

Results of the 2022 Stronger Smarter Census

Stronger Smarter Institute



Stronger Smarter Census

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Summary

Results of the 2022 Stronger Smarter Census show that after attending the Stronger Smarter Leadership Program™ (SSLP), educators make significant changes to their workplace practice. These changes are variously contributing towards 'Closing the Gap' through improvements to academic results, attendance, and classroom engagement for First Nations students.

The Stronger Smarter Approach™ (SSA) describes how, to improve outcomes for First Nations students, the three Spheres of Personal, Community and School need to come together (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2017). For other interventions and programs to work well, the school culture and learning environment need to be 'Strong and Smart.' The results are improved student wellness and belonging which contribute to improved attendance and engagement in learning. As the school builds relationships with the local community there is greater confidence that the school is supporting their children to achieve their full learning potential and greater community involvement in the school.

The 2022 Census has added to the Institute's data, providing more in-depth information on how participants enact the SSA in their schools and classrooms. Census participants described how they were using High-Expectations Relationships (Sarra, Spillman, Jackson, Davis & Bray, 2020) as the thread to bring the spheres together, and how this was improving educational outcomes for First Nations students.

In the School Sphere, participants described how the SSA provides an underlying framework and shared language for whole school visions and values. This impacted on the school culture when the SSA was used to articulate the values of high expectations for all students in a supportive environment. Participants in teaching positions described changes to teaching or classroom practice to build stronger relationships with students and ensure a Strong and Smart learning environment. Participants in leadership positions described how they had changed their leadership style to be more collaborative, to give staff more autonomy and open up dialogue about transformative change in the school. Using High-Expectations Relationships, participants were able to bring staff together to create a positive and supportive school culture that values the voices and knowledges of First Nations people.

In the Community Sphere, participants described how they were building deeper relationships with parents and community, with schools ensuring opportunities for local First Nations communities to be involved in the school planning and curriculum design and delivery. Participants were learning more about their local First Nations culture and recognising the importance of the school's role in connecting students to their land, culture, and language. Participants described how they were ensuring that their schools and classrooms were culturally safe, with First Nations cultures visibly present.

In the Personal Sphere, changes involved deep reflection on how teaching practice can be influenced by the out-of-awareness assumptions of a western education system. Participants described how they were building a High-Expectations Relationships classroom culture,

holding higher expectations for learning while still providing supportive learning environments. This involved strategies to get to know students better and differentiate teaching to meet individual student needs. In these environments, students had a sense of belonging, greater confidence in their own ability, and a better attitude to learning. Participants also told us how important the SSLP had been to them, with several participants recommending that the program should be made available to all education staff, and that it should be available in universities for pre-service students.

Introduction

We know that all educators seek the best for their students. However, we also know the out-of-awareness assumptions of our western education system can sometimes impact on what is perceived to be a quality education for First Nations students. The Stronger Smarter Leadership Program (SSLP) challenges these assumptions and asks participants to understand their role in providing high quality, culturally appropriate learning environments where First Nations students can thrive and reach their full learning potential.

We know from our partnerships with schools that, for transformational change to occur, the concepts and values of the Stronger Smarter Approach (SSA) need to be in place as an underlying framework. 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.

In this report, we focus on the elements that Census participants describe when the SSA framework is in place.

- ▶ **School Sphere** – an inclusive, high expectations culture across the whole school enabling students to achieve their full learning potential.
- ▶ **Community Sphere** – enhanced community voice supporting culturally responsive pedagogies and curriculum.
- ▶ **Personal Sphere** – all staff working together through a collaborative school culture and distributed leadership models.

The SSLP has a strong focus on the Personal Sphere, firstly unpacking personal assumptions and inspiring participants to become agents of change. A quality learning environment is all about relationships. The SSLP asks participants to reflect on the concepts of High-Expectations Relationships as a strategy to build culturally responsive learning environments that both challenge students to be the best they can be, and support students in their learning endeavours.

The SSLP also focusses on understanding and enhancing personal leadership skills, providing participants with a set of tools to take back to their schools and organisations to support them in enacting the SSA with their teams and across school communities. High-Expectations Relationships are a cornerstone to ensure that both school staff, parents/carers, and the local community all play a key part in this transformational journey. The Stronger Smarter Jarjums Program (SSJP) adds another component to focus on Early Years transitions to ensure that First Nations students are school-ready by the time they reach school.

Survey details

The 2022 Stronger Smarter Census survey was sent to all alumni of the Institute's flagship programs, the Stronger Smarter Leadership Program (SSLP), and the Stronger Smarter Jarjums Program (SSJP). These programs are a first step in enacting the Stronger Smarter Approach (SSA) in schools and organisations. Details of the demographics of Census respondents are provided in Appendix 1.

This was the fourth time the Census survey has run. Previous surveys in 2016, 2018, and 2020 focussed on the impact of the SSLP in the Personal Sphere. The 2022 Census focussed more deeply on the enactment of the SSA and the impact and outcomes of this enactment. We also sought to explore more deeply how participants choose to use the tools provided by the SSLP in their classrooms and how this impacted student learning. The survey used several text questions to allow participants to talk about what they had enacted in their own contexts.

Workplace challenges

All program participants in the SSLP and SSJP leave the program with a series of 'challenges' or action research projects. These include a Personal Sphere challenge 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. In undertaking their Workplace Challenge from the SSLP, participants had often worked together with other staff. Participants described how enacting the SSA required the support of both colleagues and leadership. Details of the level of enactment of Workplace Challenges are provided in Appendix 2.

A note on the results

In viewing the results, please note:

- ▶ Where we refer to the SSLP throughout, this also incorporates the SSJP.
- ▶ Where participants responded with 'not applicable' this has not been included in results.
- ▶ The Census is voluntary. It is likely, therefore that alumni who chose to answer the survey are those who were the most engaged in the program and most likely to have made changes.
- ▶ Many participants had changed schools since undertaking the SSLP. Responses are often a mixture of activities that have occurred in different schools. For this reason, in most cases, we have linked responses to a role, not a school.
- ▶ The focus of this report is on schools and school communities. However, we did also receive responses from SSLP participants who do not work in schools.
- ▶ Throughout, in graphs and reports we have used the shortened groupings as shown in the table below.

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 Worker	Includes other similar roles such as AIEO, AEW, IEW, AEO, KESO
Other education support	Education support roles not in schools.

A transformational journey

Participants in the 2022 Census reported improvements in their school data, including attendance, enrolments, student behaviour, truancy rates, academic progression rates, retention to Year 12, Year 12 completion, and Early Years transitions to school.

The results tell stories of transformational change where schools are building quality learning environments for First Nations students. The characteristics of these learning environments are that they have high expectations, strong teacher-student relationships, and are culturally responsive.

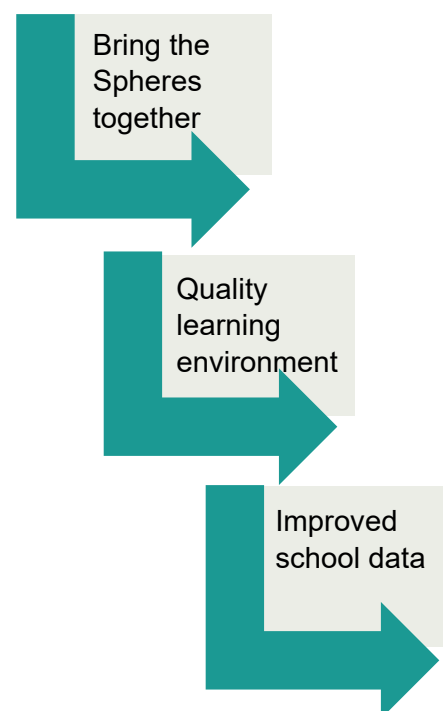
Community values of being STRONG, SMART and CONNECTED within our school community has changed the overall school community dynamic. Our behaviour data has reduced 75% in 3 years and our learning data has increased systemically across the school.

Principal, Qld

In the past, SSLP alumni have told us how the SSA provides an underlying framework that can ensure that other programs in the school come together and work successfully. Again, in the 2022 Census, some participants described using the SSA to ensure interconnections between different programs and interventions within the school.

I am voicing and aiming to implement a more holistic and interconnected approach between Positive Behaviour for Learning, student leadership with the SRC/Peer Support, Aboriginal Education Team and Learning and Wellbeing ... I am bringing others into the fold through supporting their understanding of how it all interconnects.

Teacher, NSW



In the Census, 54% of participants said they were currently in schools where the Stronger Smarter Approach extends beyond staff who had undertaken the SSLP. Participants in these schools described how Stronger Smarter strategies had become an underpinning philosophy and an integral part of the way their school or organisation operates. They described this as a Stronger Smarter ethos that could be seen across the whole school, with positive school cultures and a whole school approach to culturally safe practices. This required a transparency of operations and clear common goals and expectations across the school.

Participants described how Stronger Smarter brought to the school a common language and values, with strength-based conversations and practices. This was described as centring on belief and engagement. Staff were more likely to be thinking about the big picture and working together to embed Stronger Smarter strategies into everyday operations and school planning processes. One participant described how using the Stronger Smarter Approach to establish the school vision and values had ensured greater staff collaboration and community engagement in the whole school processes and planning. Another described the positive impact on students when the school and community work together.

Our focus was on building a stronger community in our school. We are seeing this happen, but it takes time. The flow-on effect is that we are seeing students more comfortable and feeling safer because the teachers are slowly coming together.

Head Teacher, NSW

Where several staff had attended the SSLP, the variety of different workplace challenges had made a collective impact. Participants also reported that as more staff undertook the SSLP, this was resulting in a greater embedding of strategies across the school. Other participants reported how the school had undertaken Stronger Smarter projects beyond workplace challenges.

As one participant explained, although this might sometimes be small changes, over time this could contribute to a big shift.

