Evaluation of the University of Sydney’s Compass - Find your way to higher education Program -

March 2012
Evaluation of the Compass Program 2009-2011

A report prepared for the University of Sydney
Social Inclusion Unit

Erebus International

March 2012
Evaluation of the Compass Program

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While the information presented in this report draws on the contributions of a range of stakeholders, responsibility for the accuracy of the findings and the conclusions drawn are, however, the responsibility of the evaluation team.

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Dr Tim Wyatt
Mr Peter Catt
Erebus International
THE COMPASS JOURNEY 2009-2011

1. Background and Introduction

The University of Sydney’s Compass: find your way to higher education (Compass) program is one of the University’s social inclusion initiatives, managed by the Social Inclusion Unit (SIU). The Compass initiative aims to encourage a greater number of pre-tertiary students from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds to participate in higher education, both university and vocational.

This report summarises the achievements and challenges of the Compass initiative over the period 2009 to 2011. More detailed information can be read in the progress reports produced annually during this period, which provide a fuller picture of the level of activity, the response from schools, and the issues faced and addressed.

Responding to recommendations in the Bradley Review of Higher Education in Australia (2008), the Australian Government set a target to increase the proportion of university students from low socio-economic backgrounds of 20 per cent of university enrolments. In turn the University of Sydney has developed the Compass program, as an initiative aiming to strengthen the relationship between a sample of schools and the University, with the long term goal of increasing the pool of students who have considered higher education as a post school option. Research reported in Bradley (2008) suggests that students from low socio-economic backgrounds have considerably less knowledge about what higher education entails, how it can benefit the student in the longer term, and what is required to access these opportunities. The Compass program therefore has the longer term goals of raising student teacher and parent aspirations for higher education, and increasing student attainment so that larger numbers of students have the capacity to both meet university entrance requirements and cope with the intellectual demands of higher education.

Prior to the Compass program, the University had conducted some events for this cohort through established relationships with organisations like the Smith Family aimed at raising the aspirations of pre-tertiary education students. Indeed much of the work done by the University to reach out to the community in the past was often done from a sense of charitable obligation, rather than from the perspective of a partnership of mutual benefit with the community.

In spite of those efforts, there had been no increase in the percentage of students from low SES backgrounds enrolling at the University, and it was determined that an innovative approach was required. The University administration believed that more needed to be done, and more systematically.

Historically, most Australian aspiration raising programs have worked at the Year 9 and above level. Research conducted in designing the University of Sydney program identified that children’s sense of self as a learner develops much earlier. The Compass program is unique therefore in the inclusion of early primary-aged children. The Compass program is unique in other ways also. Other universities have been active in their local communities in attempting to attract greater numbers of students from low socio-economic status families.
to tertiary study, but most of these have taken a direct marketing approach, for example in bringing students to the university to create awareness of opportunities.

Few have simultaneously attempted to work with schools to help students acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed at university or to build their motivation to do so. Developing social and cultural capital that allows children to transcend their own educational backgrounds was considered an important aspect to be addressed by the Compass program. In part due to the learnings from the Compass experience thus far, this situation is changing as more institutions have recognised the benefits of early interactions with school students in raising expectations and aspirations.

The Erebus International team commenced work on the evaluation of the program towards the end of 2009 and continued to work alongside the University of Sydney's Social Inclusion Unit (SIU) and participating schools until the completion of the first pilot period in 2011.

The objective of the evaluation was to evaluate the Compass program with regards to the following five program outcomes:

1. **Student Attainment**: this outcome sought to identify any student changes attributed to or supported by the activities of the Compass program.

2. **Teacher Engagement**: this outcome was analysed in terms of teacher participation and completion in capacity-building courses and workshops across a range of curriculum areas.

3. **Student Aspirations**: this outcome sought to determine the extent to which activities have influenced students’ awareness, attitudes, and actions towards the academic and vocational aspects of their lives for both the immediate and longer term.

4. **Teacher Aspirations**: similar to student aspiration, this outcome sought to determine the extent to which activities have influenced teachers’ awareness, attitudes, and actions towards the academic and vocational aspects of their lives and that of their students.

5. **Parental Aspirations**: this outcome sought to identify the extent to which the Compass activities have influenced their attitudes, beliefs and actions towards the academic and vocational aspects of their children’s lives.

**Evaluation methodology**

The evaluation methodology during each phase was adapted to refine key elements of the data gathering process and to ensure the participation of new schools that joined the program during its pilot implementation. To draw valid comparisons with 2009 baseline data and also progress in 2010 and 2011, each of the five outcome areas for the Compass program outlined above were the key drivers of the qualitative and quantitative approaches employed. This involved the following elements:

1. School leader briefing for schools joining the program
2. School leader interviews
3. School face-to-face visits and telephone interviews
4. Review of current student attainment data
5. Project sponsor interviews
6. Student aspiration surveys and relevant teacher surveys.
2. The Compass Initiative in Action 2009-2011

At the commencement of the Compass initiative, 16 schools were chosen to participate in the pilot phase from 2009 to 2011.

Table 1: Schools participating in the Compass Program (2009-2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marrickville</th>
<th>Kogarah</th>
<th>Picnic Point</th>
<th>Condell Park</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marrickville HS including Marrickville IEC</td>
<td>Kogarah HS including Kogarah IEC</td>
<td>Picnic Point HS</td>
<td>Condell Park HS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marrickville PS</td>
<td>Kogarah PS</td>
<td>Picnic Point PS</td>
<td>Condell Park PS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marrickville West PS</td>
<td>Bexley PS</td>
<td>Revesby Sth PS</td>
<td>Wattawa Heights PS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilkins PS</td>
<td>Athelstane PS</td>
<td>Panania PS</td>
<td>Yagoona PS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During 2011 four new high schools joined the initiative. These schools were Sir Joseph Banks High School, Bass Hill High School, Fairfield High School and Westfield Sports High School. Also, during 2011 the vast majority of the original sample of 16 schools continued activity and commitment to the Compass initiative.

