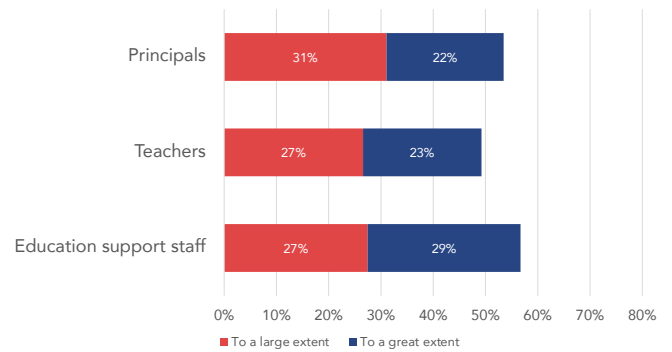

Figure 2: The extent to which school staff felt that greater family and community involvement would support the provision of high quality education and promote student and staff wellbeing

3.2 PARENT/CARER UNDERSTANDINGS OF SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

Parents and carers in Victoria are committed to education within their local communities. The survey of parents/carers asked participants to indicate the main reasons for choosing a school. The top reason selected was its location to their home (selected by 66% of the participants). However, the second most important factor for parents/carers (43%) was the quality of the facilities and resources, as shown in Figure 3 below.
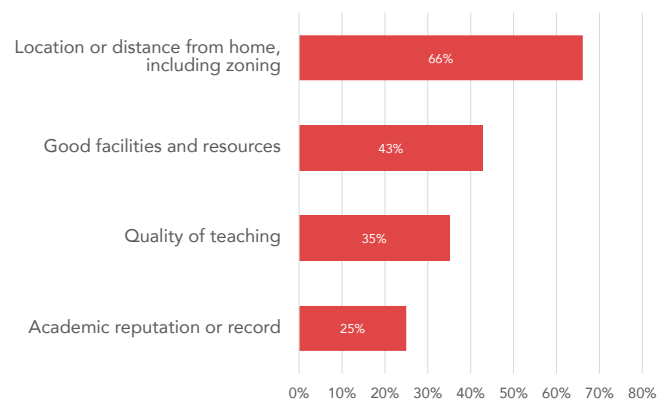

Figure 3: Main factors that parents/carers considered when choosing a school

Turning to the evidence of parents' and carers' beliefs about the importance and quality of communication with schools, 76% of parents/carers surveyed reported that schools effectively communicate with them about their children's education, as is shown in Figure 4 below. These results also show that parents/carers of students with additional needs are less likely to feel that communication is effective.
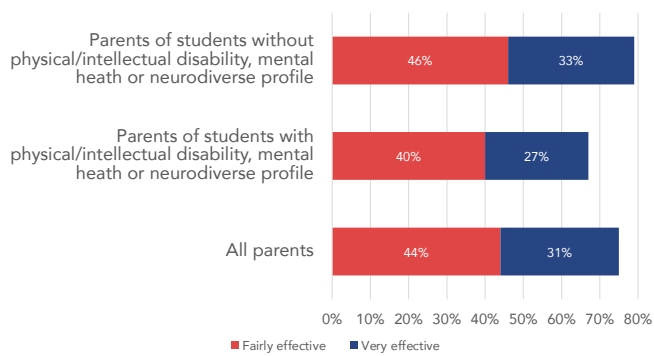
4: Parent/carer beliefs about the effectiveness of communication from teachers

In further items that parents/carers responded to, there are more insights into the similarities and differences to school staff perceptions (presented in Figure 1 above) of factors that contribute to school/family/community partnerships. Figure 5 below shows parallel items.
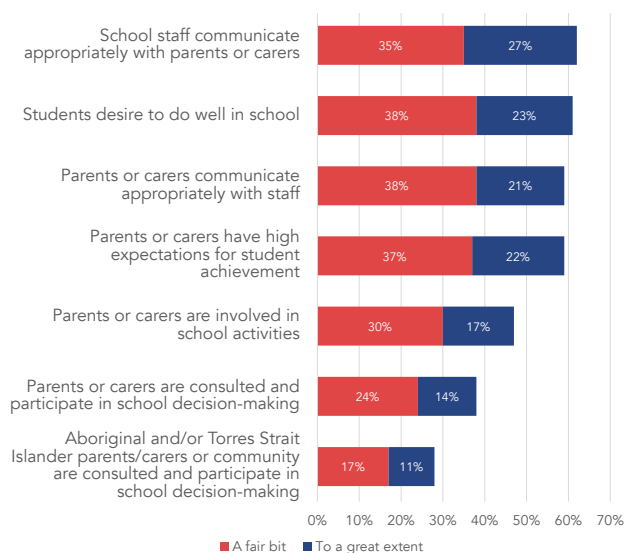

Figure 5: The extent to which parents/carers felt school/family/community partnership factors are evident in their schools

Figure 5 shows that 62% of parents/carers felt that school staff communicate with families to a reasonable extent. This is lower than the 76% of school staff who felt they communicated to a reasonable extent (see Figure 1). Figure 5 also shows that 59% of parents/carers felt that parents/carers communicate to a reasonable extent with school staff. This is higher than the 35% of school staff who felt the same. It is of interest that both groups felt it was parents/carers who were least likely to communicate to a reasonable extent.

In other comparisons between these two groups on similar items:

- Parents/carers are more likely to feel that they are involved in school activities to a reasonable extent (47%) than school staff (24%).
- Parents/carers are more likely to feel that they ensure students are ready for learning to a reasonable extent (62%) than school staff (31%).

- Parents/carers are more likely to feel that they support student achievement and wellbeing to a reasonable extent (65%) than school staff (35%).

These differences in responses may be somewhat expected due to response bias factors (whereby survey participants are more likely to respond positively when rating their own behaviours (Paulhus, 1991)). It should also be noted that there are some inconsistencies in the designs of the survey items across the two instruments, with differences in the scale labels used. However, the findings indicate the potential opportunity of considering such factors for schools. The response rates for each group suggest that there is common ground as well as varied perspectives and therefore generative discussions about the importance of, for example, parental involvement in school activities. Open and receptive conversations where the benefits, as well as the enabling and constraining factors of involvement, are discussed could help school communities to design policies and practices that enhance parental involvement, improve school–parent/carer partnerships, and benefit students' educational and social outcomes. It is important to recognise that communities can define partnerships differently from each other, and true partnerships, especially with those most historically disadvantaged, should be reciprocal (Shay & Lampert, 2022; Lampert, 2021). As the research suggests, such partnerships are inherently valuable for children and young people and their communities, and the positive responses to such factors evident in this research suggest that many school staff and parents/carers understand this.

