Social Ventures Australia – Bright Spots Schools Connection

www.socialventures.com.au/work/sva-bright-spots-schools-connection

Innovation

The SVA Bright Spots Schools Connection (The Connection) supports exceptional school leaders in disadvantaged schools to improve the outcomes of their students. The Connection empowers school leaders to advance their work and builds a network of exceptional educators. By supporting a coalition of Australia's most talented school leaders, SVA seeks to ensure that their work is furthered and that the Australian education system is informed by these schools' examples.

The Connection finds Bright Spots Schools that are achieving great student outcomes in challenging circumstances. Once these schools have been identified, SVA:

▸ Invest capital in talented and proven school leaders to autonomously further their work;

▸ Network the school leaders quarterly to share practice and learn from each other; and

▸ Contribute to a national evidence base of what it takes to be a successful school leader in low SES schools.

In challenged communities, schools provide more than just a place of learning; they're a source of stability. School leaders therefore assume a heightened role in the lives of their students. Great school leaders enable better education outcomes and are shifting the dial of social disadvantage in Australia. Illustrative of a SVA Bright Spot school is Dandenong North Primary School.

Dandenong North Primary School (DNPS) is a Prep to Year six government school in South-Eastern Melbourne, Victoria. The school has over 600 students, with 70% coming from families with a low SES context. The student population has an enormous diversity of cultural and language backgrounds. This includes 46% who were born outside Australia and 60 school families who have arrived in Australia in the past 12 months. 80% of the students speak at least one of 52 languages other than English as their main language at home.

The Bright Spots Schools Connection has enabled DNPS to invest in the professional development of their new teachers. Like many schools in low SES communities, DNPS has a large representation of new teachers in their staff. New teachers typically require greater levels of professional support to accelerate their effectiveness in classroom. Therefore, to further develop their excellent student outcomes, DNPS are using the capital provided by SVA to invest in comprehensive mentoring and coaching for their new teachers.

DNPS are accelerating the effectiveness of their new teachers by providing daily observation, appraisal, and feedback sessions with peers and teacher mentors. New teachers are released from classroom duties to observe classes of recognised highly effective teachers. DNPS are also investing in the external training of their teacher mentors to deliver effective feedback and appraisal when observing new teachers.

Despite this project only being implemented since Term 2 2014, the school leaders of DNPS have seen a notable acceleration in confidence of their new teacher cohort. This confidence is translating to improvements in teaching quality at a rate that the DNPS school leaders have not before seen. By accelerating the professional growth of DNPS new teachers will help ensure that every student is taught by an effective teacher, every day.

Outcomes

A central aim of SVA through The Connection is to improve knowledge and extend the evidence-base on what works to advance education outcomes in disadvantaged communities. To this end, SVA seeks to find, evaluate and support the growth of these 'Bright Spots' in education to help move Australia towards a 'Bright System.'

Examples include

Improving	What might help you notice whether improvements are being made? Through… Evidence and approaches, such as
Teacher quality	• The core competencies and capabilities of school leaders of the Bright Spot schools who develop strategic successful school partnerships explored through: ▸ Comparative analysis of Bright Spot schools and leaders. ▸ Student learning growth outcomes (e.g. school data and student feedback). ▸ Staff feedback and appraisal (including classroom observations). ▸ Teacher surveys. ▸ Staff retention rates.

Lessons learned

We know that evaluating what we do is critical to understanding what successful school leadership in low SES schools does to improve the education outcomes in disadvantaged communities. So the Australian Council for Education Research (ACER) is independently evaluating The Connection. This is a five-year evaluation partnership that is to address two key objectives:

▸ Identify the unique competencies and capabilities of effective school leaders in Bright Spots Powerhouse schools

▸ Measure the impact of the Bright Spots initiative on these schools. ACER is seeking to find the 'counterfactual', that is, what would have been the case in these schools had Bright Spots not been in place.

Through the evaluation, unintended consequences (good and bad) are also being identified.

Work in partnership and develop formative feedback loops: It is important to work with a highly credible and independent evaluation partner, in this case ACER. As part of the evaluation design, we have developed various feedback loops *with* ACER. These include:

▸ Having teams from SVA and ACER ensured that time was well spent co-designing an evaluation process that took into consideration all stakeholder needs. It included ensuring that demands on schools were carefully engineered to be considerate of competing priorities for limited school resources.

▸ Ensuring that processes of data collection are efficient, but also sufficiently comprehensive to collect what details were important.

Complimenting the above, SVA team members visit schools twice a term in support of school teams and to broker partner relationships such as the important relationship with ACER. These and other processes provide 'check points' for us all on how we are progressing. This helps develop trust in each other and in the evaluation processes. We use the evidence gathered through these feedback processes to inform the project design and any necessary adjustments.

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