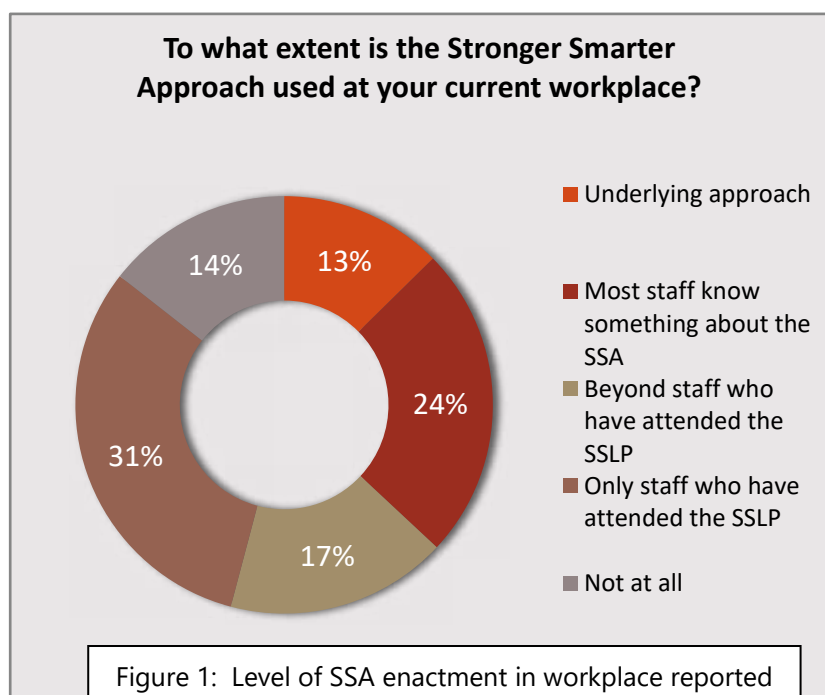


Figure 1: Level of SSA enactment in workplace reported by Census participants.

Small steps each year have contributed to a big shift in our team. Acknowledgement of Country rituals are part of daily practice, protocols are followed when engaging with community, and a cultural lens is applied to planning. Communication and relationship building with children and families, lead educators attend local AECG meetings twice a term, development of a RAP for our service and a commitment from management to allocate funds for ongoing training around cultural safety for all educators.

Education Leader, NSW




Wananami Remote Community School

Nikki Sandilands is the Principal at Wananami RCS. In 2022, Wananami was a finalist in the WA Education Awards.

Since embedding the Stronger Smarter Approach within our school, we have developed a common language and actions that support student success. Students can articulate what it looks and feels like to be successful Aboriginal students, staff can articulate what their role is in developing successful students and community can articulate what they want to see within our school to support their children as successful learners.

Our classrooms and learning environment promote positive student identity. We aim to be able to see, feel and hear culture within our classrooms. We use student voice to design a culture corner within each classroom, each term, that reflects the student identity.

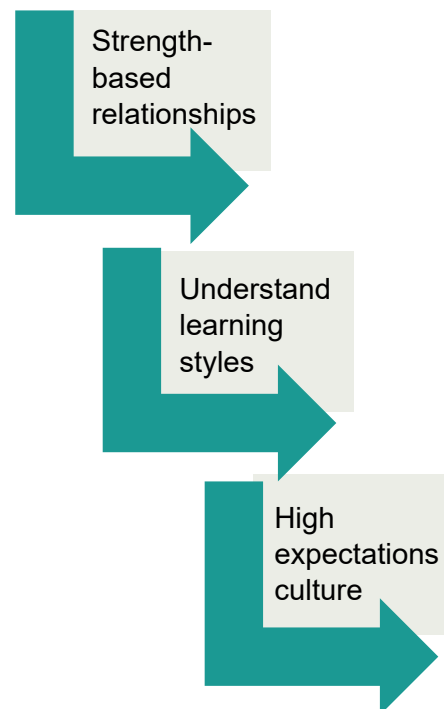
We are very intent on building meaningful High Expectations Relationships with all our students, staff and community members. We now dedicate time to build these relationships within the school timetable, to enable staff to do so.



Ensuring students achieve their full learning potential

96%

Of participants who worked in classrooms said they had made some **change to their teaching practice** after attending the SSLP.



From previous Census results, we know that improved student outcomes result from participants changing their classroom practice after attending the SSLP. Likewise, in the 2022 Census, 96% of participants who worked in classrooms said they had made some change to their teaching practice, with 73% saying these changes were on an ongoing basis.

Key themes that emerged were:

- ▶ High-Expectations Relationships – setting aside classroom time to build stronger staff-student relationships,
- ▶ reflection on teaching – deeper reflection on personal beliefs, which impacted on building High-Expectations Relationships,
- ▶ getting to know students – taking time to understand learning styles, and
- ▶ high expectations culture – strategies for ensuring high expectations for all students.

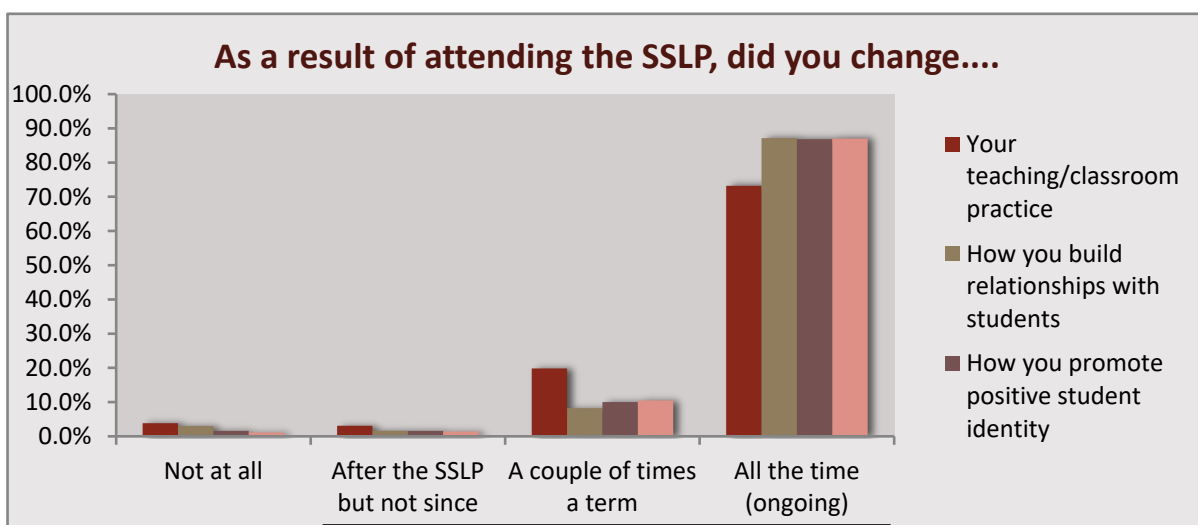


Figure 2: Changing classroom practice.

High-Expectations Relationships

In the 2022 Census, 87% of participants said they had changed, on an ongoing basis, the way they built relationships with students and promoted high expectations and positive student identity. These are the elements of High-Expectations Relationships.

Relationships - every interaction counts - take time to know the person, don't get tied up just with policy, process, procedure.

Principal, NSW

87%

Of participants said they had changed, on an ongoing basis, the way they **built relationships** with students and promoted **high expectations and positive student identity**.

Participants described being 'more relational' and taking more time to build the relationship, with one participant describing more emphasis on relationships rather than authoritarian demands for "respect". One participant explained that they were '*less concerned with getting the job done and more concerned about how people are*'. Another described how the curriculum is a natural flow on effect when the relationship is right.

I feel that I have become more focused on the relationships and the life story that every individual has. This has become way more important than the curriculum outcome for me. I feel that if the relationship is strong and right and is based on mutual respect, understanding and having high expectations then the desire to be focused on curriculum is a natural flow on effect.

Teacher, VIC

Some participants described including time in lessons to focus on relationship building activities. Participants described how building relationships and trust takes time and requires consistent strategies.

Spending the extra time to build approaches to tasks around their preferred way to learn and personal perceptions has made some appear more confident and shown better attitudes towards continuing to improve.

School Services Officer, SA

Participants described how the relationship building was worth the effort as it resulted in increased trust and the ability to agree on practices leading to high expectations. A better understanding of the motivation behind student's actions led to better insight on how the class would work together, and how to adapt teaching approaches to help students to engage in the learning.

I have had deeper conversations with students regarding how we see ourselves and others, making judgments about others and backgrounds. It has really opened up some deep conversations, thoughts and feelings from the students and I have noticed at times evidence of more empathy among each other. I feel that things take time and can't be rushed.

Teacher Librarian, NSW

Reflection on teaching

High-Expectations Relationships require a balance of being both firm and fair (Sarra, Spillman, Jackson, Davis & Bray, 2020). Many participants talked about how they were able to increase their expectations (firm) without letting the empathy or caring drop (fair), while others described how understanding students better has helped them provide the support needed to meet existing high expectations. One participant described how they had previously neglected the 'strength' side of the student and had now adopted '*a closer alignment to the philosophy of building both the smarter and stronger side of students*'.

For many, the development of High-Expectations Relationships began with a reflection on personal practice. Participants described how a sense of 'opening eyes' had changed from deficit thinking to looking at possibilities through a strength-based filter. More details are provided in Appendix 3, and in the 2020 Stronger Smarter Census Report (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2021).

Participants talked about an ongoing adjustment of practice, checking in with others, and asking for and providing feedback and reflecting on new ways to engage students in the classroom.

Increased self-reflection also led to a better understanding of personal strengths and a greater self-belief. Participants were more inclined to reach out and have discussions with colleagues and were more confident in asking questions or speaking up.

On a personal level I know that the Stronger Smarter training made me stronger in myself in the sense that my own values and practice aligned with Stronger Smarter however I was not always confident carrying things out, initiating change and speaking in front of others. That has changed a lot. I am confident enough now to call out when actions are not matching words and strong enough in my own value system to choose a school to work at that matched my own values, instead of remaining in a workplace that I had outgrown.

Indigenous Education Officer, QLD

Greater confidence led to being able to hold more difficult and challenging conversations. For some this was about holding leadership to account or talking to other staff about embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait pedagogy, histories, and culturally safe and respectful practices.

Getting to know the students

A key component of High-Expectations Relationships is understanding the backgrounds and learning styles of students. Many participants described how they had used Stronger Smarter strategies to get to know students better. As one participant described, this is 'getting to know and understand every child and their story'. Another described the importance of knowing that story.

.... being more aware that everyone has a story, and it is important to hear that story before making any assumptions or judgements. understanding how their story might influence their behaviour or reactions to a specific event. both for staff, students AND parents.

Teacher, NSW

Participants described how being more open to listening to students leads to a better understanding of how students learn and what excites them. Often this involved check ins and yarning circles in the classroom, and these had become an integral part of the school operation. One participant described the circle as '*impactful and effortless when you implement them daily*', producing – '*small but gradual significant changes.*'

Participants used the circle in different ways. In most cases, this was a process for student wellbeing and to build teacher-student relationships. In some cases, while not all students participated initially, over time the circles evolved in a way that was supported by everyone.