A further important indication from both these sets of data is that less than a third of both parents/carers (28%) and school staff (26%) felt that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities are consulted and participate in school decision-making to an appropriate extent. These perceptions of low levels of consultation sit in contrast to the Victorian government's strong commitment to strengthening partnerships between schools and Koorie families and communities (Victorian Department of Education and Training, 2016). The research suggests that consultation may not go far enough, requiring a better understanding of the principles of co-design and provision of adequate resourcing to support this (Shay & Lampert, 2022). Positioning this work within a broader education policy context, the government stated that:

> Marrung acknowledges that learning outcomes for all Koorie learners are greatly improved with strong partnerships and connections to and with their families and communities. Success can be linked to culturally supportive and responsive learning environments from early childhood, through to school and higher education and training. (Victorian Department of Education and Training, 2016, p.11)

We expand on how such partnerships and learning environments might be achieved in section 5, below.

4. CRUCIAL ISSUES IN VICTORIA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS FOR PARENTS/CARERS AND SCHOOL STAFF

The data collected from school staff and parents/carers for this research provide important insights into two crucial issues that have been shown to be of current concern to the work of educators and the effectiveness of Australian schools (see *Discussion Paper 1*; Longmuir et al., 2024; Longmuir et al., 2022; Heffernan et al., 2022). Specifically, the issues of student behaviour and respect for school staff.

Figure 6 shows the reasons given for intending to leave by school staff. The majority of teachers who responded indicated that a lack of respect for the profession (70%) and student behaviour (69%) were contributing reasons. Principal class (69%) and education support staff (55%) respondents also reported a lack of respect for the profession as contributing to their intentions to leave. Of the three groups of school staff participants, those in principal class positions were the most likely (57%) to report parent behaviour as contributing to their motivations to consider leaving the profession. This finding likely reflects the nature of principals' work in schools, which involves more direct interactions with parents/carers about concerns and issues.
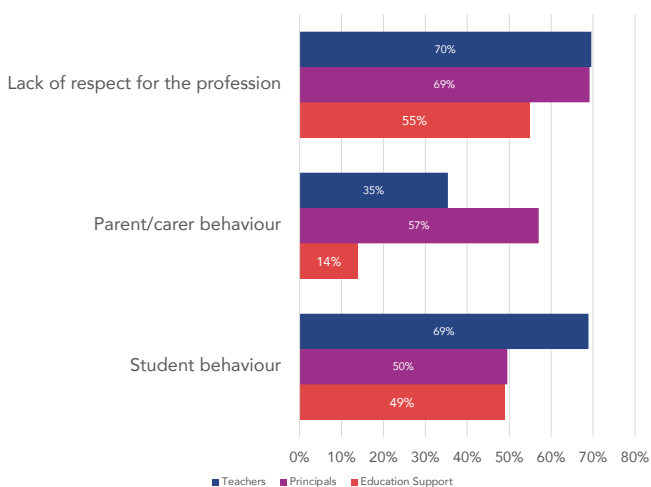

Figure 6: School staff reasons for leaving the profession in less than 10 years

Looking to contextual differences in these data, we see in Table 1 below that teachers and education support staff working in secondary schools are slightly more likely than those in primary or specialist schools to report student behaviour issues and lack of respect for the profession as a concern leading them to consider leaving the profession. As well, teachers and education support staff working in less advantaged schools and outer regional schools are more likely to report concerns with student behaviour and a lack of respect as contributing to their intention to leave the profession.

	Student behaviour	Parent/carer behaviour	Lack of respect
Primary	66%	38%	69%
Secondary	68%	25%	67%
Specialist school	55%	31%	52%
Fewer than 80 students	47%	44%	50%
Between 80 and 200 students	70%	36%	63%
Between 200 and 400 students	66%	32%	70%
Between 400 and 600 students	65%	37%	73%
Between 600 and 900 students	67%	30%	66%
More than 900 students	68%	29%	67%
High SES, i.e. school/s with low proportion of disadvantaged students	53%	31%	64%
Average SES	65%	33%	67%
Low SES, i.e. school/s with high proportion of disadvantaged students	75%	33%	70%
Major city	65%	32%	68%
Inner regional	73%	33%	66%
Outer regional	77%	37%	72%

Table 1: Teacher and education support staff reasons for leaving the profession in less than 10 years by school type, school size, advantage levels, and location

While Table 1 shows that there are some variances across the context categories for parent/carer behaviour – such as slightly higher rates of response for teachers and education support staff in primary schools and outer regional schools – the percentage citing 'parent/carer behaviour' as a reason for wanting to leave the profession is lower and more consistent across all the categories (range of 25–44%) than for 'student behaviour' as a reason to leave (range of 47–77%) and for 'lack of respect' as a reason to leave (range of 50–73%). This suggests that, while contextual factors are important considerations, student behaviour issues and lack of respect for the profession are the prevailing issues, regardless of context, while around a third of respondents report parent/carer behaviour as a consideration.

The reason that school staff are more troubled by student behaviours than parent behaviours may be related to the frequency of challenging interactions with these two groups. To further illustrate the

prevalence of concerns with challenging student and parent behaviour, school staff were asked to indicate how often they had been required to attend to a range of issues over the last month of their work. Figure 7 shows that more than 60% of school staff had engaged with parent or carer behaviours they felt were challenging, but more than 90% had managed challenging student behaviours.
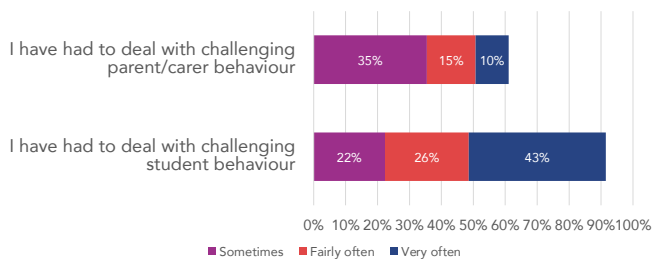

Figure 7: School staff ratings of frequency of attending to challenging behaviour from students and parents/carers

This suggests that student behaviour management likely occurs more frequently, and takes more time and energy, than dealing with challenging parent/carer behaviour. With the daily work of school staff focused more on students than parents/carers, it follows that the reported reasons for intending to leave are also similarly weighted. However, the impact of engaging with challenging parent/carer behaviours should not be understated. A growing body of research suggests that the burden of these relationships is at times damaging for educators and does contribute to attrition from the profession (see, for example, Longmuir et al, 2024; AITSL, 2024).