As seen in Table 2 below, the reach of the Compass initiative has continued to expand, totalling 351 individual activities since the inception of the program in 2009. The number of students impacted has similarly increased, with some 6,430 students participating in 2011, totalling more than 13,130 students since 2009. In addition to the above statistics, Compass has provided professional development for more than 582 teachers. Three teachers are undertaking Masters degrees as part of this professional learning programs.

Table 2: Reach of Compass program elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reach of the initiative</th>
<th>2009 (part year)</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>Since inception</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Compass events delivered</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students participating in Compass activities</td>
<td>2200</td>
<td>4500</td>
<td>6430</td>
<td>13130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers engaged in Compass activities</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents participating in Compass activities or programs</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>476</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>1123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers receiving professional development</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>582</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An overview of the activities offered during 2009-2011 is detailed in Tables 3 and 4 below, including a mix of one-off or short-term activities, professional learning opportunities, intensive and student volunteer-run programs and parent-focused activities.
Table 3: Range of Compass Activities Offered for Primary Schools 2009-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>One-off/ Short-Term Activities</th>
<th>Professional Learning</th>
<th>Intensive/ Volunteer Programs</th>
<th>Parent Focused Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Giant Science</td>
<td>• Connected classrooms</td>
<td>• Reading Program</td>
<td>• Parent Information Night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Museum Visit</td>
<td>• Drama in Literacy Workshop</td>
<td>• IEC Literacy Reading Project</td>
<td>• Parent Information Night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Science in the City</td>
<td>• Museum Staff School Visit</td>
<td>• Music Program</td>
<td>• Career Pathways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Science in the Suburbs</td>
<td>• Digital Media</td>
<td>• Numeracy &amp; Literacy Workshops</td>
<td>• Sustainable Garden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Seymour Centre</td>
<td>• Effective use of Interactive Whiteboards (on-campus)</td>
<td>• Literacy Program</td>
<td>• Stall at Fete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Year 3 Taster Day</td>
<td>• Effective use of Interactive Whiteboards (in-school)</td>
<td>• Mural</td>
<td>• Parent Pathways Session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Leadership Workshop</td>
<td>• 2011 Successful Learning Conference</td>
<td>• Occupational Therapy</td>
<td>• Drama Performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lunch Break Series</td>
<td>• Teaching Reading and Writing for Middle Years</td>
<td>• Sport Program</td>
<td>• Compass Showcase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Movie Editing</td>
<td>• Strengthen Your Strategies for Teaching ESL</td>
<td>• Speech Therapy</td>
<td>• Parent presentation (in-school)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Student Practical/Concert Workshop</td>
<td>• Film Production and Editing</td>
<td>• Music 2010</td>
<td>• Sydney Widening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Debating Program</td>
<td>• Occupational Therapy</td>
<td>• Reading Program</td>
<td>Participation in Higher Education Forum (WPHF) project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Music Program</td>
<td>• Stop Motion Animation Production</td>
<td>• Word-up</td>
<td>Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Skullduggery</td>
<td>• Sydney Widening Participation in Higher Education Forum (WPHF) project</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• SUDS</td>
<td>• Stall at Fete</td>
<td>• Occupational Therapy</td>
<td>Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Global Wash Your Hands Day</td>
<td>• Parent Information Night</td>
<td>• Mural</td>
<td>Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Glass &amp; Ceramics</td>
<td>• Parent Information Night</td>
<td>• Sport Program</td>
<td>Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• myscience@sydney</td>
<td>• Parent Information Night</td>
<td>• Speech Therapy</td>
<td>Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Parent Information Night</td>
<td>• Music 2010</td>
<td>Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Parent Information Night</td>
<td>• Reading Program</td>
<td>Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Parent Information Night</td>
<td>• Word-up</td>
<td>Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Parent Information Night</td>
<td>• Occupational Therapy</td>
<td>Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Parent Information Night</td>
<td>• Film Production and Editing</td>
<td>Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Parent Information Night</td>
<td>• Stop Motion Animation Production</td>
<td>Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Parent Information Night</td>
<td>• Sydney Widening Participation in Higher Education Forum (WPHF) project</td>
<td>Project</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tables 3 and 4 shows that Compass now provides a spectrum of activities aimed variously to support schools in basic skill development; provide students with a better understanding of the university environment; build cultural capital through museum and theatre visits; enhance knowledge and understanding in particular subject areas, and to enhance teacher capacity through professional learning. The initiative has also increasingly provided opportunities for engaging parents in supporting students to choose or consider a higher education pathway.

