

Results of the 2020 Stronger Smarter Census

Stronger Smarter Institute

Stronger Smarter Leadership Program

The Institute's flagship program, the Stronger Smarter Leadership Program (SSLP), is designed to enable school and community leaders from a broad range of contexts to understand and embrace the Stronger Smarter Approach (SSA) and use it to transform their own schools and communities.

The Program aims to challenge participants in their pursuit of educational excellence for all students, providing learning opportunities to enhance leadership capacity and a set of tools they can take back to use with their classrooms and staff to enact the SSA. The Program challenges assumptions and equips participants to hold challenging conversations with staff and actively engage the school community so that the whole school community has high expectations relationships and promotes positive identities and excellence in schools. Program alumni find they can do things differently in a way that is inspiring and transformative both for their schools and for themselves.

Jackson, C. & Andrade, J. (2021). *Results of the 2020 Stronger Smarter Census*. Stronger Smarter Institute report.



Contents

Stronger Smarter Leadership Program	2
Summary	5
Personal Sphere.....	5
School and Community Spheres.....	5
2020 Census implementation.....	7
Personal Sphere.....	9
Paradigm shift.....	9
High expectations culture.....	9
Responsibility for change.....	12
Shifting the Conversation	12
Changing workplace practice.....	13
Impact on Leadership.....	14
Impact on teaching practice	15
Impact of the SSLP	16
Enacting Stronger Smarter.....	18
Workplace Challenge.....	18
Beyond personal practice	20
Community Sphere.....	24
Embracing Indigenous Leadership.....	25
Building Community confidence	26
Building relationships with families	27
Changing the curriculum	28
School Sphere.....	29
Positive school culture.....	31
Collegiate work environment.....	31
Strength-based approaches	33
Changing teaching practice	34
Relationships with students	36
Stronger Smarter Schools.....	38
Summary	41
Personal Sphere.....	41

Enacting change	41
Community sphere	42
School sphere	43
Future work	43

Summary

The 2020 Stronger Smarter Census responses describe how transformational change is happening in schools, and also that there is still further work to be done. Some Aboriginal Education Workers are celebrating increased courage and confidence, voices heard, and spaces where they can contribute in a meaningful way. Others are still saying that they feel they could do more if given the space to do so, and that their voices are not heard. Many respondents describe strength-based high expectations learning environments. Others suggest that some schools are still based in deficit conversations and that competing priorities are getting in the way of enacting change.

The focus of this report is to explore what is happening and working in schools. In the Stronger Smarter Approach (SSA), we describe the three spheres of the Personal, School and Community. When these spheres come together underlain by High-Expectations Relationships and a personal 'responsibility for change', this is a connecting space of innovation and creation.

All participants in the Stronger Smarter Leadership Program (SSLP) leave the program with a series of 'challenges' or action research projects. These include a personal challenge within the Personal Sphere and a workplace challenge which can be in either or both of the School and Community Spheres. Many workplace challenges involve building High-Expectations Relationships with staff, students, or parents.

Personal Sphere

The first section of the Census explores participants' level of change to personal practice following the SSLP including:

- ▶ How participants shift their thinking and take on a sense of 'responsibility for change'.
- ▶ How participants enact their workplace challenges.
- ▶ The impact of the SSLP as a professional development program on workplace challenges and the personal enacting of the Stronger Smarter Approach (SSA) in schools.

School and Community Spheres

The second section of the Census explores participants' views of the impact of the SSA on their school or organisation. This includes:

- ▶ How elements of the SSA are used across the school.
- ▶ How relationships are built with staff, students, and community.
- ▶ How widespread is knowledge of the SSA in the school.
- ▶ Any outcomes seen from enacting the SSA.

In 2020, one major competing priority was the impact of Covid 19 which stopped many schools from working face-to-face with each other and with parents and communities. This face-to-face relationship building is key to developing Stronger Smarter ways of working, leading, and learning. This was particularly an issue for schools wanting to improve their community connections. In addition, while staff were focused on setting up structures for remote learning and managing things differently in schools, this meant that some workplace challenges were put on hold.

Stronger Smarter has definitely changed many things at our school. Rather than implementing a program it has been a different approach to the everyday things we do in our school.

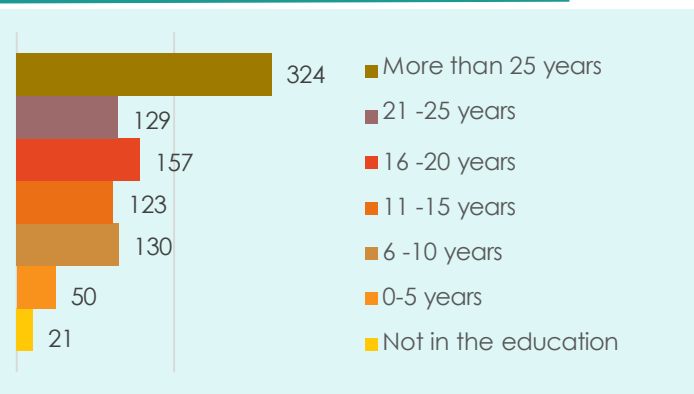
Despite the challenges of 2020, there continues to be a great depth of commitment from SSLP alumni to lead change in their schools. Workplace challenges usually go beyond the personal classroom space and are often quite ambitious. For some Principals, the workplace challenge may be about changing the whole way the school operates. For teachers, it can be at a project level where they need approval from their Principal.

Enacting the SSA in a school is not as simple as being able to implement a 'program' and lead staff through a series of steps or processes or tell all staff what they need to do. Enacting the SSA has to be a collective vision, where everyone in the school community has 'buy-in' and takes personal responsibility for thinking and doing things differently. The Census results clearly show this ripple effect where the individual makes changes to their thinking, their leadership, and their classroom practice as a result of attending the SSLP. Then through the workplace challenges, this ripples out to other staff members, the community, and the students.

This report explores this ripple from the Personal Sphere through to the Community and School spheres, looking at what is helping or hindering success.

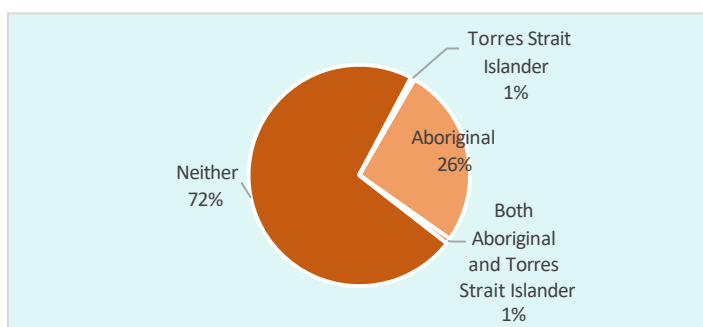
2020 Census implementation

The 2020 Stronger Smarter Census is a survey of all alumni of the Stronger Smarter Leadership Program (SSLP) from 2006 – 2020. This was the third time the Census has been run, with previous Census surveys running in 2018 and 2016. In 2020, the Census was held over 10 weeks from August to November 2020.

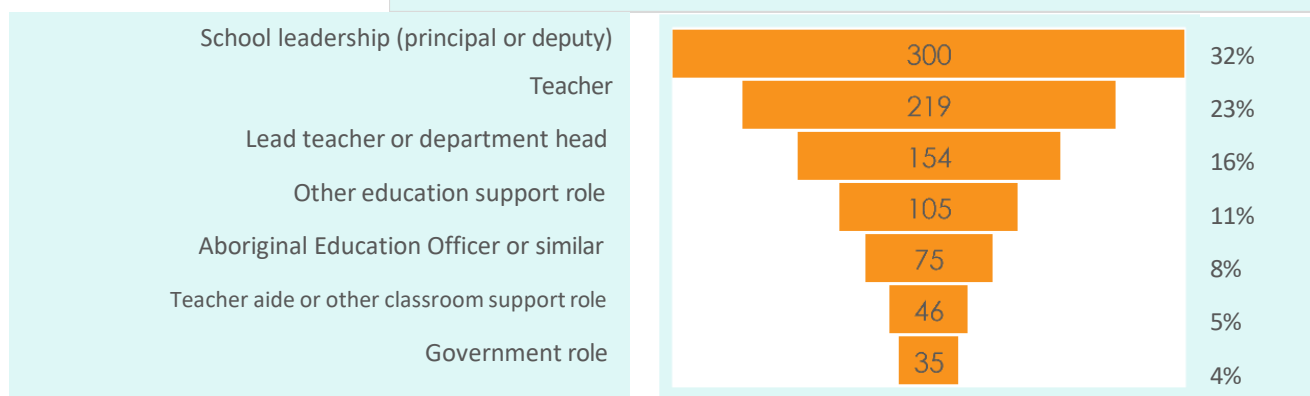
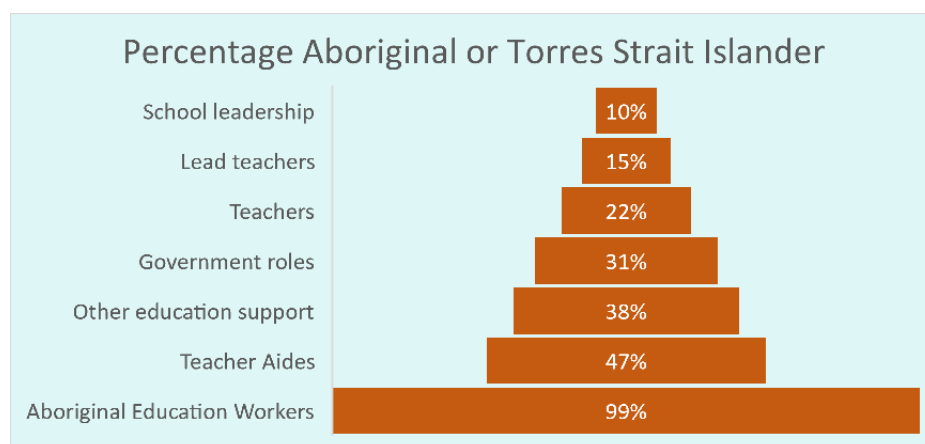


The Institute received a total of 955 responses, with 826 complete responses representing 25% of the total SSLP alumni. All responses received for individual questions were used in the analysis.

The majority of respondents were in the education profession. Respondents were 70%



Female, 25% Male (5% unknown), and 28% Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. These figures are similar to the previous Census in 2018 and 2016.



In viewing the results, please note:

- ▶ Where participants responded with 'not applicable' this has not been included in results.
- ▶ Throughout, in graphs and reports we have used the shortened groupings as shown in the table below.
- ▶ The Census is voluntary. It is likely, therefore that alumni who choose to answer the survey are those who were the most engaged in the program and most likely to have made changes.
- ▶ A lot of participants had changed schools. It is possible therefore that they answered the personal questions in relation to a previous school and school questions in relation to a current school.

Term used in graphs	Included in the grouping
School leadership	Principal or Deputy Principal
Lead teacher	Lead teacher or department head
Teacher Aide	Includes other classroom support roles
Aboriginal Education Officer	Includes other similar roles such as AIEO, AEW, IEW, AEO, KESO
Other education support	Education support roles not in schools.

The majority of questions have remained the same throughout the three Census surveys. In 2020, however, we asked additional questions to explore changes participants had made as a result of attending the SSLP, and outcomes as a result of Stronger Smarter strategies. We also asked the following free text questions.

- ▶ What contributed to success or lack of success? What else would you have needed to be successful?
- ▶ What outcomes or changes have you seen from using Stronger Smarter strategies with colleagues, students, or parents?
- ▶ Are there any other aspects of the Stronger Smarter Approach that you personally use regularly that we haven't mentioned?
- ▶ What outcomes or changes have you seen in your school from using Stronger Smarter strategies?
- ▶ Is there anything you would like to tell us? Any comment is welcome.

Personal Sphere

96%

Of respondents said the SSLP had **some level impact on their leadership** and/or they had made some level of **changes in the school**.

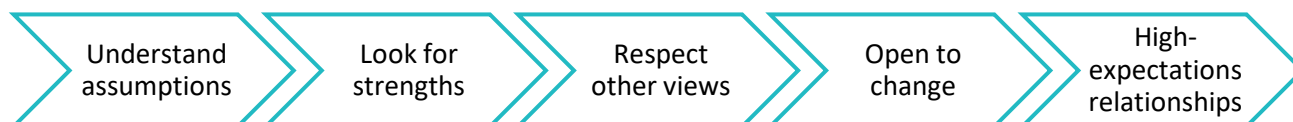


In the Personal Sphere, the majority of respondents described how they had made changes in their workplace or were 'doing things differently', with 96% of respondents saying the SSLP had some level of impact on their leadership and/or they had made changes within the school or workplace. Looking deeper into the data, we explore the ripple effect of starting with a personal paradigm shift and then moving to building relationships, promoting more collegiate working environments, and different ways of interacting with parents and students. This then leads to changes across the whole school.