Another significant broader concern for education across Australia is respect for educators (Heffernan, et al., 2022). School staff in this research also cite a lack of respect for the profession as a reason for intending to leave the profession (see Figure 6). To further understand this, school staff who participated in this study were asked to indicate if they felt that their professional opinions are valued by students and parents/carers. Figure 8, below, shows that, in fact, most school staff agree that their professional opinions are valued by those they work with in their schools. Some 77% of school staff respondents suggest that students value their professional opinions and 71% feel that parents/carers value their opinions.
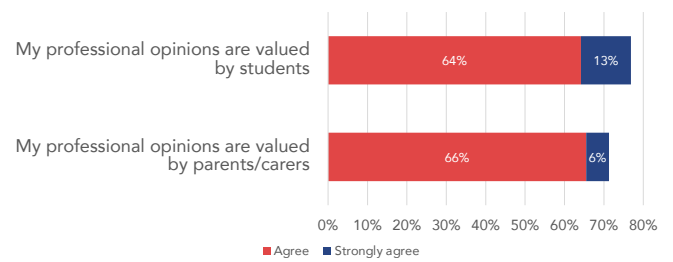

Figure 8: School staff agreement that their professional opinions are valued by students and parents/carers

This finding is a positive indication of the relationships between teachers, parents/carers, and students that occur daily in schools. Although there is a sense of broader concern for the levels of respect for the teaching profession (evident in Figure 6), when asked to give insight to the closer relationships they have with their students and their parents and carers, school staff are more positive. This finding aligns with prior research by Longmuir et al. (2022), where teachers who responded to a survey question about the levels of respect for the teaching profession felt that parents and students were more likely to respect the profession than those in politics or the media. Together, these indications suggest that broader discourses around teachers and teaching in Australia are perceived as being lower in respect, while those with whom school staff engage regularly are more likely to value educators. While such indications provide optimism for the quality and productivity of the relationships between school staff and their students and families, we also need to acknowledge the challenges of these relationships, as evidenced by behavioural concerns, and that there are still many school staff who do not feel valued or respected (20–30%, as shown in Figure 8 above, and 50–60% in Longmuir et al., 2022).

Turning to evidence from parents/carers collected for this research, it is apparent that there is some shared understanding of these challenges in Victoria's public schools. As shown in Figure 9 below, parents/carers were asked to reflect on the ways that they felt the role of teachers has become more complex in the past 10 years. A majority of the respondents noted the increasingly challenging and diverse needs of students as contributing to the complexity. Many respondents also demonstrated understanding of other key factors impacting the complexity of teaching work in modern schools, such as teacher shortages and increasing workloads. Just under half of these parents/carers suggested that issues of partnerships with families and communities, including higher expectations and lower family/community wellbeing, were contributing to the complexity of teachers' work.
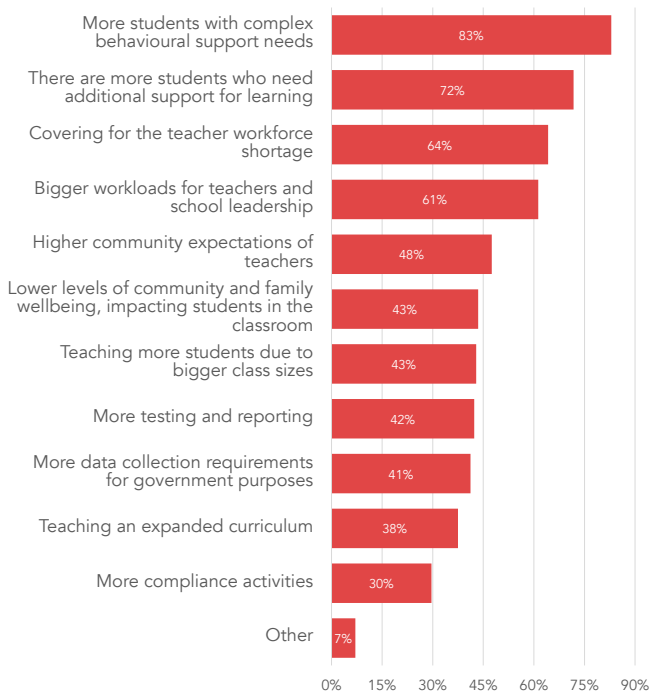
Figure 9: Parents beliefs about the ways that teaching has become more complex

Across the evidence from school staff and parents/carers, there is indication of shared understandings of the challenges that Victorian public schools are facing. Many respondents noted that student behaviour and complex and diverse learning needs can be a source of difficulty for the work of school staff, and that there are challenges related to a lack of respect for education professionals. Such shared understandings of the issues may provide promising foundations for conversations about the ways that productive partnerships could improve Victorian public schools for students, staff, and families.

5. WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE FOR IMPROVING PARTNERSHIPS

While the evidence above shows indications of common ground in terms of shared understanding, it also points to areas where partnerships with parents or carers and communities could be improved. In this section, we present and interpret data from this research that suggest possibilities for these improvements.

5.1 RESOURCING FOR PRODUCTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

A crucial area for discussion is that of resourcing. With public school budgets stretched by a range of competing priorities and an inequitable distribution of funding, which is more pronounced in Australia than in most other nations in the world (OECD, 2024b), resourcing to improve family and community partnerships is often scarce. Principal class respondents in the school staff survey were asked if they felt that their school had the necessary resources to support effective partnerships. Figure 10 below shows these responses.

Fewer than half of all principal class participants felt that they had the necessary resources for effective partnerships across all three categories of questions. These respondents were most likely to feel that they had the necessary resources for family–school partnerships (49%). Some 36% felt that they had sufficient resources for partnerships with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander parents/carers and communities, and 35% for more general community partnerships.
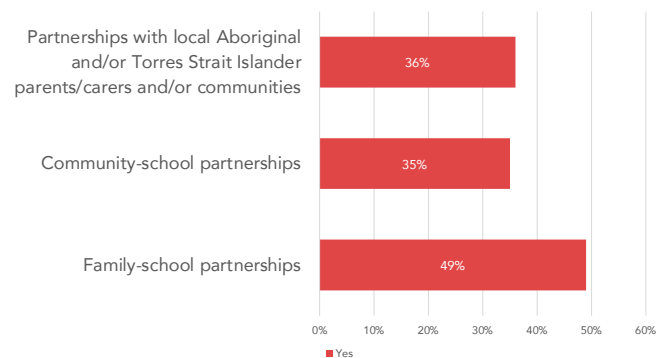
Figure 10: Principal class agreement that they have necessary resources for effective partnerships

In order to further examine challenges to effective school, family and community partnerships, the participants in the survey of parents/carers were asked to indicate the main barriers to their engagement with their children's schools. Figure 11 below presents the data from this question showing the results for parents/carers with students in primary and secondary schools.