Circle time has become a very important part of my practice with students coming in at the start of class sitting in a circle ready. Students who were not wanting to be part of this, have in a short while come in and now join the group willing to be part of it.

Teacher, NSW

Participants described how they used circle processes to provide a calm space to establish consistent and positive classroom values and routines.

We always sit in a circle for class discussions. We have set protocols for circle and ensure that everyone makes time and takes time. This started with a forced circle but evolved to a natural way the class now communicate with each other, showing respect for each other and allowing everyone time to speak and actively listen.

Principal, NSW

One participant described how students understand that they don't start until everyone is settled in the circle. Another described monitoring the class as they came in, and the determining whether the circle or check-ins were needed to pause and remind students of values of *patience, honour, challenge, courage and presence.*

Other participants used the circle processes to solve class and peer conflicts, clear the air if there had been problems, and build collective agreements. The circle was described as a space where students understood the importance of equal power, and made students feel more at the centre of decision making. One participant said, "*Yarn time is a mindful time.*"

With older groups it's become less competitive to talk or have 'time' as they know all with be heard."

Another described how circle processes supported students.

After introducing circle processes to First Nations students in Murri homeroom and to all students in Maths groups I have found that student's behaviour is more respectful and that their engagement in learning has resulted in improved outcomes.

Indigenous Education Officer, QLD

Evans Head Woodburn Preschool

Education Leader, Cath Gillespie, attended the Stronger Smarter Jarjums program in 2018.

We have implemented numerous transition plans - Phase 4 of the Stronger Smarter Jarjums program. This has where we feel we have had the most success. Supporting the Jarjum through each step of their early childhood education.

Always encouraging children to be their best self - ensuring that a positive sense of identity is at the forefront of conversations and relationships with children.

We acknowledge country every day - it begins our day. Also checking in each morning. Firstly, with educators before children arrive ensures we know how each team member is travelling and how we can better support each other. We check in with the children during morning meeting. We can help our children to become strong in their emotional regulation as they understand themselves and each other better.

Ensuring I develop relationships with my colleagues that enable us to have open and respectful relationships. When we need to have hard conversations, our buckets are full, and we can be professional. Ensuring everyone has a voice and their perspectives are valued. Using strategies, practices such as sitting in circle and social process to ensure we are all involved when decisions are being made.

Recently at a preschool network meeting of educational leaders it was asked, 'how can we advocate the department to fund Stronger Smarter Jarjums in our Early Childhood sector?' Imagine if all Early Childhood educators had this experience, what a transformational change we would see.

Some participants reported using the circle to explore the curriculum or allow the children to express what they know or what they would like to know about topics of study. Participants described the circle as working for students at all levels. One participant described how they used the circle with Year 12 students at the beginning of each week to check in where they were emotionally and in their study. Students reported back that *'this is really helped them get in the right mind set for the week.'*

High expectations culture

High-Expectations Relationships require that, alongside a supportive and inclusive learning environment, there are high expectations for all students. Many participants talked about how they were making mindset changes to focus on positive thinking and using high expectations to underpin teaching practice. This meant high expectations in relation to teaching and learning, attendance, and behaviour.

The high expectations for all that we say and do. Never letting a student think they are incapable of high performance and high expectations no matter what their starting point.

Principal, WA

In developing a high expectations culture, the first step was being more aware of personal expectations, holding personal high expectations for every student, and not making excuses for them.

High expectations at all times for all students. I shut down negative conversations. I challenge all students at my fortnightly student address to be stronger and smarter.

Deputy Principal, NSW

One participant described how important holding high expectations for students could be.

I have become more aware of my expectations as a teacher and how to teach these to students. I teach in a school where the majority of students truly believe academic wise that they have nothing to offer, my belief in them is slowly changing this, but it is a tough battle against community belief.

Head Teacher, NSW

One participant described this as not accepting second best, another described how they changed an activity from looking at what students were not good at or needed to improve, to looking at what they are good at.

Participants described how these changes went beyond their personal beliefs, to seeing changes in overall staffroom culture and conversations. This involved deliberate processes to recognise negative conversations and reframe them to positive solutions or outcomes-based conversations. Participants described how Stronger Smarter provided both the shared language for a school-wide high expectations culture and the processes to work with staff to explore what this means.

Christ the King Djaridjin Lombadina

Teacher, Grace Lewis, attended the SSLP in 2016.

My classroom is always a calm place where children and parents know I have extremely high expectations of behaviour and therefore learning outcomes.

As an Aboriginal person who is a teacher, SSLP just gave me the words and reasoning behind why I do the things I do. My skills levels have certainly increased and further developed. I do feel my baseline professional skills and practices have always been in line with SSLP, as I was raised by a Strong Aboriginal Bardi woman. SSLP helped me articulate why and how I do what I do.

The relationships I have with my children are the focus of my classroom learning. In knowing the children so well, there is a level of respect which allows us all to learn together. I had 4 classroom rules:

- 1) Be Kind,*
- 2) Be a Learner,*
- 3) Be Respectful,*
- 4) Be Resilient.*

By the end of the year the children had asked for 2 more rules 5) Be Brave, 6) Be Proud. As the children (4-7 year olds) said to me, "Miss you tell us to be Brave and try and you always tell us you are Proud of us" Relationships are the key to any form of education at any age.

I challenge staff when they are engaged in conversations that demonstrate they do not have high expectations for all students. I frequently reiterate that parents do not send their students to school to be unsuccessful or not to fulfill their potential. I challenge perceptions and bias in staff meetings and encourage staff to reflect on how they can engage students and parents.

Deputy Principal, NSW

A school-wide culture involved a shared commitment to improving outcomes for students, and staff holding high expectations for each other and keeping each other accountable.

I think the biggest impact was upon staff understanding for “the no excuses” philosophy. This not only had applications for Aboriginal students but also for our non-Indigenous students. Yes, understand their challenges but don’t allow this to be an excuse for disengagement in learning. Yes, be respectful in relationships and have high expectations of all children. This involved speaking this language to parents also.

Retired Principal, SA

Participants recognised that this high-expectations culture takes time, particularly in large schools and where there are staff changes. Setting a school-wide culture of high expectations meant being clear and visible about expectations, so that all students understood what was expected, but also knew the teacher had confidence in them to achieve.

High expectations are now a part of our school improvement plan and staff have ongoing conversations with all students about the expectations they have for their learning. We also embed self-belief in all students.

Principal, NSW

Participants described how this became a change in tone and vocabulary used by staff. Participants described the importance of talking to students regularly about expectations, giving clear instructions about ways to achieve the expectations, and ensuring that expectations were consistent across all staff. One participant described how staff felt more

empowered and better equipped to communicate with students through this strength-based language and this was resulting in an increase of students completing activities.

One participant described how each lesson included behaviour learning intentions. Some participants talked about positive goal setting with students to engage them to set themselves high expectations. This gave students something to aim for and helped students to feel they were achieving.

One School Services Officer described how they had different approaches for high expectations to ensure that students at all levels were pushed to meet their potential.

I used to give more free reign to a student to determine how much of their work they wanted to do, and to what level; in short, very strongly focused on comfort and support. I realised after SSLP that this was doing many of the students a disservice, as I was not pushing them to pursue their potential. I still aim to be friendly and build strong rapport but have begun to gently challenge their statements that they can't or won't pursue their work. I encourage them to surprise themselves by trying to go beyond what they think they can.

With the more engaged students who tend to succeed as is, I have begun to focus beyond 'completion of work' and more towards how the work can connect to them personally, explore skills or viewpoints they wish to develop, and otherwise encourage them to self-reflect on what they enjoy and how they would like to continue developing themselves.

School Services Officer, SA

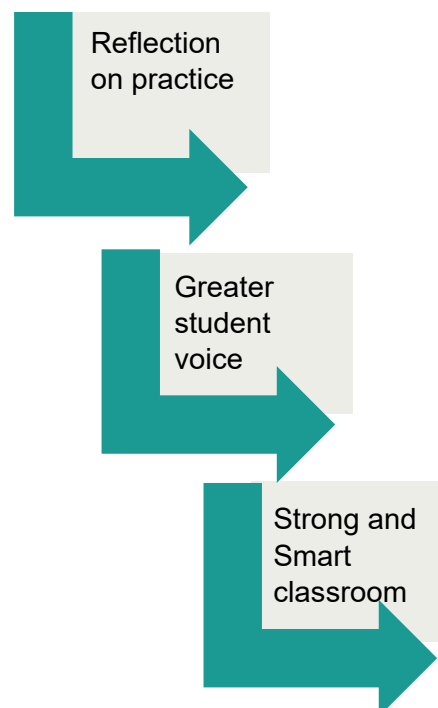
In summary, participants described how they had implemented the different elements of High-Expectations Relationships to ensure a learning environment where all students could achieve their full potential. This involved firstly reflecting on current teaching practice. Participants then set aside classroom time to run activities to get to know their students better and understand different learning styles. This provided the basis for being supportive (fair) in the relationship as a basis for challenging students with high expectations (firm). Participants described how they then implemented a high expectations culture, through strength-based language in both tone and vocabulary in the classroom, using through activities such as goal setting.

Inclusive learning environments

A clear message from the Census results is that participants believed that improving social and emotional wellbeing for students is an essential underlying element for learning.

Student wellbeing is the underlying gauge of student learning. If a student does not have his/ her wellbeing maintained at an optimum level, then learning for that student will not occur or be as positive as it can be.

Principal, NSW



Participants described how, for student social and emotional wellbeing, the learning environment needs to be space where students believe in themselves and see education as important. This is a learning environment of equal opportunities that supports all students to accept and celebrate difference. Participants described how it was important for students to have a strong sense of identity in every aspect of school life. This includes a pride in, and respect for, Aboriginal and Islander culture.

Our classrooms and learning environment promote positive student identity. We aim to be able to see, feel and hear culture within our classrooms. We use student voice to design a culture corner within each classroom, each term, that reflects the student identity.

Principal, WA

In describing how they were developing these inclusive learning environments, participants talked about:

- ▶ changing classroom practice through a reflection on their personal classroom practice and beliefs and attitudes,
- ▶ ensuring a greater student voice in the classroom, and
- ▶ Strong and Smart classrooms which supported cultural identity.

Changing classroom practices

73%

Of participants who work in classrooms had made changes to their **classroom practice on an ongoing basis** (all the time) after attending the SSLP.