Paradigm shift

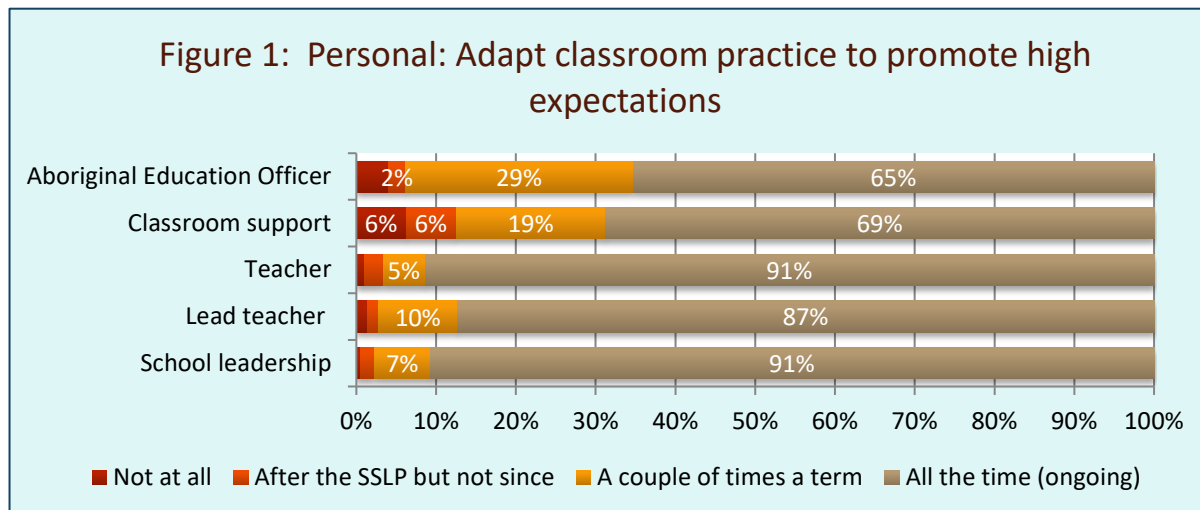
The 'impact' of the SSLP for participants starts with a paradigm shift in thinking, which impacts on leadership styles and relationships. One respondent described this as 'subtle changes in thinking that are crucial to social change.' Respondents talked about a 'change of outlook', or a 'change in attitude' in both themselves and others.

High expectations culture



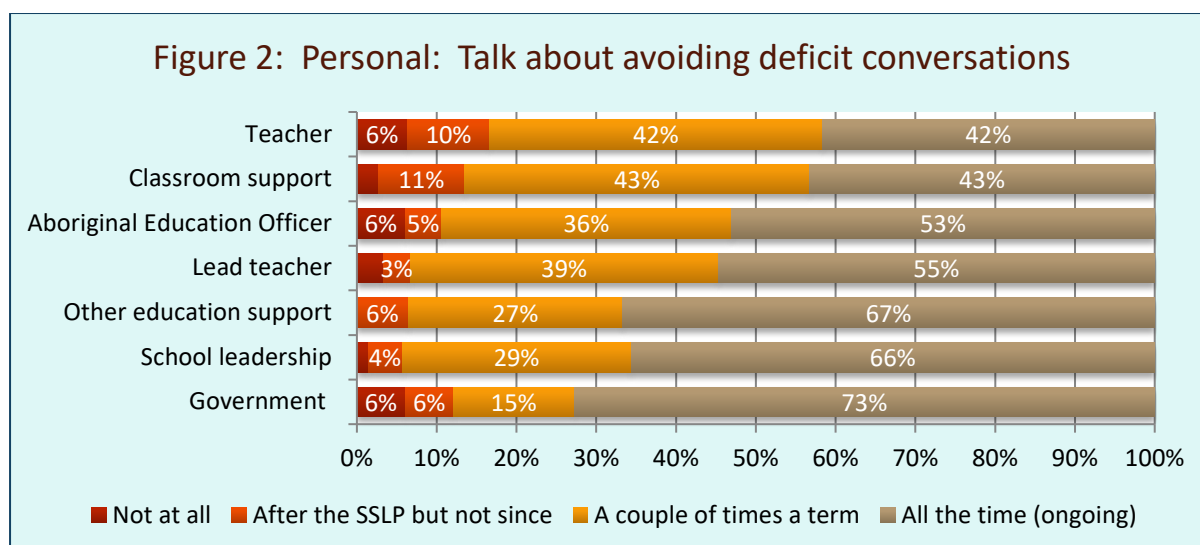
There are several components to this 'change in attitude.' Firstly, it is about being aware of assumptions and holding a growth mindset – an understanding of, and commitment to, Strong and Smart. Participants talked about refraining from negative talk and turning this around to solution-based discussions and a respectful, strength-based approach of always looking for the best outcomes for every person in the organisation. One participant talked about flipping the thinking to look for strengths and possibilities.

Figure 1 shows that approximately 90% of all teachers and school leadership had made ongoing changes to their classroom practice to ensure high expectations for all students on an ongoing basis.

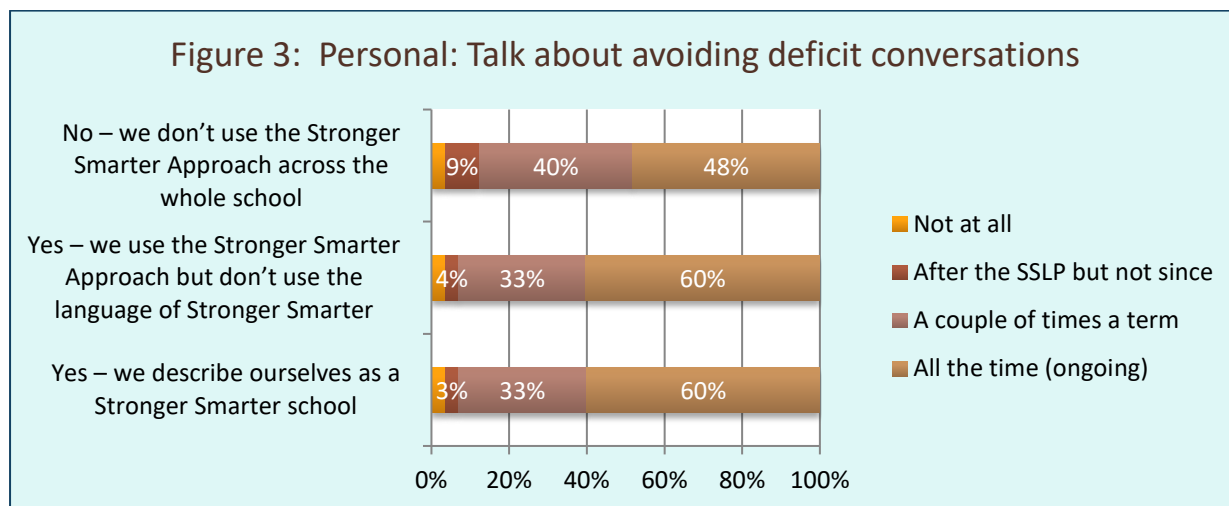


The SSLP was very impacting to me and is in my heart and mind often in ways that can't be measured but are having a continual impact on me and my educational practices and relationships.

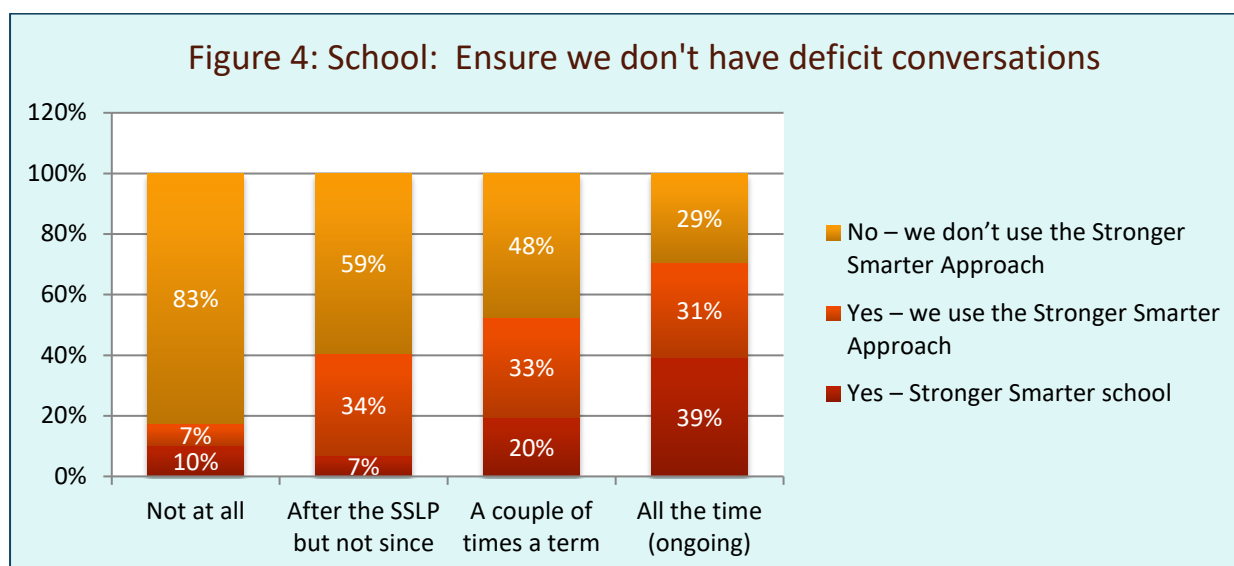
When participants were asked about outcomes, many talked about the gradual shift to a high expectations culture with a collective language for being positive. When we asked about whether participants take deliberate steps to avoid deficit conversations, this was more likely to be the case for school leadership and government roles (Figure 2).



Respondents who said they were in a school that used the SSA were more likely to personally have discussions about avoiding deficit conversations (Figure 3), and schools that continually made sure deficit conversations were not a part of the school were also more likely to also use the SSA (Figure 4).

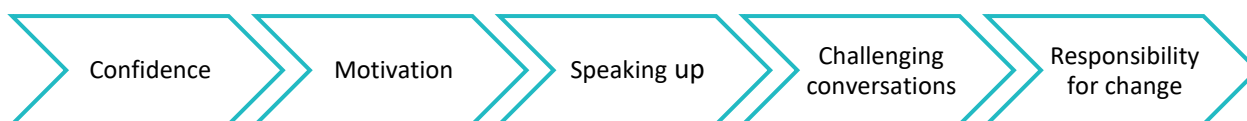


For staff that get it ... They actively look at equity, inclusion, respect, trust, and a positive approach to address student learning and teach expected behaviour in context.



With this shift to a high expectations culture, comes a greater acceptance of others, being more open and willing to accept change, a better understanding of self, and how to 'be still and listen to others'. Participants talked about honouring and valuing different perspectives and being open to other people's values.' This is High-Expectations Relationships.

Responsibility for change

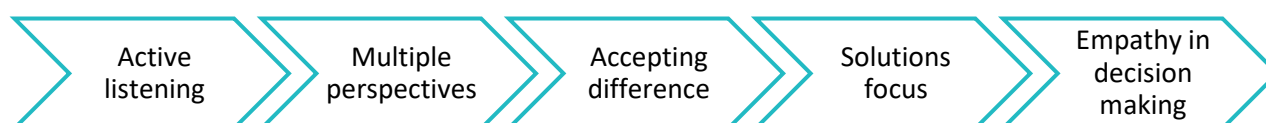


The second component of the paradigm shift is about an increased confidence, belief, or determination, and a 'can do' mentality. This was also described as integrity, courage, and creativity. Participants mentioned speaking up – both as non-Indigenous staff speaking up 'when presented with ongoing colonisation or racism' or Aboriginal Education Workers feeling that they had more confidence that their voice would be heard in the school.

I find the impact has sat with me. It is the deep connect, the emotion and the bare truth revealed that makes this learning stay with me. I feel I have an internal assumptions radar inside of me now and I find that when there are bubbling issues, I hear myself reaching out for Stronger Smarter learnings to either help me understand what is really going on or work with staff around the issue. I will never stop building Stronger Smarter around me. There is so much more to do.

Several participants talked about being more confident to have challenging conversations and feeling empowered to involve people in High-Expectations Relationships. One participant described it as 'a firm commitment to the strategy that becomes a personal lifestyle.' Another described an internal motivation to 'make a difference' which had been fuelled by Stronger Smarter. Another as 'not walking past a standard we wouldn't accept.' This is what we describe as 'Responsibility for Change.

Shifting the Conversation



The third area where many participants talked about 'doing things differently' was in the way they communicated with others. Many talked about 'active listening', being more curious, being a better listener, with less need to talk or give an opinion. Respondents talked about greater patience, slowing down the conversation, and creating open forums for discussion to ensure that all voices and perspectives were included. Associated with this was self-reflection on how they could have done things differently. One respondent described how the process and the relationships are as important as the end product.

This increase in active listening and self-reflection was leading to individuals being more accepting and understanding of difference. Several respondents referred to the SSLP provocation that 'Everyone's behaviour is their best attempt to have their needs met.'

The understandings I developed through Stronger Smarter (10 years ago!) laid the foundations for how I approach change management and school transformation. The SSLP helped me to define the type of leader that I continue to aspire to be.

Respondents described being better able to respond to feedback and more focussed on solutions rather than problems. Several referred to the SSLP provocation, 'when challenged – how do you respond – with defensiveness or opportunity?' One respondent said they added the statement to their email signature and that had generated discussion from email recipients.