Figure 11: Parent/carer reported barriers to engagement with school

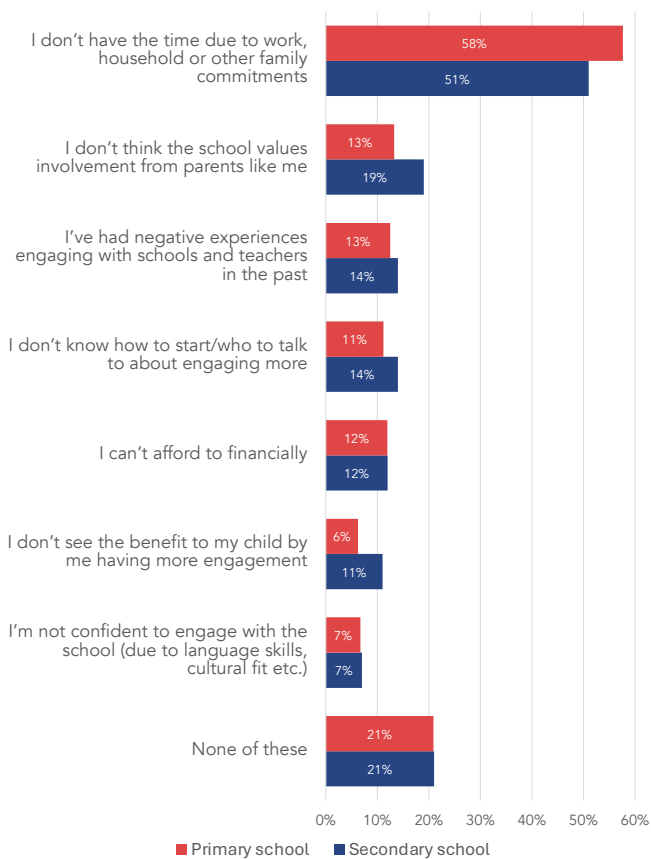| Barrier	Primary school	Secondary school
I don't have the time due to work, household or other family commitments	58%	51%
I don't think the school values involvement from parents like me	13%	19%
I've had negative experiences engaging with schools and teachers in the past	13%	14%
I don't know how to start/who to talk to about engaging more	11%	14%
I can't afford to financially	12%	12%
I don't see the benefit to my child by me having more engagement	6%	11%
I'm not confident to engage with the school (due to language skills, cultural fit etc.)	7%	7%
None of these	21%	21%

Figure 12: Percentage of principal class respondents who felt particular additional resources would help improve school family and community partnerships

Resource	Percentage
Funding to pay for partnership activities in schools	62%
Funding to pay for staff professional development	61%
Supports to help address student-related pressures on staff	61%
Supports to help address parent/carer-related pressures on staff	54%
Dedicated staff member for parent/carer-community liaison	51%
Resources to assist schools with partnership programs	50%
Dedicated programs involving parents/carers or local communities	49%
Dedicated staff member for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander parent/carer-community liaison	38%
Appropriate learning spaces	37%
Support staff professional development on protocols to engage with the local Aboriginal community and Elders	33%
Other (please specify)	8%

Figure 11 shows that over 50% of parent/carer participants across primary and secondary schools reported that time is a barrier to their further engagement with schools. This was by far the most commonly identified barrier. This finding poses a challenge to those seeking to enhance partnerships with families and communities. The pressures and busyness of modern families' lives make it difficult for families to prioritise the time needed to deepen cooperation and engagement. However, Figure 11 also indicates that there are a number of perceived barriers that offer easier opportunity for change and improvement. Thinking about ways to connect with those parents/carers who have reported that schools are not valuing parent engagement, who are not confident to engage, who do not know how and who to start conversations with, and who have had past negative experiences, all could lead to improvement.

Specific resources and approaches that might assist in addressing some of these barriers were considered by the principal class respondents in the school staff survey. Based on their experiences in schools, and their knowledge of the specific needs of schools when working to improve partnerships, they indicated the kinds of additional resources they felt would help. Figure 12 below shows the responses to this question.
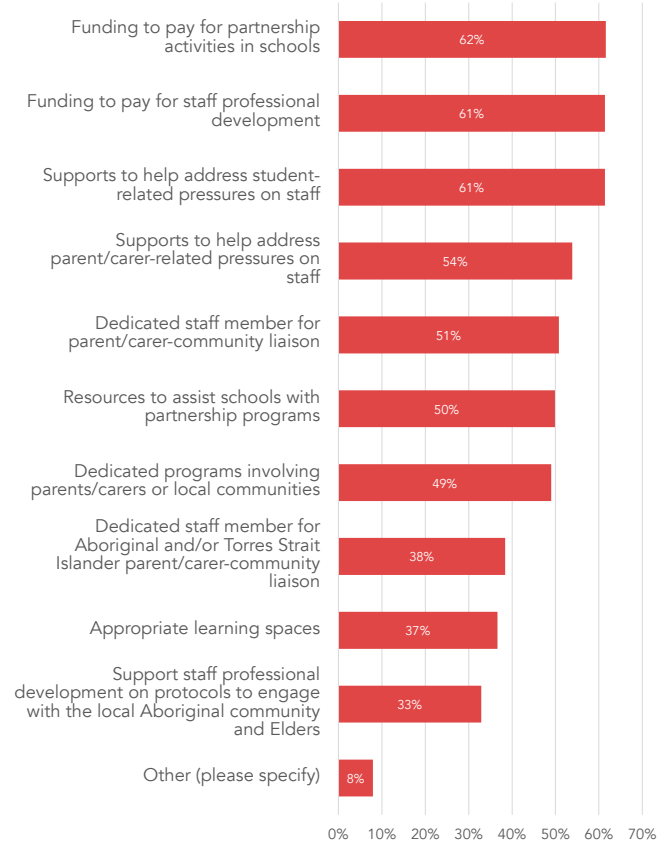
Figure 12 shows that more funding in general was the most commonly selected response, with 62% of principal class respondents suggesting that this is needed. This is closely followed by supports and funding for staff to alleviate student-related pressures and for further professional development. These results suggest that the well-documented resourcing and time pressures on school staff, exacerbated currently by teacher shortages (see *Discussion Paper 1*), are of concern for principal class staff, and likely hinder their capacity to improve school–family and school–community partnerships. A potential measure to address this concern would be to fund specific arrangements to build strong connections between schools and families and to ensure parents are fully engaged partners in their children's education – for example, parent/community liaison staff.