Many participants described how a change in personal beliefs and attitudes after attending the SSLP had impacted on their classroom practice. Firstly, the SSLP had helped participants to be more aware of their own internal bias or prejudices, as well as those of others around them. This led to a sense of 'opening eyes' to change from deficit thinking to looking at the possibilities through a strength-based filter.

It opened my eyes to the subtle racism around us and how much of an impact negative thoughts and conversations can be to the development of students and their growth.

Head Teacher, NSW

Merewether Public School

Kathryn Nagle, School Executive, attended the SSLP in 2016.

We have had new families come to our school because 'they are in safe hands' and because they know that their 'cultural needs' will be met here.

Improved student behaviour and learning outcomes as strong relationships are built with students, staff and community and we have high expectations of learning and behaviour.

I have changed the time I take to get to know all my students instead of rushing straight into curriculum. Developing that rapport and relationship with my students has really embedded the respect I receive.

The extra time I take to get to know my community, even just the small things like making a phone call or picking the students up for the Aboriginal Star Struck dance has made a huge difference to the relationships built within the school and the engagement of students in learning.

Participants described how this 'strength-based filter' resulted in changes in personal behaviours such as being more aware of challenges faced by families, more inclusive and compassionate towards students, and providing a more holistic approach to student care. This meant being more child-centred and putting the needs of the student first.

It's hard to change non-Indigenous mindset as an individual but once they complete the Stronger Smarter program, they seem to open their eyes and their perspective changes.

Teacher, NSW

Participants mentioned taking a broader view of success. Some described how when they were able to expand assessments so that all students could demonstrate success, that resulted in better student engagement.

I am more proactive at building in opportunities for students to have success in areas of struggle. Once they have even small achievement, they are more engaged.

Head Teacher, Special Education, NSW

Participants described being more open minded, with a better understanding of different world views and valuing individual student voice and abilities. This led to being calmer or more even tempered. Several participants described slowing down the pace in the classroom and being more patient, which led to being more thoughtful about working with others, and a greater capacity to understand and support.

Being more aware about what informs student and parent/carer behaviour and the way they engage with the school has helped me be more thoughtful when working with them. I continue to hold high expectations but the support I provide to help students and families meet them is more targeted and greater.

Assistant Principal, VIC

Participants reported being more aware of cultural diversity and the need to ensure that classrooms were safe and equitable places to learn. This included developing greater levels of differentiated teaching to build on student's strengths, interests and learning styles.

Participants described changing learning activities to suit learning styles and to allow students to demonstrate their diverse range of skills rather than just the traditional skills schools usually focus on.

Being more aware of the effects of environments I can't change has made me modify and individualise my approach to every student interaction. I am more considerate of students needs and not just the needs of my program. This has resulted students trying harder in class and being open about what they can or can't do (be that in relation to a skill or available time at home). This has created an environment where they will seek support and maintain engagement with the lesson.

Teacher, NSW

Several participants described how they provided more opportunities for group work and creative input, ranging from using props in storytelling for Early Years students through to creative group work with butchers paper with Year 12 students. This also included encouraging students to share ideas.

Albert Park Public School

Teacher Paul Mclauchlan attended the SSLP in 2015.

Stronger Smarter has helped me to develop multiple perspectives when dealing with challenges faced within schools and the community. Stronger Smarter has given me skills where I am able to successfully communicate expectations between home and school and develop structures which seek to be inclusive of community expectations.

Thank you for continuing your most important work. I feel there is a real push to address the barriers to Education for Indigenous students. In the time I have been in Education I have seen this 'slow change' and now we are at a point where we are in the midst of real change for not just our Indigenous students but also the communities they live in.

The conversation is changing, and Indigenous People are now being heard...and listened to. I am just a small wheel in a much bigger machine, and I feel we are all headed in the right direction. There is still much to be done...I am enjoying seeing young Indigenous people working throughout our region and listening to their aspirations and push for change is inspiring.

Student voice

Increased student engagement and motivation had come about through school cultures that enhanced the student voice. Participants described creating more time in the classroom for students to take direction of some of their learning and encouraging students to share ideas and valuing their responses. This provided a deeper sense of belonging with student pride in themselves and their culture.

I check in with students all the time. When I learnt about Dadirri, I encourage students to listen to each other and reflect on issues, how things affect themselves and others. Learning about differences and understanding how they make a group stronger was a big one for me. I talk to the students about that often.

Teacher, VIC

Often, circle processes were used to hand over power and give students more of a voice in the classroom.

Utilising the Stronger Smarter approach to redevelop and deliver peer support training and lessons has seen a massive shift in the confidence of our student leaders. They run yarning circles, unpack words and have consistent expectations for the peers in their groups.

Teacher, NSW

Strong and Smart

Strong and Smart is a culturally responsive learning environment that supports students to be Strong in culture, while also holding high expectations that enable students to be Smart in their learning. For First Nations students, Strong and Smart is about social and emotional wellbeing.

Participants described building the visual appearance of the school as a community space through flagpoles and language names on classrooms. Several participants talked about how they had included Acknowledgement of Country as a whole school activity or changed the way they delivered this, for instance with students creating their own Acknowledgements

... the school only had one flagpole, there was no Acknowledgement of Country at assemblies, there were no Indigenous activities, apart from tokenistic stories and craft activities. We now have all three flags flying, our Indigenous student leader in Year 6 speaks in Wiradjuri (for where we are) and Noongar (for his country) language for Acknowledgement of Country at all school gatherings.

Teacher, NSW.

One participant described how in addition to signage and artwork, they also had a hoodie designed by a local custodian. Another described how the school has a welcome sign in the local language.

I more actively seek and plan for opportunities to integrate Indigenous culture and stories into different areas of the curriculum. I try to utilise our outdoor learning space to help the children connect with the land and to make the local culture more relevant. We have many more visible signs of indigenous culture displayed, such as a welcome in the Gunai Kurnai language. We sometimes use this when greeting each other.

Teacher, VIC

Participants described how, when this culturally responsive learning environment was in place, students were more approachable, more forthcoming, more able to share and open up for conversation, and responding with more respect.

The children are opening up and being more involved with peers and play. They are talking more and more willing to share their ideas. They are even smiling more.

Preschool Teacher, NSW

This was resulting in greater student confidence and leadership. Students were taking on more ownership of their approach to school and responsibility for their own outcomes. Students were taking the time to listen to others and were more observant of each other's behaviours, and therefore more appreciative of each other. This strengthened classroom bonds, with students more willing to commit to initiatives and participate in group activities with genuine collaboration.

In summary, after attending the SSLP, participants were using deliberate and planned strategies to create inclusive learning environments. Participants were consciously making time to build high-expectations relationships with their students. After self-reflection on their teaching practice, participants were more likely to approach these relationships in a strength-based way. The results they were seeing were improved social and emotional wellbeing for students, leading to greater motivation and engagement and, as one participant described it, students who are more eager to learn.

Glenroi Heights Public School

Teacher, Kylie Greatbatch, has been a strong supporter of the Institute's work since completing the SSLP in 2010.

Since completing the Stronger Smarter leadership program I have developed many academic programs which align with strengthening students' identities, building empathy and respect and connecting to country.

I created the Yindjamarra program which built leadership within my students and community connections. I created a traditional dance group called the Garru (magpie) Dance group. This group, each year, creates the connection with dance which honours our ancestral spirits, cleanse country, celebrates totems animals, all on the land of our First Nation people on Wiradjuri country.

The connections program builds resilience, empathy, identity and respect. These workshops follow the value of the circle with acknowledgment, Stronger Smarter values, Check ins, a process and checkout. I train my Stage 3 team to deliver this with their group.

Every term I run Stronger Smarter meetings with my staff, so it refreshes their expectations and drive to deliver a strong presence within their classroom which is Strong, Smart and Proud.

Community voice

In text responses, 30% of participants specifically mentioned changes to how they had engaged with parents and the local community after attending the SSLP.

Only at the beginning of our journey, but there has been a significant increase in community engagement.

Principal, QLD

Results from this increased engagement included increased parent confidence in the school. With this increased trust between community and staff, more families were coming into the school, and there was increased attendance at school events.

Some participants reported that improved community engagement had resulted in improved engagement and behaviours by students.



80%

Of participants said they had changed, on an ongoing basis, the way they **interacted with parents and/or community members**.

In describing increased engagement with parents and community, participants described:

- ▶ strength-based conversations – deeper listening and more respectful conversations leading to greater community trust and confidence,
- ▶ an increased personal respect for local cultural knowledge, and
- ▶ culturally-responsive pedagogies – partnerships to bring greater cultural knowledge into the school.

Strength-based conversations

This increased engagement with parents and community had been achieved in different ways, depending on the context. Firstly, there was a change in the way conversations were held to be more respectful with greater listening.

I listen more to the students and their families and find out how they want me to support their child and also how they want their child to connect to culture.

Teacher, NSW

Participants described how changing the style of meetings to use circle processes, check ins and yarning helped open up the discussions. Others described how they had improved the regularity of contact with parents and community members. One participant noted that those staff who had attended the SSLP felt more confident in involving the community. Some participants said they had been seeking out pivotal people in the community to connect with the school.

Often, increased engagement involved a community voice in school planning with discussions about what was working or not working in the school, or what parents wanted from the school. Some participants described partnerships to work on solutions to challenges facing the school, such as attendance. Others described ensuring a community voice in Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs). Some schools had established formal groups or committees with community members to work on ways to improve outcomes for First Nations Students. For some, these groups spanned across schools and included AECG members to build relationships and share resources.

Respect for local cultural knowledge

For staff, these improved connections enabled the building of greater understanding of, and respect for, local cultural knowledge. Some participants reported how staff were more likely to seek advice and support from the school's Aboriginal Education Team or Aboriginal Education Workers (or similar roles). Other participants described how they had set up processes to ensure they invited more local community members to be part of the school team by employing them as teacher aides and trainee teachers.

I have made several connections with Aboriginal people in our local area to build cultural capability and capacity within my staff during professional development opportunities such as staff meetings and professional development days We are currently working on learning about our school's Totems as our school is located on three Aboriginal countries. We are building our cultural knowledge on the significance and importance of totems and we are involved in being able to represent these within our school grounds in some form such as a scar tree and art work.

Teacher, NSW

One participant described a deeper understanding and curiosity from staff about Aboriginal culture, issues, local customs. Some participants made specific mention of curriculum changes to have a stronger focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives. Participants mentioned building up personal knowledges and capabilities, and that they were seeing more confidence from staff about how to achieve this. This involved explicit links to Aboriginal and Torres Strait culture in lessons – for instance increasing the texts from Indigenous authors, and taking opportunities to weave examples or discussions into the learning material.