These changes in personal behaviour were ensuring that all voices were heard. Firstly, this was leading to see things from multiple perspectives, which respondents then described as meaning greater compassion and empathy to guide decision making. Secondly, it helped to build the 'emotional bank account' so that there was a safe space when the challenging conversations about high expectations were needed.

Changing workplace practice

'Responsibility for change' is reflected in SSLP participants changing what they do in the classroom. When respondents described changes to leadership as 'embedded into everyday practice' or 'considerable impact', respondents were also more likely to have:

- ▶ Changed the way they teach and adapted the curriculum to make it more culturally responsive on an ongoing basis.
- ▶ Built High-Expectations Relationships and set strategies to avoid deficit conversations.
- ▶ Worked with other staff to implement ideas or run workshops on Stronger Smarter ideas.

In other words, when participants are making changes to their leadership styles, they are also making changes aligned with the SSA.

Impact on Leadership

94%

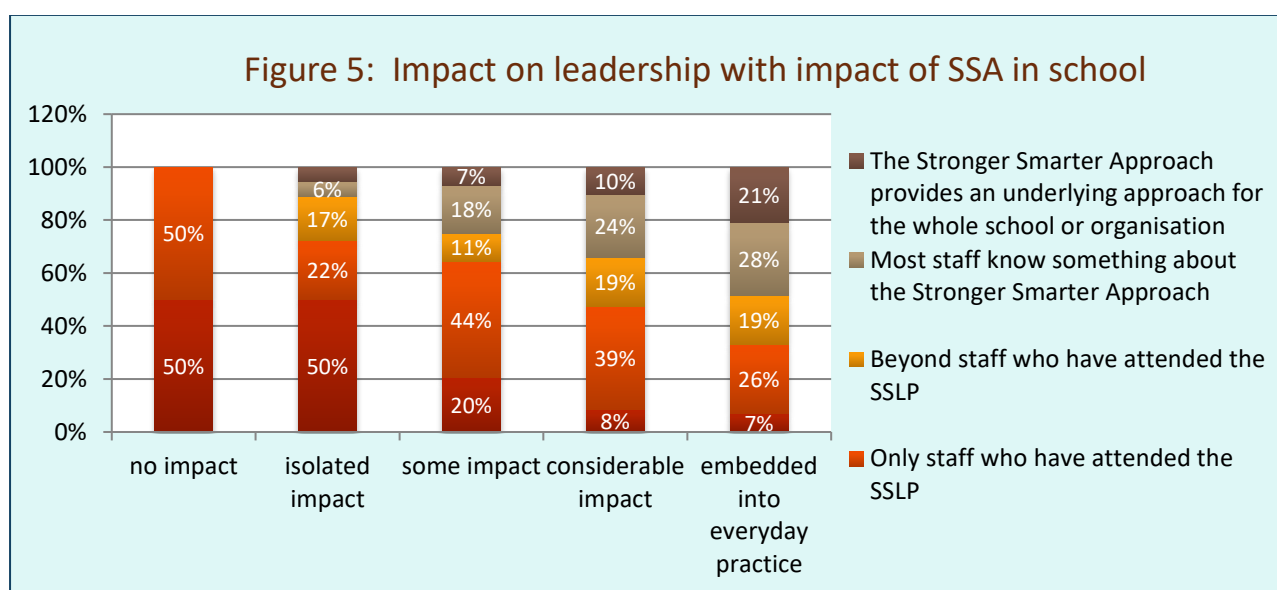
Of respondents say the SSLP continues to have at least some impact across **all aspects of their relationships and leadership**



Comments from respondents suggest that the SSLP impacts on personal leadership skills. One respondent described this as ‘finding myself as a leader and the using this gift and sharing it with others.’

Stronger Smarter has developed my leadership skills towards becoming a transformative leader.

When participants said the SSLP had ‘considerable impact’ or ‘embedded impact’ on their leadership, they were more likely to have also completed their workplace challenge, worked with other staff to implement strategies, and run presentations or workshops for staff using Stronger Smarter ideas. They were also more likely to be in a school that uses the SSA (Figure 5). That may be impacts both from those changing the way they lead and a part of that being to enact the SSA across the school, or from others being more able to change the way they do things when in a school enacting the SSA.



Impact on teaching practice

77%

Of all respondents had **changed the way they teach** on an ongoing basis after attending the SSLP.



Almost all respondents (97%) had made some changes to the way they teach after attending the SSLP, with 77% saying this was an ongoing change. School leadership and teachers were more likely to have made these changes compared to classroom support and Aboriginal Education Officer roles (Figure 6). Figure 7 suggests that a key component of 'changing the way you teach' is changing classroom practice to promote high expectations for all students. This may have been a strategy that those in support roles were already using and therefore did not need to change.

Figure 6: Changed the way you teach

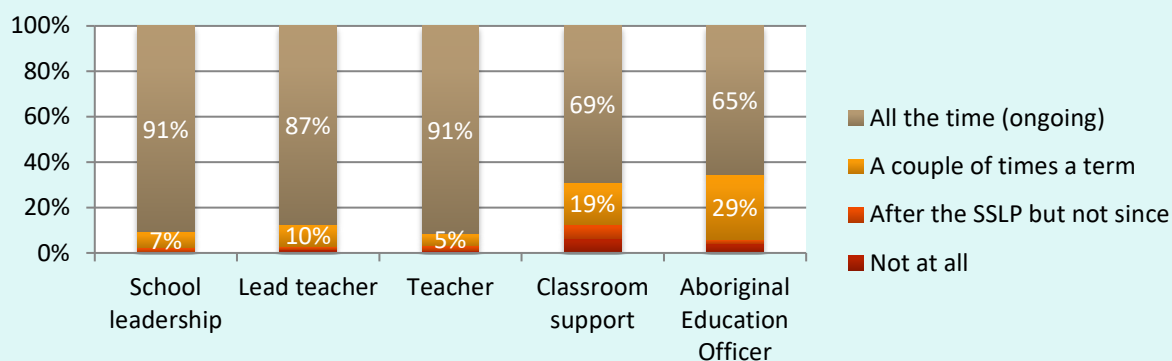
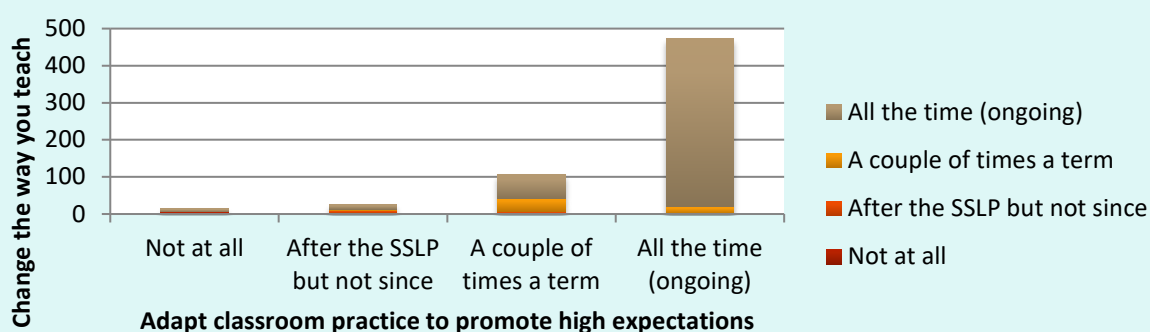


Figure 7: Promote high expectations and change the way you teach



Impact of the SSLP

The Census questionnaire did not ask direct questions about the quality of the SSLP. However, in the final question 243 (30%) participants made a statement that was either about the quality of the program and/or how they would like to further embed the SSLP.

The SSLP was very impacting to me and is in my heart and mind often in ways that can't be measured but are having a continual impact on me and my educational practices and relationships.

Of these 243 participants, 106 made comments about seeking further engagement with Stronger Smarter PDs which included:

- ▶ Attending additional training or refreshers for themselves or further access to Stronger Smarter resources.
- ▶ Having Institute-led PDs at the school or personally promoting the SSLP to staff at their school or other schools.
- ▶ Comments of the importance of the training and how it should be more widely implemented across the country.

In teaching for 16 years, I have still found this to be the single most important and influential professional development as a teacher in Queensland. It encompassed so many aspects of 'being' as a teacher.

Respondents emphasised the need to work with other 'like-minded' staff members who understood the philosophy behind Stronger Smarter. While participants said that the shared language of Stronger Smarter was useful to help build understanding with others, many respondents described the positive benefits of working with other staff who had attended the SSLP, or alternatively the difficulties of working with staff who hadn't undertaken the training.

The more staff that attend the SSLP training the more cohesive we become - as more staff have the experience of Stronger Smarter, we seem to grow in our ideals of High Expectations and it's meaning for all stakeholders. High Expectation Relationships seeps in the veins of a school and this intrinsically brings us all closer - that sense of belonging to something more powerful and binding and gives a deeper meaning to education.

In the question regarding 'what contributed to success' many participants pointed to the impact of the SSLP. This included:

- ▶ The impact of a 'unique' program on personal leadership, with respondents saying they went back to the readings, the posters, and their personal notes and diaries for support or to trigger thinking. One participant said the 'tools and language were general enough to be applicable and specific enough to be effective'.
- ▶ Others described how it was important that they were able to attend the SSLP with workplace colleagues, with one saying, 'I attribute the success to the powerful relationships we developed while in the program'.
- ▶ Where other staff in the school had undertaken the SSLP, respondents found they could share ideas and language. One said, 'this has huge benefits because we are all on the same page and support each other to make changes.' Another described it as 'broadening thinking'.
- ▶ Several participants suggested that having support from SSI program facilitators after the program had contributed to success. Others noted that they would have liked further support.

The team approach is essential when enacting Stronger Smarter, and when participants have attended the SSLP, they are more likely to be passionate about advocating Stronger Smarter processes and modelling processes to colleagues.

... it is the changing mindset which is leading to a developing skill set for building high expectations relationships, challenging limiting assumptions and deficit language.

Enacting Stronger Smarter

When we talk about ‘enacting Stronger Smarter’ in a school, this can mean different things for different schools. However, it is clearly something that has to begin with the collective vision and mindset of ‘high expectations.’ While the individual activities or programs will differ, the underlying way of thinking and the way Stronger Smarter is ‘visible’ in a school will be the same.

Workplace Challenge

85%

Of respondents had **completed their workplace challenge**. Of these, 49% said they had gone further to undertake other workplace challenges.



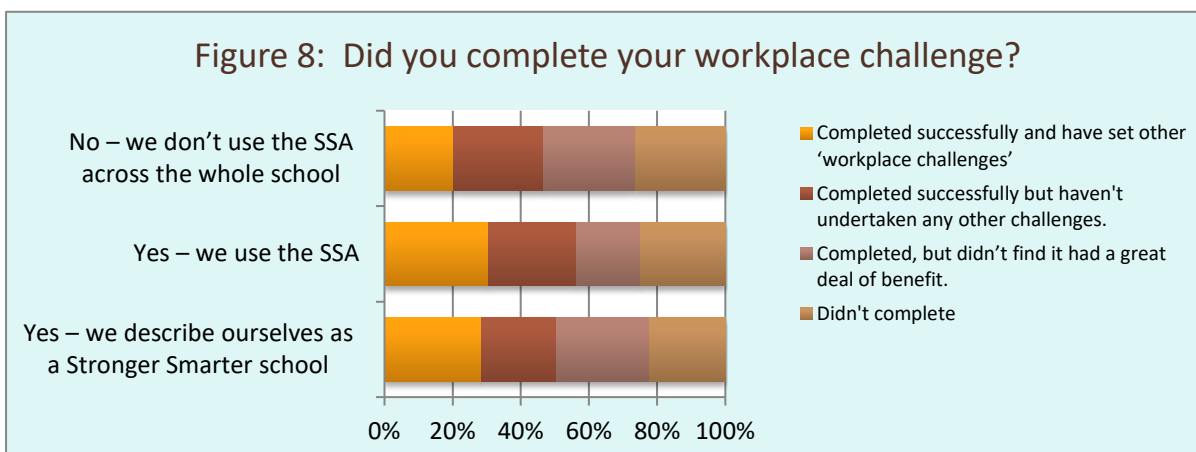
When making changes in the School Sphere, the Workplace Challenge within the program is a significant starting point for SSLP participants. 85% of respondents had completed their workplace challenge, and half of those had also taken the enactment beyond their original workplace challenge and set themselves other ‘challenges.’ However, even if respondents had not completed their workplace challenge, they had still made some personal changes to leadership or workplace practice.

What contributed to success was my strengthened ability to advocate for students. In the past I found myself hold back at the thought of offending staff.

The role participants were in had some impact on how participants had undertaken their workplace challenge. Those in school leadership or government roles, followed by Aboriginal Education workers and education support roles were most likely to have taken their work beyond their original workplace challenge (Figure 8).

Compared to other roles, those in school leadership roles were more likely to have completed their workplace challenge, found it useful, made the changes they wanted in the school, and set other workplace challenges. School leadership roles were also most likely to have changed the way they teach, promoted high expectations relationships, and embedded

Figure 8: Did you complete your workplace challenge?