Figure 12 also shows that 38% of principal class respondents indicated that the appointment of additional dedicated staff member/s would be beneficial to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and communities. While it is positive that this is regarded as a priority for almost four in ten principals, it is concerning that more than six in ten don't identify this as a priority, and that it is ranked significantly lower than other resource barriers. There could be several reasons for this. Firstly, there are Victorian public schools in Victoria without students who identify as First Nations. Conversely, there are other

schools with larger numbers of First Nations student enrolments who have already developed some strong partnerships with First Nations families. However, it is also likely that this low prioritisation of additional family and community liaison reflects a lack of understanding about the historical and continuing role that schools and education broadly play in colonisation, including how curricula continue to erase Indigenous knowledges, and that First Nations students are over-represented in school exclusions (Graham et al., 2023). It may also reflect an under-appreciation of the cultural labour carried by some First Nations staff members in schools and a likely inability to consistently provide a culturally safe place to work and learn for First Nations staff and students. Prioritising resources aimed at building positive relationships between schools and First Nations parents/carers and community members would generate practical possibilities for attending to such concerns and engage collectively to acknowledge and respond to the continuing violences of colonisation. Importantly, such resources need to be made available by the system, and school leaders and other staff should be better supported to build on existing relational work.

5.2 POTENTIAL OF CONVERSATIONS ABOUT REIMAGINED SCHOOLS

Parents/carers were asked the degree to which they felt that a range of changes would improve educational outcomes, and student and staff wellbeing in schools. The results are presented in Figure 13 below. As well as specific items that provide insight into the community and family partnership work of schools, this question included a range of possible significant changes to schooling in Victoria, and mirrors some ideas that were asked of school staff and reported in *Discussion Papers 1 and 2.*
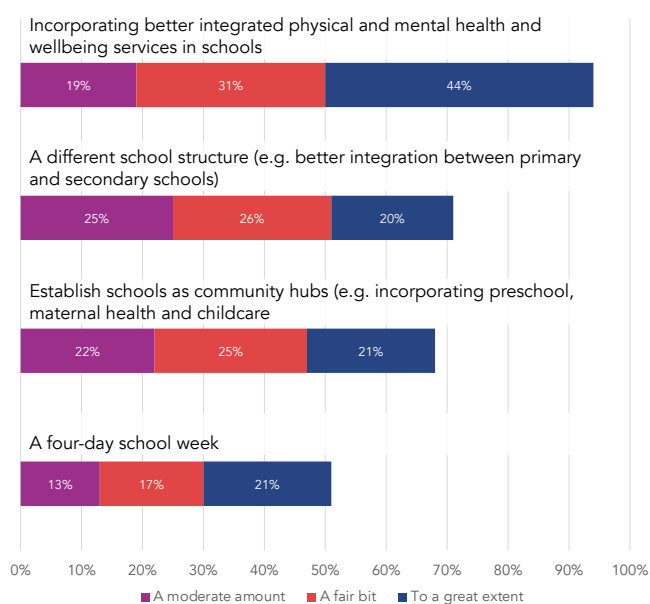

Figure 13: Parent/carer beliefs about the extent to which changes to schooling arrangements would support educational outcomes and student and staff wellbeing.

Data in Figure 13, above, show that 93% of surveyed parents/carers felt that schools offering more services to support the health and wellbeing needs of students would have a positive impact to at least a moderate extent. These kinds of services often include programs and resources that bring families and communities into partnership with schools. As well, 68% of parents/carers responded that schools enhancing their role as community hubs would support outcomes. These findings are a clear indication that many parents/carers feel that schools could play a stronger role within their communities, and that they are well placed to house and support a variety of community programs.

Figure 13 also shows that parents/carers were reasonably supportive (71%) of schools being structured differently, and that 51% were supportive of a four-day school week. The results for these final two items indicate that a majority of parents/carers are open to considering significant changes to schooling arrangements in Victoria's public schools. The level of parent/carer agreement here is not significantly dissimilar to the percentages of school staff who reported that they also felt such changes held possibility (see *Discussion Paper 2*). These items have been included to demonstrate the range of common ground that exists for such important conversations for the future of Victoria's public schools. Finding appropriate ways to connect school staff with parents/carers and community members to have these discussions could offer innovative solutions to complex and challenging problems. With a variety of indicators across this research suggesting that significant reform is needed to improve and sustain education within Victoria's public schools (see *Discussion Paper 1 and 2*), this focus on partnerships has indicated promising potential for schools and parents/carers and communities to come together to reimagine, discuss and reform schooling in Victoria.

5.3 PARTNERSHIPS FOR VOICE, TREATY AND TRUTH - THE ABORIGINAL VOICES PROJECT

This work has indicated that both school staff and parents/carers in Victoria recognise that there is much to do in terms of partnerships with First Nations communities. Renewing the focus and dynamics of such partnerships in Victoria is timely, given the potential opportunities that will arise through the forthcoming Yoorrook Justice Commission and Treaty negotiations between the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria and the Victorian government.

Further, radical shifts in schooling are necessary if we are to change an education culture that too often excludes First Nations students. While many in the community might see issues of segregation and exclusion of First Nations students as historical, the recent School Exclusion Report, prepared by the National Indigenous Youth Education Coalition (2024), shows that these practices are on the rise and that "in Victoria, 6.5% of all expulsions were directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; however, this group represents only 2.3% of the student

population" (National Indigenous Youth Education Coalition, 2024).

Beginning in 2017, the Aboriginal Voices project systematically reviewed decades of research relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and found that there is still some distance between "the aspirations of Indigenous students and families, and the ability of settler colonial education systems to meet those aspirations" (Moodie et al., 2021, p. 5). To return to the above discussion of disenfranchisement and exclusion of First Nations students, aspirations could be as simple as attending schools where alternatives to exclusion are taken seriously (National Indigenous Youth Education Coalition, 2024, p. 56) or, more ambitiously, amplifying the voice of First Nations students to the extent that prevailing deficit narratives are extinguished (Lowe & Weuffen, 2023). While the findings of the Aboriginal Voices project are wide ranging, three are particularly relevant to this research. Firstly, Australian curricula continue to overlook Indigenous knowledge and perpetuate colonial systems. The researchers highlight how local partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples can address this imbalance. Secondly, as an alternative to the disenfranchisement and exclusion of First Nations students, these researchers suggest the development of partnerships that position the purpose of education and schooling within a broader context of Country, community life and future priorities for First Nations children and young people. Finally, and most significantly, the researchers point to the UN rights of self-determination to explore possibilities for authentic engagement and partnerships between First Nations communities, schools and systems. In short, the authors suggest imagining an education context where First Nations families can "understand engagement as going beyond collaboration to deliver the transfer of decision-making power to them" (Moodie et al., 2021, p. 14).