Stage 4 and 5 KLAs programs have embedded Aboriginal perspectives in outcome-based learning and content revolving around local histories. Higher profile of cultural activities and successes on school social media. Strong Aboriginal Education Team who continue to engage and build relationships with community for best practices in teaching aboriginal histories and culture.

Lead Teacher, NSW

One teacher described how she ran a professional learning program for staff that helped Year 6 teachers successfully run an inquiry project titled 'Indigenous cultures of the world'. In a school with only a small percentage of Indigenous students, this led to a significant student-led change.

.... this led to a student demanding to change the faction names of our school as all were male and referred to as 'early settlers/explorers'. He demanded two influential Indigenous names to represent our factions and wrote letters to families to ask for permission. Faction names which were over 80 years old were changed as a result and our partnerships with the families help to stay connected with local histories.

Teacher, WA

NSW Central Coast

Kelly Overall is an Aboriginal Education Wellbeing Advisor, NSW

We are seeing a lot more community engagement with our students in the schools that we are working with. We are currently working on Stronger Smarter practices with the HSC students and how higher expectation relationships is key to helping these students attain their HSC while maintaining their cultural Heritage (Premier's priority).

I changed my way of thinking, and this has impacted my classes in such a positive way. My biggest change was reflecting on what I was doing and making the changes for the things that were not working. Things that we have "always done" got thrown out and we thought of new ways to engage the students in my classes and across my faculty. For instance, with Year 12 setting a circle at the start of every week to check into where they are emotionally and also in their study. They reported back that this is really helped them get in the right mind set for the week.

My current role is supporting staff in their Aboriginal Education Journey and the most common thing we hear is, "I don't want to make a mistake." To which I respond with you can't make a mistake if you try, the only mistake you can make is not trying.

Moving out of the classroom and into this leadership role has really shown me how important the social process is in schools and how as leaders we really need to make turns to enable staff to make the changes that they need to make. When I deliver PL to schools, I always talk of the Stronger Smarter principles and how this training is vital for all staff to complete.

In my current role, I speak about the connections that we need to have to the community and how important this is to listen to their voice. It's important that we as Education employees, engage with the parents not only on their kids needs and education but also in community events to show our commitment and support. This shows that we are not just there to get something from them. It shows that we care.

Our Workplace Challenge was an Aboriginal Community of Schools conference, and it is now becoming an entire region conference. DELS and AECG are currently in talks with us to work out the best way to get this delivered. It is going to be huge but needs to be planned out with the right people (which takes time) to ensure that we get the message across.

Culturally responsive pedagogies

Many participants described how closer links with community had resulted in partnerships to bring greater cultural knowledge into the school.

SSI gave me the tools to be more holistic in planning, engaging and implementing culturally authentic and inclusive programs in the classroom and across the school.

Principal, NSW

Several described how staff were more confident in enacting the cross-curriculum perspective of embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, and there was more collaboration and planning across staff with respect to this. Staff were more open to looking at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives on contentious issues such as Australia Day/Survival Day.

Participants described how there were planned approaches, supported at the school level, to embed greater understanding and recognition of the contribution of First Nations peoples to Australia and the world. One participant described how they had planned whole of school approaches to ensuring a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content.

We are doing a whole school audit on every learning activity in every year in every KLA to see how much focus there is on Aboriginal and Torres Strait content and perspectives, and then addressing areas where this is missing and rewriting materials or adding to them. I have asked for my faculty to provide writing time to ensure that this is done authentically in a considered way with awareness of new syllabus and to invite community members to participate in this process in a meaningful way. I have asked that a planned approach to this on a whole school level occur to ensure that it is done in a culturally appropriate way.

Teacher, NSW

One Principal described personal mentorship from local Elders, describing the local Aboriginal culture as the umbrella under which the other areas of education sat in the school. In this school, Aboriginal staff were leading the areas of language and culture.

Several participants described how Aboriginal culture and language was becoming embedded in the curriculum or particular projects such as bush tucker gardens set up with involvement from local Elders.

Students are now being regularly emersed in Aboriginal histories and perspectives, particularly with assessment and class work.

Teacher, NSW

Another participant described how the school created a program that led students into choosing Aboriginal Studies in Year 11.

We created a program to strengthen cultural knowledge and give space and time to yarn about this. All the participants that continued into Year 11 chose Aboriginal Studies at the school. Some of those students now make part of the student leadership team at school.

Teacher, NSW

One teacher described how over time, embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into teaching in a metropolitan school together with more consistent contact with parents had supported student engagement and attendance.

The skills, knowledge and confidence I gained from SSLP have enabled me to be more conscious of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives over a range of subjects and topics and to create/implement Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, knowledge, language and cultural practices into my teaching approach, teaching strategies and community relationships I have received a staff award for my support and development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and for incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into my teaching.

Teacher, QLD

At one high school, the Principal described how a whole of school approach to working with the community to engage students and provide post-school pathways has been successful.

We end the year with local community leading us on Country and supporting our collective team to build cultural safety for staff, students and families.We have engaged with a range of partner groups to deliver aspirational programs for our students and actively set high expectations for our students. Our current year 12 Cohort- Aboriginal students showed greater growth than non- Aboriginal students. We have a large number of students who now participate in a range of opportunities - to re-engage with education and training and higher education..... We have built a strong relationship with a widening pathways group who support strong post school pathways. This has seen increased aspirations of our seniors which is filtering down to younger students.

Principal, NSW

In summary, in the Community Sphere, participants described how they had used High-Expectations Relationships to build stronger relationships with the local community. This involved personal changes to conversational processes to ensure greater listening and more respectful conversations, as well changes to the style of meetings to use circle processes.

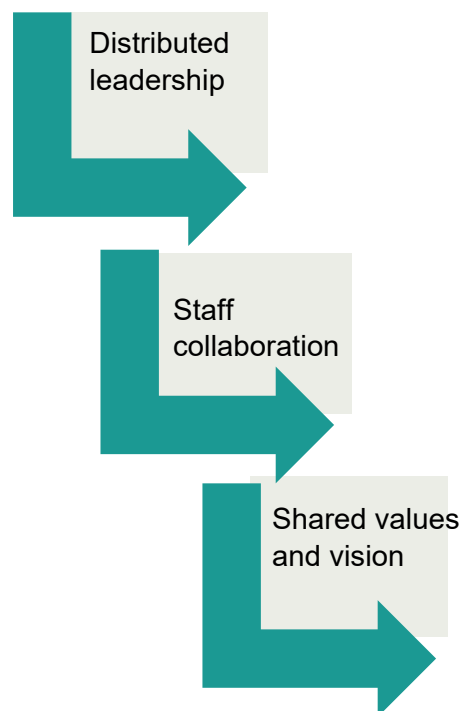
Participants also reported building a greater understanding of local cultural knowledge, which could be considered as both a result of stronger school-community relationships, and as contributing to building more respectful relationships. Greater relationships with community results in partnerships to bring greater cultural knowledge into the school. This again, all contributes to building a more inclusive learning environment.

Responsibility for change

A cornerstone of the Stronger Smarter Approach is the belief that every educator can play a role in challenging the status quo and ensure that the First Nations students in their classrooms can achieve their full learning potential. We describe this increased sense of agency as 'responsibility for change' (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2020).

In the 2022 Census, participants described the key elements of 'responsibility for change' as:

- ▶ changes to personal leadership styles – often involving a more distributed leadership style,
- ▶ building staff collaboration – leading to improved staff morale and cohesiveness, and
- ▶ culture of the school – systems to ensure staff are working towards shared values and vision.



74%

Of participants had **changed their leadership style** on an ongoing basis

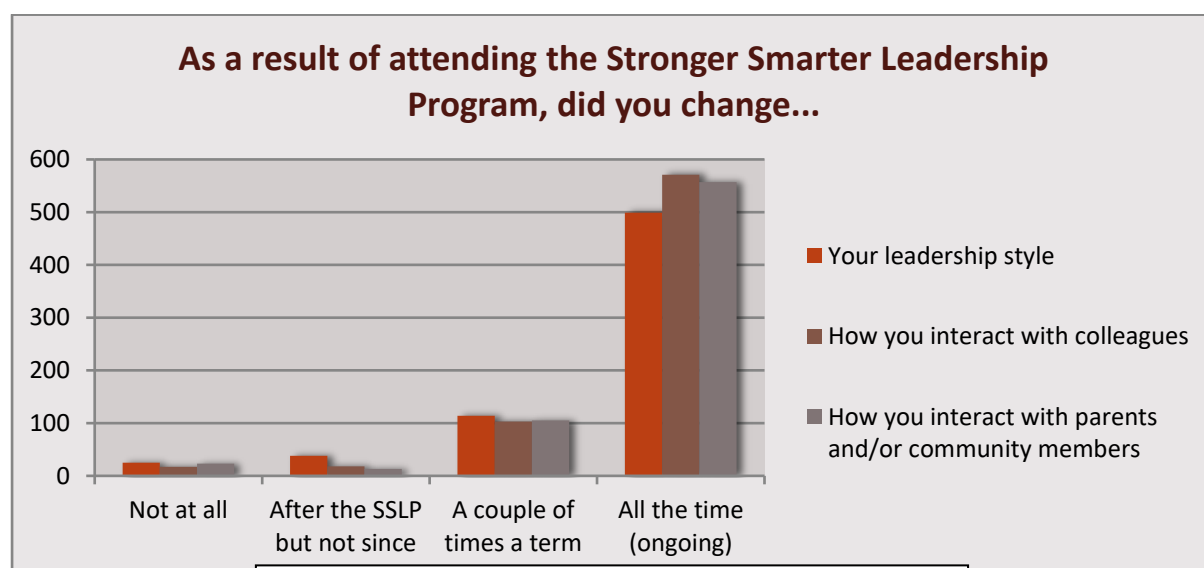


Figure 3: Changes to leadership style and interactions with others.



Distributed leadership

Many participants described how, after completing the SSLP, they had made changes to their leadership style. Participants described being more self-aware and better at realising personal strengths. Some described how they had developed strategies to consider how they reacted to different situations, often describing being calmer, more relaxed and more diplomatic. One participant described how they had developed skills to understand the qualities a leader needs to have. Another described how they could see leadership in everyone.

I was a young teacher who felt confident, and this course helped to slow me down and look at my practice and learn from everyone rather than always looking to administrators. The most profound learnings and self-growth I've had had been from EA AIEOs and peers.