It is instructive that by 2011, the range of university faculty areas participating in the initiative has grown considerably, although engagement of university staff in activities like Compass remains an area that has considerable scope for further development. It is also noteworthy that the expansion of professional learning programs for teachers is a direct result of Compass staff responding to schools' expressed needs — a strategy that provides opportunity for sustaining the impact of the initiative over the longer term.
Table 4: Compass Activities Offered for Secondary schools in 2009-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>One-off/ Short-Term Activities</th>
<th>Professional Learning</th>
<th>Intensive/ Volunteer Programs</th>
<th>Parent Focused Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Science in the City</td>
<td>Art &amp; Technology Workshop</td>
<td>Music Program</td>
<td>Parent Information Night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mock Trial</td>
<td>Drama in Literacy Workshop</td>
<td>Numeracy &amp; Literacy Workshops</td>
<td>Laptop software in-service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum Visit</td>
<td>MacquarieNet Training</td>
<td>Homework Centre</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christmas Card Workshop</td>
<td>Using Wikis and Blogs</td>
<td>IEC Literacy Reading Project</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Karl Lecture</td>
<td>Film Production and Editing for MACS</td>
<td>Leadership Workshop</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay Writing</td>
<td>Film Production and Editing for PC</td>
<td>Film Production and Editing for PC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise and Sport Science</td>
<td>Effective Use of Interactive Whiteboards in Social Sciences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience Day</td>
<td>Strength Your Strategies for ESL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC Preparation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Engineering</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seymour Centre</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>New Media</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSC Essay Writing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>HSC Preparation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Kickstart Biology</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Kickstart Chemistry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Kickstart Physics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aerospace, Mechatronic and Mechanical Engineering workshop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SULS Legal Studies workshop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>SRU/Business Future Options workshop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Food/Campus tour</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Study Skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Yr 8 Experience Day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Engineering</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1st Year Book Club</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most recent evidence indicates that the vast majority of schools are now actively integrating Compass activities into the school’s broader curriculum focus. This has resulted from a much clearer understanding of the nature and intention of the goals of the Compass program and in many cases, individual schools’ achievements in relation to the Compass program are beginning to be reported in these schools’ Annual Report. These changes have occurred predominantly because of the pervasive impact of the school leadership and commitment towards the evolving Compass program as a key strategic priority. The increased focus on the Compass program in participating schools has contributed significantly to the opportunity for enhanced student learning outcomes and teacher professional development.
Comments from both teachers and school Principals illustrate the importance of volunteer participation in this program. The relationships established by volunteers with individual teachers and students have been a very positive feature of the program and are adding significant value to the enhancement of learning outcomes for school students and the personal development of the university student volunteers. Illustrative comments about the university student volunteers expressed during the evaluation include the following:

Two to four students came to help in the Homework Centre. They are wonderful. They built long term relationships and built confidence and self esteem on our students. (Secondary teacher)

They are effervescent, enthusiastic, and passionate to assist migrants and refugees. They are second to none. Amazing. (Secondary Compass coordinator)

The Compass students rub off on the high school students. They discuss opportunities. It opens up a forum for discussion about education in the wider education community. They give disengaged learners and the university students give them another perspective. (Secondary teacher)

Our students are seeking and looking for role models in the community. The university students provide this. Our kids are saying, “I can do this.” (Primary Compass coordinator)

The students gave me an insight on university. They gave me goals. I know now that to achieve you have to work hard. They gave me inspiration. (Secondary student)
3. Lessons from the implementation journey

Throughout the implementation journey of the Compass program several recurring themes have emerged during the data gathering process that would appear to be fundamental to its ongoing success during the three years of its pilot operation. It is instructive therefore to reflect on the impact of each of these is that have prevailed so influential in the outcomes of the program since 2009.

School student views about university as a future pathway

Discussions with students about their views of tertiary education and the University of Sydney as a pathway for education shed some new light on their perceptions. As recently as 2010, many students described the University as a place where there were “large attractive buildings and nice classrooms”, but little understanding of what being a university student entailed or what benefits resulted from university study. Discussions with students in secondary school and even senior primary schools now reflect discussion about the University in a much more meaningful way. Now students are talking about the University as a learning institution that they would go to after school to get a qualification to help them get a better job and to develop greater knowledge in particular areas. Their perception of the University is now more realistic, in terms of its purpose and its relationship to their own future education. The importance of this step cannot be underestimated. Supporting schools to raise student outcome levels is important, but the longer term goals of the project rely heavily upon students accepting that university is a place where they are welcome and “belong”.

Compass provides many students with their first experience of university life

In a similar way, students interviewed for the evaluation, particularly those at secondary level appeared to be much better equipped to describe the pathway that they need to undertake in order to achieve entry to the University for whatever course they wish to pursue. While the success of the Compass program in raising awareness about the university should not be underestimated, it has also been acknowledged that the more difficult challenge for both schools and the Compass program is how students can be supported to foresee that a higher education pathway is both desirable and possible, and to understand
the level of effort and engagement from early stages of schooling that are necessary to reach the levels of achievement to which they aspire.

According to teachers interviewed, many students have very unrealistic ideas about the level of effort required, and little understanding of standards expected outside their own environments. For this reason, the issue of where Compass resources can be best targeted has been a continuing concern during the program. It is clear that this decision must be made within the particular context of each school involved, but a mix of broad scale activities at younger years, followed by more selective targeting of students at more senior years is most successful. Many schools have identified that the “second tier” of students, who have potential but not automatically considering higher education, are the most appropriate targets for Compass support.

The role of the Principal and/or school leadership team

After three years of implementation with the original schools, and more recently after one year of implementation with the new schools in 2011, the single most influential factor on the overall success and positioning of the program is the role that the school Principal and/or leadership team has adopted in ensuring that the Compass program is positioned as a whole school priority.

The role of the Principal was pivotal to the initial success of Compass, and remains so as the program evolves. Principal engagement with the implementation of the program has tended to increase over time in the majority of schools actively participating in Compass. This commitment is particularly reflected in the Principal’s willingness to identify the implementation of the Compass program as an important priority in the school’s annual Action Plan in the majority of schools.

