

**Enabling participation of diverse families study:**

**Preliminary Report  
to the Federation of P&Cs**

**Family Survey**

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## **1. Background**

This report provides preliminary results from a study of parental participation commissioned by the Federation of Parents & Citizens' Association of New South Wales. It is the first stage of a larger study which includes: surveys of parents; surveys of principals; and, focus groups with parents.

This preliminary report documents the findings of the family survey. The family survey was distributed to a random sample of 10% of public schools in New South Wales (drawn from the Department of Education list of public schools). 224 schools were identified, although a number of these did not currently have a parent-body. As a result surveys were sent to 200 P&Cs.

## **2. Sample**

In Term 4 2007 a letter was sent to 200 randomly selected P&C bodies throughout New South Wales. Each letter contained 10 blank surveys, with the P&C secretary asked to distribute these surveys to active members and potential members. Active members were defined as people who had attended 2 or more P&C activities in the past 12 months. Potential members were defined as people not involved in P&C activities but with children at that school. As at February 2008 a total of 341 completed individual survey were returned from 64 schools. This represents a response rate of 32% of P&Cs, which is more than acceptable by general standards.

Analysis in this report was undertaken with Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 16. This report presents descriptive data, including frequencies and cross-tabulations by key characteristics. Further analysis will be undertaken for the final report.

## **3. The respondents**

This section provides a brief profile of the respondents to the Family Survey. A more comprehensive profile is provided in section 6 below. This section details key characteristics including: participation in P&C; geographic distribution; level of school; and cultural diversity.

Table 1 shows that over two thirds of respondents were active members in P&C activities. The number of responses from potential members, however, enables comparison between the groups.

**Table 1: Participation in P&C**

	Number of Responses	Percentage (n=341)
Yes	233	68.3
No	104	30.5
Total	337	98.8
No answer	4	1.2
Total	341	100

There was no particular bias in responses by gender across the state, although a greater proportion of women respondents were from country towns. All respondents from remote communities were English speakers. Over three quarters of Non-English speaking background respondents were from Greater Metropolitan Sydney whilst Indigenous respondents were spread across the State (with the exception of remote locations).

**Table 2: Where do you live?**

	Number of Responses	Percent
Greater Metropolitan Sydney	104	30.5
Coastal	58	17.0
Regional	61	17.9
Country town	91	26.7
Remote	18	5.3
Total	332	97.4
No answer	9	2.6
	341	100.0

Responses from the various levels of schooling was similar to overall school patterns, with no evident bias. 3.8% of responses were from infant schools, 67.7% from primary schools, 0.6% from central schools and 22.6% from secondary schools. Over half of responses from parents with secondary school children came from the Greater Sydney Metropolitan Area.

**Table 3: Level of school**

	Number of Responses	Percent
Infants	13	3.8
Primary	231	67.7
Central	2	.6
Secondary	77	22.6
Total	323	94.7
No answer	18	5.3
	341	100.0

Table 4 below indicates that the vast majority of respondents were from English speaking background. Whilst only a small group, the proportion of Indigenous parents in the sample is similar to their proportion in the general population. Responses from Non-English speaking background parents is much lower than the general population. This cultural profile is not surprising given the lack of representation in P&Cs identified by the Federation, which was a catalyst for this study.

**Table 4: Respondents' cultural backgrounds**

	Number of Responses	Percent
Indigenous Australian	11	3.2
English speaking	295	86.5
Non-English speaking	28	8.2
No answer	7	2.1
	341	100.0

#### **4. Active members**

This section reports on the survey responses of active members in relation to their motivation for participation, activities and the time involved. Only those actively involved in the P&C answered these question (n=233).

#### 4.1 Why did you become involved in the P&C?

Table 5 below shows that the predominant reason for becoming involved was to contribute to their children's school experience. For many parents the P&C enabled them to support the work of teachers as well as finding out about the school. For half of the respondents a sense of social responsibility (contributing something back to my community) was a motivating source. Unlike other forms of volunteering concrete personal benefits (such as learning new skills, wanting new challenges and even to some extent social interactions) were less important.

