eSmart Schools Framework Outcome Evaluation

Interim Report, September 2021

Contents

Acknowledgements iv
Executive Summary v
Methodology vi
Challenges related to COVID-19 vii
Demographics of participating schools viii
Findings viii
Part A ix
Part B ix
Qualitative data x
School perceptions of performance x
Key emerging themes xi
Background 1
eSmart Schools Framework 1
Outcome Evaluation 2
COVID-19 challenges 2
Aim 3
Methodology 3
Research Design 3
Part A Tool 5
Part B Tool 5
Baseline Sample 7
Analysis 8
Demographics of participating schools 10
Results 14
Part A Results 14
Strong Domain: Respectful and caring school 16
Domain for improvement: An eSmart Curriculum 17
Part B Quantitative Results 18
Strong Focus Area: School climate 21
Focus Area for improvement: Gateway Behaviours 21
Focus Area for improvement: Data 22
Part B – Qualitative Results 23
Overall progress (total score by quartile) 26

School perceptions of performance 26
Comparison of results from Part A and Part B....27
Methodological limitations....30
Discussion....31
Strengths and areas for improvement....31
Key emerging themes 33
Active student involvement in eSmart Framework journey....33
Effective and pro-active use of data 34
Gateway behaviours 35
Secondary schools report better results....35
Perceptions of performance 35
Incongruence between Parts A and B....35
Conclusion....36
References 38
Appendices....40
Appendix A: eSmart Program Logic 40
Appendix B: Part A Tool 41
Appendix C: Part B Tool 45

List of Tables

Table 1. Self-assessment tool vi
Table 2. Part A tool vi
Table 3. Part B tool....vii
Table 4. eSmart Schools Framework - outcome evaluation 4
Table 5. Part A tool - Domains and number of action items per Domain 5
Table 6. Part B - Focus Areas and number of statements 6
Table 7. Sample schools as a percentage of the Expansion Schools population....10
Table 8. Domain: a respectful and caring community....17
Table 9. Domain: an eSmart curriculum 17
Table 10. Focus Area: school climate....21
Table 11. Focus Area: gateway behaviours 22
Table 12. Focus Area: Data - statement 3.3....23
Table 13. Focus Area: Data - statements 3.2.5 & 3.4.5. 23
Table 14. 'Unbalanced' schools by demographics 29
Table 15. 'Unbalanced' schools by Focus Area 30

List of Figures

Figure 1. Participants by school sector 10
Figure 2. Participants by school type 11
Figure 3. Participants by SES 11
Figure 4. Participants by ADII 12
Figure 5. Participants by location: metro / non-metro 12
Figure 6. Participants by DET region 13
Figure 7. Participants by eSmart status 13
Figure 8. Part A: average (median) number of eSmart action items completed by sector (out of 23) 14
Figure 9. Part A: number of eSmart action items achieved (out of 23) by sector 15
Figure 10. Part A: average (mean) completion of eSmart action items - all schools by Domain 15
Figure 11. Part A: average (mean) completion of eSmart action items by Domain by sector 16
Figure 12. Part A: Average (mean) completion by Domain by SES. 18
Figure 13. Part B: results by Focus Area - all schools 19
Figure 14. Part B: results by Focus Area by sector 19
Figure 15. Part B: results by Focus Area by SE$ 20
Figure 16. Part B: results by Focus Area by school type 20
Figure 17. Part B: progress in eSmart journey - all schools 26
Figure 18.How well-placed schools believe they are to prevent a situation: pre- vs. post-Part B: self-assessment 27
Figure 19. How well-placed schools believe they are to respond to a situation: pre- vs. post-Part B: self-assessment 27
Figure 20. Comparison of Part A and Part B scores - all schools 28

Acknowledgements

Analysis of the data and preparation of this report was undertaken by Dr Fiona MacDonald, Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Sustainable Industries and Liveable Cities, Victoria University, and Dr Nina Van Dyke, Policy Fellow/Senior Research Fellow, Mitchell Institute, Victoria University, September 2021. The Alannah and Madeline Foundation would like to acknowledge Dr Van Dyke and Dr MacDonald for their significant and thoughtful contributions, both in relation to this report and the broader eSmart evaluation project.

Executive Summary

The Alannah & Madeline Foundation (the Foundation) has been delivering eSmart in schools since 2011 to help reduce cyber bullying and bullying and improve cyber safety. As of 2021, over 2200 schools had engaged in the eSmart suite of programs. There are several eSmart programs, one of which is the eSmart Schools Framework (the Framework), which seeks to build whole school systems capable of identifying, addressing, preparing for, and responding to social challenges that occur both face-to-face and online. The Framework recognises the cyber safety and wellbeing work that schools already do across their whole-of-school community, and helps collate and map it against current best practice recommendations in the areas of policies and procedures, curriculum, staff development, and parent engagement, offering targeted resources and programs in response to any identified gaps.

The Foundation recognises that it takes more than knowledge to change behaviours. Bullying and cyber bullying are complex issues, and there are no quick-fix solutions or 'silver bullets' by which they can be easily addressed. Reducing cyber bullying and bullying requires all members of a school and its broader community to create supportive and connected school social environments that support long-term, sustainable, positive change.

To ensure Victorian schools create supportive and connected school social environments, the Victorian government funded the eSmart Schools Expansion Project to enable up to 609 government schools to register for the Framework.

The purpose of this report is to document the preliminary findings of the eSmart outcome evaluation, the long-term aim of which is to determine the efficacy of the Framework according to the outcomes outlined in the eSmart program logic model (see Appendix A). The report aims to provide a baseline or pre-test measurement of where participating Expansion Project schools currently sit in relation to each evaluation outcome, with future post-tests planned to elucidate potential changes in outcomes over time as schools progress through the Framework.

Methodology

The evaluation tool (or "self-assessment" tool) consists of two parts – Part A and Part B, see Table 1 below.

Table 1. Self-assessment tool

	Outcome	Method	Tool
A.	How well do schools *identify* and *address* system level factors that impact on the supportiveness and connectedness of the social environment?	A: Quantitative pre-test and post-test comparison: Gap Analysis	A: Online survey (self-report)
B.	How well do schools *prepare for* and *respond to* changes and events that impact the supportiveness and connectedness of the social environment?	B: Quantitative and qualitative pre-test and post-test comparison: System function	B: Online audio scenario and questions (self-report)

Part A, a gap analysis survey, is an adaptation of the existing, evidence based, eSmart Schools Framework 'gap analysis tool'. The Part A tool was designed to measure whether a school has identified and addressed system level factors that impact on the supportiveness and connectedness of the social environment. Participants were asked to respond to 23 action items, which assessed their progress under the six Domains of the eSmart Schools Framework (see Table 2 below for a detailed list of the Domains and associated action items)

Table 2. Part A tool

Domain Number	Domain Name	Number of action items
1	Effective school organisation	Five
2	School plans, policies and procedures	Three
3	A respectful and caring school community	Three
4	Effective teacher practices	Four
5	An eSmart curriculum	Five
6	Community Partnerships	Three

Part B, which consists of an audio vignette and related series of open-and close-ended questions, was developed as a system function tool to measure how well-placed a school system is to prepare for future social challenges (both online and offline), and how well positioned the school system is to respond to such challenges. Participants were asked to assess how well placed their schools are to prevent and respond to bullying and cyber bullying, and what formal procedures and processes they currently have in place in their schools to prevent and respond to these issues. They were then asked to respond to 40

statements across five Focus Areas, which were each measured on a 4-point Likert scale (see Table 3 below for a detailed list of the Focus Areas and associated statements)

Table 3. Part B tool

Focus Area	Number of statements
Data	Seven
Gateway Behaviours	Four
Reporting	Seven
Response	Six
School social connectedness/climate	Three

Responses to the Part B tool were weighted to ensure each of the five Focus Areas was represented equally in the final score. This approach enabled schools to be positioned according to their progress along the eSmart journey, from *Starting,* to *Emerging, Building*, and *Flourishing.*

The Part B tool was developed from an academic literature review on systems-level preparation and response strategies – in schools within Australia and overseas – that target anti-social behaviour changes and events; a desktop review of Australian government, Independent, and Catholic school processes; collaborator workshops; and an audio vignette created to represent an incident of cyber bullying in a school.

Schools completed both components of the self-assessment tool – that is, Part A and B – as part of the evaluation. However, it should be noted that the integration of the Part A and B tools into standard business processes will look different; specifically, Parts A and B will be administered annually to Framework schools until they achieve eSmart status. In subsequent years, schools will complete Part B only as an ongoing indicator of their progress and self-monitoring. Schools will not be required to complete Part A after achieving eSmart Status, as the assumption is that these schools will have achieved every action item in the six Domains as part of their journey through the Framework. After receiving their results, schools will have the opportunity to speak to their eSmart Advisor for guidance on areas that require further improvement.

Challenges related to COVID-19

The Foundation had intended to conduct the pre-test component of the outcome evaluation in April 2020; however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the related pause on research with schools by the Victorian Department of Education and Training, the administration of the tool was delayed until June-July 2021. Ongoing COVID-19 restrictions and the challenges of online and offsite teaching further impacted the level of participation by schools in the evaluation activities.

A sample of 50 schools was sought for the pre-test component of the evaluation, with the following inclusion criteria applied:

1. The school had to be a part of the eSmart Schools Expansion Project ('Expansion schools')
2. The school had not yet commenced the eSmart Schools Framework process (i.e., they were an 'unregistered' school)
3. The school had not undertaken and then withdrawn from the eSmart Schools Framework process prior to 2017

A total of 18 schools that strictly met the inclusion criteria agreed to participate (out of a total of 609 eligible schools). An additional 27 schools met criteria 1 and 3, but were eSmart 'registered' schools (as opposed to 'unregistered' schools), meaning that some may had begun preliminary work within the eSmart Framework, thereby precluding a "pure" baseline or 'pre-test' measurement.

However, given the difficulty in recruiting schools in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as evidence of few differences between the two categories of schools regarding their responses to the Part A and Part B tools, all 45 have been included in this report.

Demographics of participating schools

The 45 schools that participated in the baseline measure component of the Evaluation included 25 government schools, 15 Catholic and 5 Independent schools. The sample included 34 primary schools, 6 secondary and 5 combined schools. Of these, 27 schools were high socio-economic status (SES), with 10 medium, and 8 low. The majority of schools were above average (n=29) on the Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII), with 16 schools below average. The schools were spread evenly across metropolitan (n= 23) and non-metropolitan (n=22) Victoria. Twenty-seven schools were registered smart schools, and 18 were unregistered.

While 45 schools participated in the Part A tool, a total of 36 schools completed the Part B tool, again reflecting the challenges of engaging schools in research through the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 22 government, 11 Catholic and 3 Independent schools completed Part B. The Part B sample included 25 primary, 6 secondary and 5 combined schools, spread across metropolitan (n=20) and non-metropolitan (n=16) Victoria. The majority (n= 23) were high SES and above average (n=24) on the ADII. A total of 14 unregistered schools and 22 registered schools completed Part B.

Findings

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on Victorian schools through 2020-21, and subsequently on the timing of, and participation rates in, the activities related to the present evaluation. As a result, the sample size for this component of the evaluation is small, and the findings are therefore unlikely to be generalisable to the entire population of

609 Expansion schools. Despite this, the findings provide a baseline for future evaluation activities, which will seek to measure changes in schools' standing on each outcome of interest (and thereby, their progress towards achieving eSmart status), and provide additional evidence that will allow for a more comprehensive assessment of the efficacy of the Framework.

Part A

Schools achieved strong results in the following Domains:

- *School plans, policies, and procedures*, achieving 96% of action items
- *Respectful and caring schools*, achieving 96% of action items

Schools were less advanced in the following Domains:

- *eSmart curriculum*, achieving 63% of action items
- *Community partnerships*, achieving 73% of action items

Emerging themes from across the six Domains included:

- Limited explicit involvement of students in developing, delivering, and teaching about smart, safe and responsible use of digital technology
- More Catholic schools (40%) assessed themselves as achieving all 23 action items in Part A, in contrast to Government (4%) and Independent schools (20%), despite similar results in Part B.
- Secondary schools reported higher levels of achievement across the six Domains compared to primary schools, although the sample size (6% of secondary schools in Expansion population) makes it difficult to establish if this a trend for all secondary schools.

Part B

Schools demonstrated key areas of strength in the following Focus Areas:

- *School climate*, achieving 69 points out of a possible 80
- *Response*, achieving 64 points out of a possible 80

Schools reported their lowest results for:

- *Gateway behaviours*, achieving 55 points out of a possible 80
- *Data*, achieving 55 points out of a possible 80

Emerging themes from across the Focus Areas included:

- Strong commitment to creating and maintaining a positive school environment
- Having response plans in place, ready for enactment whenever cyber bullying or bullying occurred
- Training for staff and students is required on identifying gateway behaviours and in reporting them immediately and consistently
- Limited direct engagement of students in the eSmart journey
- Limited use of data to identify, prevent, and respond to cyber bullying or anti-social behaviours
- Secondary schools again reported higher levels of achievement relative to primary schools

Based on total score on the Part B tool, the vast majority of schools landed in the top two performance quartiles: *Building* (n=16) and *Flourishing* (n=18). These results indicate that schools believe they are already reasonably well-placed to address incidents of cyber bullying and bullying amongst students. However, as discussed below, there is still considerable room for improvement, and perception does not necessarily equal reality.

Qualitative data

In their open-ended responses, participants reported having well-considered plans and procedures in place to identify prevent, and respond to incidents. Addressing student behaviour was at the forefront of schools' preparedness to identify and respond to incidents of cyber bullying and bullying. Creating a positive and supportive environment where students feel safe was a key focus of schools. Relationships and trust between students and teachers or school staff were fundamental. Notably absent, in the open-ended responses, were references to the use of data to identify and inform the development of procedures to respond, or gateway behaviours, which indicate that schools have procedures in place to identify early signs that an incident might be brewing.

School perceptions of performance

Most schools reported relatively strong results on Parts A and B – indicating that they perceived themselves to be fairly well-placed to prepare for and respond to cyber bullying and bullying incidents at their schools. Despite these scores, however, the quantitative data demonstrated that there were clear areas for improvement among participating schools – particularly in the Focus Areas of *Data* and *Gateway behaviours,* as discussed below. The general tendency towards self-reporting bias must also be kept in mind (Moore & Baltutis, 2016). Therefore, in terms of measuring schools' progress and assessing the efficacy of the Framework, the baseline or 'pre-test' results outlined in the current report are not solely indicative; instead, comparisons against data collected through future administrations of the self-assessment tool must be made to provide a more nuanced assessment of schools' performance in relation to the evaluation outcomes, as well as their changes in performance over time.

The finding that responses to the tools did not differ for the most part between unregistered schools (those that had not commenced the eSmart Framework) and registered schools (those that might have begun some preliminary Framework activities) was interesting, but perhaps not surprising. Further data collection using the self-assessment tool will shed greater light on these preliminary outcomes. When unregistered schools and registered schools were examined separately for their responses before and after completing the 40 statements in the Part B tool, unregistered schools reported slightly lower scores after responding to the 40 statements than prior, whereas the scores for registered schools were similar before and after. This finding may indicate that unregistered schools are less aware of the requirements for becoming an eSmart school, and had assumed, prior to responding to the detailed questions, that they were better prepared than they actually are.

Finally, several participants stated in responses to the open-ended questions that they do not have any bullying at their school. This is despite evidence that school bullying remains a serious issue in Australia (Australian Government, 2020; Flack et al., 2020; Pennell et al., 2020) with more than one in four Year 4 to Year 9 students reporting that they have been bullied every few weeks (Australian Government, 2020), and an unknown number going unreported. This suggests that even schools that believe their students do not have access to computers and 'are not that tech savvy' may not be cognisant of the complex nature of cyber bullying and bullying, and may not be aware of incidents and gateway behaviours within their school community that could be potentially addressed through system-level changes promoted by the Framework.