Two complimentary levels of leadership are emerging. In the first instance the Principal holds responsibility for the strategic leadership of the initiative through ensuring that it is part of the whole school strategic plan and annual Action Plan, thereby ensuring its day to day importance with all of the accompanying implications for planning, budgeting, implementation, measurement and reporting.

At a second level however, the Compass Coordinator, having been given a mandate by the school Principal, takes responsibility for the day-to-day coordination of the implementation of the Compass program and ensures its integration with existing strategic priorities, syllabus requirements and teachers’ day to day activities in classrooms.

The Compass program has clearly demonstrated how important it is that school leaders provide regular opportunities and a supportive framework within which teachers can openly discuss their successes and failures in relation to the Compass program, including what seems to be working most effectively, and so share these ideas with their colleagues.

The importance of the Hub structure

In the early stages of this program, schools were organised within a hub structure whereby the opportunity was provided for primary schools to network with each other as well as the local high school, which many students from the feeder primary schools eventually attend. In the early stages of implementation of this program, participating schools, both primary and secondary, were so heavily engaged in implementing the program that networking with other participating schools became a relatively low priority.
However, as the Compass program has become more embedded in schools, some participants are now searching for collaboration to become even better in the implementation process than they are at present. The notion of networking within these hubs is a growing phenomenon and should continue to be nurtured because of the early success that is occurring. It should be noted that in one cluster, where the original high school has chosen not to continue in the program, a replacement high school has been recruited for 2012 onwards. This will ensure that the foundations laid through the work undertaken by the enthusiastically participating primary schools in this hub is continued. Earlier stages of the evaluation have shown the importance of continuity across all secondary school years for keeping the goals of Compass, in terms of high aspirations and awareness of the possibilities for higher education pathways in the forefront of students’ minds. Should the Compass program continue in future, further attention may be given as to how the hub concept can be further developed to sustain the successes observed thus far.

**Increasing sustainability by building on the notion of mutual obligation**

In the early stages of the Compass program during 2009 and early 2010, many of the activities undertaken by schools were provided free of cost. In many ways, this situation was neither sustainable nor desirable, in that it creates a level of dependency on external funding and does not require any great level of commitment from the participants.

By 2011, Principals have become much more amenable to considering the expenditure of school funds to assist in the continuation of the program. It is possible that the same level of funding will not be available to schools from SIU in the future. This may require schools to contribute further funds from their own budgets to ensure the continuity of their schools’ participation in Compass activities. According to some Principals from participating schools, this budgetary support could include the provision of teaching and learning resources in the classroom, but more importantly, may also involve subsidising travel costs for students to continue to engage in activities at the university and other learning experiences planned and offered through Compass.

![](image)

*Visits to the university campus have been invaluable in raising awareness and broadening horizons*

It should be noted that some Principals have correctly identified that the notion of mutual obligation extends further than monetary considerations alone, but concerns the development of stronger, lasting partnerships between the university and schools. This
requires two-way commitment by both parties. Such arrangements have not been the norm in many schools that often view “partnerships” in very instrumental terms rather than lasting relationships. Yet there appears in the case of the Compass program to be an opportunity for the schools to build lasting partnerships with the SIU that can have a mutual benefit for all parties concerned.

The influential role of parents in students’ career planning

In response to the research literature demonstrating the key role of parents and carers in influencing students’ career and higher education decision-making, a key intention of the Compass program was to build parental aspirations for their children’s future education and career, on the assumption that the parents will consistently engage in conversations about post school education for their children, conversations often started by classroom teachers. Yet, despite these good intentions and the evidence before us, schools appear to be more challenged than ever in attracting large numbers of parents into the important conversations about children's future education and their aspirations. It should be noted that the ability to engage with parents is an issue not confined to the Compass program but is a more widespread challenge.

Teachers recognise that this challenge in engaging with parents is not indicative of a lack of interest in their children’s education, but a result of many complex circumstances, including cultural influences as well as in some instances a lack of time or confidence to engage with schools at the level that they would wish for. Under these circumstances the strategies undertaken by most schools participating in this program is to ensure that the parents are adequately informed about what the teachers are doing in relation to students’ aspirations and encouraging the parents to have the conversations that are necessary to underline the importance of the journey in post school education.

Students, teachers and parents learning together, Bass HS, 2011
The need to further develop strategies for engaging parents has been recognised in each year of implementation of the Compass program and remains a high priority. Schools recognise they have achieved success in supporting parents who were already concerned and equipped to support their children pursue higher education pathways, but must now focus on building the capacity of those parents who currently do not understand the potential benefit of tertiary education and other post-school educational experiences for their children. It is also acknowledged that this is a major challenge that could take several years to change, as it represents a very different belief system and set of values for some parents, irrespective of the ongoing language and communication challenges.

**Links to classroom practice**

The design of the Compass program clearly recognises that the relationship between teacher and student and the learning facilitated by the teacher lies at the core of the overall achievement of Compass outcomes. Combined with the benefits that have accrued from professional learning opportunities in the National Partnerships initiative, many teachers are now expressing their satisfaction in their new-found ability to position the Compass learning experiences within the broader curriculum. This often involves using the Compass program excursions, guest speakers and related initiatives as a catalyst for learning and integration across a range of Key Learning Areas, so that students now accept Compass activities as a part of their normal routine.