**Table 5: Why did you become involved in the P&C?**

	*Number of Responses	Percentage (n=233)
Contribute to children's school experience	202	86.7%
Contribute something back to my community	118	50.6%
Support the work of teachers	142	60.9%
Influence the running of the school	91	39.1%
Friends or family members involved in P&C	39	16.7%
Find out about the school	141	60.5%
Find help with a school problem	24	10.3%
Learn new skills	24	10.3%
Knew P&C needed new members	56	24.0%
Wanted new challenges	26	11.2%
Social interactions	56	24.0%
Other	11	4.7%

\* More than one answer was possible.

Cross tabulation analysis of the data by location revealed consistent differences between remote respondents and other respondents. Whilst there were a limited number of remote responses these were much higher on all factors except finding out about the school, help with a school problem and knew P&C needed new members. Their unique experience was evident in the 70.6% of remote respondents saw the P&C as an opportunity for social interactions compared to 11% of country town respondents. Contributing to their child's schooling (83.3%) and supporting the work of teachers (77.8%) was also much more important to remote respondents than other respondents.

There was little differences between the motivations of men and women, although men were more likely to be motivated by a desire to contribute something back to their community (53.5% compared to 32.4%) as well as responding to the need for new members (25.0% compared to 15.4%).

For parents of non-English speaking backgrounds P&C involvement was motivated by a desire to find out more about the school, gain new skills and take up a new challenge. For Indigenous parents P&C involvement enabled them to influence the running of the school and facilitated social interactions.

There were only minor differences between motivations and school levels. Those respondents with children in primary schools were slightly more likely to be motivated by a desire to influence the school, support teachers and contribute to their child's education than other parents. For those respondents with children in secondary schools the P&C played a much lower role in creating social interactions.

## **4.2 Tasks or activities**

Respondents were asked to indicate the type of activities or tasks they undertook with the P&C. Once again only those active members completed this question (n=233) and more than one answer was possible. Table 6 below indicates that fundraising was by far and away the major task undertaken by respondents with the P&C. Nearly half of respondents were also involved in food preparation or canteen activities.

**Table 6: Tasks undertaken through P&C**

	Number of Responses	Percentage (n=233)
Administration/clerical	92	39.0%
Fundraising	171	72.5%
Repairing/maintenance	48	20.3%
Food preparation/canteen	115	48.7%
Information dissemination	51	21.6%
Lobbying/advocacy	36	15.3%
Teaching/classroom assistance	70	29.7%
Transporting people/goods	46	19.5%
Other	26	11.0%

Respondents with children in primary school were much more likely to be involved in fundraising, repairs/maintenance, classroom assistance and transport than those with secondary school children. Respondents with secondary school children P&C activities included administration, information dissemination, lobbying and canteen.

Male respondents were more likely to be involved in lobbying, repair work and information dissemination. Women were nearly twice as likely to assist with the canteen.

There were only minor differences between cultural groups in their activities on the P&C, although NESB respondents were much more likely to be involved in information dissemination. Disappointingly given the potential link with other Indigenous parents, no Indigenous parents indicate an involvement in information dissemination.

The tasks undertaken by respondents were similar regardless of where they lived, although those in remote communities were more likely to be involved in repairs/ maintenance and assisting teachers in the classroom.

Nearly half (46.6%) of respondents undertook tasks on behalf of the P&C on at least a weekly basis. For the vast majority (85%) of active members involvement was on at least a monthly basis. Respondents were also asked to estimate how many hours per week they normally spent on P&C activities. Nearly two-thirds of respondents estimated they spent less than 2 hours per week on P&C activities. Some respondents however spent more as the mean for weekly activities was 2.95 hours and the median was 2 hours.

**Table 7: How often do you undertake P&C activities?**

	Number of Responses	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Daily	15	6.4	6.4
Weekly	94	40.2	46.6
Monthly	90	38.5	85.0
Once a term	13	5.6	90.6
Occasionally	22	9.4	100.0
Total	234	100.0	

Those with primary school children were the most likely to undertake activities on a weekly basis. There was no difference by gender. Those respondents from remote communities however were much more likely to undertake activities on a weekly basis.