Key emerging themes

Several overarching themes were identified across the qualitative and quantitative data, indicating areas in which the Framework and the eSmart Advisors can assist schools in building and maintaining supportive social environments for students:

- The need for increased student involvement (leading to 'student agency'), in which schools move beyond 'listening' to students to actively engaging them in meaningful teaching and learning around bullying and cyber bullying
- The need for schools to: (a) gather, understand, and actively and regularly use data to identify potential incidents and challenges to the schools' social environment; and (b) to use data for action, informing the development of preparedness and response plans
- The need for greater understanding of and attention paid to identifying and responding to gateway behaviours, which are lower risk behaviours that can indicate that an incident – which may escalate to bullying or cyber bullying – is brewing (Englander, 2017)
- Bullying and cyber bullying are complex issues, and the reduction of such behaviours in schools is influenced by many internal and external factors (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Pennell et al., 2020). This may go some way to explaining the incongruence in scores for a handful of schools between their scores on the Part A and Part B tools. Of particular concern are those schools that scored high on Part A but relatively low on Part B. Part A focuses on action items that schools are required to achieve, while Part B asks participants to reflect on broader statements that introduce factors to identify cyber bullying and bullying that schools may not have considered. These include the use of data and student agency, identified above as key areas for improvement. This is also true for schools that stated they have no problems with cyber bullying at their school, yet indicated areas of weakness in either the Part A or Part B assessments.

The key emerging themes speak directly to the utility of the eSmart Framework, as they acknowledge: the complexity of bullying and cyber bullying; the long-term nature of behavioural change; the potential for continued growth for schools in relation to identifying, addressing, preparing for, and responding to challenges in the school social environment; and the need to engage the entire community – teachers, students, parents, and

community – in addressing issues related to cyber bullying and bullying. With expertise, knowledge, and resources, the eSmart Schools Framework provides an opportunity for schools to work with experts in the areas of bullying and cyber safety – the eSmart Advisors – who can guide them to take action in ways that address key areas of potential growth, and by extension, help to build supportive school social environments over time.

While this report presents several interesting findings, and speaks to the potential utility of the self-assessment tool in driving continuous quality improvement within schools, it is important to remember that the sample size is small, so while emerging themes have been identified, more data is needed to determine whether the findings: (a) would reach statistical significance if data were obtained from a larger cohort of schools; and (b) are generalisable beyond the current sample. Future post-test data collection activities are planned for 2022 and beyond to allow for a more robust and comprehensive assessment of the evaluation outcomes, and to track schools' progress over time.

Background

Since 2011, the Alannah & Madeline Foundation (the Foundation) has been delivering eSmart - a suite of programs that collectively aim to build supportive and connected school social environments by increasing awareness around positive use of digital technology – thereby preventing anti-social behaviours such as bullying and cyber bullying.

Addressing cyber bullying is like solving a 'complex puzzle' of social problems and online and offline bullying behaviours. This includes 'how children actually bully today, what goes on in schools, and how digital behaviours emerge during childhood and interrelate with (and sometimes determine in-school socializing' (Englander, 2013). It is difficult to separate cyber bullying from bullying and for the remainder of this report, unless otherwise indicated, reference to cyber bullying refers to both types of bullying.

In 2021, COVID-19 has had a global impact on schools and school systems (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Schools are being asked to play a significant role through COVID-19, addressing the social and emotional needs of students, and creating caring and supportive online environments for students, families, and the school community (Baker et al., 1997; MacDonald, 2021). It is widely acknowledged that the shift to online or off-site learning has had significant adverse effects on the educational outcomes of students (CIRES, 2020); however, the impact on the social environment of schools and the wellbeing of students is largely unknown (Brown et al., 2020; Drane, Vernon & O'Shea, 2020; Flack, et al., 2020). There is therefore an important need to provide schools with access to programs and services like eSmart, so that they retain the capacity to prepare for, and respond to, social challenges that occur within the online environment.

eSmart Schools Framework

There are several eSmart programs – one of which is the eSmart Schools Framework. The eSmart Schools Framework recognises that schools create social environments in which students, teachers, and parents engage with each other, and that these social environments are shaped by six key factors, or Domains:

1. How effectively the school is organised
2. The school's plans, policies, and procedures
3. The values of the school community
4. How effective the teacher practices are
5. What is and is not included in the curriculum
6. The relationship between the school, its parent cohort, and community groups

Upon registering for the Framework, schools engage in a 'planning' process whereby they review their current practices to identify gaps in relation to the above six Domains. They are then guided through a series of activities – both online and offline – as part of an 'implementation' process that enables them to implement system-level strategies that

address the identified gaps in practice. At the end of the implementation process, they achieve eSmart Status, and are given the opportunity to become an eSmart Membership school – engaging in ongoing learning and development opportunities to strengthen their school systems.
Internally, participating schools are classified into the following categories based on their stage of progression through the Framework:

1. Registered (signed up for the Framework, and commenced preliminary planning work)
2. Planning Complete (planning process is accomplished)
3. Awaiting Evidence (evidence of having implemented system-level strategies is required)
4. eSmart status (implementation process is complete, precedes transition into Membership)

The Foundation's eSmart Advisors work with schools to address their individual needs in each of the above categories, and over time, help schools make improvements across the six Domains of the Framework.

Driven by research that shows significant overlap between online and offline experiences, the eSmart Schools Framework seeks to build school systems capable of identifying, addressing, preparing for, and responding to social challenges that increasingly cross over between cyber and face-to-face realms.

Outcome Evaluation

The Foundation has a current agreement with the Victorian Government to deliver the eSmart Schools Framework to a further 609 schools in Victoria (the eSmart Schools Expansion project) - The Victorian Common Funding Agreement.

This Funding Agreement includes a requirement to undertake an evaluation of the efficacy of the eSmart Schools Framework intervention, with a budget allocation for evaluation of $30,000 over two years. While the present report documents the findings of the evaluation activities that have been conducted to date, a final report for the outcome evaluation is to be presented to the Victorian Department of Education and Training by mid-2022.

COVID-19 challenges

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the timelines and sample originally proposed for this evaluation. It was originally intended that the Foundation conduct the evaluation (pre-test), including Part A and Part B tools, in April 2020. However, due to the pause placed on research with schools, and with agreement by the Department of Education and Training, the administration of the tool was delayed until June-July 2021. This delay also resulted in some schools with Expansion funding moving from 'unregistered' to 'registered' status. Participation rates were also adversely impacted, with schools focused on the ongoing and changing demands of online teaching and learning.

Aim

The aim of the eSmart Schools Outcome Evaluation is to determine the efficacy of the eSmart Schools Framework, by testing the eSmart Schools Framework outcomes, as per the program logic (see Appendix A for Logic Model).

Accordingly, the Foundation seeks to broadly measure the effectiveness of the eSmart Schools Framework in helping schools to:

1. identify and address system level factors that impact on the supportiveness and connectedness of the social environment (Gap Analysis), and
2. prepare for and respond, at a system level, to changes and events that impact on the supportiveness and connectedness of the social environment (System Function).

It is important to note that Victorian school environments deliver many 'interventions' concurrently, and extraneous variables cannot be controlled (by the Foundation). It will not be possible to make definitive 'causal claims' linking the eSmart Schools Framework to outcome measures, and/or to determine the proportion of the outcome that can be attributed to the eSmart Schools Framework intervention.

What the evaluation can provide is an overview of how well-placed schools, which have different levels of engagement with the eSmart Framework, are to identify and address system-level factors that influence supportiveness and connectedness of the school social environment. The evaluation will also reveal how prepared schools currently are for, and how well positioned they are in, responding to changes and events that impact the supportiveness and connectedness of the school social environment.

The aim of this interim report is to provide a 'baseline' or 'pre-test' measure – to describe where Expansion Schools are currently placed before starting, or shortly after commencing, their eSmart journey. Subsequent reports will document post-test data obtained at later points in time, which will allow for an examination of the changes that occur for schools as they progress along this journey. Such data will enable the Foundation to understand the effectiveness of the eSmart Schools Framework, and help participating schools measure their progress towards building a more supportive and cohesive school social environment.

Methodology

Research Design

The present evaluation adopts a pre-post design to assess the outcomes in the eSmart Framework logic model, and thereby assess the efficacy of the eSmart Schools Framework – as described in Table 4, below.

This report presents findings from the pre-test component of the evaluation, thereby providing a baseline measure of schools' standing on the outcomes of interest.

Subsequent post-tests will allow for measurement of change over time as schools progress through the Framework.

Table 4. eSmart Schools Framework - outcome evaluation

Outcome	Method	Tool
A. How well do schools *identify* and *address* system level factors that impact on the supportiveness and connectedness of the social environment?	A: Quantitative pre-test and post-test comparison: Gap Analysis	A: Online survey (Part A tool – self-report)
B. How well do schools *prepare for* and *respond to* changes and events that impact the supportiveness and connectedness of the social environment?	B: Quantitative and qualitative pre-test and post-test comparison: System function	B: Online audio scenario and questions (Part B tool – self-report)

The Part A and B tools were administered to schools as a combined "self-assessment" tool (henceforth referred to as the self-assessment tool), using cloud-based software called SurveyMonkey. SurveyMonkey functions, including password protection and customised email collectors to protect privacy and to track school progress respectively, were activated.

The initial round of the self-assessment tool (the pre-test) was administered in the second quarter of 2021. Prior to this, a pilot test for the Part B tool was conducted with 12 schools. Feedback from this pilot test informed the final version of the Part B tool. There was no pilot test conducted for the Part A tool as this tool was adapted directly from the existing eSmart Schools Framework 'gap analysis tool', which schools complete as part of business as usual when they commence the eSmart Framework.

The first round of post-tests using the self-assessment tool is planned for the second quarter of 2022, or earlier for schools that progress through the six Domains and complete the eSmart Schools Framework sooner.

It should be noted that, as part of business as usual, schools will complete the self-assessment tool following their registration to the eSmart Framework and each year thereafter. Upon reaching eSmart status, which is achieved by completing a series of activities both on and offline, schools will undertake the Part A tool for a final time. In subsequent years, they will complete the Part B tool only, as an ongoing indicator of progress and self-monitoring.

After completing the either one or both tools, the schools will receive their results and be provided with an opportunity to seek guidance from their eSmart Advisor about how to improve areas of underperformance.

Part A Tool

The Part A Gap Analysis survey (Part A tool) is an adaptation of the existing, evidence based, eSmart Schools Framework 'gap analysis tool'. The Part A tool is designed to measure whether a school has identified and addressed each system level factor that impacts on the supportiveness and connectedness of the social environment – as defined by 'action items' set out under each of the six Domains of the eSmart Schools Framework. Each school is asked to respond "yes" or "no" as to whether it has achieved each of the 23 action items (see Appendix B for Part A tool and associated covering email).

Results from the Part A tool provide evidence regarding how schools are going overall and within each Domain, where the gaps are for schools in each of the six Domains, and, over time, the proportion of schools that have 'closed' identified gaps in each of these Domains.

Table 5. Part A tool - Domains and number of action items per Domain

Domain Number	Domain Name	Number of action items
1	Effective school organisation	Five
2	School plans, policies, and procedures	Three
3	A respectful and caring school community	Three
4	Effective teacher practices	Four
5	An eSmart curriculum	Five
6	Community Partnerships	Three

Part B Tool

The Foundation retained external research support from Victoria University to develop a Part B system function tool that measures how well prepared a school system is for future social challenges (online and offline), and how well positioned the school system is to respond to such future challenges (see Appendix C for Part B tool and associated covering email).

The design and administration of the Part B tool was approved by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee. The Strategic Research Unit, Department of Education and Training Victoria, (RISEC application); and the Catholic Dioceses of Melbourne, Bendigo, Sale, and Sandhurst all consented to the Part B tool being administered in their schools. Independent schools were approached individually.

The process for Part B tool development included:

1. **Tool design**: academic literature review on preparation and response systems both within Australia and internationally; desktop review of Australian government,

Independent, and Catholic school processes; collaborator workshops; audio vignette creation

2. **Pilot test**: the draft tool was administered to 12 schools with whom the Foundation maintains a high level of contact. Changes to the tool were made based on their feedback. Ten of the pilot schools were primary schools and two were secondary schools. Ten were government schools, one Catholic, and one Independent. Ten of the schools were in metropolitan areas and two were in regional areas.

The development of the self-assessment tool reflects the Foundation's commitment to incorporating research and best practice in the creation of supportive school social environments.

The academic literature review and desktop review of school processes revealed five key Focus Areas relevant for system-level preparation and response in schools. A series of individual statements, also based on the evidence, were developed to measure each of these Focus Areas, see Table 6.

Table 6. Part B - Focus Areas and number of statements

Focus Area	Number of statements
Data	Seven
Gateway Behaviours	Four
Reporting	Seven
Response	Six
School social connectedness/climate	Three

The Focus Areas do not align precisely with the six eSmart Domains measured in Part A as the two instruments have different purposes and foci. The Part A tool is focused on identifying gaps at a system level, and measuring the extent to which schools address these gaps over time as they to work towards achieving eSmart status. The Part B tool is focused on providing a 'test' of the systems that schools currently have in place to prepare for, and respond to, challenges, and changes that impact on the school social environment; in this way, the Part B tool allows for ongoing monitoring and progress in system-level functioning and responsiveness.

The Part B tool begins with two general questions asking the school to rate on a scale of 1-10 the extent to which they believe their school is well placed to prevent and respond to a cyber bullying or other type of bullying incident. These questions are asked again at the end of the instrument, to understand whether completing the self-assessment shifts their overall perception of how their school is performing within each Focus Area.

The participant then listens to a short audio vignette about a hypothetical cyber bullying incident involving students.

After listening to the audio vignette, participants are asked three open-ended questions about the formal procedures and processes their school has in place to address incidents such as the one in the vignette: the first question asks what procedures the school has in place that would have allowed it to identify that such an incident might be brewing; the second asks what steps the school would then take to prevent escalation; and the third asks what steps the school takes to respond to such an incident where things have already escalated. A final, fourth question, was asked at the end of Part B, giving the participants a chance to tell us anything else about how their school, at a system level, prepares for and responds to, cyber bullying and bullying.

Participants are next asked to respond to 40 statements across the 5 Focus Areas regarding the extent to which each is true at their school – using a 4-point Likert scale of Not true, A little bit true, Mostly true, or Completely true. Future administrations of the Part B tool will include new vignettes.

Also included in the Part B tool are several questions about participants' opinions of the vignette, to allow for ongoing monitoring of its realism, utility, and engagingness.

The Part B tool enables the Foundation not only to evaluate the efficacy of the eSmart School Framework, but also to:

- Evaluate the efficacy of eSmart Membership intervention, a stage of the eSmart journey that is undertaken once a school has worked through the Framework and earned eSmart status
- Drive continuous school improvement, as schools can monitor their school system over time, either independently or through reflective discussions with the Foundation's eSmart advisors

Baseline Sample

A sample of 50 schools was sought for this pre-test (Part A and Part B) component of the evaluation, with the following inclusion criteria applied:

4. The school had to be a part of the eSmart Schools Expansion Project ('Expansion schools')
5. The school had not yet commenced the eSmart Schools Framework process (i.e., they were an 'unregistered' school)
6. The school had not undertaken and then withdrawn from the eSmart Schools Framework process prior to 2017

All Expansion Schools (n= 609) were invited to participate. A total of 18 schools that strictly met the inclusion criteria agreed to participate. An additional 27 schools met criteria 1 and 3, but were eSmart 'registered' schools (as opposed to 'unregistered' schools), which means that some may have begun preliminary work within the eSmart Framework, thus precluding a "pure" baseline or 'pre-test' measurement. However, given the difficulty in recruiting schools in the midst of the COVID pandemic, as well as evidence of few differences between

the two categories of schools regarding their responses to the Part A and Part B tools, all 45 have been included in this report.