Linking classroom learning with university resources has increased curriculum relevance of Compass activities
Such integration has not only assisted student learning but given the teachers greater confidence to explore other Compass program opportunities that can be readily incorporated into the classroom and shared with colleagues at both year and Stage levels. The opportunity to engage in professional dialogue with colleagues about Compass learning experiences and how they are being planned and implemented is continuing to add value in many schools. The Compass program has responded to previous recommendations to increase the relevance of university experiences by, for example, providing pre and post excursion learning activities for teachers to use in their classrooms. The future development of the Compass program should similarly consider how schools can continue to build the opportunities provided through Compass into a coherent scope and sequence of experiences.

School—University relationships and Compass program administration

Schools have greatly appreciated accessibility of Compass program staff and their willingness to provide immediate practical solutions when required. Several schools have talked about the relationship with the University in terms of a partnership where both parties are well respected and engage in significant collaboration. Schools are generally appreciative of the extent to which they are kept informed about Compass related issues and events and the willingness of staff to “go the extra mile” to assist them.

Schools have genuinely appreciated the sensitive understanding that Compass Coordinators have expressed in response to the distinctive nature of each school setting, the associated challenges that result from that setting, and the particular goals they have set for the Compass programs in their schools. Teachers in schools have valued the openness in communication and the ability to be able to access the level of support provided by the Coordinators often at very short notice. The attentive assistance provided by the Compass Coordinators in facilitating cultural and structural change in schools has been very important. These findings point to the importance of continuing the roles of the Compass administration team, including the facilitators with direct responsibility for liaison with school.

There is a strong desire from schools for further engagement of staff across the university in general faculty areas in ongoing relationships. There are several examples of where this is already occurring which may provide a model for future practice. Faculty engagement has grown considerably over the last 3 years. More than 20 events are planned for 2012 including experience days introduction to university for Year 3 and Year 7 students; specific days for Indigenous students in years 7 and 11 & 12; a year 9 science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) day; a hub-based parent events of campus and showcase. Each of the events has really high engagement of faculties (15 out of 17 faculties engage in these events regularly each year). Compass has a number of ongoing embedded projects in schools through faculty engagement (e.g. Engineering, Education, Sydney College of the Arts, Science, Arts). A number of faculties have professional development projects for teachers, and also offer opportunities for students to engage in established faculty initiatives. The University’s Widening Participation Grants program has provided a vehicle for continued engagement, and many faculty members are active in the University’s Widening Participation Network.

The engagement of university students in schools

University student volunteers have been an important element of the Compass program since its inception. Their yellow-shirted presence has been a very visible and recognizable
“face” for the program in many schools. Student volunteers not only provide tangible assistance to school students, as Word Up tutors; providing mentoring for secondary students, working in homework centres, assisting at university open days and activities like film-making and science experiments. Regardless of the kind of experience undertaken, the university students believed that it had been a good experience for them, broadening their cultural horizons. They found that they enjoyed it more than they had expected, because they felt that they were really making a difference and helping the school students achieve something from their input, for example in “seeing the younger students become proud of themselves”. Some volunteers felt that they had a better understanding of how to relate to individuals as a consequence of their experience.

The volunteers attributed their success in working with the young people to the fact that they provided an opportunity for the young people to relate to an adult who had the time to listen to them and provide them with individual attention. Being consistently available was recognized as a key factor in contributing to this success. The continued employment of an identified university student volunteer coordinator appears to be pivotal to the successful recruitment, training, deployment and monitoring of volunteers in any future iteration of Compass.
Building cultural capital from early school years has been a unique aspect of Compass
4. Significant achievements

Since the inception of the Compass initiative, a broad range of achievements has occurred in relation to its overall intentions during the implementation of the pilot phase. The following statements represent consistently recurring achievements identified by a broad range of stakeholders involved in the program:

- The Compass initiative has consistently contributed towards The University of Sydney's goals for social inclusion and community participation, particularly in terms of the program's potential to proactively build wider relationships between the University and the broader education community.

- The Compass initiative has introduced a significant number of both primary and secondary students, as well as teachers and parents to the notion and purpose of a University and the University of Sydney in particular.

- The Compass initiative has made a significant contribution towards a culture of learning engagement for students at both primary and secondary levels that would not have been possible otherwise. This cultural change has been driven by a range of interesting and appropriate student learning opportunities provided by the University’s Social Inclusion Unit.

- Through the program significant numbers of students have increased their awareness of what university life entails. A greater number of secondary students have consequently built a positive view of the University as a potential prerequisite for developing an appropriate career path in the future.

- The vast majority of schools that commenced the program in 2009 have willingly continued with the program because of the outcomes already achieved for both students and teachers, while other potential schools demonstrate a keen interest to join the program if at all possible.

- Several schools have engaged with the program to the extent that it is now identified as a key priority in the school’s Annual Action Plan focus on sustained energy and resources. This has also meant that the program has become integrated into the overall learning experiences for students within the school.

- In all of the Compass schools, there has been a greater awareness and acceptance amongst teachers of the need for higher academic expectations for their students, and increased commitment to making higher education pathways possible. This aligns with wider government and regional priorities.

- The Compass initiative is building a reputation as a valuable contributor towards ongoing professional learning for teachers, due to its promotion and practical and targeted provision of appropriate professional learning experiences.

- The program has been able to attract increasing number of volunteers from University student on a year by year basis, reflecting the perceived value of the program for volunteers themselves as well as delivering tangible benefits for students, for example, assistance with the Multi-lit program and the provision of Occupational Therapy assistance for students in need.
The list of achievements highlighted above reflects the growing impact that the program has had students, teachers and parents as well as other members of the broader education community. Nevertheless, these achievements represent the outcome of constructive leadership by the Social Inclusion Unit as well as high levels of commitment and hard work by Principals, teachers and other members of the community in participating schools.

