School Community Profile

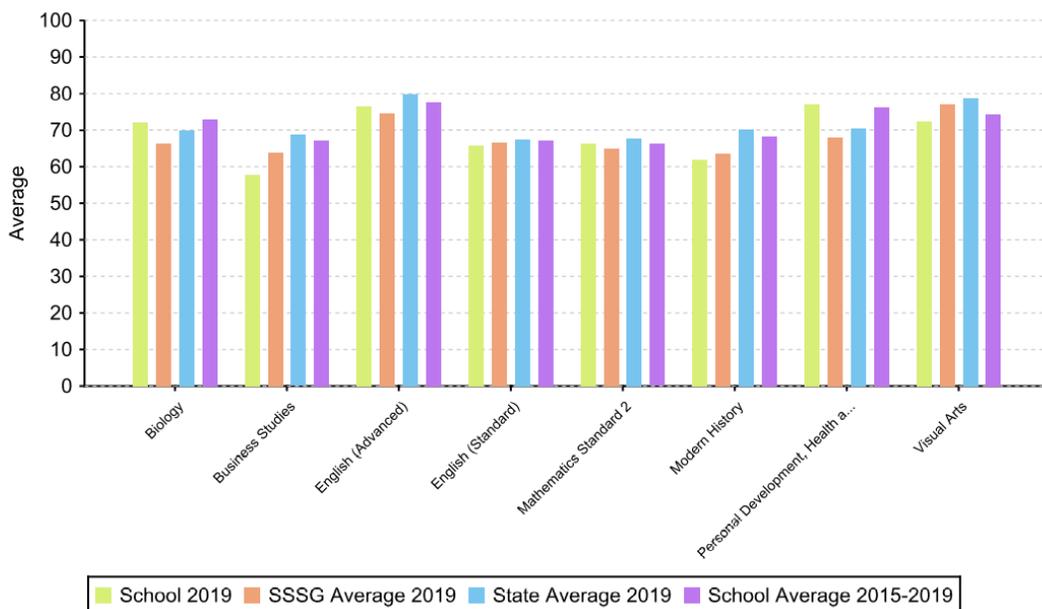**Finley High School Information and Demographics**

(NSW Department of Education, 2020)

Finley High School (FHS) is located in the agricultural region of Riverina, in South-Western New South Wales. Whilst the school currently performs slightly below average in comparison to state-wide Higher School Certificate results (ranked 504 out of 800 NSW schools (Better Education Pty Ltd, n.d.)), it performs above average in the areas of PDHPE and Biology (see *Figure 1*) and excels in extra-curricular activities, including sport, agriculture, public speaking and debate. The rural secondary school is located in the centre of Finley, presenting great opportunities to forge stronger community connections.

FHS's population is quite small. In 2019, the school comprised merely 171 boys and 180 girls (NSW Department of Education [NSW DoE], 2020, p. 9). 97% of Year 12 students were expected to complete their HSC , with 54% of students gaining university entry and 29% moving into employment in 2019 (NSW DoE, 2020, p. 10).

Figure 1: School Performance - HSC (NSW DoE, 2020)
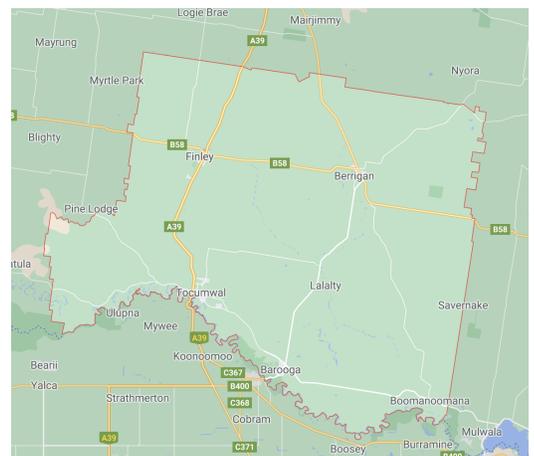
Riverina Area Information and Demographics

Finley is a small rural town in South-West NSW, located in the Berrigan shire, with a population of just 2,519 as recorded in the 2016 census (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2020). The median weekly household income of $988 falls below NSW's median of $1,481 (ABS, 2020). Residents skew older, with a median age of 47, (ABS, 2020) of whom have received a lower quality of education in comparison to today's students. The ethnic makeup of the community is 80.3% Australian and European, with only 4% "households where a non-English language is spoken" (ABS, 2020).