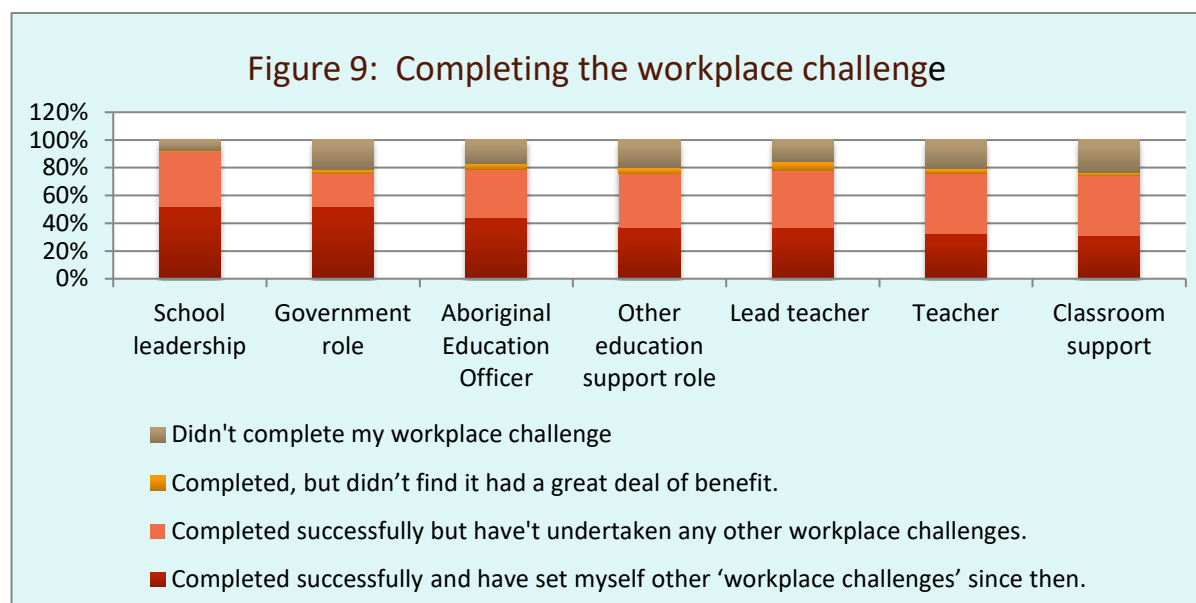


changes into everyday practice. There was no statistically significant relationship between completing workplace challenge and being in a school enacting the SSA.

For those who had completed their workplace challenge, over 50% had also embedded changes into their leadership practice, their teaching, and their relationships with others. This was compared to 30% for those who had not completed their workplace challenge. There was also a correlation between making the changes you wanted to make and completing the workplace challenge. 91% of those who had completed their workplace challenge also considered they had been able to make the changes they wanted. For those who had not been able to make the changes they wanted, only 62% had completed their workplace challenge. Those who said the SSLP had only isolated impact or some impact on their leadership were also more likely to say they had implemented the SSA 'in their personal work only' or not implemented anything.

Those in leadership positions more likely to have seen success in completing workplace challenges. For Aboriginal Education Workers, although 80% had completed their workplace challenges, only 66% said they had been able to make the changes they wanted to see – suggesting that they feel there is still more work to do (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Completing the workplace challenge



72%

Of respondents said they had been able to **make the changes they wanted.**



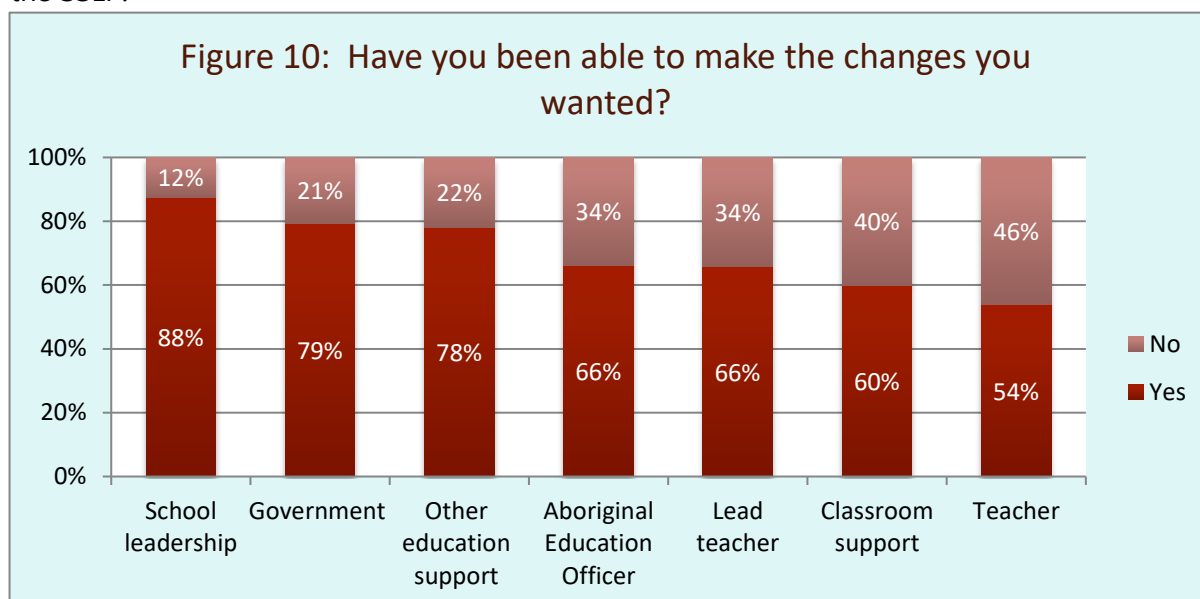
For those in teaching and school leadership roles, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff were also slightly less likely to say they had been able to make the changes they wanted (61%) compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts (73%).

When participants said they had been able to make the changes they wanted in the school, they were also more likely to have implemented their workplace challenge, and to have made changes to their leadership. This suggests that the personal changes to leadership are an important step to making changing in the school.

Respondents were more likely to have been able to make the changes they wanted when they considered that the SSA was used as a whole school approach. Alternatively, this could mean that the changes they had wanted to make were to use the SSA approach for the whole school.

Beyond personal practice

Although the ability of SSLP participants to enact a school-wide approach may vary depending on their role in the school, it is clear from respondents that they view the SSA as something that needs to go beyond their own teaching or workplace practice. Respondents described the importance of collaboration with a team of like-minded' or 'similarly inspired' colleagues who were willing to 'take on new ideas and who valued the implementation of Stronger Smarter strategies. In many cases, these colleagues were staff who had undertaken the SSLP.



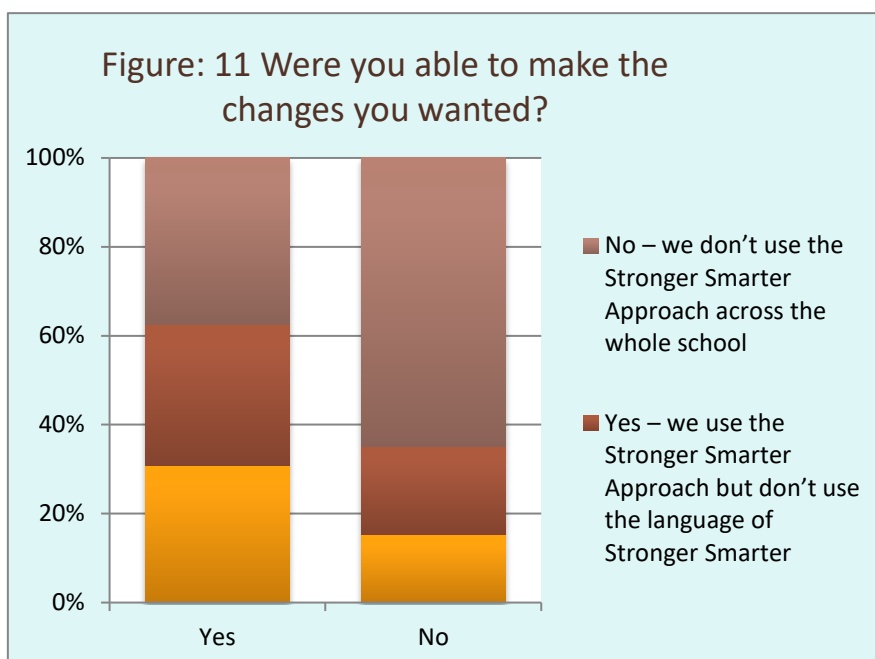
91%

Of respondents who said they had been able to **make the changes they wanted had also completed their workplace challenge** compared to those who said No – only 62% had completed their workplace challenge

62%

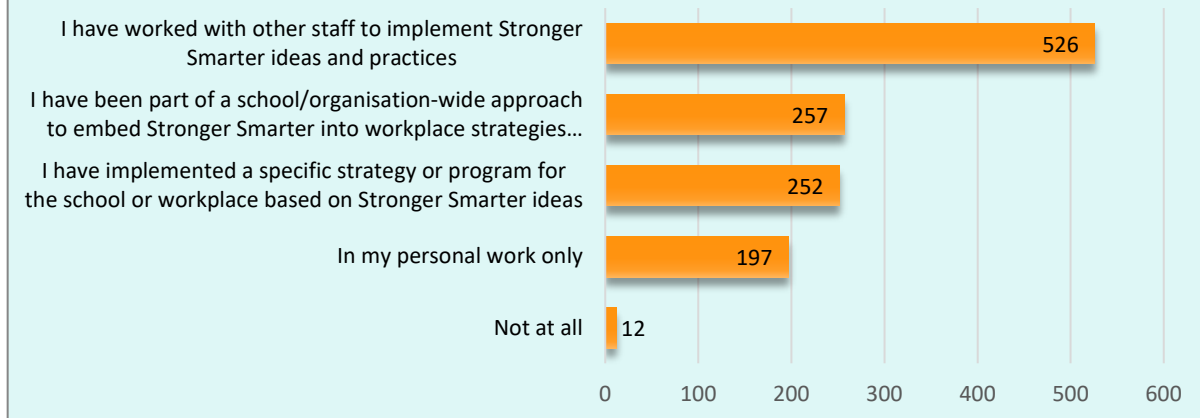
For most respondents, their workplace challenge or other enactment of the SSA had involved working with others or leading change in the school (Figure 10). Those who had been able to make the changes they wanted in the school were more likely to run Stronger Smarter presentations with their staff (Figure 11). In some cases, staff were working together with just one other person, or a small group. In other cases, it was clearly about working across the whole school (Figure 12).

Respondents talked about the importance of trust from their managers and being given opportunities for leadership, or autonomy to implement innovations or new practices. Open communication and transparency were important. One respondent talked about needing perseverance and determination to continue to work with leadership to show the value of implementing Stronger Smarter in the school.



Enacting is clearly a process that begins with sharing the 'mindset shift' in thinking with other staff across the school, and then look at what that means for workplace practice. A number of respondents described how it was important for all staff to understand the core beliefs and principles of the SSA, with many suggesting that the best way to do this was for staff to attend the SSLP. As one Aboriginal classroom support officer in a remote school described, it is about everyone working together along the same lines – working with the children and for the children.

Figure 12: Enacting across the school



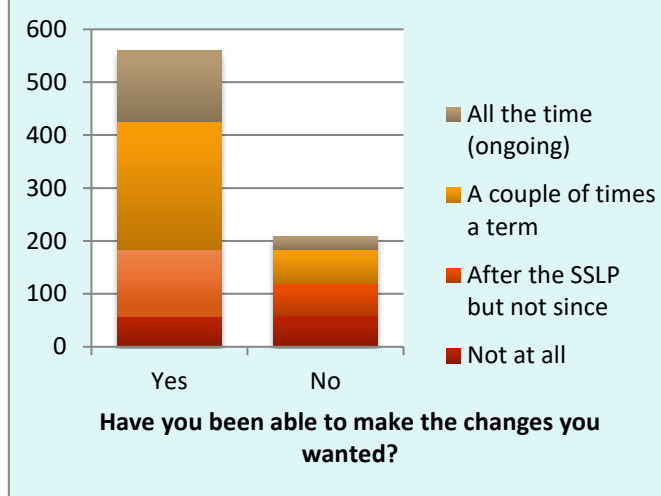
Where staff had attended the SSLP, the shared language of Stronger Smarter was described as contributing to success. Where respondents were working with staff who hadn't attend the SSLP, this was described as a blocker to success. Several respondents talked about the importance of the relationships they had developed during the program itself. These relationships were both with workplace colleagues and with colleagues from other schools, providing a professional learning network.

A small number of participants talked about the difficulty of not being able to change established mindsets, noting that there were still excuses for not having high expectations of students, and an 'unwillingness to rock the boat.' One respondent described this as staff not fully understanding 'high expectations' – interpreting it as behaviour expectations as opposed to 'learning and inclusivity'.

Respondents talked about blockers from their schools as being both time and competing priorities where Stronger Smarter was 'just another thing to do' or 'we don't have the money.' A few participants who would have liked to work across the school had found they could only work within their own classroom but found that it was still achievable to have high expectations in the classroom even if that was not fully reflected across the school.