Analysis

The data have been analysed at an aggregate level for all 45 participating schools. Analyses were also conducted by sector (Government, Catholic, Independent); type (primary, secondary, combined); location (region, and metro/non-metro); socio-economic status (SES) (low, medium, high); Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) status (below average, above average), and eSmart status (unregistered, registered).

Analysis by sector and school type is important as these variables reflect the different educational environments, ages, and stages of students. There is also evidence of differences between primary and secondary schools in perceptions by students and teachers of cyber bullying (Barnes et al., 2012; Giménez-Gualdo et al., 2018).

Limited evidence exists regarding the impact of SES on the preparedness of schools to respond to cyber bullying (Egeberg, Thorvaldsen & Ronning, 2017). However, SES is an indicator of disadvantage and disadvantage has been linked to concerns for students who are less skilled or digitally savvy (Brown et al., 2020). Ensuring 'every child will live in a safe and supportive environment' is a key focus of the Foundation and the Victorian Department of Education and Training, so SES has been included as a variable in the present report. The ADII also follows Australia's economic and social divide and those with 'low levels of income, education, and employment are significantly less digitally included' (Thomas et al., 2017, p. 5). Emerging research has linked the digital divide to an increased risk of exposure to cyber bullying and inappropriate material for vulnerable children, particularly with their increased online educational activity through COVID-19 (Drane, Vernon & O'Shea, 2020).

Examining the impact of these demographic variables in relation to the self-assessment tool will enable the Foundation to tailor the assistance and support provided to schools as part of the eSmart Schools intervention.

As some sub-group sample sizes are small, particularly the number of Independent schools (n=5), secondary schools (n=6), and combined schools (n=5), inferential statistical analyses to compare sub-groups were not utilised. Instead, trends in the data are discussed. "Trends" are defined as any sub-group differences that meet the following criteria: (a) a consistent pattern of results (i.e., the same sub-group reports the highest or lowest score across all Domains or Focus Areas), and (b) the average difference is five percentage points (Part A) or five points (Part B). For example, in Part B, secondary schools reported consistently higher scores across each Focus Area, and the average difference between secondary school scores and either primary school or combined school scores was greater than five. This approach is somewhat arbitrary, but helps to identify potentially "true" differences in results by sub-groups of interest.

Given the small sample size, the results presented in this report cannot be generalised to the population of eSmart Expansion Schools. As more schools participate in the self-

assessment and additional waves of data are gathered, it will be possible to build on these initial findings.

While schools were invited to complete the Part A and B tools as part of a single survey, only 36 schools completed the Part B tool (compared to 45 respondents for Part A). Therefore, analyses for Part A are based on 45 schools and analyses for Part B are based on 36 schools.

Results for Part A are presented both as counts (number of action items achieved) and percentages (percentage of items within each Domain achieved).

Results for Part B are presented as a score out of 80 for each Focus Area (out of 400 total).

Responses to Part B statements are weighted, such that each of the five Focus Areas is weighted equally in the total score.

Part B total scores were accorded descriptors based on quadrant to indicate their position along the eSmart journey: “Starting” (quadrant 1); “Emerging” (quadrant 2); “Building” (quadrant 3); and “Flourishing” (quadrant 4). This will allow schools to easily compare their overall progress from year to year. The analysis also considered any incongruence between Parts A and Parts B.

A thematic analysis was undertaken for the qualitative component, identifying open-ended responses that aligned with areas of strength and those that required improvement in both Part A and Part B (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The qualitative analysis engaged current knowledge and emerging research to identify schools’ system level preparedness for, and response to, incidents of bullying and cyber bullying and the potential ongoing impact of COIVD-19.

Demographics of participating schools

More than half (n=25) of the participating schools were government schools. Just five were Independent schools, with the remainder of the sample (n=15) Catholic schools (Figure 1). As a percentage of the total population of Expansion Schools, these numbers represent 10% of government schools, 7% of Catholic schools, and 4% of Independent schools (Table 7). Therefore, not only did more government schools participate in this pre-test, but they did so at a higher rate when compared with the other sectors.

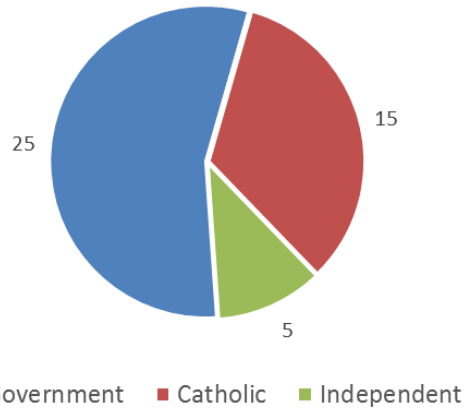


Figure 1. Participants by school sector

Completed Part B tool: 22 Government; 11 Catholic; 3 Independent

Table 7. Sample schools as a percentage of the Expansion Schools population

Sector	Sample	Expansion schools	Percentage of population
Government	25	253	10%
Catholic	15	214	7%
Independent	5	142	4%

The overwhelming majority of participating schools were primary schools (n=34; 9% of the population), with just 6 secondary schools (6% of the population) and 5 combined schools (3% of the population) participating.

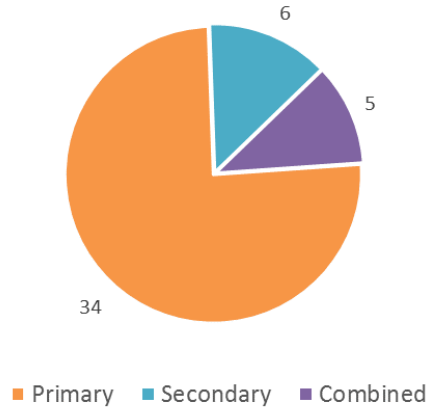


Figure 2. Participants by school type

Completed Part B tool: 25 Primary, 6 Secondary, 5 Combined

Most participating schools were high-SES schools (n=27), representing almost half of the sample but just 6% of the Expansion Schools population, compared with 10 medium-SES schools (13% of the population) and 8 low-SES schools (8% of the population).

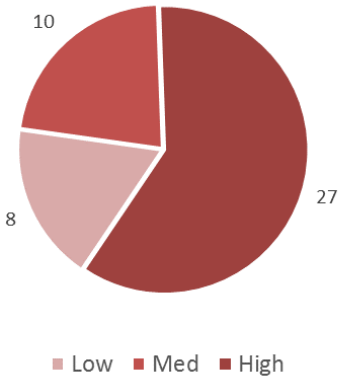


Figure 3. Participants by SES

Completed Part B tool: 5 low SES; 8 medium SES; 23 high SES

More participating schools were above average on the ADII (n=29; 6% of the population) than below average (n=16; 11% of the population).

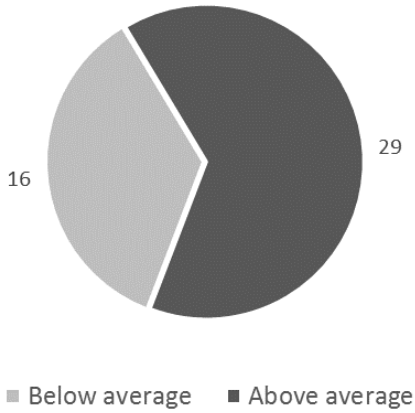


Figure 4. Participants by ADII

Completed Part B tool: 12 below average; 24 above average

Approximately equal numbers of metropolitan schools (n=23; 6% of the population) and non-metropolitan schools (n=22; 10% of the population) participated.

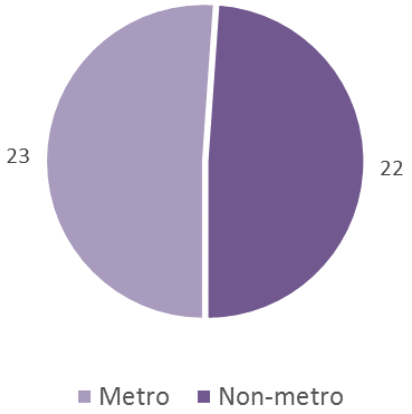


Figure 5. Participants by location: metro / non-metro

Completed Part B tool: 20 metro; 16 non-metro

Similar results are found by region, with approximately equal numbers of schools from each of the four DET regions participating. There were small differences by representation, with 9% of north-eastern schools in the population participating, 7% of north-western and south-eastern schools, and just 6% of south-western schools.

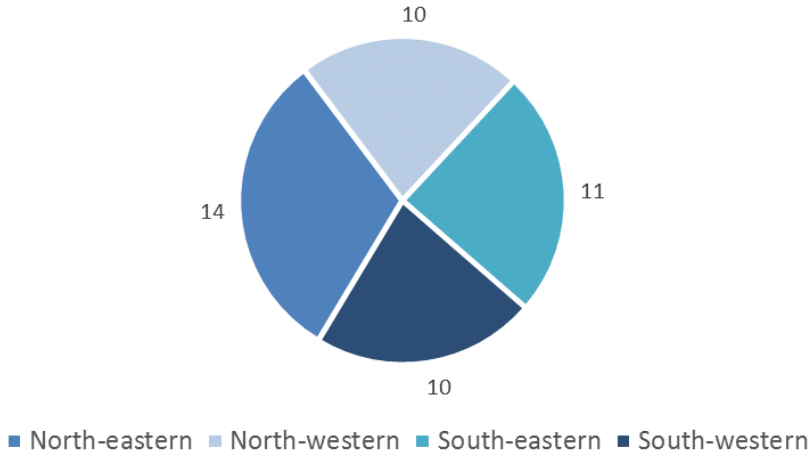


Figure 6. Participants by DET region

Completed Part B tool: 11 north-eastern, 9 north-western, 8 south-eastern, 8 south-western

Finally, more eSmart registered schools (n=27; 14% of the population) than unregistered schools (n=18; 4% of the population) participated. As discussed above, the original target for this evaluation was unregistered schools only. However, as will be shown in the analysis, there were few differences between these two categories of schools in their responses to the Part A and Part B tools, as both are in the early stages of their work towards becoming eSmart schools.

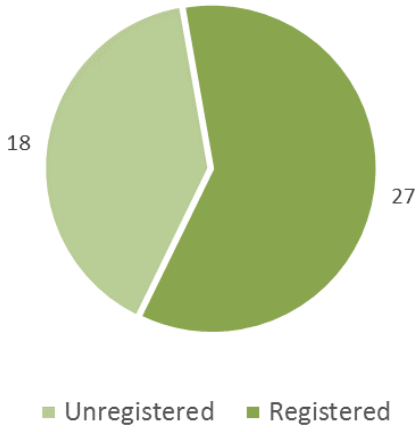


Figure 7. Participants by eSmart status

Completed Part B tool: 14 unregistered; 22 registered

Results

For the most part, results are presented separately for the Part A tool and the Part B tool, as each has a separate purpose and focus. Whereas the Part A tool is intended as a measure of progress towards eSmart school status, and is no longer completed once that status is achieved, the Part B tool offers schools an opportunity for ongoing self-assessment of how prepared the school is for, and how well positioned it is to respond to, future challenges – both being important in maintaining a fully eSmart school.

However, some analysis is provided comparing results from Part A and Part B. Of particular interest are cases in which schools scored very highly on the Part A tool but relatively poorly on the Part B tool, and visa-versa.

Part A Results

Across all participant schools, the median number of action items achieved across the six Domains was 19 out of 23. This number was slightly higher for the Catholic schools than for the government and Independent schools.

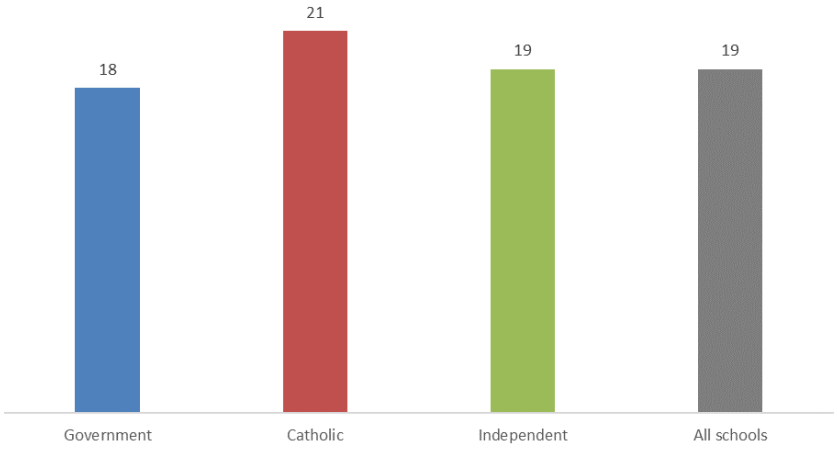


Figure 8. Part A: average (median) number of eSmart action items completed by sector (out of 23)

In examining the spread of responses by sector, it can be seen that a relatively large number of Catholic schools (n=6) reported they had achieved all 23 of the action items. This contrasts with the results for the other school sectors, in which the school scores were more evenly spread.

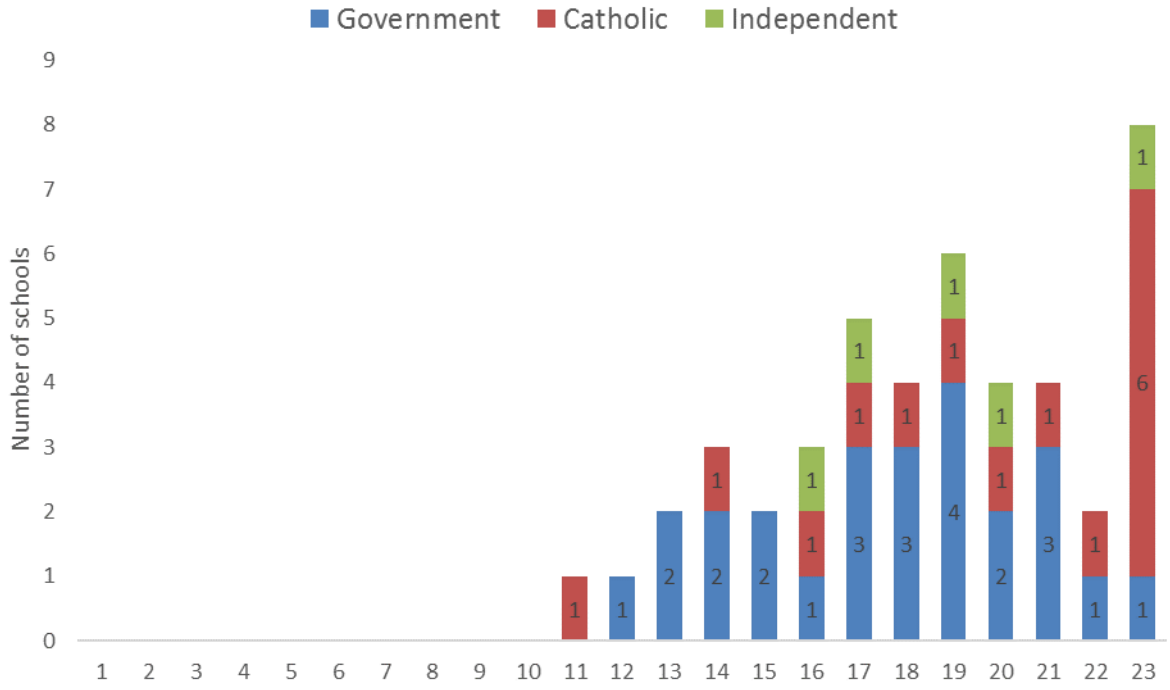


Figure 9. Part A: number of eSmart action items achieved (out of 23) by sector

The percentage achievement within each Domain for all schools (n=45) is presented in Figure 10. On average, schools assessed themselves as having achieved almost all action items within the Domains of *School plans, policies, and procedures*, and *A respectful and caring school community*. Schools were noticeably less advanced with respect to the *eSmart curriculum,* Domain.