## **5. All respondents**

### **5.1 The decision to join**

All respondents were asked 'what helped or would help you join the P&C?'. Once again more than one answer was possible. Table 5 below reveals that respondents were spread quite evenly across the options, suggesting no clear single recruitment strategy would be appropriate. The largest proportion of respondents supported a personal approach however this was considerably less than half of respondents.

**Table 8: What help or would help you join in the P&C?**

	Number of Responses	Percentage (n=341)
Approached personally by member	130	41.5%
General P&C publicity	113	36.1%
General invitation by the principal or teachers	103	32.9%
Friend/relative joined recently	69	22.0%
Other	67	21.4%

Analysis of data by membership reveals some surprising results. For active members, being personally approached was more helpful (46.1% active members compared to 22.1% potential members). This difference was statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = .000$ ). There were also statistically significant differences between the groups responsiveness to general publicity (41.4% active members compared to 16.3% potential members). This data suggests that all of the strategies identified were less helpful to potential members, who most highly supported 'other' strategies (30.8% potential members compared to 14.7% active members). This will be explored further in the remainder of the study, particularly through the focus group discussions.

Examination of the data via other factors such as location, school type/level and cultural background reveals little differences. Respondents from country towns and remote communities were more affected by a personal approach than respondents from other locations. Interestingly, Indigenous parents were not in favour of personal approaches but preferred recruitment via general P&C publicity. This challenges assumptions about the need for personal connections to recruit Indigenous parents. This issue will be explored further in the focus groups.

## **5.2 Supporting participation**

Respondents were also asked about a range of potential strategies to support P&C participation. Table 6 below indicates that feeling welcomed and encouraged by the school is influential in people's decisions about participation. For nearly half of respondents knowing someone already on the P&C was also influential. These two responses have the potential to be in conflict as one suggests the need for openness and inclusion whilst the other has the potential of including only those already known to each other. For about one quarter of respondents greater information would assist their participation. Childcare and the time of the day meetings are held were a barrier for about one quarter of respondents.

**Table 9: What would have made it easier for you to participate in P&C? (More than one answer possible).**

	Number of Responses	Percentage (n=341)
Knowing someone on P&C	147	46.8%
Feeling welcomed and encouraged by the school	163	51.9%
Changing the name of the committee (e.g. School community meeting)	13	4.1%
Help with childcare during P&C activities	73	23.2%
Information about what the meeting will discuss beforehand	101	32.2%
More information about what is involved	79	25.2%
Better information about how to contact P&C	24	7.6%
Time of the day it meets	96	30.6%
The format and language used in meetings	15	4.8%
Regular reports from the P&C about their activities	75	23.9%
Seminars, etc. on topics directly relevant to the education or parenting of children	47	15.0%

There were few differences between respondents from the various levels of schools. Help with childcare during P&C activities was most strongly identified as a support by those respondents with primary school children. Among those with secondary aged children regular reports from the P&C about their activities was identified as a support for participation.

Time of day of meetings and support with childcare were both identified as important by respondents from remote communities. Interesting time of day was also identified as important by respondents from coastal communities, suggesting that commuting may create a challenge for these respondents to participation.

There were no statistically significant differences between respondents of different cultural backgrounds. Indigenous parents did, however, place greater importance on feeling welcomed and receiving regular reports from the P&C about their activities.

There were also no statistically significant differences by gender, although women were more likely to see having more information about what is involved as supporting participation.

### 5.3 Participation by cultural groups

One of the aims of this study was to identify existing or new strategies that may assist in supporting the participation of non-English speaking background parents and Indigenous parents in P&C activities. Table 7 below indicates support for a wide range of strategies. Nearly half of respondents however believed that a direct approach by an existing member would be most effective in encouraging participation. There was also considerable support for specific events tailored to provide information for these parents.