There is an immense love for sports in the community, with several renowned athletes, particularly in the Australian Football League, hailing from Finley. Nearby towns in the Berrigan Shire often combine sporting efforts with Finley, generating more interest and competition in the community.

In Finley, 70.7% of the population have internet access whilst 25.7% have no connection or unreliable/limited access (ABS, 2020). In COVID times, technology has become increasingly important, and major occasions such as the agricultural event, the Finley show, have been moved online. 90% of parents agreed on laptop access being "an important component of their child's learning" (NSW DoE, 2019, p.21). Access to technology is an ongoing issue in the community and pivotal to the success of students in their studies.

Finley (Google, n.d.)

Map of Berrigan Shire (Google, n.d.)

Lauren's Group 6: Dimity Macho, Kirn Hans, Lyla Hine, Courteney Robertson, Marina Encarnacion

Current Community Engagement Strategies

FHS is currently attempting to engage the community through family counselling, parental volunteer opportunities, a Parents & Citizens Association and a Facebook page. Currently 75% of parents are satisfied with the school's communication (NSW DoE, 2020, p.21). The school has committed to three strategic directions, as explored in the NSW DoE's Annual Report 2019 (2020):

1.   Wellbeing – Connect, Succeed, Thrive (p. 5)

This direction is supported by a School Chaplain and Student Support Officer in tandem with the student led group STOMP (Student Team on Mental Positivity).

2.   Leading a culture of successful learning (p. 6)

Initiatives like Homework Centre, the Learning SpACE and IXL provide a cultural foundation.

3.   Innovative, collaborative teaching and learning (p. 7)

Teacher professional development is allocated funds to reinforce this aim.

Strategies and Justifications

Taking into account the previously stated demographics, we suggest the implementation of 5 strategies to improve community engagement: inter-school sport events, a student showcase, a careers fair, a parent teacher corner, and a parent-teacher app.

Inter-school sport events

One strategy we suggest is to host a sporting event, where students, teachers and parents collaboratively organise , working with other schools in the district. Incorporating a sporting competition into this particular school community will be beneficial due to the great local focus on sport. It will be hosted at the end of terms, with each term centred around a new sport (e.g. AFL, netball, cricket etc.), to ensure maximum participation from students.

In addition, non-sporting 'teams' will comprise of students, teachers and parent volunteers, with the remainder to support and run the event itself. This includes business students running the canteen, students interested in marketing creating promotional materials, science and physical education-oriented students forming the medical team, literature students writing match reports for the local paper and mathematics students analysing match statistics. We will also include parents and community members in specialist areas such as coaches, umpires and paramedics to, again, maximise involvement (Epstein, 2010). The smaller population of Finley High School prompts this to be an event between the Berrigan Shire schools, allowing cross-school involvement.

Broadening the scope to the surrounding towns demonstrates to the students their role in a community larger than they have potentially considered. Spaaij (2019) argues that the role of sport in a rural community is a multifaceted program helping bond and bridge social groups, and encouraging young people to develop leadership abilities and new knowledge and skills. This dovetails with FHS's strategy of innovative, collaborative teaching and learning with universal involvement.

Student Showcase

To cater to all students, we also recommend events designed to showcase subject-related student work, including science fairs and art exhibitions, which are already implemented in some NSW schools. Our strategy focuses on a student showcase at the school, open to the public and featuring talent from a broad array of subjects. Grinnell et al. (2020) show that science fairs develop students' interest in science, technology, engineering and mathematical (STEM) fields. We may well presume a similar impact by a multi-curricular event like the student showcase on the featured subjects. By organising one main event where all subjects are on display, we can reduce travel time, as Finley is a rural area. Parent attendance will mark an interest in their children's work, the academic benefits of which significant research has demonstrated (Epstein, 2010, p. 504).