In addition personnel from the Social Inclusion Unit have been consistently responsive to the feedback from ongoing evaluation record as well as school. In this way they have been proactive in seeking to enhance the effectiveness of the program, reflecting an ongoing commitment to continuous improvement of Compass in its various forms.

Key Success Factors

The data however has identified a range of success factors that have significantly influenced the achievements highlighted above. Each of the key success factors is listed below:

- Tailoring of activities to suit individual school needs — Compass is not a “one size fits all” model
- Successively embedding Compass activities into the school’s mainstream curriculum, so that it is not an add-on but an integral part of students’ learning
Establishing a single point of contact for Compass in most schools, which has encouraged efficient communication (while also providing strong back office or behind the scenes support)

Working with identified school, university and community participants, ensuring positive commitment is further built upon

Financial support from one DEC region, which has facilitated planning in that region

Strong initial emphasis on awareness raising has led to high profile of Compass in participating schools

Leadership from the university has increased school understanding of issues underpinning higher education participation, and matched school staff willingness to engage

School staff recognition of the needs that can be met through participating in Compass, and acceptance of the usefulness of Compass in delivering useful support to meet those needs.

Strong communication at all levels of the program has been the hallmark of many successful schools. This has included not only communication between school and Compass program staff but also internal communication operating on a two way regular basis.

Hands on experiences have been key to engaging students in Compass activities

Expansion of the Compass initiative

The expansion of the Compass program into a cluster of secondary schools in the Metropolitan area, and outreach into a fairly isolated part of NSW was a significant element of the program in 2011. This expansion was preceded by an extensive process of consultation and negotiation with the new schools. All of these new schools volunteered for the program, in contrast to the first round of schools, not all of whom were enthusiastic
about their nomination. Some of the initially reluctant schools subsequently embraced the initiative more fully, but a few remained limited in their engagement.

The new schools came to the initiative with a clear understanding of what Compass could offer them. There was strong alignment between the schools’ needs and the goals of Compass in relation to increasing the number of students aspiring to or going on to higher education. Compass’s intention of involving students early in secondary schooling rather than simply orientation for Year 12 students also accorded strongly with schools’ own strategies and regional targets. There was also strong alignment perceived between the professional development offered for teachers and the current quality teaching agenda. The new schools tended to have a clear idea about which students could benefit most from Compass support. This has also aligned with the intentions of other national programs as part of the agenda for better assisting students from low socio-economic backgrounds. There are important lessons to be learned from the experience of engagement of new schools in the program, including the importance of extensive preparation and planning that can be applied in any further expansion that may be contemplated.

It should be noted that the innovative nature of University of Sydney Compass model has been recognised nationally, as is now forming a model for other institutions. For example, the University has formed a partnership with the University of Adelaide in 2012. A new program, Adelaide Compass, is being established in Adelaide’s north with a pilot program at Mark Oliphant College, before being rolled out to other schools in the Peachey Belt Cluster of northern Adelaide.

In addition, Compass has formed the basis for a new initiative, the Bridges to Higher Education program, which is a unique collaboration bringing together the collective resources and experience of five universities: the University of Sydney, the University of Technology, Sydney, the Australian Catholic University, the University of Western Sydney, and Macquarie University. Bridges aims to improve the participation in higher education of students from low socio-economic communities.

Compass has given students confidence to succeed in new environments.
5. Impact of Compass on attitudes, aspirations and achievement

Over the course of the evaluation, qualitative and quantitative data was gathered each year, and reported in the annual progress reports. Five key outcomes for the Compass program were tracked: Student attainment, Student aspirations, Teacher engagement, Teacher aspirations and Parent aspirations. Given the plethora of other state and Commonwealth interventions simultaneously taking place in many of the Compass schools, it is impossible to separate out the effects on standardised measures such as NAPLAN results that may be due uniquely to Compass.

However, it should be noted that there have been outcomes observed by teachers in areas not covered by formal measurements. Areas in which improvements have been noted include student motivation, interest in learning, engagement in class and self-confidence. Gains in these areas have been attributed to the individual support provided through Compass initiatives including Word Up, speech pathology, and individual mentoring activities. These gains have been highly valued by the schools involved.

Across all of the schools in the Compass program, it is important to note that in addition to the variation between schools, there is also considerable variation within the schools. The average figures for these schools disguise the fact that, within each school, there are groups of students who perform well or at the mid-range and who could well matriculate at a level that would support successful learning at university level. In secondary schools, Compass has provided mentors, study skills courses and enrichment programs that cater for this cohort. However in primary schools, there has been a preference for both remediation on an individual student level of low-performing students (through, for example Word Up and speech pathology) and for whole cohort “taster” activities giving experience of the university environment. In both cases, schools value the input of Compass in providing opportunities that would have been otherwise difficult or impossible for them to provide. The speech therapy and occupational therapy programs provided through Compass, for example, are particularly well regarded by primary schools.

Overall performance by students in participating schools in both numeracy and literacy is generally less than expected for students aiming for an HSC result that will qualify them for university entrance. These results are therefore an important indicator of the need for attainment levels early in secondary schooling to be enhanced by intervention efforts. Compass now provides access to experiences for students from Year 3 to Year 12. Compass is seen to be supportive of the schools’ desires to open up the possibility of a higher education pathway to a greater percentage of their cohort, and is perceived to be an important component of the development of a positive learning culture in these schools, particularly the schools volunteering to join the program in 2011.