**Table 10: What do you think would help non-English speaking Background parents or Indigenous parents to become more involved in P&C activities? (more than one answer possible)**

	Number of Responses	Percentage
Direct approach by existing member	154	47.2%
Information about the P&C in languages other than English	119	36.5%
Encouragement by the Principal or class teacher	116	35.6%
More awareness and encouragement from existing members	116	35.6%
More informal format and language of the meetings	60	18.4%
Specific events (such as welcome nights or picnics) to providing information to these parents	131	40.2%
Greater inclusion of cultural diversity in the whole school community	69	21.2%
Don't know	52	16.0%
Other	10	3.1%

Women were more likely to believe providing information about the P&C in languages other than English would assist participation by NESB and Indigenous parents.

Once again respondents from remote communities showed themselves to be different from other respondents. They were much more likely to identify direct approaches by existing members, more awareness and encouragement from existing members; more informal format and language of meetings; and greater inclusion of cultural diversity in the whole school community. The provision of information about the P&C in languages other than English was only really identified by respondents from the Greater Sydney Metropolitan area.

There was also no statistically significant differences by cultural group. However, those respondents from NESB were more likely to identify the provision of information in languages other than English and encouragement by the Principal or class teacher as supporting diverse participation. Indigenous respondents identified a more informal format and language of the meetings as well as greater inclusion of cultural diversity in the whole school community as important supports to diverse participation.

Respondents with primary school children identified direct approach by existing members and more awareness and encouragement from existing members as possible access strategies. For those with secondary school children specific events (such as welcome nights or picnics) to provide information to parents were seen as a potential access strategy.

#### **5.4 Factors influencing participation**

The survey asked respondents 'How important are the following issues in influencing your participation in the P&C?'. Respondents were asked to rate the level of importance on a five-point scale, from 'not at all important' to 'very important'. The Table below show respondent's responses.

Other demands (such as work and family responsibilities) were rated as 'most important' by largest proportion of respondents (49.9%). This finding reflects general trends in volunteering across Australia and the world in which the time available to volunteer is being squeezed. Reflecting this, the timing of meetings and the amount of time required were also of importance to many respondents.

Being welcomed by existing members was also 'very important' to many (40.5%) respondents. This suggests that it is not merely a matter of time but also the culture of the P&C that influences participation. Confirming this nearly 30% of respondents also rated as 'very important' support for new members.

The gender of respondents did not affect responses significantly. There were a number of factors rated by women as more important (important/very important) than male respondents. These included: the amount of time required; poor management by the P&C; feeling welcomed by existing members; information about the P&C and what it does; and, recognition of P&C involvement within the school and community. The only statistically significant difference between male and female respondents related to the importance placed on the type of work of the P&C, which women rated as more important ( $\chi^2 = .024$ ).

Cross tabulation of data by location once again highlights the impact of geography on respondent experiences. Respondents from regional communities, country towns and remote communities rated the financial costs associated with P&C involvement as more important. This may reflect fuel and travel costs not incurred to the same extent by urban dwellers. Perceptions of poor management of the P&C were more likely to encourage participation from respondents from regional locations and country towns. Those respondents from country towns gave greater importance to the type of work (40%) and feeling welcomed (50%) than other respondents. Respondents from country town and remote communities were also concerned about P&C involvement in broad educational matters and the recognition given to P&C involvement.

Time pressures appear to be important to respondents from Non-English speaking backgrounds, who identified other demands, timing of meetings and amount of time required as very important. For Indigenous respondents there was a broader range of issues identified as important including: perceived poor management of P&C; feeling welcomed; ability to participate in broad educational matters; and recognition of involvement in P&C.

Potential members more than active members identified time pressures as very important. Timing of meetings (42.6% compared to 29.7%), other demands (65.3% compared to 44.4%) as well as the amount of time involved were all rated as very important to potential members. Interestingly, feeling welcomed and being recognised were more important to active members than potential members. Potential members were also slightly more concerned about having skills to offer than active members.