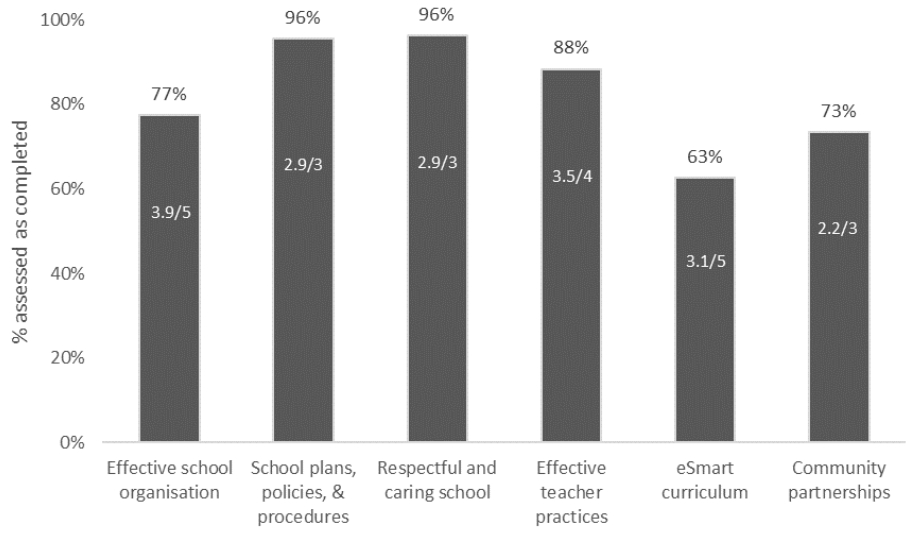


Figure 10. Part A: average (mean) completion of eSmart action items - all schools by Domain

Examining these results by school sector, we see a similar pattern, although Catholic schools assessed themselves as relatively further along on an *eSmart curriculum*.

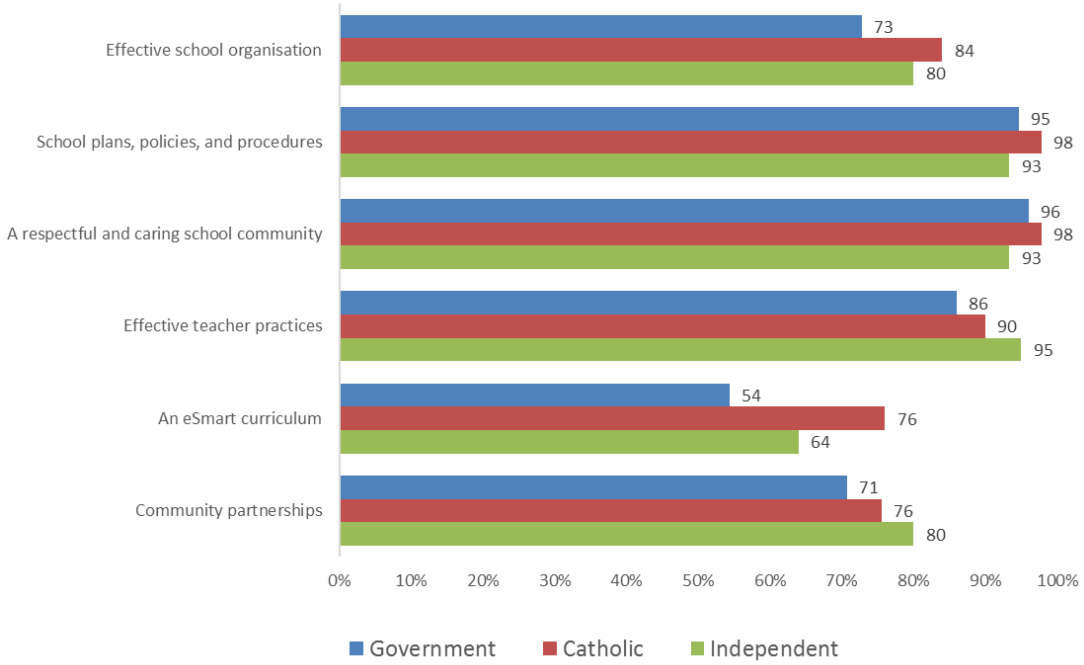


Figure 11. Part A: average (mean) completion of eSmart action items by Domain by sector

Strong Domain: Respectful and caring school

One of the strongest Domains in Part A was *A respectful and caring community,* with schools achieving on average 96% of these action items. Several schools discussed this Domain as a strength of their school.

> *We work hard to create a family environment where kids are safe and learn through play. We give them responsibility to use things correctly, teach them how to use things the right way rather than let them use tech for "stuff". We find if we fill the void with stimulating educational activities, they would rather do that than bully!* (Government primary, non-metropolitan, medium SES).

This Domain included three action items, with almost all respondents stating that their school had achieved all three.

Table 8. Domain: a respectful and caring community

Statement Number	Statement	Number of schools Yes	Number of schools No
5.1	has a strong set of prosocial values in place to guide behaviour both on and offline	44	1
5.2	applies an agreed set of protocols to guide staff in modelling respectful behaviour in their everyday interactions with students, parents, and other staff members, including in their online interactions	43	2
5.3	provides ways for students to formally and informally interact, in both same-age and cross age groups, in order to foster supportive relationships across the school community	43	2

Domain for improvement: An eSmart Curriculum

The *eSmart Curriculum* Domain consists of five action items, see Table 9.

As can be seen in Table 9, achievement across these items varied widely. Almost all schools (40 out of 45) stated that their school includes explicit teaching of rights and responsibilities as well as social and emotional skills in the classroom. However, only 18 schools reported that students at their school develop and share in teaching about the smart, safe, and responsible use of digital technologies to a range of audiences, including their peers and parents.

In examining the pattern of responses within this Domain, it appears that the greatest area for improvement is around student involvement. Both items 5.4 and 5.5, the lowest-ascribed items within the Domain, are about the explicit involvement of students. Of particular note, only 24% of the participating government schools stated that they had achieved item 5.5.

Table 9. Domain: an eSmart curriculum

Statement Number	Statement	Number of schools Yes	Number of schools No
5.1	includes explicit teaching of rights and responsibilities as well as social and emotional skills in the curriculum	40	5
5.2	includes the teaching of digital intelligence in the curriculum, and maintains related teacher knowledge and skills through professional learning	31	14
5.3	uses curriculum planning to identify where and how digital intelligence is to be taught	30	15
5.4	students are regularly involved in developing and delivering information about antisocial behaviours, such as bullying and cyber bullying, to a range of audiences	22	23

5.5	students develop, share and are involved in teaching about the smart, safe and responsible use of digital technologies to a range of audiences including peers and parents	18	27

In other Domains, however, schools generally reported successful student involvement, although often this involvement is implicit rather than explicit. For example, all 45 schools reported that they have achieved a 'whole school approach to behaviour management' (Domain 2*: School Plans, Policies, and Procedures*); 38 schools reported they have achieved 'confidential reporting systems for students to safely disclose incidents' (Domain 2); and 43 schools reported that their school 'provides ways for students to formally and informally interact in both same-age and cross-age groups, in order to foster supportive relationships across the school community' (Domain 3*: A Respectful and Caring School*).

An examination of results by SES shows no consistent differences, with low SES schools often reporting as much or more successful achievement on each Domain as high SES schools.

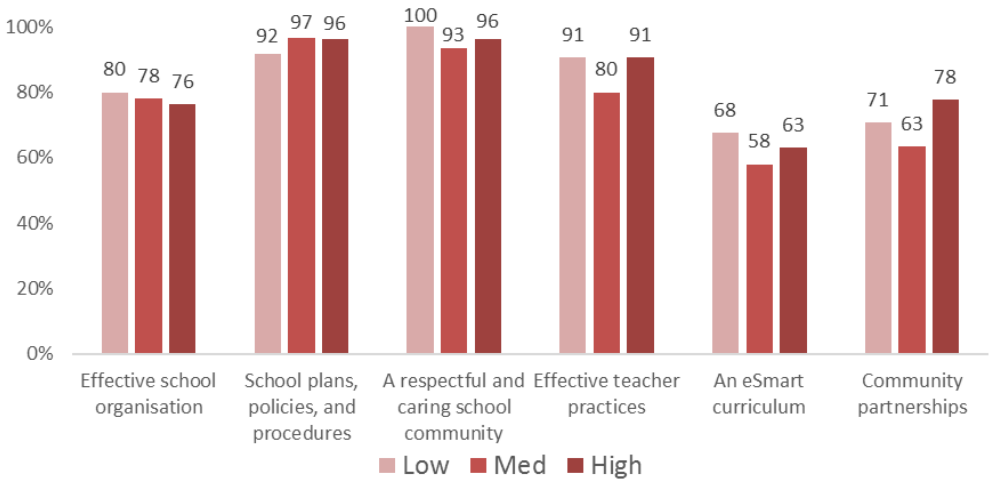


Figure 12. Part A: Average (mean) completion by Domain by SES.

Other sub-group differences were mostly small and inconsistent. Secondary schools tended to report higher levels of achievement across Domains than primary schools or combined schools, although there are only six secondary schools in the sample. Above average ADII schools tended to report higher levels of achievement than did below average ADII schools, as did schools located in metropolitan areas as compared with those located in regional areas. No consistent patterns were apparent by DET region or eSmart status.

Part B Quantitative Results

A total of 36 of the 45 schools completed Part B: 22 Government schools, 11 Catholic schools, and 3 Independent schools. These numbers reflect both the challenges of engaging schools in evaluation and reporting during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the amount of time required to complete both Parts A and B of the self-assessment tool.

This analysis indicates key areas of strength, as well as areas that require further attention. Overall, schools reported their best results in the *School Climate* Focus Area (69 points out of 80), and lowest results for *Gateway Behaviours* and *Data* (each 55 out of 80).

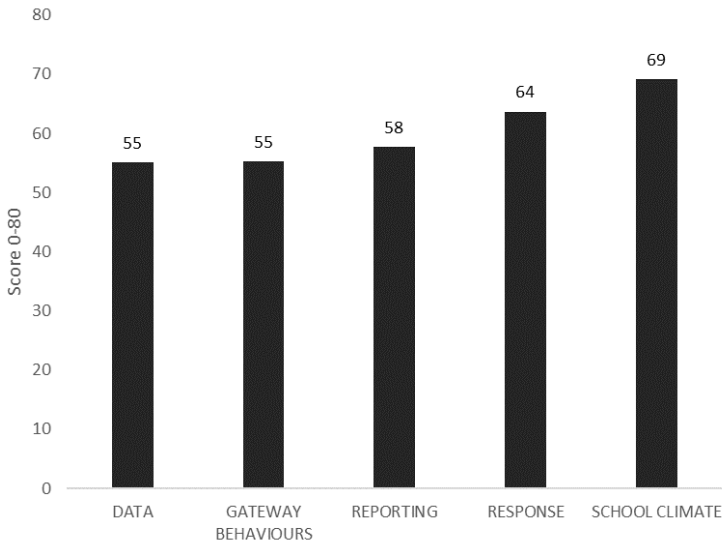


Figure 13. Part B: results by Focus Area - all schools

Analysis of Part B results by school sector (Figure 14) reveals that Government schools, on average, reported that they are somewhat better placed than Catholic and Independent schools to prevent and respond to anti-social activities. Government schools scored highest on all Focus Areas, although often the differences were very small.

This result is particularly interesting given the results from Part A, which show that Catholic schools reported greater achievement in identifying and addressing factors that impact on social support and connection within the school, refer to Figure 9.

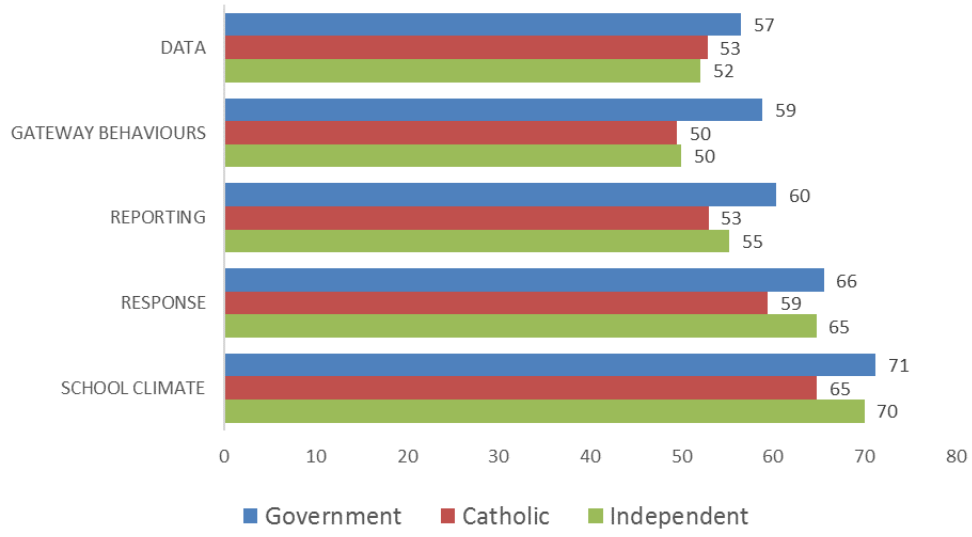


Figure 14. Part B: results by Focus Area by sector

Results by SES are shown in Figure 15. Similar to the results from Part A, there is no clear pattern, with low SES schools reporting similar, or for some Focus Areas such as School climate, better results, than high SES schools.

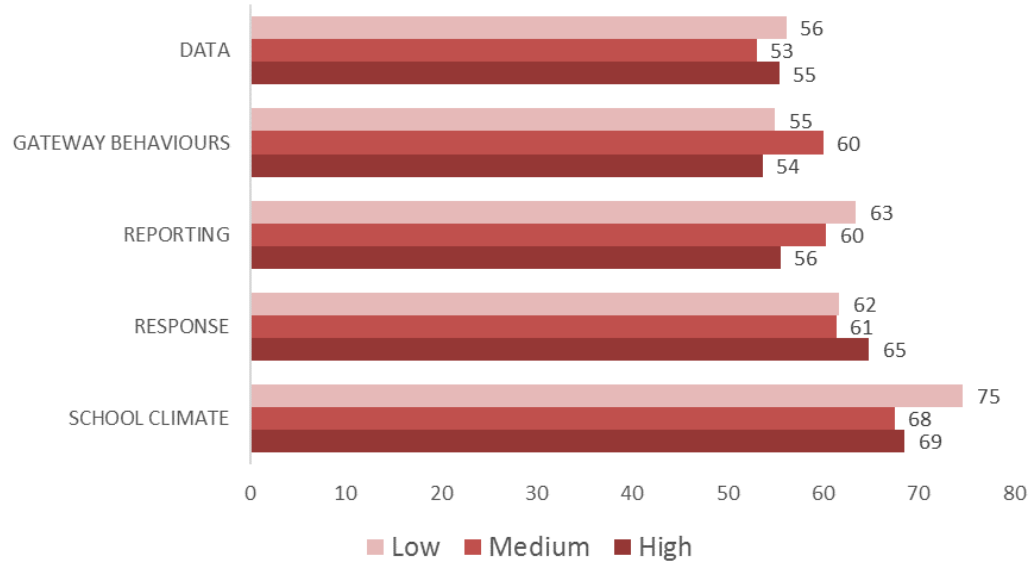


Figure 15. Part B: results by Focus Area by SE$

Although few secondary schools participated in the self-assessment, in every Domain they reported better preparation and response as compared with the other school types. This pattern of results was similar to the outcome of Part A, in which secondary schools also outperformed primary schools and combined schools, with the discrepancies for Part B somewhat larger than for Part A.