Student aspirations

Data collected over the three year pilot period shows that the overwhelming majority of students in the Compass sample have positive views about their schools. Students overwhelmingly believed that their schools are safe, that they are well regarded by their teachers and peers, and they look forward to going to school each day. The vast majority of
primary students also report that their lessons are engaging and interesting, that they work hard, and that they understand why it is important to do so. They believe their teachers listen to what they have to say, that teachers are approachable, and they see themselves as successful learners. The one area in which views are not as positive concerns academic risk taking as fewer students reported that they were prepared to answer questions in class they were not sure of. Figure 1 above shows that the large majority of secondary students in Compass schools say they are likely to continue their education beyond Year 12, with nearly half of the survey respondents strongly agreeing to this question.

Figure 1: Secondary student responses to the question, “I am likely to continue my education beyond Year 12”, 2009-2011 average

The implication for Compass from these findings is that there is a very positive base of student engagement to work with within these schools (and the schools new to the program in 2011. Coupled with awareness raising activities that provide students and parents with a better understanding of what a university education entails, there is fertile ground for Compass to assist the schools involved to realize their aspirations.

Students see new pathways and possibilities through Compass experiences
As seen in Figure 2 below, the vast majority of students said they often talked to their parents about their school work, and had discussed with their parents future career pathways. In the majority of cases, it appears that parents are highly supportive of their children’s continuing education, without necessarily being actively involved in their children’s education.

Figure 2: Secondary student responses to the statement “My parents often talk to me about what I can do in the future” 2009-2011

Teacher engagement

The findings indicate that the program is well embedded in the majority of schools originally nominated for participation. In many of the schools, Compass is officially recognised within the schools’ management plan. Teacher engagement is reflected in measures such as:

- Teacher participation in and completion of Compass capacity-building courses and workshops across a range of curriculum areas;
- Teacher enthusiasm and interest in Compass student-focussed activities, including the level of preparation and follow-up given to Compass excursions and activities like Science in the City;
- Teacher participation and completion in early-career teacher mentoring programs; and
- Teacher enrolment and progression in post-graduate degrees and diplomas.

While the level at which teachers are engaged tends to vary considerably within individual schools, the general trend observed was an increase in the level of engagement of teachers in primary schools, but a mixed level of engagement in secondary schools. Engagement of teachers in primary schools has been greatly enhanced by the development of activities for use in classrooms before and after Compass events, which has greatly increased the curriculum relevance of participation in such events. In the original set of secondary schools, high levels of interest in the program tend to be confined to one or a few teachers,
however, the display of Compass materials in school foyers, articles in school newsletters, and the presence of yellow-shirted Compass volunteers and staff have all helped to raise the profile of the program across participating schools. Importantly, many teachers who accompanied students to Compass events initially saw their role as being largely supervisory, but now take a much more active role and use the events as a springboard for broader discussions with students back in the school setting.

The Compass initiative has clearly demonstrated how important it is that school leaders provide regular opportunities and a supportive framework within which teachers can openly discuss their successes and failures in relation to the Compass initiative, including what seems to be working most effectively, and so share these ideas with their colleagues. Examples of comments from teachers about Compass demonstrate this trend:

*Compass is one of the things that we always talk about in our Stage meetings.*

*My colleagues and I see a real synergy between what is happening in the National Partnerships and what we are trying to do through the Compass program.*

*I feel more confident now to talk about aspirations for future education with students. Before I just didn't know enough about what was involved.*

*I can now see how the Compass program can help me with my own learning as well as the students’. That has to be a real bonus and has helped my commitment to the program.*

*I talk with the students a lot more now about what they could do at university and what they need to do to get there. For many students the pathway from school to university just isn't clear. I can see that if I don't talk to them about that pathway nobody else will.*

Students had high recall of Compass activities and spoke eagerly about them with family members.
Teacher aspirations

The findings demonstrate that overall teacher aspirations for their students are quite positive. Examination of the individual survey items shows that teachers believe that they are providing their students with a safe and supportive environment, that their lessons are engaging and interesting, and that they treat children fairly and are concerned for their well-being.

Figure 3 below shows that over the period that Compass has operated, there has been an increase in the percentage of teachers who say that academic achievement is a high priority in their school. As with all of the data collected for this evaluation, this result is not solely attributable to Compass (increasing academic aspirations has also been a feature of the National Partnership for Literacy and Numeracy, for example), however, it is consistent with increased motivation on the part of teachers to help students aspire to the high levels of academic achievement necessary for success at university.

Figure 3: Teacher responses to survey question “Academic achievement is a high priority in this school”, All Compass Schools, 2009-2011
6. Conclusions and recommendations

Key conclusions

At the conclusion of the three-year pilot period commencing in 2009, the findings presented in the annual reports and summarised above clearly indicates the significant progress that the Compass initiative has achieved towards meeting its objectives. As the name of the program itself suggests, the initiative has manifestly enhanced the capacity for students in disadvantaged areas to “find their way to higher education”. The qualitative and quantitative evaluation findings both indicate the positive impact that the Compass program as a whole has had on the key stakeholders engaged in this initiative.

It is fair to conclude that Compass has contributed to the social and cultural capital of participants, to an extent that would not have been possible without the focus and direction provided by Compass staff and the funding provided to facilitate engagement in on-campus activities. The initiative has a high degree of acceptance and recognition in the schools that have remained engaged from the outset and those who have recently joined the program.

At the same time, Compass has provided an effective vehicle for the University to work towards its wider social inclusion objectives, including increased engagement of university staff and students with the wider community. The success of the Compass university student volunteer recruitment process and the increasing engagement of faculty members in experience days and professional development for teachers are testimony to this effort.