**Table 11: Respondent’s rating of importance of factors influencing participation**

	Not at all important %	Not Important %	Somewhat important %	Important %	Very important %
Timing of meetings	2.9	3.2	22.9	36.1	32.8
Amount of time required	2.3	6.2	27.3	34.0	27.9
Financial costs	32.6	21.1	21.7	12.9	8.8
Poor management of P&C	7.6	5.3	22.6	24.0	33.4
Type of work	3.8	4.7	22.6	37.5	28.2
Other demands	1.5	2.6	15.8	28.2	49.9
Feeling welcomed by existing members	3.2	5.6	15.8	33.1	40.5
Feeling like you have skills to offer	4.1	6.5	29.6	36.1	21.4
P&C involvement in broader educational matters	6.7	17.0	27.6	29.6	15.5
Information about the P&C and what it does	4.1	7.6	27.6	36.4	22.0
Recognition of P&C involvement within the school and community	4.1	10.6	24.3	32.0	25.2
Support for new members	2.1	7.3	21.4	35.5	29.9

**6. Profile of respondents**

Similar to volunteering more generally, the vast majority of respondents were female. 61.6% of respondents were aged between 35 and 44 years. The average age of respondents’ was 40. The age distribution suggests the P&C struggle to attract participation from both younger (less than 34 years) and older people (over 45 years). This may point to some potential recruitment strategies. The vast majority of respondents had two or three children, mostly aged between 5 and 12 years,

although one quarter also had pre-school children. The average number of children among respondents was 2.66, with a median of 3.00. The median age of respondent's youngest child was 7. Respondents lived in a wide range of locations, suggesting the survey results are not biased geographically. Nearly 70% of respondents were involved in a P&C at a primary school. Responses were received from P&C in very small to very large schools. Just over half of respondents volunteered for others groups, the median number of other groups was 2. Only a very small proportion of respondents were sole carers for children, much lower than the proportion of sole parents in the community more broadly. The low numbers of Non-English speaking background respondents resulted in an over-representation of Australian born English speakers in the study. Respondents were not highly qualified with less than one third holding university degrees. Over half of respondents were engaged in the workforce either on a full or part time basis. The median hours of work per week were 21 hours. The average was 25.47 hours per week, suggesting some respondents worked considerably longer hours than the norm for all respondents. Over two thirds of respondents rated their health as 'excellent' or 'very good'.

Data in relation to the respondents profile was cross-tabulated to explore differences between those currently active members of the P&C and those potential members. Potential members were likely to have slightly larger families, although both groups youngest child was of a similar age. Potential members were more likely to be younger, with 25.2% aged 25-34 years compared to 10.0% of active members. This difference was statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = .002$ ).

There was a statistically significant difference between the groups in relation to volunteering. 62.6% of active members volunteered for other groups, compared to 47.0% of potential members ( $\chi^2 = .009$ ). Among those respondents who did volunteer for other groups, active members were more likely to volunteer for more than one group. 66.7% of those potential members who volunteered for other groups did so for one other group compared to 36.3% of active members. This difference is once again statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = .033$ ). This suggests that the active members had a greater general propensity towards volunteering.

Among those respondents of NESB background (n=28) 60.7% were active members and 39.3% potential members. Respondents of Indigenous backgrounds (n=11) 45.5% were active members and 54.5% potential members.

Caring for children alone affects the ability of respondents to participate in P&C activities ( $\chi^2 = .006$ ).

There was also a difference in education levels between active and potential members, although this difference was not statistically significant. In general active members held more formal qualifications, with 33% obtaining High School qualifications only compared to 47.5% of potential members.

Potential members had higher levels of full-time caring responsibilities and unemployment than active members. Whilst potential members had lower levels of paid employment they were more likely to be employed casually. Those employed in casual positions often have greater uncertainty in their work hours and generally have less employment security. There was little difference in working hours or income levels between the two groups.

Active members were likely to rate their health as 'excellent' or 'very good' (73.9%) compared to potential members (54.9%). This difference was statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = .009$ ).