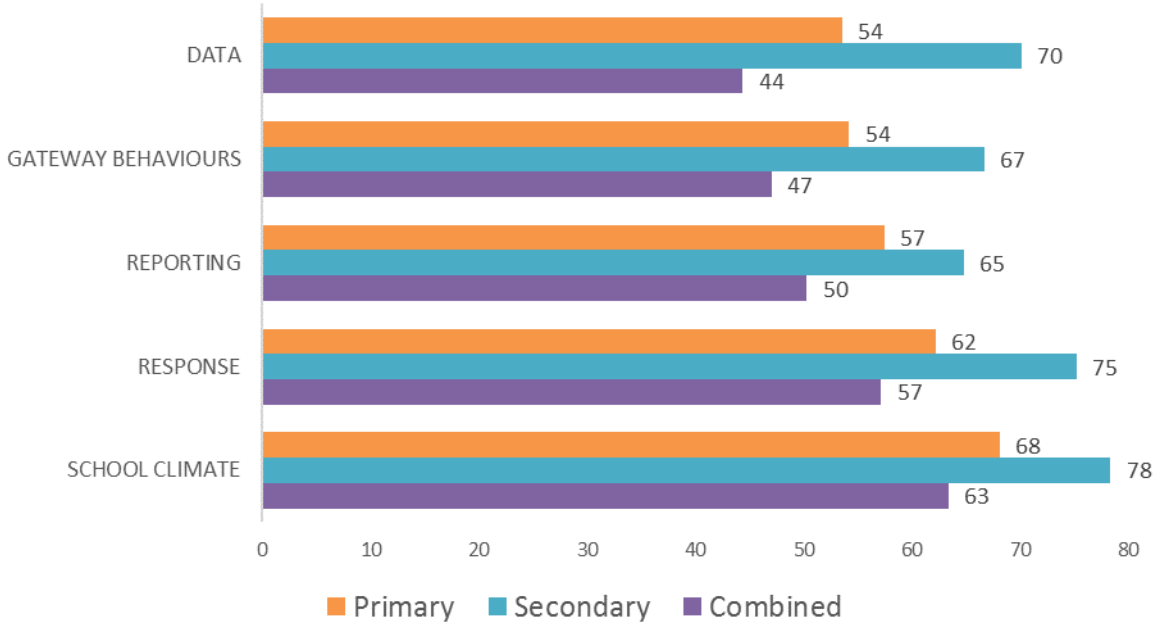


Figure 16. Part B: results by Focus Area by school type

Analysis by ADII, Region, and eSmart stage showed no consistent differences. Interestingly, although the differences were small, schools in regional areas reported slightly better results in Part B when compared with schools in metropolitan areas in all Focus Areas except for *Data*, in which the metro schools did slightly better.

Closer analysis of the strongest Focus Areas – *School climate*, and the areas most needing attention – *Gateway behaviours* and *Data*, provide additional insight into these results.

Strong Focus Area: School climate

The *School climate* Focus Area is measured with four statements, listed in Table 10 below. As can be seen, the degree to which schools believed each statement is true of their school varied. All schools agreed that it is mostly or completely true that *all school staff agree on the imperative for creating and maintaining a positive school environment* (Statement 7.1). Fewer schools agreed that *Data gathered on social relationships within the school includes measurement of norms regarding pro-social and anti-social behaviour*, with just 22 schools stating this is mostly or completely true (Statement 7.2.2).

Table 10. Focus Area: school climate

Statement	**Number of responses**				
	Not true	A little bit true	Mostly true	Completely true	Total
7.1. All school staff agree on the imperative for creating and maintaining a positive school environment.	0	0	2	34	36
7.2. Data gathered on social relationships within the school includes measurement of the following: 7.2.1 relationships between students, including levels of trust, support, empathy, and kindness	3	7	10	16	36
7.2.1. … data on relationships between students and teachers/staff, including levels of trust, support, empathy, and kindness	2	8	12	14	36
7.2.2. … data on norms regarding pro-social and anti-social behaviour (for example, level of acceptability of cyber bullying	4	10	12	10	36

Focus Area for improvement: Gateway Behaviours

Focus Area 4, *Gateway Behaviours*, is an area that schools can improve to build their preparedness for and response to future events and changes. The term, 'Gateway Behaviours', is used extensively in the scholarly literature around cyber bullying (Englander, 2017), with evidence that a school's ability to notice and respond to such behaviours promptly can result in a reduction of bullying and other anti-social behaviours. The following is the definition of *Gateway Behaviours* included in the Part B survey:

Gateway behaviours are lower-risk behaviours, online or offline, which are used to show contempt and dominance. When left unchecked, these behaviours can escalate into conflict and bullying. Examples include posting embarrassing photos online, ignoring, name calling, whispering about people in front of them, eye rolling.

An examination of responses to the Gateway behaviours Focus Area by statement, see Table 11, shows that many schools reported that it was either not true or only a little bit true that *school staff are trained in, and consistently practice, identifying both overt and covert gateway behaviours* (Statement 4.2; 19 out of the 36 schools). Similarly, many schools reported that it was either not true or only a little bit true that *students immediately and consistently report any gateway behaviours observed* (Statement 4.4; 16 out of the 36 schools). This latter result supports the earlier finding regarding the *eSmart Curriculum* Domain from Part A that schools appear to struggle with directly involving students in addressing anti-social behaviours and school connectedness.

Table 11. Focus Area: gateway behaviours

Statement	Number of responses				
	Not true	A little bit true	Mostly true	Completely true	Total
4.1 The identification and reporting of gateway behaviours is viewed as a **crucial** activity for the school by the Principal, all school staff, students, and parents.	2	5	13	16	36
4.2 School staff are trained in, and consistently practice, identifying both overt and covert gateway behaviours, including online behaviours.	4	15	13	4	36
4.3 School staff immediately and consistently report any gateway behaviours observed.	4	9	13	10	36
4.4 Students immediately and consistently report any gateway behaviours observed.	5	11	14	6	36

Focus Area for improvement: Data

The other Focus Area that schools reported as being least prominent in their current practice is *Data* – both the collection of data and, most clearly, the use of data to identify, prevent, and respond to bullying and other anti-social behaviours. This was particularly true for primary and combined schools.

Room for improvement in this Focus Area was evident in responses to the following statement, for which only 13 of the 36 schools responded that this is mostly true or completely true of their school:

Table 12. Focus Area: Data - statement 3.3

Statement	Number of responses			
	Not true	A little bit true	Mostly true	Completely true
3.3 Data review is conducted regularly (at least monthly) and integrated into standard practice (for example, data review is a standing meeting agenda item	12	11	8	5

Other statements within the *Data* Focus Area that fewer than half of the schools agreed was true of their school (*mostly true* or *completely true*) were:

Table 13. Focus Area: Data - statements 3.2.5 & 3.4.5.

Statement	Number of responses			
	Not true	A little bit true	Mostly true	Completely true
3.2.5. the extent to which students believe teachers and other school staff model positive behaviours themselves	3	17	4	12
3.4.5 data reviews are conducted to: evaluate whether current approaches to the prevention of, and response to, cyber bullying and bullying are working	3	15	11	7

Part B – Qualitative Results

The following section of the report discusses findings from the four open-ended questions included in the Part B tool: three that were asked of participants before they responded to the 40 statements, and one that was asked at the end of the Part B tool, which gave participants a final chance to provide information about anything that had not already been asked.

1.a What procedures does your school have in place that would have allowed it to identify that such an incident might be brewing?

Gateway behaviours (Englander, 2017) may not be a term that schools are familiar with; however, student behaviour was at the forefront of participant responses to this question. The term, 'behaviours', was used extensively by participants, including 'undesirable' and 'inappropriate', 'positive', 'social', and 'expected' behaviours. One school identified gateway behaviours by acknowledging that an incident 'may begin with other smaller incidental actions'. 'Teaching pro-social behaviours' was central to procedures at three schools, which referenced the DET School-wide Positive Behaviours Framework.

Participants referred to strong, close, respectful, and trusted relationships between students, teachers, and school staff across their school, including one-on-one relationships,

that create a 'strong bond and connection with one teacher'. The importance of positive school environments, where students feel safe, was clear:

> *Students and parents are confident to come to the staff - teachers, ES [education support], principal – to express concerns before it gets to this stage. Our parents are very quick to let us know if something is brewing as our students require a lot of support to manage these situations (Government combined school, metropolitan, high SES).*

Trust was key here as 'trusted relationships between students and teachers enable confidences to be shared'. Group sessions were important, including 'circle time', small group work, 'wellbeing lessons', and regular weekly commitments, including '75-minute wellbeing sessions'. Other participants reported that they use wellbeing check-in programs, such as *Skodel*, *SIMON,* and the Twitter-inspired *iwishmyteacherknew*.

Communication was identified as being important, primarily between students and teachers/school staff. Many reported conversations with students about behaviours, but they also identified staff meetings, conversations, and observations as key to identifying an incident. Participants also reported strong relationships with parents, whom they described were 'confident to come to the staff', helping schools to identify the early signs of an incident brewing.

Participants reported that having appropriate school policies in place would enable them to identify incidents as they are brewing. These included 'child safe', 'student management', 'social media' policies and a 'behaviour audit'. There was little reference, however, to a broader engagement with school data.

1.b. If your school identifies that such an incident might be brewing, what steps does it take to prevent escalation?

In response to this question, participants focused on the students directly engaged in the incident and their parents. Communication was important; however, this focused primarily on the students and families directly involved in the incident.

Restorative action was a strong theme, with 10 participants reporting that they would adopt restorative conferences, conversations, meetings, or practices to prevent escalation. While much of the restorative action focused on the students involved, including bystanders, several schools reported that they would engage with the 'whole cohort or school discussion and investigation [with] generic communication to all families.'

Communicating the incident and response with teachers and school staff was part of the schools' response to prevent escalation, including classroom teachers, unit leaders, wellbeing staff, welfare staff, a chaplain, and psychologists.

The monitoring of behaviours, as well as teaching and reinforcement of appropriate behaviours with students, was evident. Participants referred to a 'behaviour continuum' and

'solution matrix' that would enable teachers and staff to 're-direct and re-teach expected behaviours'.

Six schools acknowledged the complexity and severity of the incident described in the audio vignette, indicating that they would report the incident to police or report the abusive behaviour directly via the social media platform, such as Twitter.

Participants stated that an incident would become a learning experience for the whole school. The reported incident would inform cyber bullying education and curriculum design, conversations with students, and communication to families. A secondary school participant demonstrated what this learning experience would encompass:

> *If there are specific areas of need, we would use this opportunity to develop and deliver curriculum that helps students to better understand what their responsibilities are, and/or look at specialist consultants to deliver sessions (Government secondary, metropolitan, high SES).*

2. *If an incident like this occurs at your school – where things have already escalated – what steps does your school take to respond to the incident?*

It is clear that schools would take the type of incident presented in the audio scenario seriously and adopt a whole of school approach in their response. Participants reported that restorative practices would inform the steps their school would take. These included adopting a 'restorative practice framework', and community conferences and conversations.

Enabling behavioural change was apparent, with one participant referencing a 'behaviour matrix', another a 'behaviour pyramid', and one referred to a 'behavioural continuum', which includes 'reteach, redirect, leadership support, movement breaks, student reflection'.

The consequences for students involved were evident, as participants reported their schools would develop a conciliation plan, or plan of action that adhered to their own Code of Conduct and DET requirements.

Recording and reporting on the incident was evident in participants' responses, and that 'clear documentation and communication' would take place.

3. *Finally, please tell us anything else not already asked about regarding how your school, at the system level, prepares for and respond to, cyber bullying and bullying.*

Two participants used this opportunity to state that they have no incidents of bullying or cyber bullying in their schools. Reasons given for this assertion included being a 'small country school' in which few students or families have computers. Another reported that they had created 'a family environment where kids are safe and learn through play'.

One of these schools supported this claim with data. The other stated they did not have the need to keep records or to establish formal relationships between students and teachers or establish formal groups due to their small size and everyone knowing each other.

Overall progress (total score by quartile)

Based on the total score from the Part B tool, schools can be assigned to one of four categories that represents where they currently sit in the eSmart Schools journey: Starting, Emerging, Building, or Flourishing. Such a designation can assist both the Foundation and schools to easily compare overall results across years – to understand where they currently sit and the progress they have made since their last self-assessment.

The four quartiles can also be used by the Foundation as a benchmarking exercise with schools – for example, to demonstrate to each school where it sits overall as compared with other schools from the same sector, SES status, metropolitan or non-metropolitan area, ADII, or DET Region.

Given that the Expansion Schools are only just beginning their engagement with the eSmart Framework, it might be expected that most would be categorised as either *Starting* or *Emerging.* However, 18 of the 36 participating schools fell into the *Flourishing* category, with an additional 16 schools falling into the third quadrant – *Building.* No schools landed in the first quadrant, *Starting* (see Fig. 17). These results were largely consistent across the three school sectors, although all government schools sat within the *Flourishing* or *Building* stages.

Despite this result, all schools have room for improvement across the Focus Areas.

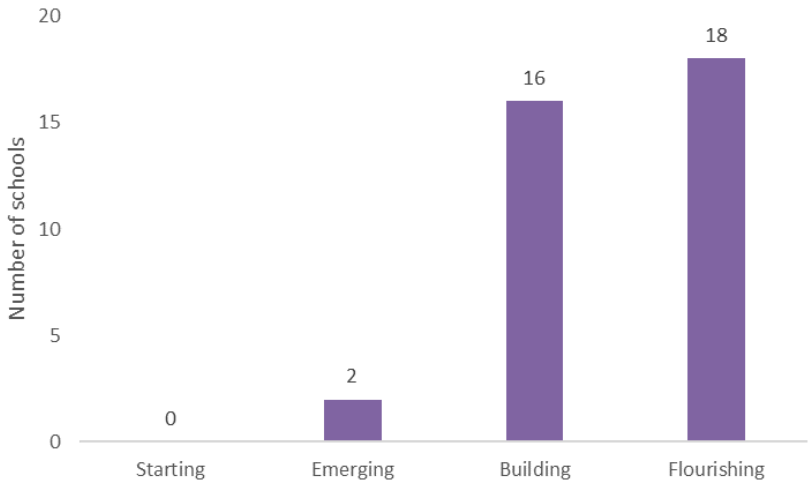


Figure 17. Part B: progress in eSmart journey - all schools

School perceptions of performance

Schools were asked, using a 10-point scale, to assess their preparedness and responsiveness to an event or situation affecting their school both before and after listening to the audio

scenario and answering the 40- items in the Part B tool. These questions were included in the tool to understand if schools' views would be impacted by their responses to the specific statements across the five Focus Areas; in other words, whether schools either overestimated or underestimated the extent to which their school is prepared to prevent and respond to disruptive events.

Figures 18 and 19, below, show the results for all schools. The orange line indicates where schools would sit if they gave the same response to each question before and after completing the 40 statements. On average, schools provided approximately the same scores before and after when asked about prevention. They provided slightly higher scores after for response.

This analysis indicates that, on average, schools' self-assessment regarding their preparedness to respond to a situation was lower before listening to the vignette and answering to the items compared to after. This result suggests that schools may be somewhat better prepared to respond to an incident of cyber bullying or bullying than they might initially think.

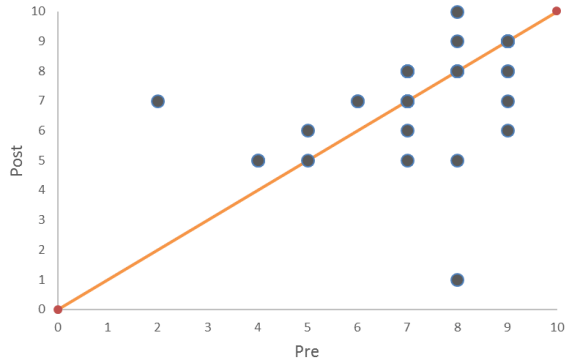


Figure 18.How well-placed schools believe they are to prevent a situation: pre- vs. post-Part B: self-assessment

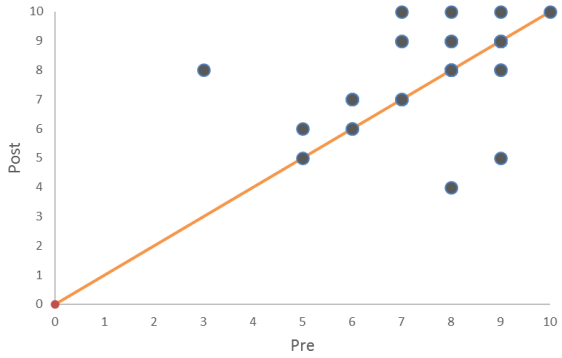


Figure 19. How well-placed schools believe they are to respond to a situation: pre- vs. post-Part B: self-assessment

When unregistered and registered schools were examined separately, unregistered schools reported slightly lower scores after responding to the 40 statements than prior, whereas the scores for registered schools were similar before and after.