Teacher, WA

Participants described changing from a hierarchical, top-down leadership approach to a more collaborative approach involving a distributed leadership style. Participants described this distributed leadership and shared power and valuing the voice of all. In the SSLP, we describe this as knowing when to move between the triangle and the circle.

Increased distributed leadership across the school. This has and is still resisted at times, but perseverance does pay off. I work to build knowledge with a bigger team, so there is no team that holds all information and ability to decide directions and strategies. I work to give voice to all members of the team.

Principal, NSW

Participants described this 'moving to a circle' both in terms of the physical space of holding meetings in a circle or providing more collaborative spaces to open up communication. This involved holding more conversations with staff, and in those conversations taking a step back and spending more time listening and learning.

Participants described how running staff meetings in a Circle and using Check In processes with staff ensured that sessions could be more collaborative. This was valuable for team building, resulting in staff being more open and relaxed with expressing ideas.

A few participants reported how they extended the circle processes and values into everyday operations, recognising the leadership potential in others. This involved giving staff more autonomy and placing greater trust in staff.

As I have enacted the Stronger Smarter practices in my workplace and in my interactions with community members, this has helped me grow in confidence in my leadership of Stronger Smarter practices. Sharing this knowledge with the senior leadership team at every meeting has seen the leadership of the region change to more inclusive leaders who listen more, who are comfortable with silence, who have high expectations relationships and who genuinely engage with community.

Director, QLD

Staff collaboration

81%

Of participants had **changed how they interact with colleagues** on an ongoing basis.

Many participants reported greater staff collaboration and engagement. As staff were given more input into decisions, this resulted in more trusting relationships, an improved sense of belonging, and greater staff cohesiveness. There was greater buy-in for changes and improvements, higher staff morale and wellbeing, and a more respectful workplace.

The biggest change was in the closeness of relationships across the school. We were a much closer school after staff underwent training and implemented Stronger Smarter philosophies.

Retired Principal, NSW

These changes came both from changes to school leadership styles, and from the way individuals interacted with their colleagues after attending the SSLP. Some described being more receptive to change, being open to different perspectives, and more open to feedback and learning. A more positive mindset and approach to complex challenges and spending

more time to fully analyse situations led to a clearer understanding of the bigger picture and what they were trying to implement and why.

Stronger Smarter has helped me to develop multiple perspectives when dealing with challenges faced within schools and the community.

Teacher, NSW

Participants described how building staff relationships ensures that difficult conversations come from a place of support. This had resulted in deeper discussions and open conversations and a wider dialogue to speak in meetings about what needs to happen differently. Participants described how they were better able to provide feedback to each other, using the idea that 'feedback is a gift.'

Changes I have seen have occurred within my own team and have positively impacted the ways we work with each other and with external agencies in complex situations. They include staff having a greater appreciation for treating feedback as a gift, understanding the different perspectives and strengths of others and how they enrich the collaboration process, being conscious of perceptual positioning in meetings so that all have an opportunity to contribute and focussing on the multiple perspectives in a situation rather than 'the truth'.

Government role, VIC Dept of Education and Training

As one Project Officer observed, the greater collaboration from staff was leading to multiple perspectives and greater problem solving, which in turn was leading to improved student outcomes.

More collaboration and making connections with staff have enabled a wider dialogue for us to be able to connect at meetings and speak about what needs to happen differently and how. This has brought on outcomes of better attendance in students, better student behaviour and community wanting to be more involved in schools. I think teachers that are not Aboriginal are so worried and even scared to do or say things so by opening up conversations and meeting and talking through things has made them feel more at ease and confident to have a say on Aboriginal issues within their school.

Project Officer – AECG, NSW

School culture

Many participants said the SSLP had provided them with strategies to examine the culture of their school or organisation or 'how we are together', with this often being a part of ongoing staff development. A few participants described how staff collaboration had involved teaching staff working alongside SLSOs and working together with outside agencies. Some participants talked about ensuring that all voices and perspectives are valued, and there were more spaces in which First Nations school employees felt they could speak up and be listened to.

Some participants described how their school had set up a Stronger Smarter team to embed Stronger Smarter philosophies into all areas of the school. One participant described a role in ensuring they ran a Stronger Smarter 'lens' over aspects of their educational practice. As one participant described, it is a process of first improving team collaboration and then ensuring systems to ensure the shared vision is realised.

I implemented more collaboration and team building to develop a consistent vision for the faculty and then created systems which work to protect and move towards this shared vision.

Head Teacher, NSW

Several participants described the types of activities they had used in staff PD, with perceptual positioning often something that had been used.

During Professional Learning sessions and Staff Development Days the executive (all have attended Stronger Smarter Leadership courses) facilitate elements of the Stronger Smarter program. Building staff culture and collaboration has been a priority this year so we refer to P1/2/3 all the time and just recently we did the Johari Window to explore what we think of ourselves, what others think of us and what might be kept secret. In stage teams we have completed Uncle Steve Mam's Coconut Tree to build values, behaviours and rituals that will help us be cohesive and successful. These hang in the hallway from the office to the staffroom.

Teacher, NSW

In summary, in the Personal Sphere, High-expectations relationships play a major role in changing the school culture to one of shared responsibility and high expectations. Participants describe being more self-aware and making changes to their personal leadership and communication styles. Several participants in school leadership roles described a more distributed leadership style with shared power. As staff were given more input into decisions, this resulted in greater staff cohesiveness with greater buy-in for changes and improvements. This leads back to the ideas of using the SSA as an underlying framework for the school, where activities in the Personal Sphere ensure that all staff understand their own role in enacting this framework.

Park Avenue State School

Principal, Helen Heery, undertook the SSLP in 2012. She says the SSA provides an underlying approach for the school and they have seen improved academic results.

The Stronger Smarter program has built my resilience as a Principal - collaborative work, work that embraces the strength of community, is joyful work - a gift.

All those years ago putting distributed leadership practices in place was challenging as for many it was 'new' and perhaps posed a sense of high risk; a concern about workloads and a difficulty in knowing what the new ways of working would look like.

Now that leadership capability is strong across the school and across roles, now that collaborative processes are part of how we operate and how we think, staff feel supported in their work and there is always an enthusiasm, an eagerness, to pursue the next piece of work.

Our students are articulate about and active in their own learning. Community are partners in the school.

To recruit teachers and teacher aides I have taken the long view - hosting RATEP at the school, inviting community members to be part of the school team as teacher aides and trainee teachers. Building the visual and physical presence of the school to ensure it is a community place.

Conclusion

Transformational change means bringing the Spheres of the Personal, Community and School together. Staff, students, and community all need to be part of this journey. The 2022 Census results describe how High-Expectations Relationships provide the thread to bring everyone along on this journey. As the Spheres come together, schools are seeing greater student motivation and classroom engagement which helps to drive improved school attendance and academic outcomes.

Results of the 2022 Stronger Smarter Census show a high level of enactment of the SSA. Whole school change needs to be led from the top and supported by school leadership. Participants describe how it is easier to bring staff along on the journey or work with others for change when those staff have also undertaken the SSLP. In many schools, however, the SSA extends beyond staff who have undertaken the SSLP. Some schools are choosing to send as many staff as possible to the SSLP to support this change, while others are using the tools and strategies provided by the SSLP to introduce the SSA to their staff.

In schools enacting whole school change, the SSA provides an underlying framework with a common language and values. The SSA becomes an integral part of the way the school operates. A Stronger Smarter ethos is visible with a whole school approach to culturally safe practices. High-expectations relationships play a major role in changing the school culture to one of shared responsibility and high expectations with transparency of operations and clear common goals. Participants in leadership roles are using processes to share power and give staff more input into decisions. This results in greater staff cohesiveness with greater buy-in for changes and improvements. High-Expectations Relationships ensure that all staff understand their own role in enacting the school's vision and values.

High-Expectations Relationships play a role in changing conversational processes with parents and local community, building greater trust from community that their voices will be heard. School staff are increasing their local cultural knowledge, contributing further to building relationships as well as resulting in changes to the curriculum to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.

In the classroom, as educators establish high-expectations learning environments that support all students to achieve their best, High-Expectations Relationships again play a role. Educators are using deliberate and planned activities to build stronger relationships with students and between students. This results in improved social and emotional wellbeing, providing a basis for improved learning. Educators are using strength-based language and activities to ensure students set high expectations for themselves and see themselves as learners. Creating spaces for enhanced student voice is helping to build student self-belief and belonging. As improved relationships with community result in partnerships to bring greater cultural knowledge into the school, this improves pride and identity for First Nations students.

Appendix 1 – Demographics

A total of 788 SSLP alumni responded to the 2022 Census. This represents 18% of the total SSLP alumni. Census participants were 77% female and 23% male (compared 72% and 28% for all alumni).

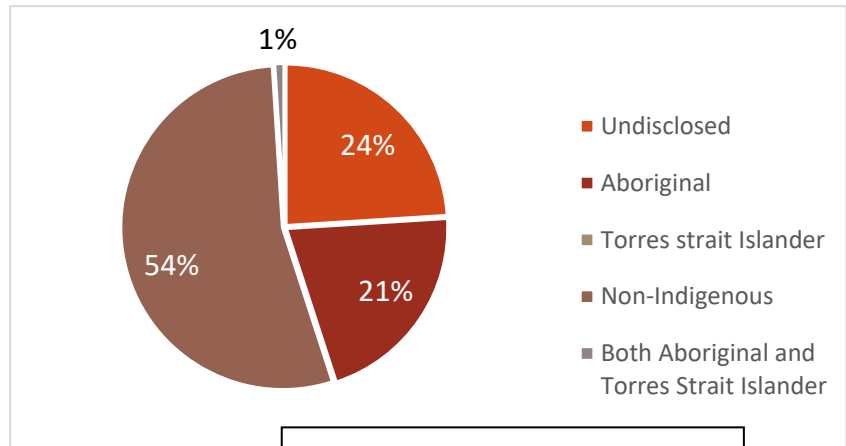


Figure 4: Ethnicity.

Participants were in various roles, with 29% in school leadership positions.