**Table 12: Gender of respondents**

	Number of Responses	Percent
Male	44	12.9
Female	293	85.9
Total	337	98.8
No answer	4	1.2
Total	341	100.0

**Table 13: Age of respondents**

	Number of Responses	Percent	Cumulative Percent
<25	2	.6	.6
25-34	49	14.4	15.3
35-44	210	61.6	78.4
45-54	66	19.4	98.2
55+	6	1.8	100.0
No answer	8	2.3	
	341	100.0	

Female respondents tended to be younger than male respondents. Older respondents (45 years plus) tended to be from Greater Metropolitan Sydney. In keeping with the general Indigenous age profile, Indigenous respondents tended to be younger with over 80% being aged under 44 years.

**Table 14: Number of children**

	Number of Responses	Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	22	6.5	6.6
2	140	41.1	48.6
3	124	36.4	85.9
4	31	9.1	95.2
5 +	16	4.7	100.0
0	8	2.3	
	341	100.0	

Respondents from English speaking backgrounds had the largest families. In general families with 3 or more children lived outside the Greater Sydney Metropolitan area. All of the respondents from remote communities children were primary school age or below.

**Table 15: Age of youngest child**

	Number of Responses	Percent
<5 years	80	23.5
5-7 years	91	26.7
8-12 years	119	34.9
13-18 years	43	12.6
19 + years	1	.3
No answer	7	2.1
	341	100.0

**Table 16: Approximate size of the school**

	Number of Responses	Percent
<50	49	14.4
50-100	19	5.6
101-300	35	10.3
301-500	55	16.1
501-800	28	8.2
801+	18	5.3
No answer*	137	40.2
	341	100.0

*\*Note the high number of 'no answers' to the question was reflects a misinterpretation of the question. Many respondents indicated the number of their own children at the school.*

**Table 17: Do you volunteer for other groups?**

	Number of Responses	Percent
Yes	190	55.7
No	138	40.5
Total	328	96.2
No answer	13	3.8
	341	100.0

Non-English speaking background respondents had the lowest level of volunteering for other groups. Respondents from remote communities had the highest level of volunteering whilst those from regional communities the lowest.

**Table 18: Number of other organizations respondent's volunteer for**

	Number of Responses	Percent
1	69	20.2
2	58	17.0
3	16	4.7
4+	13	3.8
No answer	185	54.3
Total	341	100.0

**Table 19: Respondent's marital status**

	Number of Responses	Percent
Partnered/married	312	91.5
Single	23	6.7
No answer	6	1.8
	341	100.0

Among the respondents there were no single parent males. Female headed sole parent families were most likely to live in country towns. Among Non-English speaking background respondents there were no single parent families.

**Table 20: Education qualifications of respondents**

	Number of Responses	Percent
Post graduate	32	9.4
Bachelors degree	74	21.7
Trade Certificate or Diploma	102	29.9
High school	124	36.4
No answer	9	2.6
Total	341	100.0

Male respondents tended to be more highly qualified than female respondents. There was a similar educational profile across the State (by location). Those respondents from Non-English speaking backgrounds had the highest levels of educational qualifications. The majority of Indigenous respondents had no post-school qualifications.

**Table 21: Work status of respondents**

	Number of Responses	Percent
Full time	76	22.3
Part time	108	31.7
Casual	60	17.6
Unemployed/looking for work	17	5.0
Retired	5	1.5
Full time caring	60	17.6
Currently studying	3	.9
	341	100.0

Indigenous respondents were much more likely to being working on a casual basis or studying than other groups of respondents. There were strong gender differences among respondents in relation to their work status. 69% of male respondents worked on a full time basis compared to 16.4% of female respondents. Conversely, 56.4% of female respondents worked on either a part time or casual basis compared to 14.3% of male respondents. Work patterns were similar across the State.

**Table 22: Hours of work**

	Number of Responses	Percent
<15 hours	44	12.9
15-28 hours	81	23.8
29-40 hours	50	14.7
41+ hours	24	7.0
No answer	142	41.6
	341	100.0

**Table 23: What is your weekly household income**

	Number of Responses	Percent
Under \$300	12	3.5
\$300-499	29	8.5
\$500-999	101	29.6
\$1,000-1999	111	32.6
\$2000-3999	39	11.4
\$4000+	8	2.3
No answer	41	12.0
	341	100.0

In general, respondents from the Greater Sydney Metropolitan area indicated higher levels of household income and those living in remote communities the lowest. Non-English speaking background respondents indicated the highest level of household income and Indigenous respondents the lowest. Household income levels appear to have little impact on P&C participation.