The program of activities sponsored by Compass has already demonstrated benefits for students in terms of their aspirations for future education. For example, school students at all levels now have a greater understanding of what happens at a university; what is required to gain entrance into a university course; and what benefits a university education can provide. This understanding is expressed in various ways. Primary students have identified the need to work assiduously to ensure that they can achieve university entrance, while secondary students now have better understanding about entrance requirements and are following a path way towards university or another form of post secondary education, such as TAFE. The university experiences have also allowed school students to contemplate a wider range of career options and possibilities.

For many teachers, their engagement in the Compass program has not only enabled them to become a more effective “broker” for building students’ aspirations and charting a pathway towards further education. Their participation in the program has also broadened their own perspective about what students can achieve both now and in the future, particularly when the pathway towards future education is carefully articulated and explained. However the added benefit for teachers has been the opportunity to enhance their own pedagogy, through both in classroom learning experiences with experts but also through the attendance of professional learning opportunities offered by Sydney University staff.

Teachers in participating schools over the three years have increasingly acknowledged and appreciated the support provided by Compass program staff on both administrative and educational issues that have helped to facilitate the smooth delivery of the program in schools. Teachers consistently report that Compass program staff understand and respect the distinctive nature of the schools in which they operate and provide tailored advice that
is helpful to teachers in addressing both short and long term issues relating to the objectives of the Compass program. For this, teachers have expressed great appreciation.

What made the university experience a success may be summarised as follows:

- Skilled presenters able to pitch learning at the school students’ level
- Engaging, hands on activities
- Flexibility in responding to schools’ needs and emerging circumstances
- Active engagement of the Compass team in coordinating access, setting expectations, smoothing the way, and resolving issues.

From the schools’ perspective, success depended on:

- Having a dedicated, informed and motivated coordinator at the school
- The need to develop density of ownership among school staff to maintain momentum
- Having funding available both through Compass and from other Commonwealth government sources (without which the level of engagement to date would not have been possible)
- Strong communication between all partners
- Having a defined strategy and purpose for the partnership (“not just a feel good exercise”) or short term activities
- Taking a long term view of the engagement as a continuing partnership.

The schools that have joined the program in 2011 have been most enthusiastic, well-organised and strongly committed to the outcomes and processes that characterise the Compass program. While they have only been in the program for one year, the level of student and teacher participation and emerging impact has been positive. The early progress of the schools clearly highlight the importance of the future selection process for schools participating in the Compass program, particularly in terms of their motivation and willingness to participate in the program to enhance student learning outcomes.

Many schools have ensured that Compass becomes a high priority in the school through incorporating the program into the annual school Action Plan as a major priority. Many of the teachers engaged in the program are now ready to begin to measure their success through using a range of simple initiatives, for example, student self-evaluations and teacher self-evaluations. It is therefore timely that teachers begin to build the measurement of their effectiveness into the implementation process that has been directed thus far through the annual school Action Plan.

Parent participation in school related matters continues to be one of the greatest emerging challenges confronting school executives and teachers, most of them being acutely aware of the significant advantages for student learning that can be gained by engaging parents in school-related issues. It is worth noting that in 2011 Compass worked with five other universities in Sydney to engage parents, for example, through development of a DVD for parents and some resources which are available online (see http://www.swphec.edu.au/parents/index.shtml).

Compass also trained 68 DET Community Liaison Officers, with the intention that they could run sessions with parent groups in their own school communities. It may be that the reach
of Compass with parents is greater than appears from the program records of attendance at events, as parents are being reached in a different way.

**Major recommendations**

As the program continues to mature and expand in 2012, there remain further opportunities to continue to refine particular aspects of the program. These areas have been identified in the discussion above. Each of these is designed to maximise the leverage the program can make in increasing aspirations and attainment as students continue their active participation in Compass related activities. The recommendations below are therefore designed to further refine and enhance what has now become a very successful program for both participating primary and secondary school students and their teachers.

It is therefore recommended that Compass program staff:

- continue efforts to creatively engage parents in the Compass program, thereby increasing parent awareness and aspiration. Compass program staff work with schools to implement a range of initiatives that will increasingly engage parents in the program as it becomes embedded into school activities
- work with school leaders and Coordinators to ensure the ongoing integration of Compass program initiatives with the ongoing learning occurring in classroom. This can be achieved through the provision of ongoing programming ideas that highlight the link between the Compass learning activities and a range of Key Learning Areas
- continue to work with Coordinators and school leaders to ensure that the Compass program remains a high priority in each school's annual Action Plan
- initiate discussions with school Coordinators and school leaders to help them to build effective measures that would measure teacher/classroom and whole school success in achieving Compass program objectives, as they relate to the whole school annual Action Plan
- continue to work with Coordinators to assist them to help teachers (in secondary schools particularly) to identify the pathway for students between career aspirations and post school education
- work with teachers and school leaders to actively promote the Compass brand to increase explicit recognition of the contribution of The University of Sydney
- increasingly target secondary schools who are willing to participate in the Compass program and have understanding and great empathy for its objectives, as a prerequisite for ongoing participation
- continue to promote the notion of the Hub arrangements established earlier to ensure ongoing networking among participating schools and the continuity of the Compass program from primary schools into feeder secondary schools
- consider carefully the future selection of participating schools within cooperative Hub arrangements.

Each of the recommendations above is intended only to continue to refine a program which has evolved over three years in a way that has demonstrated significant success for students, teachers and the broader school community. The ongoing role of leadership and coordination by Compass program staff cannot be underestimated as a significant influence upon this success.