Respondents described how a buy-in approach was needed to get past those blockers. Those in non-leadership roles described how change required a school-wide, strategic approach to link

Figure 13: Running Stronger Smarter presentations



80%

Of respondents say they have **taken the Stronger Smarter Approach beyond their personal work** and have worked with others in the school



Stronger Smarter principles into the school vision and procedures and give consistent messages over time and over all spaces in the school. This couldn't occur without support from school leadership, and many respondents described support from colleagues or leadership as being integral to success in their workplace challenges. Lack of leadership support or support from colleagues was described as a blocker to success, and momentum could be lost when the school leadership changed.

In some schools, leaders who had not undertaken the SSLP were supporting groups of Stronger Smarter trained staff to work together to drive change. Respondents suggested, however, that change was easier when the school leadership had undertaken the SSLP, and the ideas of Stronger Smarter could then 'filter down' to other staff members.

Respondents described how the buy-in approach needed for cultural change takes time. Respondents talked about taking small steps, taking time to listen, and not making assumptions. Several respondents described how personal attendance at the SSLP gives the passion and commitment to keep going. One participant described how those who had not attended the SSLP were not as motivated to keep the momentum of change, with 'things changing for a while, and then dropping back to the old negative ways.'

I struggle consistently in my efforts to have the conversations with some staff that despite challenges students face in their lives, that it is in the classroom where we are able to equip them with the skills and mindset to strive to achieve. As a school ... there is a myriad of excuses for them not to behave and secure the same academic standards as their peers This mindset makes it extremely difficult to work towards establishing high expectations of all students across our school. I feel the only place that I am able to do this is in my own classroom where I am somewhat buoyed by the evidence that this is achievable.

Staff turnover was cited as an issue by several participants, particularly in remote areas. This was both the impact of school leadership changing or the need to 'go back to basics every year' to train more staff which limited how far forward the school could move each year. A number of respondents noted the impact of their personal change of roles or schools. This could either be a negative or a positive impact depending on whether they moved to a school where there were other Stronger Smarter trained staff.

Community Sphere

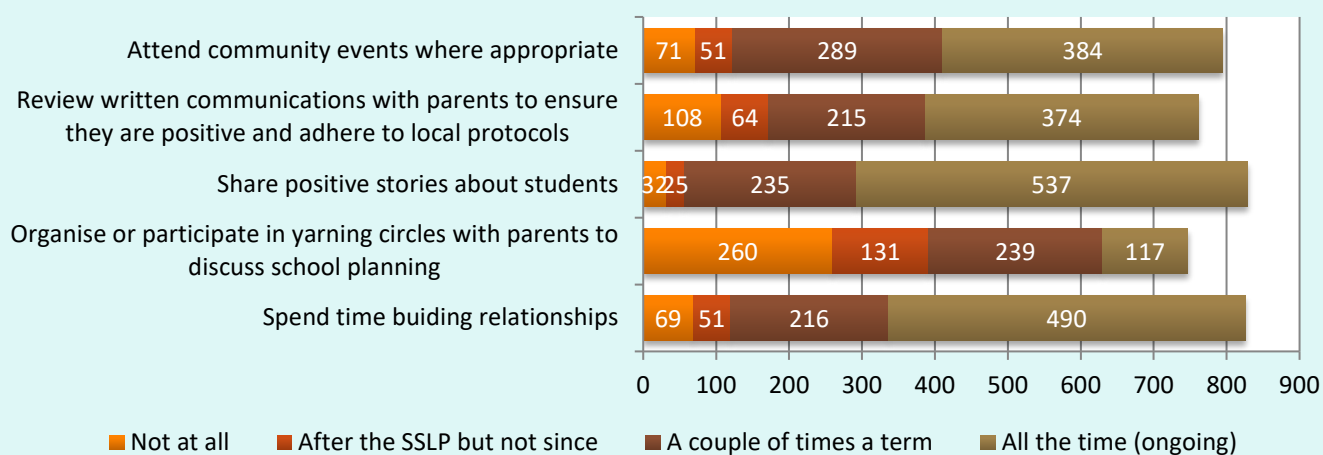
In the Community Sphere, respondents talked about a more successful school community and improved parent and community involvement. Respondents noticed how the community were seeing their school in a more positive light, parents were now more comfortable entering the school, more willing to talk to the school, and more comfortable about being involved in their child’s education. Success was described as increased community confidence shown through increased enrolments from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, or improved survey results from parents.

In addition to the community building activities explored through the Census questions (Figure 14), respondents also talked about

- ▶ Ensuring a positive, strength-based approach to Indigenous leadership, whether school staff, community members or students.
- ▶ Building greater community confidence in the school, through both making the school a welcome environment, providing opportunities for engagement, and building high-expectations relationships.
- ▶ Making the curriculum more culturally responsive. This involved staff learning more about local culture and building the relationships with local Elders to be more involved in the curriculum.

We have seen a massive increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolments since the introduction of Stronger Smarter values. It would appear that we are now the school of choice for our indigenous families.

Figure 14: Community building activities



Embracing Indigenous Leadership

A small number of school principals talked about success coming from employing Aboriginal people in the school and recognising community leadership and decision-making capabilities. Respondents described how they had worked more closely with local Elders or Indigenous Knowledge experts on particular projects, sought local leaders as role models and mentors, and provided opportunities to ensure input from local community leaders. Several respondents mentioned liaisons with local Elders on collaborative projects to build cultural gardens, language programs and programs to take students out on country.

89%

Of respondents in a school embracing the SSA say the school **actively recruits local staff**. This compared to 60% in a non-SSA school

60%

Some respondents noted greater connections with Aboriginal support staff and teacher aides, with more confidence and value placed on their knowledge, and schools actively working to support leadership development for support staff and facilitating more voices in decision making in the school. One remote school described how the capacity building for local staff was important to implement strategies and programs that were sustainable beyond any particular staff member. This is clearly important where respondents note the difficulties of staff turnover.

Finally, we have a platform to be listened to, and our advice is appreciated and implemented.

Aboriginal Education Officer

There was some recognition from respondents in support roles that the school was placing greater value on their input, seeking their help for resources and support, and providing more class time with students to teach language and art. However, other respondents talked about schools not using their Aboriginal Education Workers as much as they could and needing to provide more opportunities for their voice to be heard. There were suggestions from some respondents that a lack of cultural competence in some staff was still a major blocker to Indigenous staff being given leadership roles.

Building Community confidence

79%

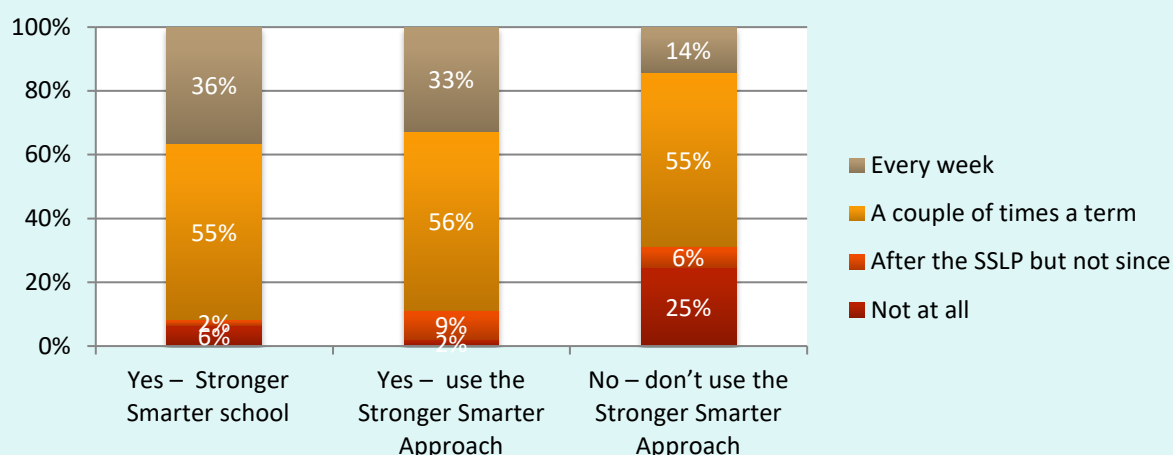
Of respondents said that their school ensures **formal opportunities for community to input into school planning** at least a couple of times a term.



Several respondents described about how community confidence in the school had improved. One respondent described how, through using the SSA and building relationships, they were endeavouring to make the school a 'relevant and productive part of the town'. In some cases, this was aided by improving visual aspects of the school such as displaying the Aboriginal flag, murals by local artists, art produced by students, or developing Indigenous gardens. A few respondents mentioned the importance of visible acknowledgement of culture through signs, paintings, newsletters. Respondents described how their school was now more inviting and open, and they were finding more ways to involve parents on a more regular basis.

When respondents described themselves as being in school embracing the SSA, they were more likely to have deliberate strategies to make the school welcoming, and to ensure opportunities to meet with parents outside the school gate and send positive messages home to parents (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Create informal opportunities for parents and community to meet the school



Building relationships with families

Respondents described how they were making opportunities to build relationships with families and community members. This was described as open and honest communication and a deeper respect. Respondents described how they were deliberately seeking community feedback or guidance to help determine school strategic directions, empowering parents to make decisions in the running of the school, and 'listening to the hopes and expectations of community'.

62%

Of respondents said that their school **sets up opportunities to meet with parents and community outside the school gate** at least once or twice a term.



One aspect of building relationships involved setting up formal and informal communication with families, often providing alternative settings to meet with parents, to provide a more welcoming environment. This was more likely to happen in schools enacting the SSA, with 74% of respondents who described themselves as being in a school using the SSA saying they set up opportunities to meet parents and community outside the school gates at least a couple of times a term. This compared to 45% of respondents who were not in a school using the SSA.

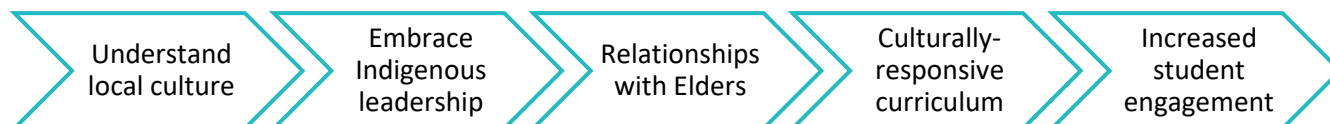
48%

Of respondents said that their school has deliberate strategies every week to ensure **all families feel welcome**.



We have raised attendance for some of our kids by discussing our high expectations with families and maintaining that conversation as well as working on building the emotional bank balances with kids and families to allow us to openly talk about attendance and learning without it being a negative point of contact.

Changing the curriculum



Many respondents talked about how staff had taken steps to develop a deeper knowledge and understanding of local Aboriginal cultures, often through working with local Elders. A few respondents talked about how they had implemented an Acknowledgement to Country at staff meetings or other events. It was recognised that this was a first step, however, when it was enacted in a meaningful way with, for instance people taking turns to acknowledge country at each staff meeting and making it personal, it became an important awareness-raising and learning step for staff.

73%

Of respondents said that after attending the SSLP, they had **adapted the curriculum to make it more inclusive or culturally responsive** 'all the time'.



One respondent talked about working with staff as a group to recognise what they didn't know about local culture and learning together. Another talked about a strong school culture where they could have open dialogue and being aware of personal assumptions.

This greater understanding and knowledge were translating into a greater willingness by staff to make their teaching and learning programs more culturally relevant and inclusive. Staff were finding more resources for their classes, seeking knowledge, and in some cases creating resources at the school such as hip-hop videos or books.

The results were more culturally safe spaces for teaching, with more students being more aware of different cultures and increased pride in and respect for our First Nation's culture and history from all students.

Stronger Smarter has made a huge difference to our school community and will be the vehicle we use to drive forward achievement for our students and families.

School Sphere

The Census survey asked a general text question about what respondents considered the outcomes to be from their attendance at the SSLP. This could be personal outcomes, general outcomes for the school, or specific outcomes for students.

Many respondents described a more positive school environment with a culture built on strengths, respect, and honest communication. This included a more collegiate work environment with shared visions, and a focus on student wellbeing and understanding the impact on learning. One respondent described this as a culture where everybody is important to the school, and everybody is a learner. Conversations were described as being more positive, both between staff and with students. One respondent said, 'deficit conversations are in the past.'

Students are achieving more outcomes and the general mood of the school has lifted.