**Table 24: Health status**

	Number of Responses	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Excellent	97	28.4	29.1
Very good	130	38.1	68.2
Good	89	26.1	94.9
Fair	16	4.7	99.7
Poor	1	.3	100.0
No answer	8	2.3	
Total	341	100.0	

## **7. Preliminary conclusions**

This preliminary report details the findings to date from the Family Survey. Further data analysis will be undertaken prior to the final report. The Family Survey aimed to collect information on the experiences of those currently involved in the P&C movement and potential members. The findings provide insight into families from a range of location and at all levels of schooling. Only a small number of Non-English speaking background and Indigenous families participated in the survey, although their experiences provide some pointers for the future focus of the broader study.

Many of the findings from the survey are unsurprising, confirming previous research and personal experiences. Women tend to significantly outnumber men among volunteers. Men tend to have a much stronger attachment to the paid workforce. Younger people are less represented among volunteers. Balancing the various demands on family life is the greatest barrier to participation in P&C activities. People who volunteer to participate in P&C activities are more likely to participate in other forms of volunteering as well. English speakers are more likely to participate in this type of mainstream volunteering than people from other cultural groups.

There are, however, some findings providing pointers for further investigation. Motivation for volunteering was influenced mainly by individual concerns (children's education) but also broader community concerns (supporting the school and teachers). Unlike many other forms of volunteering P&C involvement was not viewed as a pathway to employment nor were direct immediate personal outcomes that important. P&C participation appears to require regular and ongoing commitment. Many active members committed 2 hours per week to P&C activities. This type of volunteer commitment is declining more generally, with a growing tendency towards short one-off acts. This creates particular challenges for the recruitment and support of P&Cs members.

Responses from potential members highlighted the barriers to participation created by casual employment and ill-health. The number of children and the age of the youngest child do not appear to be as influential. Whilst time pressures clearly affect ability to participate this is not an explanation alone. Timing of meetings, the amount of time required for participation and other demands were highlighted by both active and potential members.

From both the overall data and individual comments perceptions of not fitting or not being welcomed by existing members was common among non-members. This is a very common experience for individuals in relation to established groups and one about which there is a large amount of research. Training and support in relation to group dynamics and processes is a widely used strategy to deal with this difficulty.

The NESB respondents were more highly qualified than other respondents, suggesting that the P&C movement is engaging more middle class people from NESB. The question arises is how to engage less affluent and educated NESB people? Is there a role for these more middle class NESB families to assist in the recruitment and support of other NESB families? Although there were only a small number of Indigenous respondents their lack of involvement in information dissemination points to a potential strategy to enhance Indigenous parents' involvement.

Families in remote locations face unique challenges in participation. Time, distance and cost all create barriers that may require specific responses and support.

These and other issues will be investigated further in the remainder of the study. Comments or questions on this preliminary report are welcomed.

## Participation in Parents & Citizens (P&Cs) Study

### Family Survey Confidential

1. Have you attended two or more P&C meetings or activities in the last 12 months?  
(Please tick)

- Yes  No

*If you answered No please go to question 5*

2. If you answered yes, why did you become involved in the P&C? (more than one answer possible)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Contribute to children's school experience | <input type="checkbox"/> Find out about the school       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Contribute something back to my community  | <input type="checkbox"/> Find help with a school problem |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Support the work of teachers               | <input type="checkbox"/> Learn new skills                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Influence the running of the school        | <input type="checkbox"/> Knew P&C needed new members     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Friends or family members involved in P&C  | <input type="checkbox"/> Wanted new challenges           |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> Social interactions             |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> Other                           |