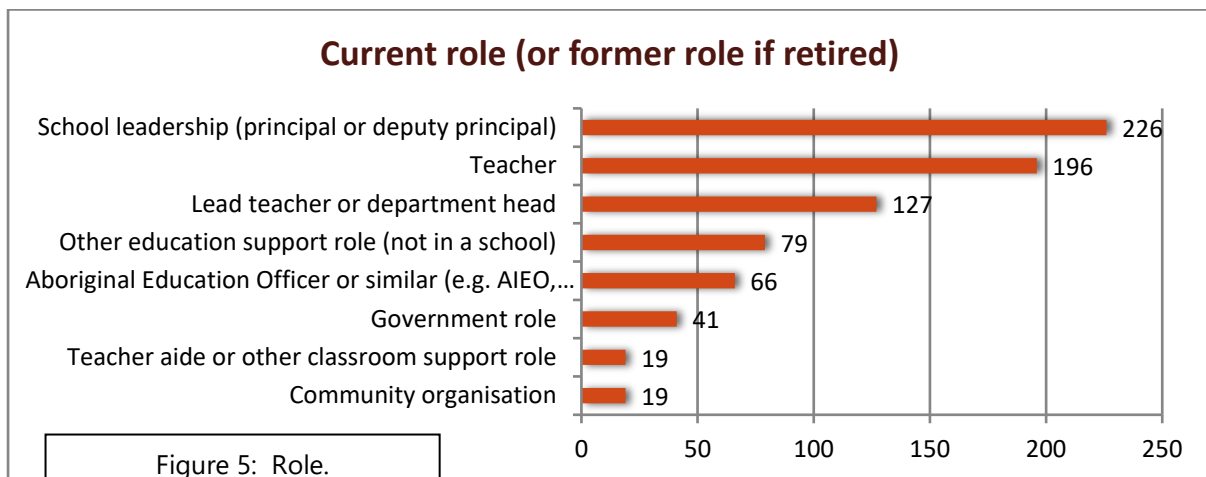


Figure 5: Role.

Over 50% of respondents have been in the teaching or education support profession for over 20 years.

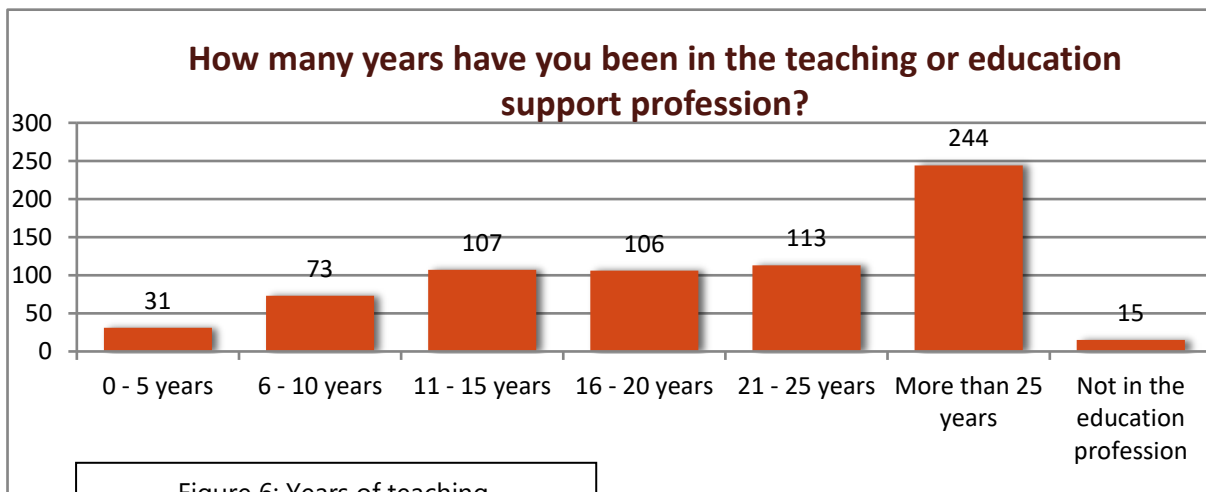
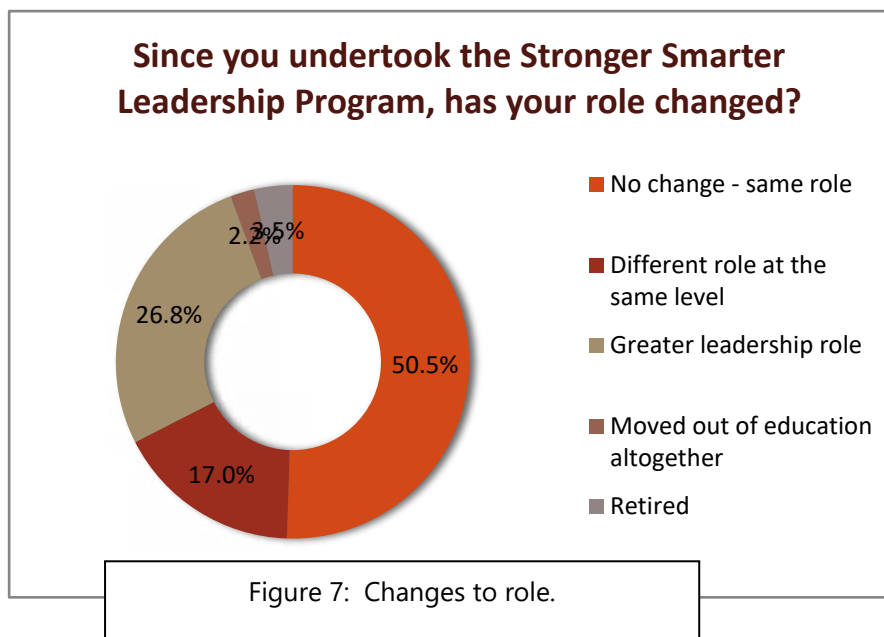


Figure 6: Years of teaching.

27% of participants reported that they were now in a greater leadership role after attending the SSLP.



As might be expected in rural and remote schools, participants had often changed schools since they had undertaken the SSLP.



Appendix 2 – Enactment of Workplace Challenges

In the SSLP, participants are asked to set up a Workplace Challenge which they then report on at the follow up session.

In the Census,

- ▶ 89% of respondents said that they had either completed their workplace challenge or were still working on it.
- ▶ 42% of respondents had gone on to set themselves other 'challenges' after completing their initial Workplace Challenge.
- ▶ 71% of participants felt they had been able to make the changes they wanted to make in their school or organisation.

The overwhelming theme is that enacting the SSA in schools is a collaborative process, with over 70% of participants having worked with other staff to complete their workplace challenge.

71%

Of participants had **worked collaboratively with other staff** to undertake their workplace challenge.

For school leadership this means seeking ways to bring staff along on a journey of transformational change. Participants reported that this was always easier when staff had undertaken the SSLP.

At the start only a small group had done the training, so implementing changes took a while and building trust took time. We now have 60% to 70% of our staff trained in stronger/smarter and the process moves a lot quicker. More people to share the load and more perspectives to help plan strategies.

School Learning Support Officer, NSW

Participants in non-leadership roles, reported that enacting their Workplace Challenge was easier when they had support from peers and school leadership. Some participants reported that the lack of support from above in the hierarchy had, at times, left them deciding to

implement strategies in their personal work only, and not attempt to implement at a wider school level.

While some participants reported that some staff who hadn't undertaken the SSLP were challenged by an approach that asks them to consider their role in establishing a Stronger Smarter workplace, others reported that they saw more staff wanting to know about the Stronger Smarter Approach as they saw the higher levels of engagement from others.

As more workplace staff 'get on board' it is much easier working together on the same page and building collaborative, solutions focussed and innovative ways of working across our schools.