The Aboriginal Voices research collective also considered how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families are often excluded from the research. For example, research relating to students' numeracy often relied on test scores or teacher perspectives, without including student voice. As an alternative, approaches such as decolonising race theory (Moodie, 2018) presents practical pathways for non-Indigenous educators and researchers to engage with issues of coloniality and Indigenous sovereignty. Such approaches require long-term partnerships between school staff and First Nations communities with democratic decision-making and power-sharing arrangements. In order for schools to elevate partnerships that centre Indigenous voices, they must be well supported with material resources for this important work. More significantly, such partnerships demand considerable political support as they generate and centre ways of thinking and knowing that depart from the damaging neoliberal logics of competition and performativity such as those associated with NAPLAN and MySchool.

FUTURE VISIONS FOR SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES IN FLANDERS

A recent OECD research project into the future of teaching in Flanders also considered changing community attitudes to schools and education, and the need to imagine different ways that schools might form partnerships with changing communities, in ways that see "education as a collective responsibility, away from the idea that teachers are on their own" (OECD, 2024c, p. 3). The study asks specifically how other professions can support teachers. The findings echo our own research regarding the importance for the teaching workforce to be supported by a wider range of professionals working in schools and in partnership with schools (see Discussion Paper 1). However, the Flemish research also highlights how future visions for education could and should include new approaches to partnerships with families, communities and industries. For example, in one scenario, researchers positioned schools within a "web of partners providing everything that children need to develop" (OECD, 2024c, p. 60). In such a scenario, the researchers mapped out how clear relationships, goals for all partners, collaboration, shared professional learning, and enabling and joined-up policy can ensure that such partnerships are sustainable and generative. While the researchers acknowledge that cultural and institutional barriers to partnership and collaboration are not always easily overcome, they show how system-level resources can be deployed to build change that would ultimately benefit staff and students in schools.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Complexity, diversity and volatility are steadfast features of modern communities. Victoria's public schools are working to serve their local communities and families, and to maximise outcomes for Victoria's children and young people, whilst the social, economic and political conditions around them constantly evolve and demand new responses. As has been discussed here and in the prior papers in this series, schools are working to do this from an outdated and misaligned paradigm of education – one that was conceived for a different time and where different resources were available. It is observable, from this work and as more broadly reported, that this model is no longer effective for significant numbers of students, school staff or families. It is time for new ways of thinking about and delivering education provision if achieving more supportive and effective schooling in Victoria – that meets the needs of students, families, school staff and communities – is a central goal. This requires ongoing and meaningful school and broader community-wide conversations, which are inclusive and collaborative.

The evidence presented in this paper highlights some complex and challenging issues in school and family and community partnerships, including student and parent behaviour, respect for the teaching profession, and valuing of community diversity. These challenges are entangled with the marketisation of education, where a service-delivery approach fundamentally and purposefully mispositions parents/carers as customers or clients rather than partners in the education process that benefits their child(ren), the school community, broader community and, ultimately, the fabric of our democracy. This marketisation shifts the focus to transactional approaches, aimed at satisfying individual demands, rather than nurturing relationships for deeper collaboration and social good (Blackmore, 2010). This market attitude can also pervade school decision-making, whereby resources distribution is evaluated for short-term cost effectiveness and the likelihood of contribution to narrow goals (Gobby and Niesche, 2019). These broader circumstances undermine the collaborative spirit needed for authentic partnerships that would overcome challenges, and open space for transformed schooling arrangements.

Moreover, the market-based model exacerbates inequalities. Schools in more affluent areas are better equipped to meet the demands of parents/carers and to support diverse student needs, while those in disadvantaged communities are more likely to struggle, despite their commitment to providing high-quality education (Rowe and Perry, 2022). This disparity widens the gap between schools and undermines efforts to create an equitable education system. It is essential to recognise that education is a public good, and the focus should be on fostering inclusive and supportive environments that benefit all students.

However, this paper also offers the basis for future opportunities, as school staff and parents share much common ground in their hopes and concerns for children and young people and their schools. Examples of the power of committed partnership work are promising – where schools and families are able to connect together with the broader community in authentic, reciprocal and productive ways. These show that approaches that incorporate listening to the diverse needs of communities and acknowledging the impact of historic harms of schooling approaches (particularly the colonising and privileging of practices and arrangements that are damaging to marginalised communities) hold potential for transformative change. In highlighting some of these examples, such as the *Our Place* initiative at Doveton College and international examples, we recognise that there is significant productive community and family partnership work occurring in schools in Victoria and around the world. Many schools are engaging with broader services and are committed to a collaborative approach to issues that impact their students. Examples of funding and policy that supports some schools to broker and/or host important services such as mental health practitioners, dentists and nurses are available across Victoria's public schools. There is much to be learnt from these examples. What is needed is a more comprehensive and supported approach that acknowledges the benefits but also recognises the burden that schools take on in broadening their purpose within their communities. While this type of work is important in terms of the contribution it can make to educative purposes for students, a robust and informed discussion about the purpose of schools should occur alongside any expansion of services, to avoid unintended creep in the expectations of what our public schools can and should provide.

As is shown through this paper, school staff and parents stand ready to work together to find solutions to complex challenges and to improve their schools and communities. Further, research led by Indigenous academics have provided a clear critique of the continuing coloniality of schooling, and suggested new practical and pedagogical tools for engaging with Indigenous knowledges and people to unsettle practices and pedagogies that marginalise and exclude Indigenous students, their families and their communities. What school staff and parents/carers need is increased support and increased resources. Adequate resourcing is fundamental to the success of partnerships. Schools need sufficient funding so they can facilitate parent and community engagement and leverage the position of their schools to foster healthier and more socially cohesive communities. This work cannot be added to the load of school staff unless adequate support is provided. To ask more of school staff without appropriate support will risk the further

deterioration of the workforce in Victoria's public schools.