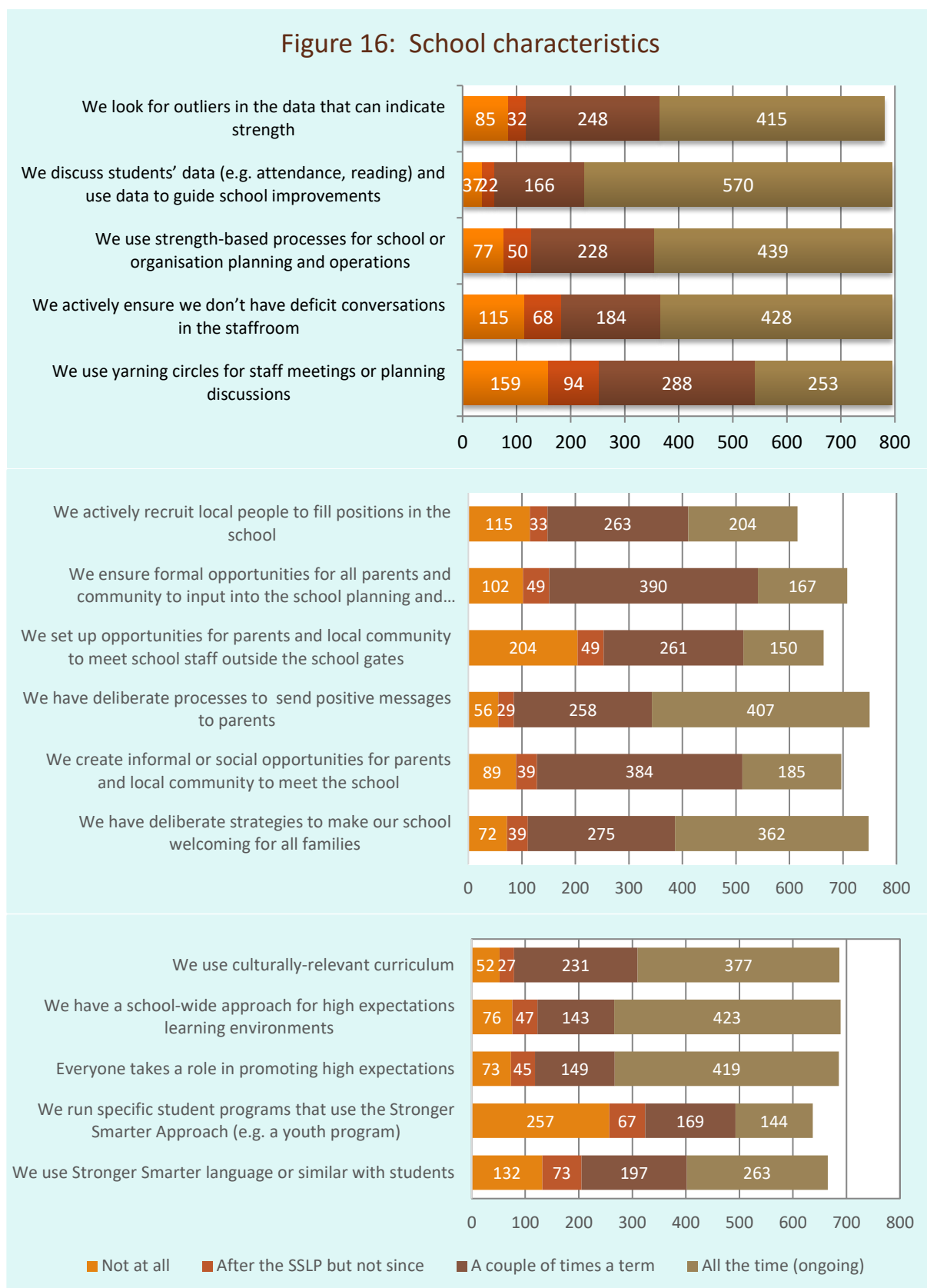
Respondents talked about improved relationships with students, with one respondent describing this as an improved 'bond and trust between the students and myself'. It was clear that building high-expectations relationships with shared visions and positive student identity were essential elements in ensuring improved outcomes for students.

The Institute recognises that outcomes for students will always come from bringing together a number of different activities or programs. However, positive outcomes in the School Sphere clearly rely on what happens in the Personal sphere to build a positive school culture and supportive learning environments.

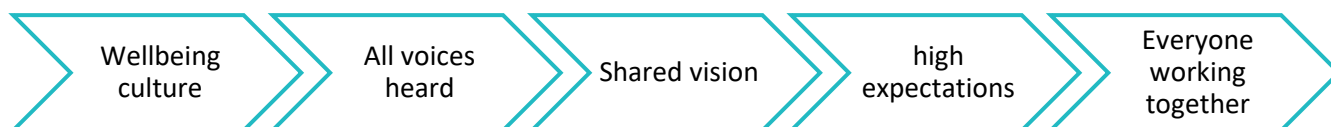
A few respondents shared longer-term student outcomes for students, which included:

- ▶ Improved academic outcomes and higher literacy.
- ▶ Improved attendance, student engagement and retention – students were happier and calmer, more motivated, had an improved attitude to learning, suspension rates falling.
- ▶ Greater confidence and positive self-image – resulting from greater student voice and greater cultural awareness from all students.

The three graphs in Figure 16 show responses to a series of questions about activities within a school.



Positive school culture



As described previously, enacting the SSA requires the paradigm shift that starts as a personal change for SSLP participants to move to everyone in the school. Respondents described how enacting Stronger Smarter has to be a 'buy-in' approach where success will only happen if all staff are 'on board' and willing to have open conversations about high expectations. One Assistant Principal described this as staff empowerment and a framework of mutual collaboration through a school-wide structure of collaborative decision-making processes and listening to all voices.

90%

Of respondents in school leadership and government roles said they were building **high-expectations relationships with colleagues** 'all the time.'



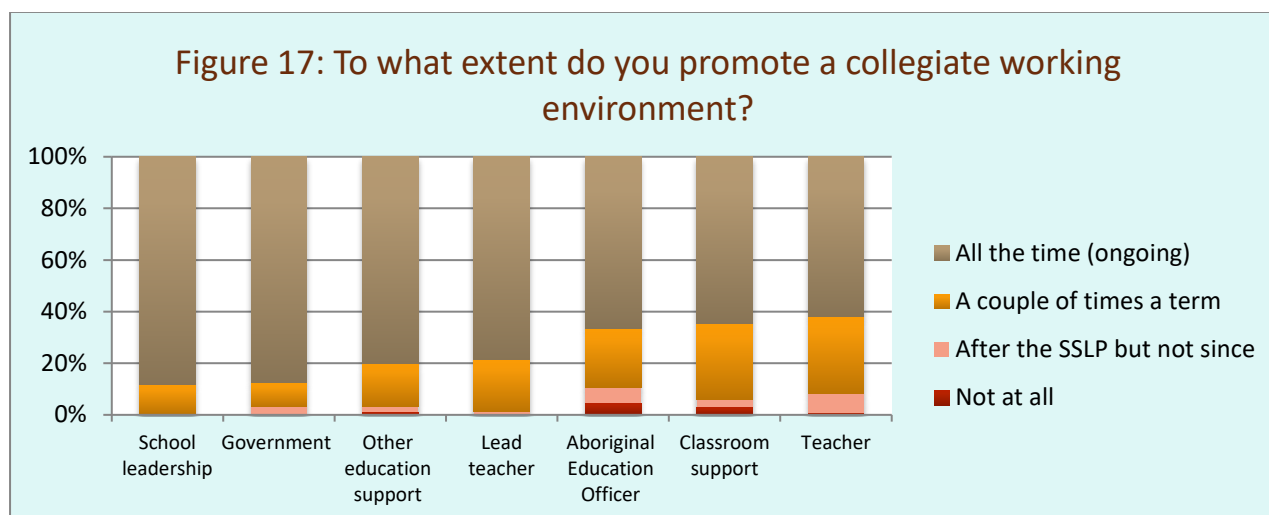
Collegiate work environment

Many respondents described changes in how staff worked together, suggesting that the SSA had brought a more collegiate approach to highly complex challenges. This collegiate approach involves team members being valued and cared for, a culture of wellbeing and thoughtfulness, with greater trust and honesty. This was bringing staff together in genuine supportive partnerships in education provision for all students.

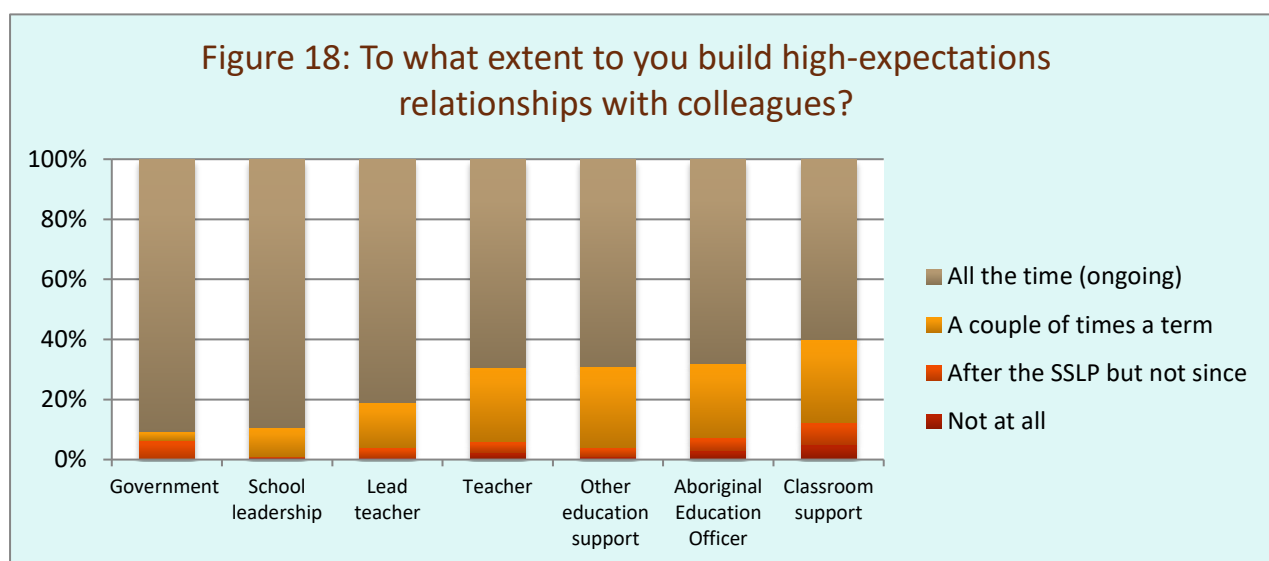
As might be expected, respondents in school leadership and government roles were more likely to be leading efforts to build collegiate work environments and high-expectations relationships with staff and promote a working environment where everyone shares ideas (Figures 17 and 18).

The delivery of new information to staff, in a way that was inviting, not threatening, and providing them with the understanding that their knowledge and involvement in supporting students to be the best version of themselves is forever changing. If we all contribute something, we can all make a difference.

Participants described more collaborative decision-making processes, frameworks for mutual collaboration, and a hierarchy of responsibility, not a hierarchy of power. This was resulting in staff empowerment, greater staff voice, better and more open communication, and more strength-based conversations. Staff were feeling comfortable to raise issues and work together for improvement, with more inclusive and collaborative professional dialogue in meetings. One respondent described how the frameworks of Stronger Smarter help to clarify which factors to focus on to achieve positive change.



Collaboration is key – not a top-down approach that lends itself to hierarchy in many schools. Working together to be stronger and smarter is when the learning becomes much more powerful.



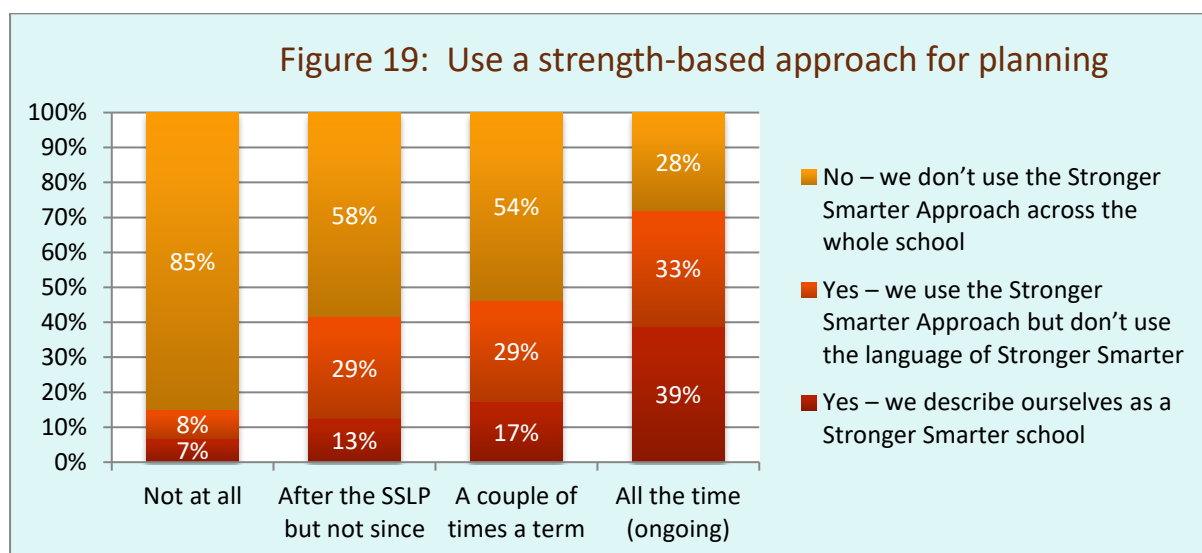
Results were described as schools ‘becoming more unified and pulling in the same direction.’ This came from setting clear visions and an intentional direction, using a positive collective and consistent language, sharing of ideas, and deliberately including Stronger Smarter in school plans.

Stronger Smarter has made a huge difference with our classes and our children's learning. Nothing but the best results and no one is left behind, we move forward together as a team.

Strength-based approaches

Participants talked about the strength-based approach of not making assumptions, challenging stereotypes, and believing everyone can improve. One respondent described this as a strength-based approach to wellbeing across the whole school. Once supportive and trusting environments had been established, respondents described being more willing and more able to have the hard conversations.

