



2 March 2020

The Principal

Dear Principal,

How can teachers better cater for their high-achieving students?

Research indicates that students at the higher end of their class (described as high achieving or high capacity students) make less progress on average than less advanced peers. Researchers at the University of Melbourne have developed pilot instruments that measure the types of aspects of classroom climate that foster the learning growth of high-achieving students, together with teacher learning progressions that show teachers how well their classroom climate currently supports the learning of these students, and what steps they can take next to strengthen their practice.

We are seeking teachers from your school to participate in a project about classroom climate and its influences on high achieving student growth.

Teachers will be asked to:

- Complete an online questionnaire (60 items, multiple choice) taking around 18 minutes.
- **Optional:** Complete an optional 30-minute face-to-face interview about classroom climates for growth.

In return:

- Teachers, during the interview, receive copies of two progressions about classroom climate together with where their questionnaire responses place them along these progressions. These progressions also indicate what the next steps are in strengthening classroom climate to better support high-achieving students.
- A summary report of the project will be sent to you.

A pilot at 42 schools showed the questionnaire and the subsequent progressions provided empirical support for their validity. In this stage of the project we are seeking to validate the questionnaire and progressions among a broader range of schools. This project forms the basis of a PhD study but is also part of the wider Realising the Potential of Australia's High-Capacity Students (REAP) led by the Assessment Research Centre and funded by the Australian Research Council.

The attached Plain Language Statement – Principals provides additional information.

*Please note that this research differs from the Department's teaching and learning approach for high achieving students and the Victorian Teaching and Learning Model. Rather, this research is being conducted independently of the Department and is seeking to test an alternative approach to engaging high achieving students.*

If you are happy for your school to participate in the project, this would require you speak with staff at a staff meeting seeking participation and provide to us the names and email addresses of any staff who agree to participate. I will telephone you in the next week to see whether you are interested in your school participating.

If you have any questions about the research, please feel very free to email me ([jszymakowski@student.unimelb.edu.au](mailto:jszymakowski@student.unimelb.edu.au)).

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Postal address:  
Assessment Research Centre MGSE  
Level 8 100 Leicester St  
University of Melbourne VIC 3010:

Phone:  
03 8344 4000 ext 76184

I do hope your school is able to join in this exciting project.

Sincerely

**Jolanta Szymakowski**

PhD Researcher

## **Additional Background**

### **Classroom Climate**

Classroom climate is modelled to be in four dimensions:

#### **Aspects Outside the Classroom**

1. School Support:

Provides curriculum materials, collegial support, provides learning tools, supports diversity.

#### **Aspects Inside the Classroom**

2. Teacher Knowledge and Skills:

Curriculum expertise, subject expertise, provides access to curriculum materials.

3. Teacher climate aspects:

Supports academic success, general interaction, diversity; enacts curriculum flexibility

4. Student climate aspects:

Supports academic success, general interaction, diversity, help seeking.

### **Ethics**

University of Melbourne: Approval Ethics ID 1852274.

Department of Education and Training Victoria: Approved 21 November 2019.

### **Link to the questionnaire:**

[https://melbourneuni.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_7ahdxCTfkFkoMG9](https://melbourneuni.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_7ahdxCTfkFkoMG9)

or