Principal, NSW

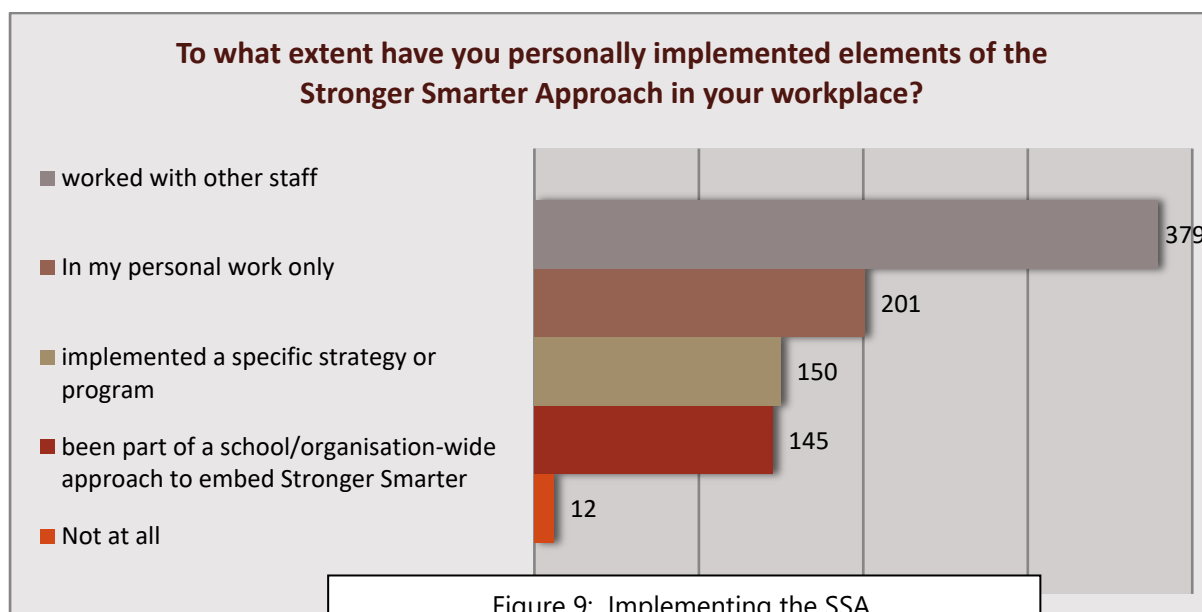
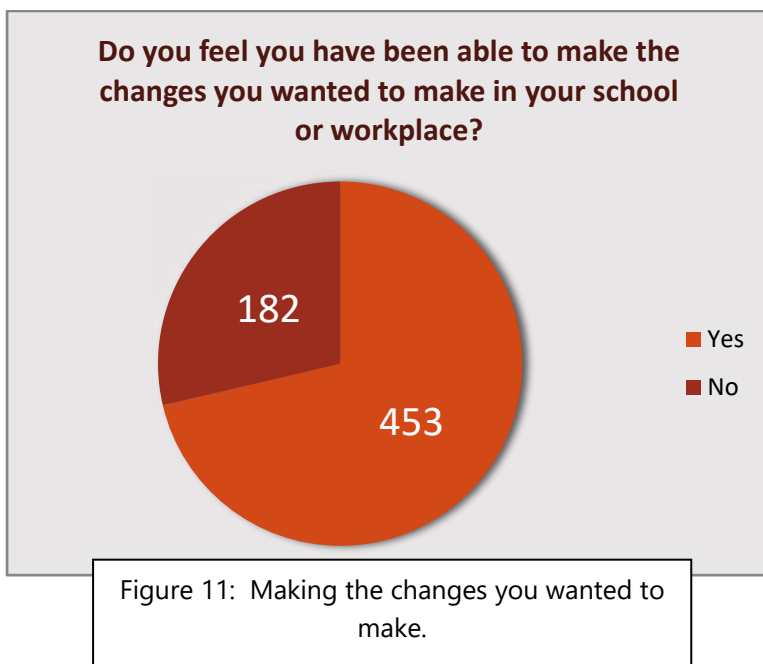
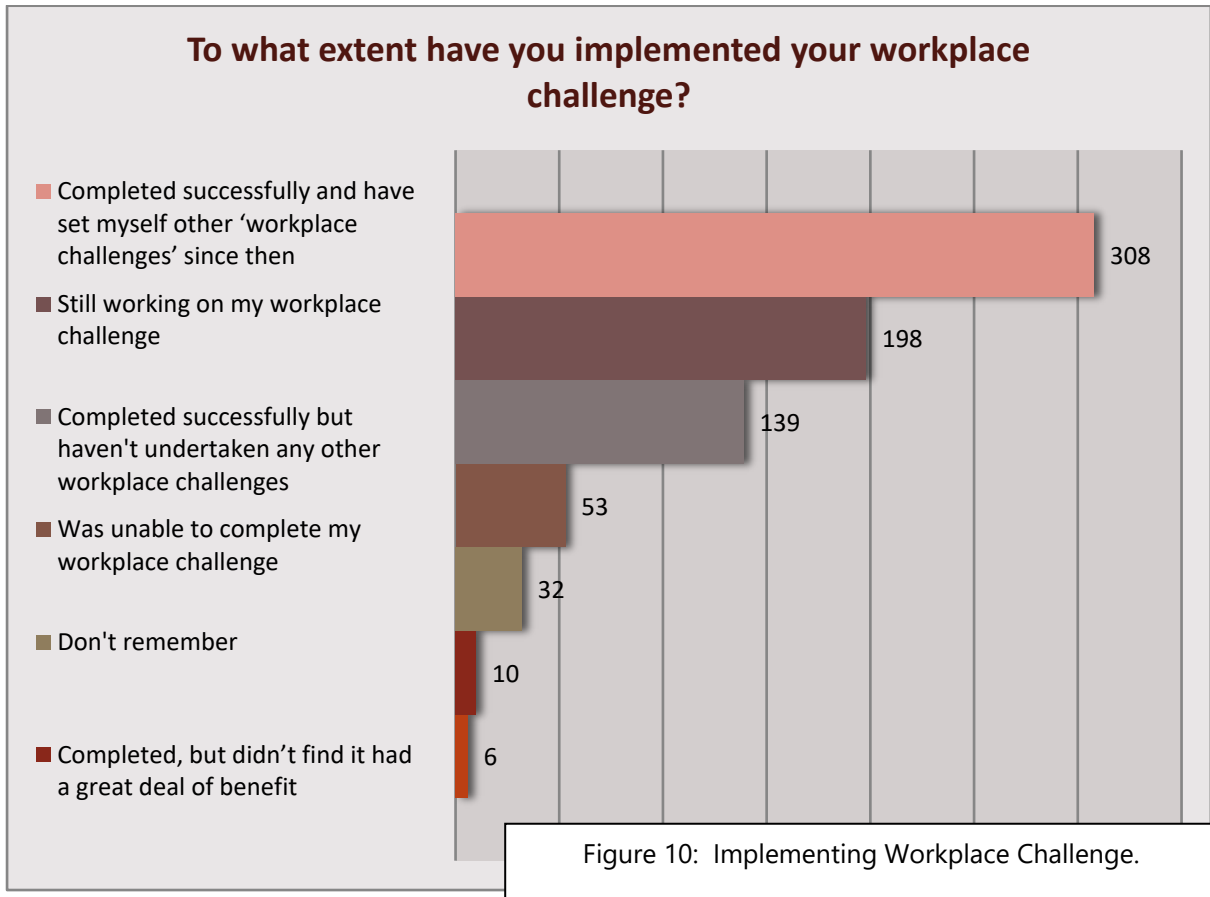


Figure 9: Implementing the SSA.

71%

Of participants said they had been able to **make the changes** they wanted to make in their school or organisation.



Leadership support and changing workplaces

In the 2022 Census we asked what had hindered or supported participants to achieve their workplace challenge. The responses were similar to the 2020 Census in that support from leadership or other staff was the single biggest key factor in whether their workplace challenge had been successful. This included both leadership support for enacting change, and staff knowledge in terms of colleagues' understanding of the SSA. Participants reported that other staff having undertaken the SSLP made it easier to enact change.

Moving schools impacted on this in both ways. Some staff moved out of leadership roles and/or into schools that had not experienced the SSA, making it more difficult to impact school-wide change. Some participants had moved to schools with greater leadership support, making it easier to enact change. In some cases, while things had worked initially, it had not been sustained because of staff changes.

Some participants had decided to focus only on their own practice, for fear that it would not be well received if they tried to initiate change across the school as a teacher. However, others had clearly tried to put ideas forward and had not been supported by leadership. This was variously described as leadership blocking change, tokenism from leadership, leadership not seeing the big picture and hierarchical power structures and leadership with different or changing priorities. Others spoke about system barriers, and departmental processes and policies that were 'metro-centric' and unsuited to regional contexts. Some had decided to work with smaller teams of like-minded people.

Change takes time

A number of participants mentioned that time in general was a restraint to enacting change, and that for some, progress was slow. Educators in general are time poor and there are competing priorities, both for the participants and for the other staff that they want to bring along on a change journey. While some of these competing priorities were clearly useful, other competing priorities, such as an over-emphasis on data collection and compliance were seen more as distractions. Outside influences such as staff shortages, staff turnover, Covid disruptions and floods had also impacted on progress. Covid had particularly disrupted plans to improve connections with the local community.

In addition, participants were clear that systemic change, changing cultures and building relationships does take time. If staff are resistant to change, it takes time to bring people on board, and participants described how it was important to take the time to do things well. As one participant described, new habits take time to form, and it has to be a continued push for high expectations and maintaining standards.

Staff who also believed in the process and were willing to proceed helped, those who challenged ideas or were reluctant to be part of the process made some things more challenging, however also help with ensuring all were listened to and able to express their concerns or different ideas. This meant it has been a slow process with little changes happening on a growing scale. They may be small changes, but I feel they are moving in the right direction to have bigger impacts in the future

Teacher and Year Coordinator, NSW

Participants made different choices about how they implemented, with some choosing to implement quietly.

I made the changes quietly over time; people didn't even realize it. It was their comments about how they enjoy their workplace and doing their job.

Community organisation, QLD

Staff knowledge

A number of participants talked about, at times, finding it hard to get others to adopt change, or get buy-in from other staff when they don't understand the SSA. Participants described how this meant implementation had to occur slowly.

Some participants described how they were still seeing deeply embedded ignorance, a level of racism, and low expectations that staff are not necessarily aware of. Others described staff being 'held back by that underlying belief that Aboriginal students can't learn as well as other students' or thinking that their practice is 'good enough'. Some participants reported that while staff who had not undertaken the SSLP might be respectful of the SSA, there could still be some misunderstandings. For instance, one participant noted how high expectations without high-expectations relationships could be detrimental.

Support from colleagues

In terms of being able to implement the SSLP Workplace Challenge and 'make the changes you wanted to make', many participants mentioned how the support of leadership or colleagues was important. As expected, being in a leadership position meant it was easier to

make change. Some staff talked about support from leadership or regional directors to have the freedom to try new things and the time and the support to do this.

A number of participants mentioned the support of local community Elders or support from the local AECG.

Factors that have supported my changes are strong leadership support and support from my colleagues who are keen to learn and willing to implement changes and making connections with many local Aboriginal people in my community that are keen to be involved.

Teacher, NSW

As expected, being in a school that was implementing the SSA, or that had a Stronger Smarter team in place made it easier to complete a Workplace Challenge.

Appendix 3 – Personal Sphere

The Census did not include any questions about the program itself. However, over 100 respondents chose to tell us how this was one of the best or most powerful Professional Developments they have undertaken. Participants described the program as ‘amazing’, ‘life changing’, and ‘transformational’.

I think the stronger smarter was life changing experience that makes you look at yourself and makes you see how your reactions influence what happens, how people react to you. How positive the outcome becomes when you care about the other person feelings.

Retired Aboriginal Education Officer, NSW

Stronger Smarter is still by far the best professional learning I have ever attended despite being almost 10 years ago. It combines a fantastic mix of personal reflection to support your professional development and I am yet to come across anything that is remotely similar or as profound. I would highly encourage anyone to attend Stronger Smarter - regardless of their workplace setting or context. I cannot speak highly enough about Stronger Smarter and the way that it has shaped me into the educator and person that I am.

Deputy Principal, WA

While the Personal Sphere was not a focus of the 2022 Census, some participants described the impact of the SSLP in increasing awareness of how personal assumptions might impact on teaching and curriculum decisions.

Every aspect of how I see the world has been enhanced by my Stronger Smarter experience.

Coordinator, NSW

Some participants in leadership positions described how the program had helped them to move into that position, empowered them to make positive change in the school, or to move their school through a Stronger Smarter journey.

Stronger Smarter is a huge part of the reason I am currently a principal. The leadership training was transformational, and I'll be forever grateful to the life changing impact it's had on me, personally and professionally.

Principal, NSW

Without the Stronger Smarter Strengths I would not have had the tools to move my school through a strong, smart and connected transformational journey

Principal, QLD

Participants described how the program had helped shape their teaching practice or changed their approach to teaching or empowered them to make positive change in the school. One participant described how the program was 'emotional without it being intrusive' with learnings that can be applied in all settings. Others described how the program re-energised and reinvigorated.

I loved this course. It totally recharged and energised me. When I think of the course it makes me smile!

Teacher, NSW

A number of participants suggested the program should be compulsory for all educators. Several suggested that the Stronger Smarter Approach was important for new educators and university students.