Where respondents said their school used the SSA, they were also more likely to say that the school used a strength-based approach for planning.

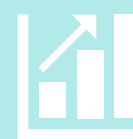


All staff know that we are a high expectations school where high expectations of self as well as students is expected and encouraged.

Changing teaching practice

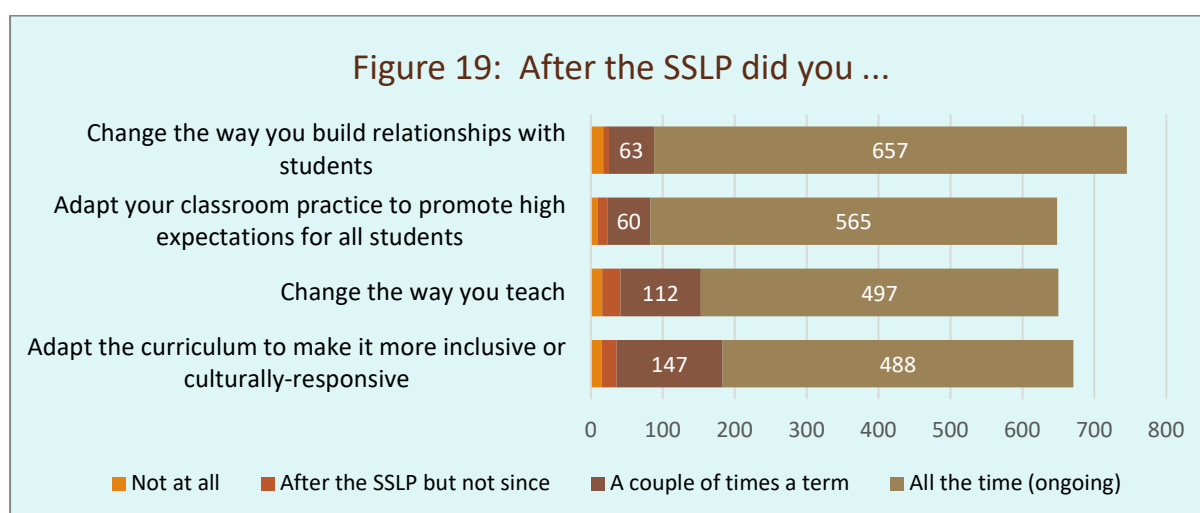
96%

Of respondents who had **changed the way they teach** on an ongoing basis had also adapted classroom practice to **promote high expectations** for all students on an ongoing basis



In response to the question regarding changes to teaching practice (Figure 19):

- ▶ 77% of respondents said they had changed the way they teach on an ongoing basis.
- ▶ 88% of respondents had changed the way they build relationships with students also on an ongoing basis.



There was a clear relationship between 'changing the way you teach' and the other questions asked on changing classroom practice. Of participants who said they had changed the way they teach on an ongoing basis:

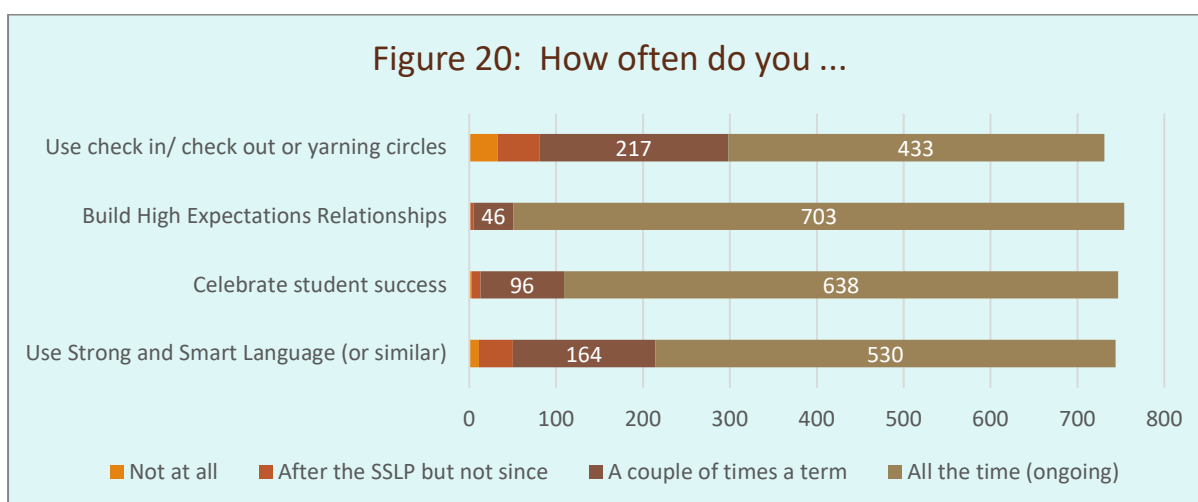
- ▶ 96% had also adapted classroom practice to promote high expectations for all students on an ongoing basis.
- ▶ 96% had also changed the way you build relationships with students on an ongoing basis.
- ▶ 94% share positive stories about students at least a couple of times a term, with 70% saying they do this all the time.
- ▶ 86% build high expectations all the time.
- ▶ 83% had also adapted the curriculum to make it more responsive.

66%

Of all respondents had both **changed the way they teach** after attending the SSLP and **embedded the SSA** into their workplace practice.



Figure 20: How often do you ...



The high expectations approach is super important in having kids believe in themselves and their abilities as there is a tremendous amount of negative self-talk, 'I can't do that...' and 'I'm just dumb at this...' etc, so really committing to turning that around is important.

Non-Indigenous staff were more likely to have changed the way they teach compared to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. 82% of non-Indigenous respondents had changed the way they teach on an ongoing basis compared to 61% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents. When looking at respondents in teaching or school leadership roles only, this difference was 82% of non-Indigenous respondents compared to 70% of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander respondents.

This may be impacted in part by differences in roles. While 15% of respondents in teaching or leadership roles were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, this was not evenly distributed across the roles. Across the roles, the following percentages were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander:

- ▶ 10% of school leadership roles
- ▶ 16% of Lead teachers or department heads
- ▶ 23% of teachers.

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander staff in teaching or school leadership roles were more likely to attend community events, share news in the Indigenous landscape and organised yarning circles with parents to discuss school planning compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts.

Non-Indigenous staff were more likely to say they had adapted their classroom practice towards high expectations.

Embedding a strengths-based approach helps me to create a shift in thinking and actions so that others are able to see things through a different lens. It provides opportunities for increased collaborative ways of working. This creates an organisational culture where everyone is equal so that buy-in is easier when all voices are heard.

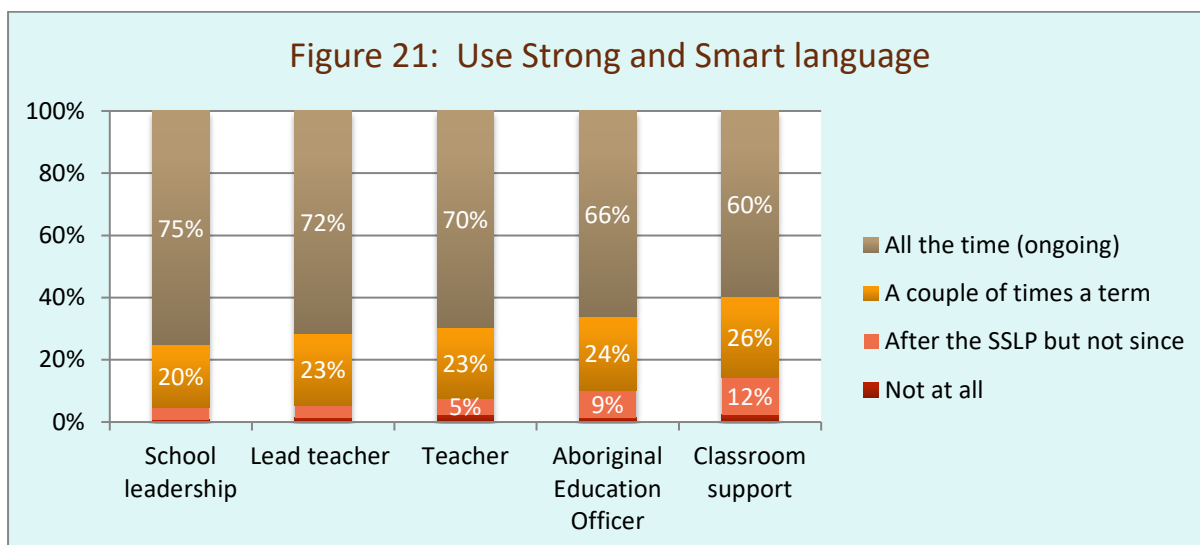
There was no significant correlation between being in a Stronger Smarter school and changing the way you teach. This suggests that SSLP participants are able to make changes within their own classrooms, even if they are not able to enact change across the whole school.

Relationships with students

Respondents describe how building the emotional bank account with students meant they could then enact high expectations. This was both expecting staff to 'give their best', and for students this was being able to 'push, guide and stretch' the student experience, and build capacity in each child to believe in themselves and take responsibility for their own actions.

Children who need to talk, actively seek out the teachers/staff who are Stronger Smarter trained (because we get it!). Teachers/staff who have a natural ability to build high expectation relationships are also sought out by children. This leads to students who are nurtured and feel safe enough to have a go! It also brings out the caring side of all the kids.

Many respondents had used yarning circles as a tool to build relationships with students and used the Strong and Smart language to build positive student identities (Figure 21). One respondent described how they had made changes to the types of furniture they used to allow students to work in circles in classes, and also provided many circles outside to use for classes or sitting in friendship groups.



One respondent described the outcomes from building relationships with students as a greater understanding and empathy from staff towards not only Aboriginal students but other students with different ethnic backgrounds. Another described gaining a greater understanding of students through realising they have other parts of their lives we may not see or be aware of.

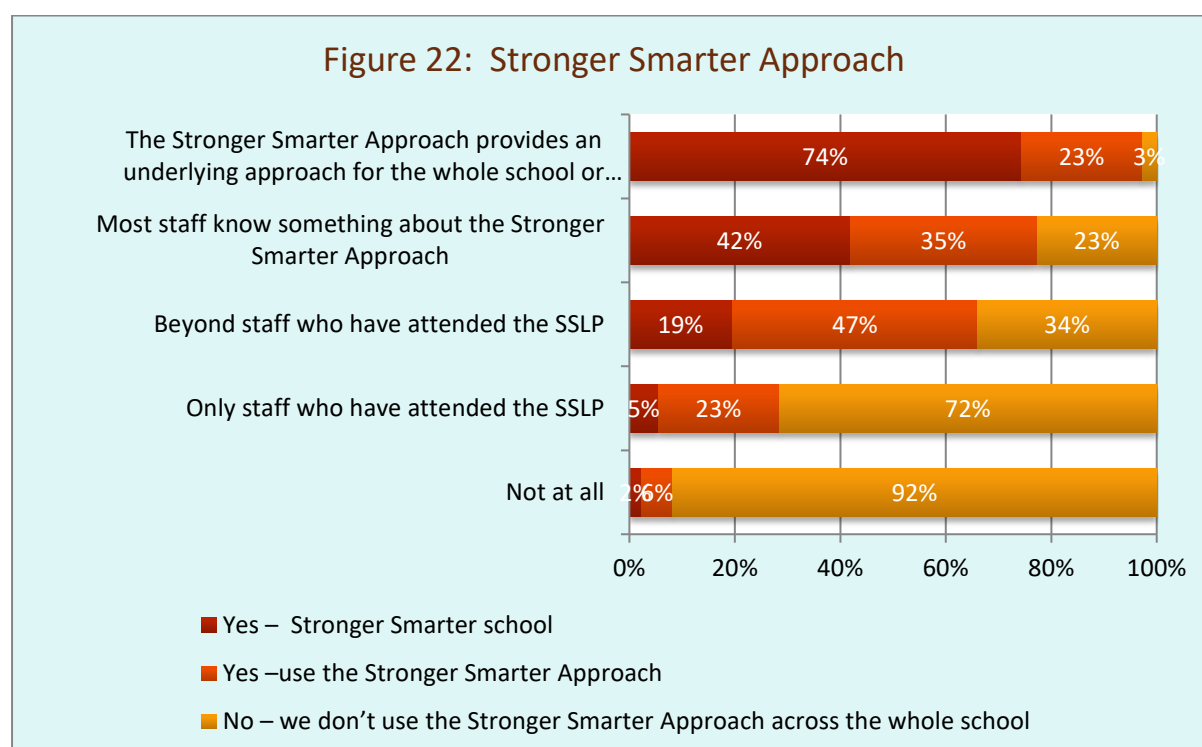
A greater understanding from staff as a whole that they all play a part and have a responsibility to have high expectations of our Aboriginal students. Some staff have started to move beyond seeing individual students as their behaviour or their outcomes, but more as a person.