Comparison of results from Part A and Part B

Although it is neither possible nor desirable to directly compare results from Parts A and B, it is interesting to observe that some schools that reported achieving all or nearly all of the action items in Part A had relatively weak outcomes in Part B, and visa-versa. Below are examples of two such schools:

School X reported achieving all 23 action items on the Part A tool but a score of only 268 out of 400 on the Part B tool. School X is a Catholic primary school located in metropolitan north-west Victoria. It is a high SES school and above average on the ADII. It is an eSmart registered school.

School Y reported achieving just 14 out of the 23 action items on the Part A tool but a score of 340 out of 400 on the Part B tool. School Y is a Government primary school located in non-metropolitan south-west Victoria. It is a medium SES school and below average on the ADII. It is an eSmart registered school.

The figure below, see Figure 20, shows Part A and Part B results for all schools, with each dot representing a school. The black line indicates average responses across all schools. Those schools located furthest from the line reported a combination of Part A and Part B schools most dissimilar to the average (i.e., relatively high Part A scores but low Part B scores, or relatively low part A score but high Part B scores). The red dots represent the five schools with the highest Part A score relative to their Part B score, and the green dots represent the five schools with the lowest Part A score relative to their Part B score.

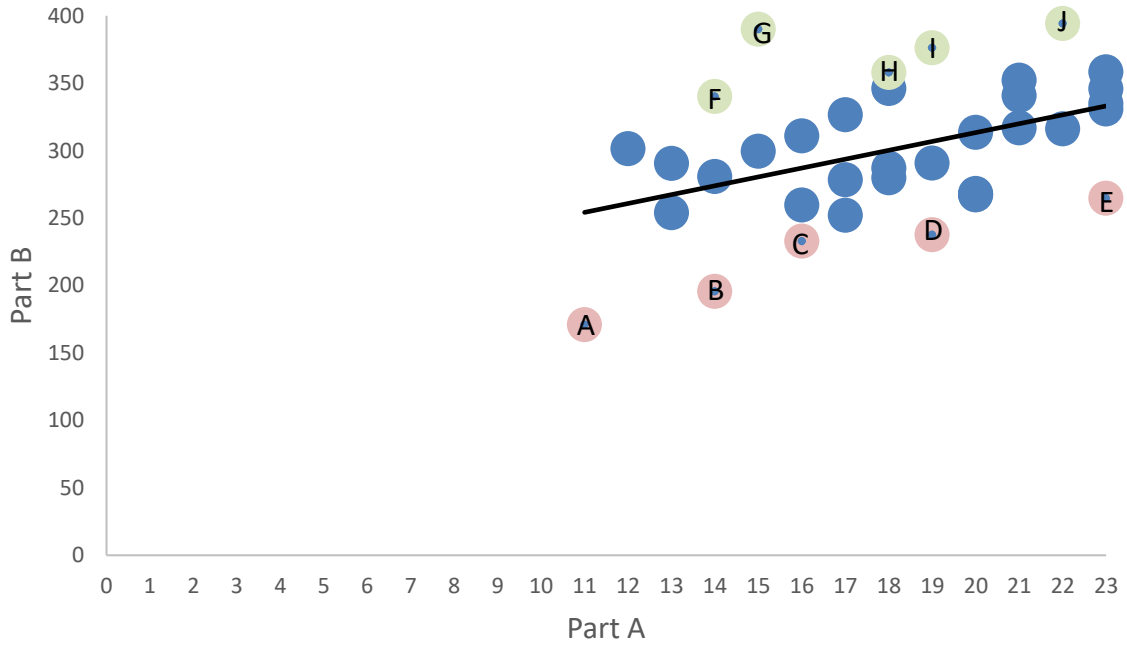


Figure 20. Comparison of Part A and Part B scores - all schools

An examination of these 10 "unbalanced" schools suggests a tendency for the high Part A / low Part B schools to be Catholic schools, and for the low Part A / high Part B schools to be Government schools, secondary schools, or unregistered schools (see Table 14). No other trends by school demographic variables were apparent. Subsequent administrations of the tools will provide additional evidence regarding this initial finding.

Table 14. 'Unbalanced' schools by demographics

	Sector	SES	Type	Metro / Non-metro	DET region	ADII	eSmart stage
High Part A / Low Part B							
School A	Catholic	High	Primary	Non-metro	SW	Above avg	Reg
School B	Catholic	Med	Primary	Non-metro	NW	Below avg	Unreg
School C	Independent	High	Comb	Metro	SW	Above avg	Reg
School D	Government	High	Comb	Metro	SE	Above avg	Reg
School E	Catholic	High	Primary	Metro	NW	Above avg	Reg
Low Part A / High Part B							
School F	Government	Med	Primary	Non-metro	SW	Below avg	Reg
School G	Government	High	Secondary	Metro	NE	Above Avg	Unreg
School H	Government	High	Secondary	Metro	NE	Above avg	Reg
School I	Indep	Low	Secondary	Non-metro	SW	Above avg	Reg
School J	Government	High	Primary	Non-metro	SW	Above avg	Unreg
Average - all schools							

An examination of Focus Area scores for these 10 schools is presented below, see Table 15. The grey shaded cells represent scores that deviate by more than 20 points (out of a possible 80 points) from the average (mean) score across all schools for that Focus Area.

For the schools with high Part A scores relative to their Part B scores, *Data, Gateway behaviours,* and *Response* appear to be the areas of particular weakness. In other words, despite these schools ticking off a relatively large number of action items in the Part A tool, they reported relatively low scores on these three Focus Areas.

For the schools with low Part A scores relative to their Part B scores, *Data* and *Response* appear to be relative areas of strength. In other words, despite these schools ticking off relatively few action items in the Part A tool, they reported relatively high scores on these two Focus Areas.

School climate is the one Focus Area for which scores on Part A largely matched scores on Part B, with none of the "unbalanced" schools reporting an unusually low or high score on this Focus Area, as defined by the criteria of +/- 20 points.

As with the examination of results by demographic variables, subsequent administrations of the Part A and Part B tools will provide additional evidence regarding this initial finding.

Table 15. 'Unbalanced' schools by Focus Area

	Data	Gateway behaviours	Reporting	Response	School climate	TOTAL
High Part A / Low Part B						
School A	36	25	20	40	50	171
School B	32	30	46	31	57	196
School C	33	45	43	51	60	233
School D	50	45	40	43	60	238
School E	29	25	60	77	73	265
Low Part A / High Part B						
School F	58	65	71	69	77	340
School G	75	75	80	80	80	390
School H	68	70	63	80	77	358
School I	80	65	71	80	80	376
School J	80	80	80	74	80	394
Avg - all schools	**55**	**55**	**58**	**64**	**69**	**301**

Methodological limitations

The above findings present an interesting snapshot of schools' performance on the Part A and B tools; however, it should be noted that, due to the small sample size and related inability to conduct inferential statistical analyses, the findings reflect general trends in the data and must therefore be interpreted with caution, as any noted differences between different sub-groups are not likely to be statistically meaningful. The small sample size also presents a methodological limitation, insofar as it means that the results are unlikely to be generalisable beyond the current sample.

To substantiate the trends evidenced in the current dataset and allow for the findings to be more widely applicable to all schools with Expansion Funding, as well as the broader group of schools participating in the eSmart Framework under other funding arrangements, future research with larger sample sizes - and inferential statistical analyses - will be needed, as will multiple post-test analyses to assess changes in school responses as they progress through the Framework.

Discussion

The aim of the eSmart Schools Outcome Evaluation is to determine the efficacy of the eSmart Schools Framework by establishing baseline measures (pre-test), against which later comparisons will be made (post-test). It does so using the following self-assessment tools completed by a school principal or other school leader:

1. Part A – gap analysis (annually, until attainment of eSmart status)
2. Part B – system function (annually, ongoing)

This interim report presents findings from the initial, baseline measurement involving 45 schools across Victoria that are at the beginning of their involvement with the eSmart Framework.

A final report will compare the results between this initial self-assessment and a second, post-test self-assessment conducted in the second quarter of 2022.

COVID-19 has presented many challenges for schools and continues to have a significant impact as schools focus on online or off-site teaching and addressing the social needs of students (Flack et al., 2020). As a result, school engagement in the evaluation was lower than anticipated. However, the 45 schools that completed Part A and the 36 that completed Part B have provided valuable evidence that has captured a baseline measurement of performance on the outcomes of interest. From a business operations perspective, the preliminary evaluation results will assist schools to identify their strengths and areas for improvement as they begin their work through the eSmart Framework.

Strengths and areas for improvement

The results from the self-assessments indicate several areas of strength within schools' system level processes and procedures to ensure a supportive and cohesive school environment. In Part A, we see that schools perceive strong achievement in the Domains, *Respectful and caring schools* and *School plans, policies & procedures*, with schools achieving on average 96% of the action items within each of these Domains. However, schools reported less achievement in the *eSmart Curriculum* Domain, with an average of 63% of action items achieved, as well as the *Community Partnerships* Domain, with an average of 73% of action items achieved.

In Part B, schools reported strengths in the *School Climate* Focus Area, scoring on average 69 out of 80. This Focus Area included an assessment of whether all school staff agree on the imperative to create and maintain a positive school environment. The remaining three statements focus on the collection of data around social relationships and pro-social and anti-social behaviour. While schools tended to score lower on the three data items, they reported higher scores on the positive school environment statement.

Another area of relative strength was the Focus Area, *Response,* in which schools scored an average of 64 out of 80. Statements here focused on response plans; meeting with victims; offering comfort, counselling and additional support; meeting with perpetrators; following up with parents/carers; and informing relevant school staff. Schools scored relatively highly across all items within this Focus Area, with over two thirds of participants indicating the statements were mostly true or completely true in their school environment.

Focus Areas that require greater improvement were identified as *Gateway Behaviours* and *Data,* both with an average score of 55 out of 80. Unpacking responses to each of the statements in these Focus Areas and comparing these with participant responses to the open-ended questions reveals that schools may underestimate the extent to which identifying and reporting gateway behaviours is important. Schools are less advanced in the training of staff to identify overt and covert behaviours, both online and offline, and ensuring that staff and students immediately report any gateway behaviours. This is an interesting finding, as the qualitative findings illustrated that schools are very invested in creating an environment that allows for this to happen.

The *Data* Focus Area includes seven statements, covering student attendance, health and wellbeing reports, students' perspectives, staff focus groups, and school reviews. With limited reference to data in the qualitative responses and relatively low scores in this Focus Area, it appears that the collection and use of data may not be at the forefront of schools' thinking around the identification of, and response to, cyber bullying and bullying, and the steps needed to prevent escalation. Taken together, the findings around *Gateway Behaviours* and *Data* indicate two potentially important points of intervention for the eSmart Advisors in the work they do with schools around the Framework.

Most schools reported strong achievement in Part A, with a median of 19 action items completed out of 23. Most also reported being quite well placed to prepare for and respond to any incidents at their school – with all but two schools scoring in the top two quartiles for total score in Part B ('building' and 'flourishing'). Despite these results, there is still substantial room for improvement – particularly in the Focus Areas of *Data* and *Gateway behaviours.* The general tendency towards self-reporting bias must also be kept in mind (Moore & Baltutis, 2016). Schools are being asked to report on their own systems, and are therefore likely to report more positive levels than may actually be the case. Moreover, the weighting applied across the five Focus Areas may have inflated schools' results. For example, the *School Climate* Focus Area, in which schools reported high scores, consisted of only three statements, whereas the *Data* Focus Area, for which schools reported much lower scores, consisted of seven statements. It is also difficult to know whether this outcome is due to the particular sample of schools included in the evaluation, or whether all schools would report similar outcomes. Therefore, in terms of measuring progress, the baseline measure is not in and of itself indicative; instead, comparisons against data collected at future time points will provide a better measure of schools' progress over time, and their performance in relation to the evaluation outcomes of interest.

The fact that responses to the tools do not appear to differ for the most part between unregistered schools (those that have not begun to interact with the eSmart Framework)

and registered schools (those that may have begun some preliminary activities) was interesting but perhaps not surprising. Further iterations of the tools will shed greater light on these preliminary outcomes. When unregistered schools and registered schools were examined separately for their responses before and after completing the 40 statements in the Part B tool, unregistered schools reported slightly lower scores after responding to the 40 statements than prior, whereas the scores for registered schools were similar before and after. This finding may indicate that unregistered schools are less aware of the requirements for becoming an eSmart school, and had assumed, prior to responding to the detailed questions, that they were better prepared than they actually are.

Interestingly, several participants stated in responses to the open-ended questions that they do not have any bullying at their school. This is despite evidence that school bullying remains a serious issue in Australia, with more than one in four Year 4 to Year 9 students reporting that they have been bullied every few weeks (Australian Government, 2020), and with an unknown number going unreported. Research shows that students do not always report incidents to teachers and school staff, particularly if the cyber bullying is covert (Barnes et al., 2012). Moreover, the complex nature of cyber bullying and bullying suggests that even schools with plans and procedures in place cannot control the external societal influences of cyber bullying and bullying or stay on top of rapidly changing digital behaviours (Englander, 2013; Harris & Jones, 2020; Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Pennell et al., 2020) and that schools require ongoing support to address and respond to incidents of cyber bullying and bullying. The Foundation does a lot of this work for schools by ensuring their eSmart Advisors have the expertise to support and work with schools who engage in the Framework.

Key emerging themes

Active student involvement in eSmart Framework journey

One of the key themes that emerged across the Part A and Part B results was the limited direct and explicitly planned involvement at the school system level of students in combating anti-social behaviours. The survey findings indicate reasonable student involvement in *response* to anti-social behaviours, and they are mentioned in school plans, policies, and procedures. This is consistent in the open-ended responses where participants reported that their schools teach students appropriate behaviours, actively develop relationships with students to facilitate the reporting of incidents, and hold weekly sessions to focus on student wellbeing. Absent, however, in both the quantitative and qualitative data was evidence of an active engagement in student-led or co-designed cyber bullying preparedness and response initiatives. While schools captured student perspectives through wellbeing check-in sessions or programs, there was no evidence that this information was utilised to engage students actively in the eSmart journey.

Research shows that engaging and actively involving young people in decisions that affect them is important (Cahill & Dadvand, 2018; Cook-Sather, 2020; Corney et al., 2020). There are many concepts that promote the involvement of young people, including ‘student voice’, ‘co-design’, ‘co-led’, ‘co-creation’, ‘co-production’, and co-management’. However, not all lead to ‘student agency’ and it has been argued, in student voice and youth

participation literature, that schools are not experienced in sharing power and responsibility with students. Student agency connects the 'sound of students speaking with students having the power to influence practices and analyses of education' (Cook-Sather, 2020, p. 182). Adopting a true student involvement approach to cyber bullying and the social environment of schools requires a shift in mind-set. This requires schools to ensure that 'it is young people identifying the needs and informing the approach' (Pennell, et al., 2020). This might include involving students in the 'meaningful processes of analysing teaching and learning' so that their 'voices and perspectives' inform practices and policies (Cook-Santher, p. 183). The *eSmart Curriculum* Domain focuses on this active involvement and engagement with students, and the eSmart Advisors are well placed to support schools to create more inclusion conditions and evolve school practices and policies.