3. Type of involvement (more than one answer possible)

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Administration/clerical             | <input type="checkbox"/> Information dissemination     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fundraising                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Lobbying/advocacy             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Repairing/maintenance/<br>gardening | <input type="checkbox"/> Teaching/classroom assistance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Food preparation/canteen            | <input type="checkbox"/> Transporting people/goods     |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (what?)                 |

4. How frequently do you assist the P&C? (please tick)

- Daily  
 Weekly  
 Monthly  
 Once a term  
 Occasionally

Estimate of hours per week spent on P&C activities? \_\_\_\_\_

5. What helped or would help you join the P&C? (*more than one answer possible*)

- Approached personally by member
- General P&C publicity
- General invitation by the principal or teachers
- Friend/relative joined recently
- Other (please indicate)

6. What would have made it easier for you to participate in P&C? (*more than one answer possible*)

- Knowing someone on P&C
- Feeling welcomed and encouraged by the school
- Changing the name of the committee (eg. School community meeting)
- Help with childcare during P&C activities
- Information about what the meeting will discuss beforehand
- More information about what is involved
- Better information about how to contact P&C
- Time of the day it meets
- The format and language used in of meetings
- Regular reports from the P&C about their activities
- Seminars, etc. on topics directly relevant to the education or parenting of children

7. What do you think would help non-English speaking background parents or Indigenous parents to become more involved in P&C activities? (*more than one answer possible*)

- Direct approach by existing member
- Information about the P&C in languages other than English
- Encouragement by the Principal or class teachers
- More awareness and encouragement from existing members
- More informal format and language of the meetings
- Specific events (such as welcome nights or picnics) to provide information to these parents
- Greater inclusion of cultural diversity in the whole school community
- Don't know
- Other (please comment)

8. How important are the following issues in influencing your participation in the P&C (please use the following scale)

- 1 Not at all important
- 2 Not important
- 3 Somewhat important
- 4 Important
- 5 Very important

Timing of meetings	1	2	3	4	5
Amount of time required	1	2	3	4	5
The financial costs involved	1	2	3	4	5
Poor management of the P&C	1	2	3	4	5
The type of work of the P&C (particularly fundraising activities)	1	2	3	4	5
Other demands (such as work or family)	1	2	3	4	5
Feeling welcomed by existing members	1	2	3	4	5
Feeling like you have skills to offer	1	2	3	4	5
P&C involvement in broad educational matters (e.g. topics such as reconciliation)	1	2	3	4	5
Information about the P&C and what it does	1	2	3	4	5
Recognition of P&C involvement within the school and community	1	2	3	4	5
Support for new members (such as information, training and a contact person)	1	2	3	4	5

**9. Would you like to make any other comments?**

**10.** Please provide us with the following information about yourself:

<p>Gender:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Male</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Female</p>	<p>What is your cultural background?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Indigenous Australian</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> English speaking</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Non-English speaking</p>
<p>How old are you? _____</p> <p>How many children do you have? _____</p> <p>What is the age of your youngest child?</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>Are you?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Partnered/Married</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Single</p>
<p>Where do you live?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Greater Metropolitan Sydney</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Coastal</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Regional</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Country town</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Remote</p>	<p>What is your highest educational qualification?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Post-graduate</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor degree</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Trade certificate or diploma</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> High school</p>
<p>What is the postcode of your school?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Total number of children at your school?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>What level is your school</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Infants school (K-Y2)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Primary</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Central</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Secondary</p>	<p>What is your work status?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Full-time</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Part-time</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Casual</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Unemployed/looking for work</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Retired</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Full time caring</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Currently studying</p> <p>How many hours weekly do you normally work?</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>Do you volunteer for other groups?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>If yes, how many? _____</p>	<p>How would you describe your health status?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Excellent                      <input type="checkbox"/> Good</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Very good                      <input type="checkbox"/> Fair</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Poor</p>
<p>What is your weekly household income?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Under \$300                      <input type="checkbox"/> \$300-499</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$500-999                      <input type="checkbox"/> \$1,000-1,999</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$2,000-3,999                      <input type="checkbox"/> \$4,000 or more</p>	