These recommendations suggest possibilities for advancing the capacity of school, family and community partnerships in Victoria's public schools so that educational excellence and equity are accessible for all in healthy, vibrant and thriving communities.

1. Urgently build on the commitment to fund Victoria's public schools to 100% of the Schooling Resource Standard by delivering the additional resources quickly as a first step to combatting entrenched funding inequity.

2. Review and learn from the variety of school, family and community partnership arrangements in place across Victoria and scale up through cohesive and comprehensive initiatives. For example, funding a broad trial of family engagement officers to build strong connections between schools and families and ensure parents are fully engaged partners in their children's education.

3. Enhance mutual respect between parents/carers and school staff. This should include: identifying common ways for schools to better incorporate parents/carers' knowledge of their children to support student learning and well-being; enhancing school staff and parent/carer awareness of the need for, and benefit of, greater involvement of parents/carers with their child's education; improving the recognition of school staff as key educational experts; and better valuing the rich cultural and social capitals of families and communities.

4. Identify common, system-wide ways in which schools could enable improved involvement of parents/carers in their children's school education. This should include investigation of the barriers to involvement and ways to overcome these.

5. Develop processes for inviting families and community members into conversations about the modernisation of schooling arrangements (eg. school hours/days/term/year lengths) in Victoria in order to better meet the needs of students, staff and families.

6. Listen to – and act on – what First Nations teachers, school leaders, education support personnel, researchers, the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria, and Traditional Owners say about building learning partnerships on unceded sovereign lands.

7. Reset system wide expectations for respectful and appropriate conduct for all stakeholders in Victoria's public schools. This should investigate the ways that policies and resources support responses to challenging behaviours (for example, the impact of class size and/or access to appropriate personnel). This should also consider how expectations of respect and appropriate conduct enhance the status of the profession and contribute to improved learning outcomes for students.

8. Re-establish system-wide processes, which apply to all schools, to provide a common basis from which to work with students with complex and challenging behaviours.

7. REFERENCES

AITSL. (2024). *Strengthening parent engagement to improve student outcomes*.

Allen, J. D., Fu, Q., Nguyen, K. H., Rose, R., Silva, D., & Corlin, L. (2023). *Parents' Willingness to Vaccinate Children for COVID-19: Conspiracy Theories, Information Sources, and Perceived Responsibility*. Journal of Health Communication, 28(1), 15–27.

Australian Education Union. (2024). *Ending the capital funding divide in Australia's schools*.

Blackmore, J. (2010). *Preparing leaders to work with emotions in culturally diverse educational communities*. Journal of Educational Administration, 48(5), 642–658.

Essential Research. (2024). Understanding the views of parents of public school students in Victoria. Unpublished report. AEU Victoria.

Fray, L., Jaremus, F., Gore, J., & Harris, J (2023). *Schooling upheaval during COVID-19: troubling consequences for students' return to school.* Australian Education Researcher, 50(3),1533–1550

Gerrard, J. (2020). *Nationhood, sex and the family: Neoconservatism and the moral dilemmas of privatisation in schooling*. In Privatisation and commercialisation in public education (pp. 171-183). Routledge.

Glover, D. (2020). *Regenerating Doveton by investing in place*

Gobby, B., & Niesche, R. (2019). *Community empowerment? School autonomy, school boards and depoliticising governance*. The Australian Educational Researcher, 46(3), 565–582.

Graham, L.J., Killingly, C., Laurens, K.R., Sweller, N. (2023) *Overrepresentation of Indigenous students in school suspension, exclusion, and enrolment cancellation in Queensland: is there a case for systemic inclusive school reform?*. Australian Education Researcher, 50 (2), 167–201

Harvard Family Research Project. (2014). *Redefining Family Engagement for Student Success*. Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Heffernan, A., Bright, D., Kim, M., Longmuir, F., & Magyar, B. (2022). *'I cannot sustain the workload and the emotional toll': Reasons behind Australian teachers' intentions to leave the profession*. Australian Journal of Education, 66(2), 196–209.

Houtenville, A., & Smith Conway, K. (2008). *Parental Effort, School Resources, and Student Achievement*. Journal of Human Resources, 43(2), 437-453

Lampert, J. (2021). *A community-engaged framework for the preparation of teachers for high-poverty communities*. The Australian Educational Researcher, 48(3), 449-466.

Longmuir, F. (2023). *Leading in lockdown: Community, communication and compassion in response to the COVID-19 crisis*. Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 51(5), 1014-1030

Longmuir, F., Gallo Cordoba, B., Phillips, M., Allen, K. A., & Moharami, M. (2022). *Australian teachers' perceptions of their work in 2022.* Monash

Longmuir, F., Delany, T., Lampert, J., & Wilkinson, J. (2024). *What the Profession Needs Now for The Future: Discussion Paper One: Work in Victoria's Public Schools.*

Longmuir, F., Delany, T., Wilkinson, J., & Lampert, J. (2024). *What the Profession Needs Now for The Future: Discussion Paper Two: Provision for Victoria's Public Schools.*

Longmuir, F., McKay, A., Gallo Cordoba, B., Allen, K.-A., & Phillips, M. (2024). *Australian Teachers' Perceptions of Safety, Violence and Limited Support in Their Workplaces.* Journal of School Violence, 1-20.

Lowe, K., & Weuffen, S. (2023). *"You get to 'feel' your culture": Aboriginal students speaking back to deficit discourses in Australian schooling*. The Australian Educational Researcher, 50(1), 33-53.

Moodie, N. (2018). *Decolonising race theory: Place, survivance and sovereignty*. In The relationality of race in education research (pp. 33-46). Routledge.

Moodie, N., Vass, G., & Lowe, K. (2021). *The Aboriginal voices project: findings and reflections.* Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education, 49(1), 5–19.

Morris, E., & Nora, L. (2024). *Six Global Lessons on How Family, School, and Community Engagement Can Transform Education*. Brookings Institution.

Murphy, E., Banerjee, A., & Walsh, P. P. (Eds.). (2022). *Partnerships and the Sustainable Development Goals.* Springer International Publishing.

OECD. (2024a). *Parental Involvement Overview*. Education GPS. OECD

OECD. (2024b). *Education at a Glance 2024: OECD Indicators*. OECD.

OECD. (2024c). *Constructing Scenarios for the Future of Teaching in Flanders*. OECD.

Paulhus, D. L. (1991). *CHAPTER 2—Measurement and Control of Response Bias*. In J. P. Robinson, P. R. Shaver, & L. S. Wrightsman (Eds.), Measures of Personality and Social Psychological Attitudes (pp. 17–59). Academic Press.