Stronger Smarter Schools

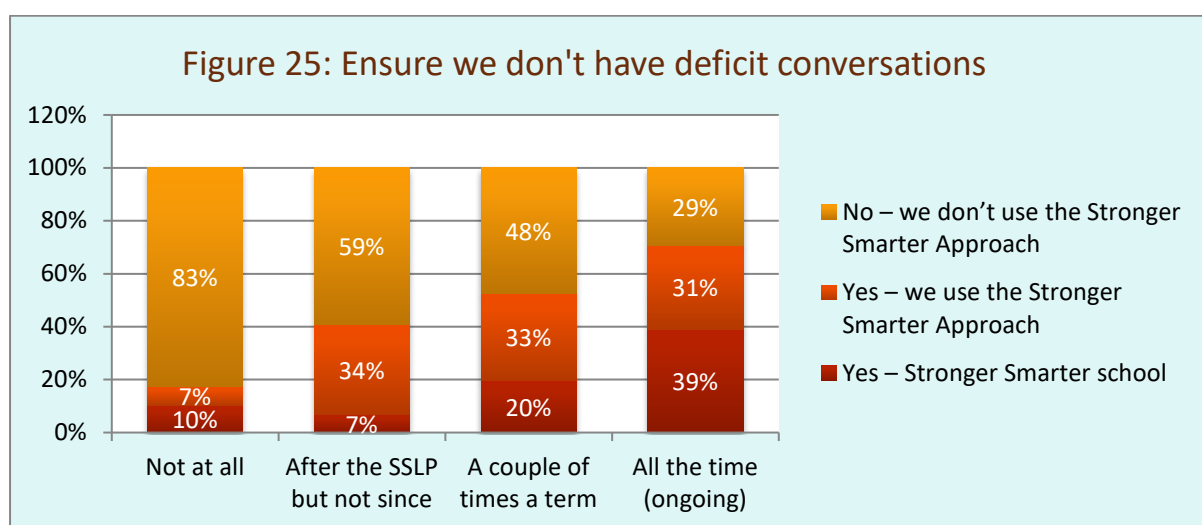
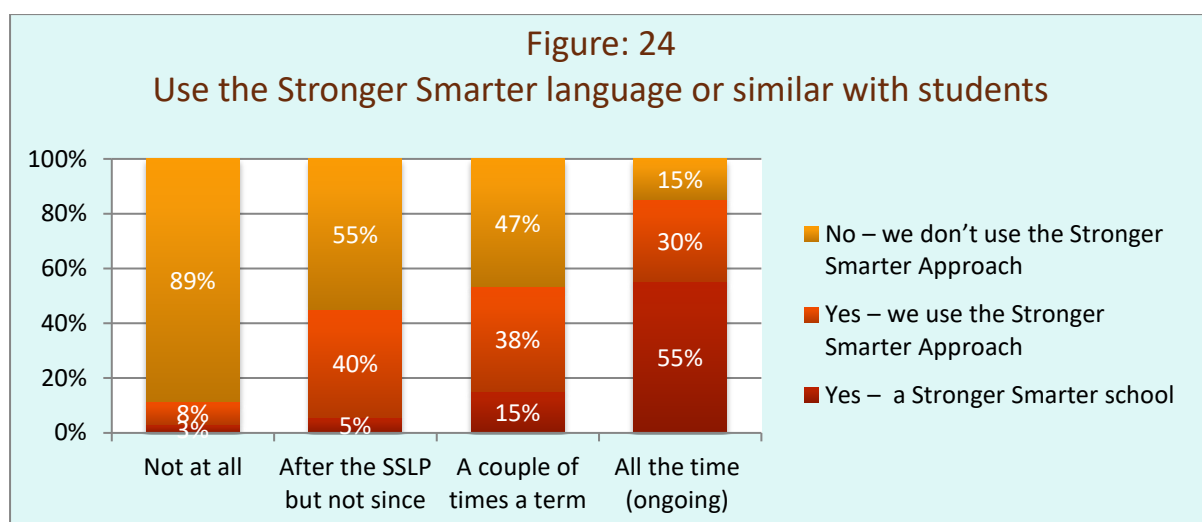
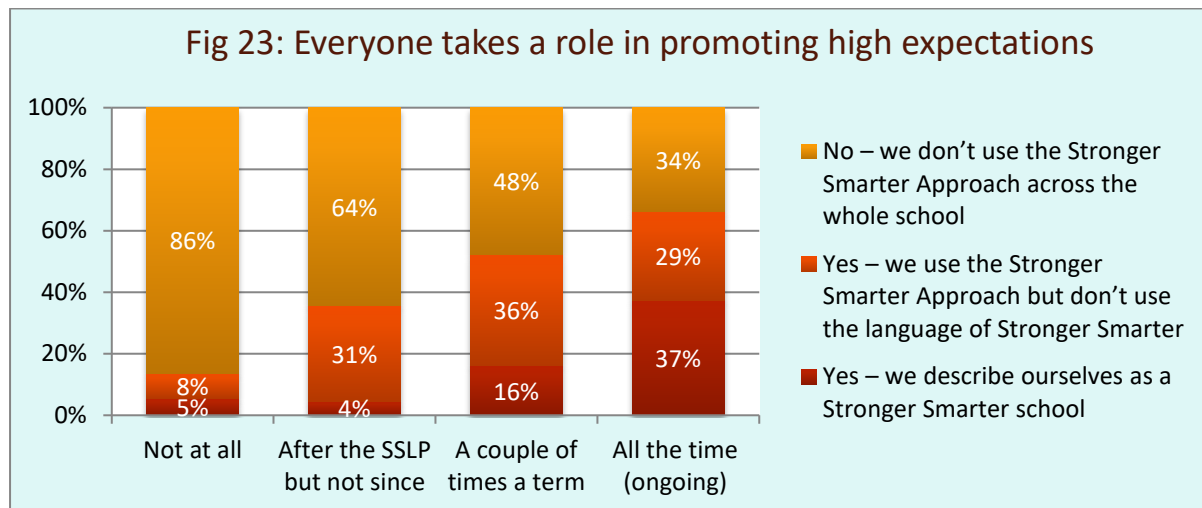
I think all staff are beginning to identify as part of a Stronger Smarter school. This ownership has seen the development of a school-wide agreed-to practices for High expectations and High-expectations relationships.

The Census asked respondents two questions about whether the Stronger Smarter Approach was used in their school. The first asked respondents whether they considered the school to be a Stronger Smarter school and the second asked about the level of embeddedness of the SSA in the school.

Figure 22 shows that there was the expected correlation between calling the school a Stronger Smarter school and using the Stronger Smarter Approach in the school.



The activities in schools that are considered to be a part of the Stronger Smarter Approach (shown in Figure 20 in the previous section) were more likely to be reported when the respondent also said that they were in a Stronger Smarter school (Figures 23, 24 and 25).



Those who were in a Stronger Smarter School were more likely to have been able to make the changes they wanted in the workplace. Respondents who said they were in a Stronger Smarter school or school using the Stronger Smarter approach were more likely to have run presentations or workshops using Stronger Smarter ideas and promote a working environment where everyone shares ideas. They were also more likely to celebrate student success, ensure written communications were positive and make the curriculum more culturally responsive.

77%

Of respondents who said they were not in a school that was using the SSA, still said that the **SSLP had considerable impact on their leadership.**



However, there was no relationship between being in a Stronger Smarter school and completing the workplace challenge. Respondents who were not in a Stronger Smarter school were still making individual changes such as building high-expectations relationships, promoting high expectations and using Stronger Smarter language in the classroom, and avoiding deficit conversations.

77% of those not using the SSA in a school still said the SSLP had considerable impact on their leadership, which might mean that in changing their leadership practice they also brought in SSA to the school, or that they had moved schools since attending the SSLP.

This suggests that being in a Stronger Smarter school does not necessarily impact on what SSLP participants do immediately after the SSLP as their workplace challenge but may impact on what they are able to achieve in the long term.

60%

Of participants who had **embedded leadership changes into everyday practice were also in a school using the SSA.** 40% said they weren't using the SSA in the school.

40%

Summary

The Census has provided a deep insight into how SSLP alumni make changes in the Personal Sphere, and to a lesser extent how they enact the Stronger Smarter Approach (SSA) in the Community and School spheres.

Personal Sphere

The majority of respondents to the Census indicated that the SSLP had some level of impact on their leadership or workplace practice. Respondents describe this as a change in attitude to flip thinking from deficit talk and look for strengths and possibilities. Essentially this is a commitment to the Strong and Smart Philosophy.

From this starting point, there is then a difference in the way SSLP alumni build relationships. This is about active listening together with a greater acceptance of others, honouring different perspectives and being open to other people's values. In other words, taking a strength-based approach and building High-Expectations Relationships. From this comes an increased confidence and 'can do' mentality – a sense of personal responsibility for not accepting low expectations, for speaking up and leading change. Respondents also describe being more solutions-focussed and more accepting of feedback.

There is a strong sense throughout the Census responses that alumni take the implementation of the SSA beyond their own classroom or workplace practice, and work with others to implement change across the school. Workplace challenges are often about moving this change in thinking to the whole school – a gradual shift to a high expectations culture with positive language.

Enacting change

SSLP participants are choosing to both make changes to their own way of thinking and their workplace practice, and then also share this change across the school. The personal challenge and what happens in the Personal Sphere is clearly essential to the success of any workplace challenge. Workplace challenges are often about building high-expectations relationships across the school community. It is all about building trust to be able hold challenging conversations about expectations, getting everyone on board with a willingness to change, and then co-creating collective visions.

This therefore is about the Personal Sphere for others. A change in language and attitude in all staff is a first step in changing workplace culture. High-Expectations Relationships flow through everything – it is all about connections to people. While High-Expectations Relationships is often the 'what' of the leadership challenge, it is also the 'how' of many other challenges.

Respondents describe how enacting the SSA is easier when working with staff who have undertaken the SSLP. This is not always possible, and therefore the enactment of the SSA in schools normally has to involve some form of in-school training or discussions. It is clearly easier to make changes when SSLP alumni can work together with colleagues and there is support from leadership. While change does not necessarily need to be led by the Principal, it does need to have support at that level, and it needs to be strategic to keep the momentum going.

Being in a school that is implementing the Stronger Smarter Approach clearly makes it easier to implement individual workplace challenges. This obviously relates to colleague and leadership support, being able to work with other 'like-minded' people. As might be expected, those who are in leadership positions are most likely to be leading change across the whole school and therefore most likely to also be able to achieve the changes they want to see.

However, SSLP alumni are enacting change regardless of role, their school situation, and leadership support. The difference is in how wide the ripples of change can reach beyond personal workplace practice and the sustainability of change. Being in a Stronger Smarter school does not necessarily impact on what SSLP participants do immediately after the SSLP as their workplace challenge but may impact on what they are able to achieve in the long term.

The Census responses confirm the how the Personal Sphere is absolutely essential in leading change in a school, and that how the shift to strength-based, high expectations culture needs to happen across the whole school as a basis for enacting transformational change in the Community and school spheres.

Community sphere

The Census shows that schools are taking on activities to build better relationships with their local communities. There include strategies to make the school more visually welcoming, finding different ways to connect with families, and celebrating success and send positive messages to parents. Some respondents talked about seeking community guidance, listening to the expectations of the community, and empowering parents to make decisions in the running of the school.

A number of respondents mentioned staff turnover in remote schools as a blocker for success. Some schools were taking steps to employ local people in schools and make sure that their local staff were empowered to be a part of the school transformation as a way of ensuring sustainability.

A small number of respondents described greater community confidence in the school. In some cases, this was resulting either in increased attendance, or increased enrolments where the Indigenous community in the area saw them as the school of choice for their children.

School sphere

The activities that we describe as being a part of the SSA, such as rejecting deficit conversations, using Strong and Smart language, and promoting high expectations, and making the curriculum more culturally responsive were more likely to happen when respondents described themselves as being in a school enacting the SSA.

As described above, many workplace challenges were clearly about working with others to promote a shared vision of high expectations. In some cases, this was working with 'like-minded' staff, who had often already undertaken the SSLP. For staff who hadn't undertaken the SSLP, a 'buy-in approach' was needed. In the same way that the SSLP provides time and space for self-reflection, this approach across the school staff also takes time. Clearly, SSLP alumni are returning to their schools and taking the time to build high-expectations relationships with staff which involve active listening and ensuring all voices are heard.

The outcomes of this approach were described as a more positive and collegiate work environment, with mutual collaboration, honest communication, and shared visions. The results are staff feeling valued in a work environment of wellbeing, trust, and honesty. This then also becomes a work environment where all staff can have high expectations and hold the 'hard conversations' if needed.

Likewise, when working with students, respondents describe how building the emotional bank account meant they could then enact high expectations. This was both expecting staff to 'give their best', and for students this was being able to 'push, guide and stretch' the student experience, and build capacity in each child to believe in themselves and take responsibility for their own actions.

Future work

The Stronger Smarter Census is designed to look at how SSLP alumni individually enact their workplace challenges after attending the SSLP. This gives an initial insight into what is happening in classrooms and school communities as the SSA is enacted in schools.

We recognise, however, that the Census is an SSLP-alumni view only, and does not provide the views of students, parents, or communities. The survey provides an indication that respondents are changing the way they teach and making their curriculum more culturally responsive. There was evidence that this involves high expectations, finding or creating new curriculum resources, bringing in language or cultural programs. However, we need further research to look deeper into what SSLP alumni are doing in their schools, and the outcomes that respondents are seeing as a result.