Effective and pro-active use of data

Effective use of data by schools to identify, prevent, and respond to anti-social behaviours was an identified area requiring improvement in the Part B *Data* Focus area. Whereas most of the schools appear to *collect* relevant data, they were much less likely to *effectively use* this data to prevent and respond to bullying and other anti-social behaviours, as indicated by the responses to statements in the Part B *Data* domain.

A key component of School-Wide Positive Behaviour Interventions and Supports or other behaviour frameworks is the use of data. Data can be used to determine how effective the interventions are, what modifications could be implemented to strengthen them and address behaviour problems more effectively, and which can actually change behaviour (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014). As behaviour management was mentioned by many participants, and the way in which many schools said they identify an incident might be brewing, a more proactive engagement with school level data would assist their awareness of potential incidents and challenges to the school environment.

Referral data, including attendance records and student surveys, is another significant resource for schools that appears to be overlooked by schools. The level of data already available in schools is considerable, although traditionally schools have used this data for reporting requirements and not to understand students better. Increasingly, however, schools are beginning to explore how student and school level data can be used to better understand students and gain greater insights into the school environment (Selwyn, Pangrazio & Cumbo, 2011). Concerns around the legal implications of sharing information about students were evident in the open-ended responses, creating barriers for schools' engagement with data (Drane, Vernon & O'Shea, 2020; Pennell, et al., 2020).

While schools were making advances in the use of data pre-COVID, it is unclear how the pandemic has impacted this progress. However, with concerns for students who are less skilled or digitally savvy, and increased incidents of cyber bullying, data is likely to remain a key focus area for schools (Brown et al., 2020; Drane, Vernon & O'Shea, 2020; Lessard & Puhl, 2021).

Gateway behaviours

Gateway behaviours were identified as a key area for improvement for most schools. While schools focused on student behaviour, this tended to be more broadly around teaching students about appropriate, pro-social behaviours and how to behave in a civilized and considerate manner (Englander, 2017), rather than identifying and addressing individual problematic student behaviours. This suggests that schools could be supported by the Foundation to introduce procedures to detect early signs of incidents. Working with the eSmart Advisors on this Focus Area will also assist schools to address their *Reporting* of cyber bullying, another identified area of relative weakness.

Secondary schools report better results

Across Part A and Part B, secondary schools consistently outperformed primary and combined schools. With only six participants, it is difficult to know whether this is a generalisable result, but it is an interesting finding that will be worth tracking over time.

There are many factors that could contribute to this result, including the different social environments of primary, secondary, and combined schools. Age has been acknowledged as a factor in schools' response to cyber bullying (Ho, Chen & Ng, 2017), and building empathy with older students (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). Australian research has also identified differences in the reporting of cyber bullying, school policies, and response, between primary, secondary, and combined schools as well as between government and non-government schools (Australian Government, 2014). The eSmart Framework recognises the unique structure of schools and that eSmart looks different in every school. The eSmart Advisors are well placed to consider the heterogeneity of contexts, needs, and resources of the different school types as it provides feedback and works with schools who undertake the eSmart Framework intervention.

Perceptions of performance

When asked to assess how well placed their schools are to prevent, and respond to, antisocial behaviours before and after they completed the Part B statement, participant responses were consistent for preparedness but slightly higher after for response. This result suggests that schools may be slightly better prepared to respond a situation than they had initially thought. A comparison of responses by unregistered and registered schools indicates that unregistered schools may be less aware of what constitutes the level of preparedness required and to be well placed to respond. While these trends require further data collection and statistical analysis in order to be fully substantiated, the latter finding suggests that unregistered schools may have initially over-estimated their preparedness to respond to instances of bullying and cyber bullying, and may therefore benefit from participating in such a program as the eSmart Schools Framework – with the assistance of the eSmart Advisors, unregistered schools will be afforded the opportunity to further their knowledge and understanding of what is needed in order to be well-prepared for, and responsive to, unexpected challenges they might face.

Incongruence between Parts A and B

Although Parts A and B of the evaluation have somewhat different foci and serve different purposes, it would be expected that there would be some relationship between the two

sets of self-assessment as they are both measuring system-level factors in schools. For the most part, this was true -- schools that indicated achievement of most action items in Part A also reported strong agreement with many statements in Part B. This was not always the case, however. Of note were schools that responded 'yes' to achieving all or almost all action items of the Part A tool, but reported low levels of agreement with many of the statements in Part B.

Cyber bullying is a complex issue. The action items in Part A require simply a yes/no response, whereas the statements in Part B are more detailed, are asked in response to an identified incident (the audio vignette), and require responses along a four-point scale. The Part A tool is also more familiar to schools, particularly those that have registered for eSmart, as they mirror the existing eSmart Schools Framework 'gap analysis' tool. Four of the five 'unbalanced' schools – those that scored relatively higher in Part A and lower in Part B, are registered schools with a high SES. Their results may reflect the fact that the 23 action items represent only the first step in achieving and maintaining a socially cohesive and supportive school environment, and that despite their effective school practices and procedures, they recognise areas that require work and the value of working with the Framework.

Conclusion

The aim of this report was to present a baseline or 'pre-test' measure of the efficacy of the eSmart Schools Framework in Victoria. The larger evaluation project will enable the Foundation to broadly measure the effectiveness of the Framework in helping schools to:

1. identify and address system level factors that impact on the supportiveness and connectedness of the social environment (Gap Analysis), and
2. prepare for and respond, at a system level, to changes and events that impact on the supportiveness and connectedness of the social environment (System Function).

As discussed, COVID-19 has had a significant impact on both the timing and participation rates in this baseline measure, and potentially the responses. While a sample of 50 schools was sought, only 45 schools agreed to participate. Given the small sample size, it was not possible to determine statistically significant differences between sub-groups, nor to generalise the results to the entire population of 609 eSmart Expansion Schools. Nevertheless, the findings establish a baseline for future evaluation and measurement of schools' progress as they work with the Foundation to build more supportive and connected school social environments.

Results for Part A showed that schools are already progressing well, reporting strong achievement in the *School plans, policies, and procedures* Domain, and *Respectful and caring schools* Domains, with schools achieving 96% of the action items in each. The *eSmart Curriculum* Domain was identified as an area for improvement, particularly around the explicit involvement of students in developing, delivering, and teaching about smart, safe, and responsible use of digital technology.

Most schools performed highly – i.e., 'building' or 'flourishing' – on the Part B tool overall. Particular areas of strength were the *School Climate* and *Response*, with schools reporting a strong commitment to creating and maintaining a positive school environment. They also reported having response plans in place that are enacted whenever cyber bullying or bullying occurs.

Focus Areas identified for improvement included *Gateway behaviours,* which enable schools to identify that a full-blown bullying or cyber -bullying incident may be developing, or that there may be challenges within their school social environment. The *Data* Focus Area was also identified as a key area for improvement, with schools reporting that regular engagement with data was not part of their system-level preparedness and response plans. The need for improvement in these Focus Areas was evident in both the qualitative and quantitative analyses. Taken together, these findings suggest that schools still have room for improvement in key areas despite scoring highly on the self-assessment tool overall, which in turn speaks to the continued utility of the Framework as a tool by which they can build more supportive and connected social environments.

Schools operate in a larger system of societal influences and a 'macrosystem' that includes not just the culture of the school, but also 'the culture of technology; the legal framework; and the media portrayal of cyber bullying' (Pennell, et al., 2020, p. 284). Current research indicates that the impact of COVID-19 and external societal influences will require schools to adopt a multi-systemic and ongoing approach to bullying and cyber bullying – one which includes the support of community and organisations external to the school environment. The findings of this report provide preliminary evidence that speaks to the potential of the Framework – and associated self-assessment tool – to act as a 'roadmap' for schools in navigating this complex area. The Framework acknowledges the complex nature of cyber bullying, and offers the expertise of the Foundation's experience, knowledge, and resources to schools through the support and guidance of the eSmart Advisors.

There is no 'silver bullet' or single solution to cyber bullying (Alannah & Madeline Foundation, 2021; Walker, 2011). An eSmart school is one that engages with its whole school and broader community, and recognises that reducing cyber bullying is a complex undertaking. This report and the findings detailed therein represent an important first step in testing the efficacy of the eSmart Framework. Future post-test data collection will further clarify these initial results, allowing for a more nuanced and robust assessment of the efficacy of the Framework in preventing cyber bullying and bullying in Victorian schools, and providing an opportunity to measure schools' progress over time in building a socially cohesive and connected environment for students.

References

Australian Government. (2014). Estimates of cyber-bullying incidents dealt with by Australian schools: Final report, prepared by IRIS Research for Department of Communications.

Australian Government. (2020). Australia's children, *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/australias-children/contents/justice-and-safety/bullying*.

Baker, J., Bridger, R., Terry, T. & Winsor, A. (1997). Schools as caring communities: A relational approach to school reform, *School Psychology Review,* 26(4), 586-602, https://doi.org/10.1080/02796015.1997.12085888.

Barnes, A., Cross, D., Lester, L., Hearn, L., Epstein, M. & Monks, H. (2012). The invisibility of covert bullying among students: challenges for school intervention, *Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling,* 22(2), 206-226. doi 10.1017/jgc.2012.27.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2012). *Thematic Analysis,* in H. Cooper, P.M. Camic, D.L. Long, A.T. Panter, D. Rindskopf, & K.J. Sher (Eds). *APA handbook of research methods in psychology, Vol. 2. Research designs: quantitative, qualitative, neuropsychological, and biological,* 57-71. American Psychological Association, https://doi.org/10.1037/13620-004.

Brown, N., Te Riele, K., Shelley, B. & Woodroffe, J. (2020). *Learning at home during COVID-19: Effects on vulnerable young Australians. Independent Rapid Response Report*. Hobart: University of Tasmania, Peter Underwood Centre for Educational Attainment.

Cahill, H. & Dadvand, B. (2018). *Re*-conceptualising youth participation: A framework to inform action, *Children and Youth Services Review,* 95, 243-253.

CIRES. (2020). Impact of learning from home on educational outcomes for disadvantaged children: Brief assessment to the Australian Government, Department of Education, Skills and Employment, Centre for International Research on Education Systems.

Cook-Sather, A. (2020). Student voice across contexts: Fostering student agency in today's schools, *Theory Into Practice,* 59(2), 182-191. Doi: 10.1080/00405841.2019.1705091.

Corney, T., Williamson, H., Holdsworth, R., Broadbent, R., Ellis, K., Shier, H., & Cooper, T. (2020). Approaches to youth participation in youth and community work practices: A critical dialogue, *Youth Workers Association.*

Drane, C., Vernon, L. & O'Shea, S. (2020). The impact of 'learning at home' on the educational outcomes of vulnerable children in Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic, *Literature Review prepared by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education,* Curtin University.

Egeberg, G., Thorvaldsen, S. & Rønning, J. (2017). The impact of cyberbullying and cyber harassment on academic achievement, in E. Elstad (Ed) *Digital Expectations and Experiences in Education,* 183-204, Sense Publishers.

Englander, E. (2013). *Bullying and cyberbullying: what every educator needs to know,* Harvard Education Press.

Englander, E. (2017). Understanding Bullying Behaviour: What educators should know and can do, *American Educator,* 40(4), 24-29.

Flack, C.B., Walker, L., Bickerstaff, A., Earle, H. & Margetts, C. (2020). Educator perspectives on the impact of COVID-19 on teaching and learning in Australia and New Zealand, Melbourne, for Pivot Professional Learning.

Giménez-Gualdo, A., Arnaiz-Sánchez, P., Cerezo-Ramirez, F. & Prodócimo, E. (2018). Teachers' and students' perception about cyberbullying: intervention and coping strategies in primary and secondary education, *Communicar. Media Education Research Journal,* 26(2), 29-38.

Harris, A. & Jones, M. (2020). COVID-19 – school leadership in disruptive times, *School Leadership & Management,* 40(4), 243-247, https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2020.1811479.

Hinduja, S. & Patchin, J. W. (2014). *Beyond the schoolyard: preventing and responding to cyberbullying,* Corwin.

Ho, S., Chen, L. & Ng, A. (2017). Comparing cyberbullying perpetration on social media between primary and secondary school students, *Computers & Education,* 109, 74-84.

Human Rights Watch. (2021). "Years don't wait for them" Increased inequality in children's right to education due to the COVID-19 pandemic, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2021/05/global_covideducation0521_web.pdf.

Lessard, L. & Puhl, R. (2021). Adolescent academic worries amid COVID-19 and perspectives on pandemic-related changes in teacher and peer relations, *School Psychology,* published online, https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000443.

MacDonald, F. (2021). Aligning School Autonomy and Social Justice Approaches to School Re- form in School Breakfast Clubs in Australia' in Pink, William (ed.), *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*, Oxford University Press, New York, doi:doi:10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.1671.

Moore, M. L., & Baltutis, W. J. (2016). Assessing capacity in watershed organizations in British Columbia: A study of reliability and resilience in organizational processes. *Canadian Water Resources Journal/Revue Canadienne Des Resources Hydriques*, *41*(3), 385-397.

Pennell, D., Campbell, M. & Tangen, D. (2020). What influences Australian secondary schools in their efforts to prevent and intervene in cyberbullying?, *Educational Research,* 62(3), published online 10th July, https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2020.1795701.

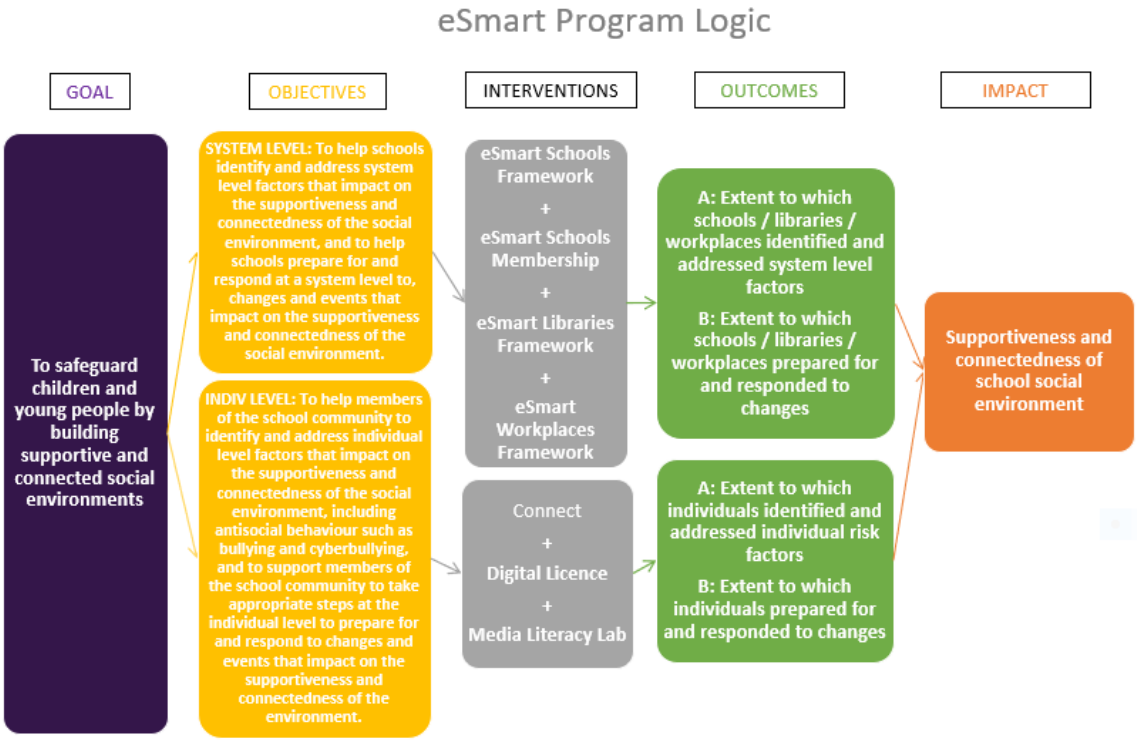
Thomas, J., Barraket, J., Wilson, C., Ewing, S., MacDonald, T., Tucker, J. & Rennie, E. (2017). *Measuring Australia's Digital Divide: The Australian Digital Inclusion Index,* RMIT University, Melbourne for Telstra.