Rowe, E., & Perry, L. B. (2019). *Inequalities in the private funding of public schools: parent financial contributions and school socioeconomic status.* Journal of Educational Administration and History, 52(1), 42-59

Rowe, E., & Perry, L. B. (2022). *Voluntary school fees in segregated public schools: how selective public schools turbo-charge inequity and funding gaps.* Comparative Education, 58(1), 106-123.

Shay, M., & Lampert, J. (2022). *Community according to whom? An analysis of how Indigenous 'community' is defined in Australia's* Through Growth to Achievement *2018 report on equity in education.* Critical Studies, 63(1), 47-63.

State Government of Victoria, (2024a). *Education State in Schools Guiding Coalition.*

State Government of Victoria, (2024b). *Partnerships: Department of Education.*

Thompson, G., Hogan, A., & Rahimi, M. (2019). *Private funding in Australian public schools: A problem of equity.* The Australian Educational Researcher, 46(5), 893-910.

Victorian Department of Education and Training, (2016). *Marrung: Aboriginal Education Plan 2016 - 2026.* State of Victoria.

Wilkinson, J., Walsh, L., Keddie, A., Howie, L., Sum, N., & Longmuir, F. (2018). *Leading for Social Cohesion: How principals respond to "challenging conversations" about social and political volatilities and disharmonies.* Monash University.

Wilkinson, J., Walsh, L., Keddie, A., & Longmuir, F. (2020). *Leading for social cohesion in Victorian public schools: Final report.* Monash University.

Yoon, E.-S. (2020). *School Choice Research and Politics with Pierre Bourdieu: New Possibilities.* Educational Policy, 34(1), 193-210.

Methodology for Paper 3

8. METHODS OVERVIEW

This discussion paper draws from the '*What the profession needs now for the future'* project. This project, instigated by AEU Victoria, and conducted in partnership with Monash University, seeks to identify the nature and scale of the key issues faced by AEU members in public schools and the opportunities for necessary system and school-based reforms.

The broader research project includes: a survey of AEU Victoria members; a literature review; a desktop review of other relevant education systems and jurisdictions; a survey of public school parents; feedback from AEU member forums; and, an economic analysis.

Each discussion paper draws primarily on the survey of AEU Victorian members who work in public schools in order to illustrate and understand the work that is occurring in Victoria's public schools, and the issues that teachers, education support staff and principal class members are experiencing. *Discussion Paper 3* also includes data from the market research of parents. Findings from the survey are discussed alongside findings from the literature review and jurisdiction scan in each of the sections of Paper 3 and to inform the recommendations developed.

9. SURVEY

The survey consisted of 47 questions in total. The survey was designed by the AEU Victorian research team in consultation with Monash researchers. Many survey items were informed by other reliable instruments, such as the Teaching and Learning International Survey [TALIS] (OECD) and the School Staff Workload Study (Weldon & Ingvarson, 2016). The survey was distributed using Survey Monkey and responses were collected by the AEU Victorian research team.

Depending on role and response choices in some questions, participants answered between 30 and 40 questions. The majority of questions were closed multiple choice responses, and Likert response questions (for example, levels of agreement on four- or five-point scales). The instrument used seven different scales which were chosen as appropriate for each question and because they were consistent with the instruments that informed them. The five-point Likert scales used included: '*Never'* to '*Very often'*; '*Not at all'* to '*To a great extent'*; '*Far too little time'* to '*Far too much time'*. The four-point scales included: '*Strongly disagree'* to '*Strongly agree'*; '*Not at all'* to '*A lot'*; '*Never or seldom* to *Nearly always or always'*. The survey also included four questions that elicited open responses, which resulted in 12,200 comments.

9.1. RESPONSE RATE
The survey was circulated to AEU members and available over a four-week period during Term 2, 2024 (April–May). All AEU Victorian school-based members received an invitation to participate in the survey and follow-up reminders via email and text messages, and 8,084 members engaged with the survey.

For reasons of commercial confidentiality, the total Union membership and the number of respondents by target group have been redacted from this report. In total, there were more than 8,000 respondents. The final response rate for teachers was 20%, for principals it was 31%, and for education support staff it was 20%.

9.2. PARTICIPANTS
In the following report, we use these terms to describe the different cohorts of participants. *Educators* refer to all participants. *Teachers* include those respondents who selected 'Classroom teacher' and 'Leading teacher/learning specialist' to describe their role. *Education support* includes respondents who selected any of the four education support categories for their role (see Appendix A for details of these). *Principal class* includes 'Principal', 'Acting principal' and 'Assistant principal'. We use these groupings of respondents most commonly unless there is a particular subgroup of interest where we use the name of the category as found in the survey (see Appendix A).

9.3. DATA ANALYSIS
The survey data were cleaned and a preliminary analysis undertaken by the AEU Victorian research team. The data were further analysed and interrogated for specific purposes for the in the discussion papers by the Monash team. These secondary analyses use Microsoft Excel for quantitative data analysis and NVivo for thematic coding of qualitative responses.

10. LITERATURE REVIEW

A national and international review of relevant research and policy literature was undertaken by the Monash team. This involved an initial process that developed a summative overview of literature related to the three themes of the papers. The search strategy for this phase used an adapted scoping review methodology to scan, search and summaries significant publications. As findings emerged from other research methods for this project, most commonly, the survey, specific literature searches were undertaken to inform the discussion of specific topics.

11. DESKTOP REVIEW OF APPROACHES IN OTHER JURISDICTIONS

An initial list of possible jurisdictions of interest was developed by the research team. An overview scan of publicly available internet sources was undertaken to summarise the key points of interest from each jurisdiction. As the papers were developed, we returned to this scan and further investigated those jurisdictions that were relevant to the topics that emerged as important.

12. MARKET RESEARCH OF PARENTS/CARERS OF STUDENTS ENROLLED IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

This project was conducted independently by Essential Media and included a survey of 1,651 participants who were parents/carers with at least one child enrolled at a Victorian public school. Some 1,005 of these participants were recruited through the company's database, and 646 were recruited via AEU's partner networks. This market research also spoke in-depth to 36 parents in six focus groups of six parents. The survey used some Likert-scale questions, which employed eight different scales. Some of these were similar to those used in the school staff survey but none were replicated. This resulted in a need to treat discussion of the two set of results as not directly comparable, and to instead consider broader insights that could be drawn from participants' responses on similar topics (which occurred in *Discussion Paper 3*).