Ttofi, M.M. Farrington. D.R. (2011). Effectiveness of school-based programs to reduce bullying: A systematic and meta-analytic review, *Journal of Experimental Criminology,* 7, 27-56.

Walker, C. (2011). A "toolbox" of cyberbullying prevention initiatives and activities, In J. Patchin & S. Hinduja (Eds.), *Cyberbullying Prevention and Response: Expert Perspectives,* Routledge.

Appendices

Appendix A: eSmart Program Logic



Appendix B: Part A Tool

Pre email (administered immediately after a school registers for the eSmart Framework and before they start formally working through the Gap Analysis)

How do you create a supportive and connected offline and online social environment within your school?

As a school, you create a social environment in which students, teachers and parents engage with each other. Their relationships are shaped by:

1. How effectively your school is organised
2. Your school plans, policies and procedures
3. The values of your school community
4. How effective your teacher practices are
5. What is and is not included in your curriculum
6. The relationship between your school, its parent cohort and community groups

Together, we'd like to work on these six Domains to build the most supportive and connected school social environment – **an eSmart School** – that structurally and functionally promotes prosocial behaviours and reduces risk factors for antisocial behaviours such as bullying and cyber bullying.

Being an eSmart school means being a socially supportive and connected school.

Your school probably already does many things to create a supportive and connected offline and online social environment. Let's start by identifying what you currently do within your school.

Annual post email (administered annually in February)

Are you creating a supportive and connected offline and online social environment within your school?

As a school, you create a social environment in which students, teachers and parents engage with each other. Their relationships are shaped by:

1. How effectively your school is organised
2. Your school plans, policies and procedures
3. The values of your school community
4. How effective your teacher practices are
5. What is and is not included in your curriculum
6. The relationship between your school, its parent cohort and community groups

Together, we've been working to build the most supportive and connected school social environment – **an eSmart School** – that structurally and functionally promotes prosocial behaviours and reduces risk factors for antisocial behaviours such as bullying and cyber bullying.

Being an eSmart school means being a socially supportive and connected school.

Your school is probably doing some great things to create a supportive and connected offline and online social environment. Let's see what you currently doing within your school.

Final post email (administered immediately after completion of eSmart Framework)
What have you done to create a supportive and connected offline and online social environment within your school?

As a school, you create a social environment in which students, teachers and parents engage with each other. Their relationships are shaped by:
1. How effectively your school is organised
2. Your school plans, policies and procedures
3. The values of your school community
4. How effective your teacher practices are
5. What is and is not included in your curriculum
6. The relationship between your school, its parent cohort and community groups

Together, we've been working to build the most supportive and connected school social environment – an eSmart School – that structurally and functionally promotes prosocial behaviours and reduces risk factors for antisocial behaviours such as bullying and cyber bullying.

Being an eSmart school means being a socially supportive and connected school.

Your school is probably doing some great things to create a supportive and connected offline and online social environment. Let's see what your school has put in place.

Part A tool

Name of your school
Name of the suburb your school is in?
What sector is your school?
What is your school type?
Please answer Yes or No to the following statements:

EFFECTIVE SCHOOL ORGANISATION
Our school has…

		Yes	No
1.1	a committee that meets regularly to guide students, teachers and parents in creating and maintaining a supportive and connected social environment		
1.2	guidelines that provide a consistent approach to the supervision of student behaviour on school grounds, including when students are online		
1.3	a system to manage ethical collection and analysis of data (e.g.: incident data) so we can prepare for and respond to antisocial behaviour		
1.4	confidential reporting systems for students to safely disclose incidents - including		

	bullying, cyber bullying and other forms of antisocial behaviour		
1.5	an induction process for new students, teachers and parents that outlines their respective roles in creating and maintaining a socially supportive and connected environment		

SCHOOL PLANS, POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Our school…

		Yes	No
2.1	has a policy and related procedures that guide students, teachers and parents in creating and maintaining a supportive and connected social environment		
2.2	takes a whole school approach to behaviour management, explicitly outlining expected student behaviours and guiding staff to appropriately respond to offline and online antisocial behaviours		
2.3	employs 'Acceptable Use Agreements' for technology use that are signed by the students, teachers and parents		

A RESPECTFUL AND CARING COMMUNITY

Our school…

		Yes	No
3.1	has a strong set of prosocial values in place to guide behaviour both on and offline		
3.2	applies an agreed set of protocols to guide staff in modelling respectful behaviour in their everyday interactions with students, parents and other staff members, including in their online interactions		
3.3	provides ways for students to formally and informally interact, in both same-age and cross age groups, in order to foster supportive relationships across the school community		

EFFECTIVE TEACHER PRACTICES

Our teachers…

		Yes	No
4.1	formally foster positive student to student relationships through their teaching practice		
4.2	role model smart, safe and responsible use of digital technologies for students, in		

	accordance with explicitly stated expectations about teacher behaviour		
4.3	adhere to an agreed set of approaches for positive classroom management and are skilled at responding appropriately to both online and offline antisocial behaviour in the student population		
4.4	regularly participate in professional learning that enables them to integrate knew information about technology into their practice		

AN ESMART CURRICULUM

Our school…

		Yes	No
5.1	includes explicit teaching of rights and responsibilities as well as social and emotional skills in the curriculum		
5.2	includes the teaching of digital intelligence in the curriculum, and maintains related teacher knowledge and skills through professional learning		
5.3	uses curriculum planning to identify where and how digital intelligence is to be taught		
5.4	students are regularly involved in developing and delivering information about antisocial behaviours, such as bullying and cyber bullying, to a range of audiences		
5.5	students develop, share and are involved in teaching about the smart, safe and responsible use of digital technologies to a range of audiences including peers and parents		

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Our school…

		Yes	No
6.1	actively involves parents/carers in a wide range of activities and events within the life of the school community		
6.2	regularly communicates with parents/carers about both offline and online behavioural expectations, including antisocial behaviours such as bullying and cyber bullying		
6.3	3 has links with local community organisations to promote a consistent message about offline and online behaviour in order to build and maintain supportive and connected social environments		

Appendix C: Part B Tool

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

How prepared is your school to address cyber bullying and other types of bullying in your school community, and how well placed is your school to respond appropriately when things go wrong?

Together, we'd like to build the most *supportive and connected school social environment* – an eSmart School – where everyone knows how to be smart, safe, and responsible online, and reduce risk factors for antisocial behaviours such as cyber bullying and bullying.

Being an eSmart school means being a socially supportive and connected school.

As part of our work together, we will focus on making sure your school prepares for social challenges and is well placed to respond appropriately to cyber bullying and bullying.

Together with Victoria University, we have designed a quick and interactive way to help assess your preparation and response systems, so that together, we can build and maintain a school system that is ready for, and can respond in the best way possible to, cyber bullying and bullying.

We ask you, as the Principal, to take the lead role in this important exercise. If you participate, we estimate that completing the exercise on behalf of your school will take about 15-20 minutes. It would be helpful if you could please do this by [date].

There are no right or wrong responses to the exercise. The aim is to develop a realistic understanding of where your school is placed now, and *not* where you think you should or would like to be placed. Realistic responses will enable us to guide your development and, over time, your responses might change as your school grows and learns from the eSmart program.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us:

Rachael Bajayo (Alannah & Madeline Foundation): rachael.bajayo@amf.org.au

Dr Nina Van Dyke (Victoria University): nina.vandyke@vu.edu.au

Consent to Participate

Please indicate by ticking the box that you have read the covering email and you are agreeing to take part in the exercise and for us to evaluate your responses. Please ensure that you have also read the privacy statement below before you start.

Privacy Statement

Data will be held external to the Alannah & Madeline Foundation on cloud-based software, and results will be aggregated and reported as a whole. Data will be accessible only to designated staff at the Alannah & Madeline Foundation and Victoria University.

Introduction

Name of your school
Name of the suburb your school is in?
What sector is your school?
What is your school type?

PART B Tool

You will first be asked two questions about how well placed your school is to prevent and respond to a cyber bullying or other type of bullying incident.

You will then listen to a recording of a parent who has brought her 12-year-old child into the Principal's office to report an incident.

Afterwards, you will be presented with some questions about how well your school is prepared for such an incident. The first three questions are open-ended, meaning you will be asked to type your responses in your own words. These will be followed by a set of closed-ended questions in which you will be asked to tick which option most closely matches your answer. At the end, you will have the opportunity to provide any additional information you think would be useful.

If at any point you would like to listen to the recording again, just click on the arrow button in the bottom left-hand corner of the video.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Not at all well placed									Completely well placed
1. Overall, how well placed would you say your school is to **prevent** antisocial behaviours, such as cyber bullying or another type of bullying incident?										
2. Overall, how well placed would you say your school is to **respond to** antisocial behaviours, such as cyber bullying or another type of bullying incident?										

Audio Recording

To listen to the recording now, click on the play button, below.

[EMBED VIGNETTE HERE]

PRIOR TO SUCH AN EVENT OCCURING

Please think about your school's formal procedures/processes (rather than any of the individual programs you might run) designed to address incidents such as this.

1.a. What procedures does your school have in place that would have allowed it to identify that such an incident might be brewing?

1.b. If your school identifies that such an incident might be brewing, what steps does it take to prevent escalation?

Below are a series of statements that reflect best practice around identifying, preventing, and responding to cyber bullying and bullying. **For each statement below, please indicate THE EXTENT TO WHICH IT IS TRUE for your school.**

Please remember that each of these statements represents an eSmart standard, which your school will be working towards over time. It is not expected that each statement is true of your school now.

	Not true	A little bit true	Mostly true	Completely true
2. DATA				
3.1. The collection of data to understand the social relationships within the school is viewed as a **crucial activity** by the Principal, school staff, students, and parents.				
3.2. In order to understand the social relationships within the school, the following types of high-quality data are collected and analysed: 3.2.1. data on 'gateway behaviours' *(definition below)* – by staff, students, and parents **Gateway behaviours** are lower risk behaviours, online or offline, which are used to show contempt and dominance. When left unchecked, these behaviours can escalate into conflict and bullying. Examples include posting embarrassing photos online, ignoring, name calling, whispering about people in front of them, eye rolling.				
3.2.2. data on more serious cyber bullying or bullying behaviours -- by staff, students, and parents				

3.2.3. data on relevant counsellor/health and wellbeing staff reports				
3.2.4. data on student attendance				
3.2.5. feedback from focus groups and surveys with **students**, which includes: 3.2.5.1. the extent to which students believe teachers and other school staff treat cyber bullying and bullying seriously				
3.2.5.2. the extent to which students believe teachers and other school staff model positive behaviours themselves				
3.2.5.3. student perspectives on what is considered most helpful in reducing cyber bullying and bullying				
3.2.5.4. student perspectives on physical 'hot spots' at the school – locations where problematic behaviours are more likely to occur				
3.2.6. feedback from focus groups and surveys with **staff**				
3.2.7. feedback from focus groups and surveys with **parents**				
3.3. Data review is conducted regularly (at least monthly) and integrated into standard practice (for example, data review is a standing meeting agenda item).				
3.4. Data reviews are conducted to: 3.4.1. monitor the school environment				
3.4.2. identify social needs across the school community				
3.4.3. identify and respond to 'gateway behaviours'				

3.4.4. enable early identification of children/young people at risk of engaging in cyber bullying or bullying, in order to put management plans into place				
3.4.5. evaluate whether current approaches to the prevention of, and response to, cyber bullying and bullying are working				
3.4.6. make changes to policies or practices if warranted				
3. GATEWAY BEHAVIOURS *(refer to definition below)* **Gateway behaviours** are lower-risk behaviours, online or offline, which are used to show contempt and dominance. When left unchecked, these behaviours can escalate into conflict and bullying. Examples include posting embarrassing photos online, ignoring, name calling, whispering about people in front of them, eye rolling.				
4.1. The identification and reporting of gateway behaviours is viewed as a **crucial** activity for the school by the Principal, all school staff, students, and parents.				
4.2. School staff are trained in, and consistently practice, identifying both overt and covert gateway behaviours, including online behaviours.				
4.3. **School staff** immediately and consistently report any gateway behaviours observed.				
4.4. **Students** immediately and consistently report any gateway behaviours observed.				

4. REPORTING				
5.1. Students, staff and parents know which staff member(s) within the school have been assigned responsibility to receive reports of cyber bullying and bullying.				

5.2. Students understand how to report cyber bullying and bullying.				
5.3. Students find the process of reporting easy and clear.				
5.4. Students believe that their reporting will remain anonymous.				
5.5. Students believe that their reports will be acted on and positively resolved.				
5.6. Students believe that students report all or almost all cyber bullying and bullying they observe.				
5.7. School staff report all cyber bullying and bullying promptly.				
6. RESPONSE				
6.1. The school's response plan, which includes a response team with designated roles and responsibilities, is immediately enacted when cyber bullying or bullying occur.				
6.2. A designated staff member(s) meets with the **victim(s)** of the cyber bullying or bullying and their parents/carers as soon as feasible to provide: 6.2.1. comfort, support such as counselling, and referral to additional assistance as needed such as mental health support				

6.2.2. a 'safety and comfort plan' A **Safety and Comfort Plan** is a plan created for a specific student immediately after they are identified as having been a victim of cyber bullying or bullying to ensure they feel comforted and safe at school. The plan is designed by the student and staff member together. For example, the plan may identify a 'safe person' in the school – someone the student likes and can go to, and the student's teachers are told that this student has the freedom to go see their safe person at any time. (Patchin & Hinduja, 2012)				
6.3. A designated staff member(s) meets with the **perpetrator(s)** of the cyber bullying or bullying and their parents/carers as soon as feasible to provide counselling, a plan for accountability including actions to protect and restore relationships, and referral to a full mental health evaluation as warranted.				
6.4. As appropriate, the school informs other people not directly impacted by the cyber bullying or bullying (for example, teachers, library staff, school nurses, health and wellbeing staff, reception staff, school crossing guards, etc.)				
6.5. As soon as possible, the school follows up with parents/carers of the victim to let them know what actions they are taking now and their plan for the future.				
6.6. The school identifies any geographical 'hot spots' specific to the cyber bullying or bullying (physical locations at the school where issues are more likely to occur) and increases monitoring in these locations until it is no longer needed.				

7. SCHOOL SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS/CLIMATE				
7.1. All school staff agree on the imperative for creating and maintaining a positive school environment.				
7.2. Data gathered on social relationships within the school includes measurement of the following themes: 7.2.1. relationships between students, including levels of trust, support, empathy, and kindness				
7.2.2. data on relationships between students and teachers/staff, including levels of trust, support, empathy, and kindness				
7.2.3. data on norms regarding pro-social and anti-social behaviour (for example, level of acceptability of cyber bullying)				

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Not at all well placed									Completely well placed
8.1. Overall, how well placed would you say your school is to **prevent** a situation such as the scenario you listened to?										
8.2. Overall, how well placed would you say your school is to **respond to** a situation such as the scenario you listened to?										

Next are three questions about the audio scenario…	**Not at all**	**A little bit**	**A fair bit**	**Completely**
9.1. How engaging did you find the audio scenario?				
9.2. How plausible did you find the audio scenario?				

9.3. To what extent did the audio scenario help you answer the questions above?				

10. Finally, please tell us anything else not already asked about regarding how your school, at a system level, prepares for and responds to, cyber bullying and bullying.

Thank you so much for completing this survey! Your answers will allow us to better understand how your school is going in improving its preparation for and response to cyber bullying and bullying!