We can also accommodate parent schedules by displaying posters and exhibits for an extended duration, at the school or in other community spaces, such as the church. Art exhibitions, for instance, can involve sidewalk projects, similar to a recent event in Finley featuring local legends on new murals. (ABC Goulburn Murray, 2020). By involving the community in displaying the students' work outside of the school, bonds between the microsystem and exosystem are strengthened. This forms a tangible representation of students' place in their society and their society's pride in their work in turn (Guy-Evans, 2020).

Human Society in Its Environment can be featured through cultural displays by students studying Society and Culture or Languages. Creative homework projects, such as model maps or period-piece dioramas, can be displayed. Finley High School's multipurpose hall can also feature plays and slam poetry performed by English students. "Find the Maths" scavenger hunts will integrate numeracy in students' everyday lives, whilst also involving the community. Both visual and performance art at the student showcase can also highlight mathematical components.

Careers Fair

A third engagement strategy focuses on the professional development of students, by way of a careers fair. This will entail a multiple day event where community members and alumni host seminars and panels regarding educational and employment options for students following high school, and their prerequisites. Students Year 10 and above will note their preferences for the panels prior to the fair and consequently receive a specialised timetable generated by the school.

Therefore, the students' career motivation is furthered, as well as their knowledge of local industries. Presence of career goals has a positive impact on student learning (Arhin, 2018). Student interest in local affairs will also bolster the Finley community and encourage further communication and collaboration between the school and the wider area, creating a virtuous cycle. Additionally, the school requesting parental participation in the fair will amplify a personal connection between the school, students, parents and community. Research from Dietrich and Kracke (2009) suggests that adolescents view parents as a major influence in choosing a vocation, indicating that parental career-related support strengthens participation in investigating career prospects.

Parent App

Drawing from the school's technological aims, a phone and desktop application for parents will enhance parent-teacher communication. Apps such as Bloomz are designed for this, where parents receive information from schools and teachers by email, text or push notifications. This is important as local internet limitations require accessibility through multiple platforms. Parents will also be able to schedule visits to the school to further engage with teachers and their children's education. Other features support inter-parental communication, organising parent-teacher meetings and teachers asking for parent volunteers. This will facilitate easier communication between parents and teachers, hopefully increasing parent engagement and volunteering.

By improving teacher and information accessibility for parents, we can create a psychologically safe space for community members to engage with education so that parents can better support their children's learning (Hadar & Brody, 2017). Nisbet and Opp (2017) studied a similar app and found that parents valued the update and reminder notifications the most, with many parents preferring the app as the future primary source of school communication and information. Olmstead (2013) found that parents and teachers concur on the significance of consistent, proactive communication to their children's education. Additionally, the use of technology increased parent engagement as parents' physical presence at the school was unnecessary to communicate quickly with teachers, "connect[ing] schools to home[s]" (2013, p. 28).

Parent Teacher Corner

To further connect students' homelife and schooling, we plan to create a parent teacher corner at the school, which will include information regarding upcoming events, parent volunteering, and tips on supporting their children's education. Additionally, teachers will share a roster for informal drop-in meetings, moving Finley High School from a "come if we call you" model to an "open door" policy (Clarke & Pittaway, 2014, p. 294). This will not only assist parent-teacher communication, but also will help parents' and teachers' to understand each other's needs, and those of the student (Ellis et al., 2015).

Teacher inaccessibility can reduce information sharing and support for students (Ellis et al., 2015). The parent teacher corner aims to improve accessibility for parents to teachers, and to information, again, creating a psychologically safe environment for parents to engage with their children's education (Hadar & Brody, 2017). Creating an explicit shared space also expands the overlap between the family and school spheres of influence (Epstein, 2010, pp. 38-39).

Overarching Justification

Our work draws heavily from Epstein's model, 'Spheres of Influence' (Epstein, 2010), highlighting the pivotal relationship played by a student's family, school and community. Epstein

Lauren's Group 6: Dimity Macho, Kirn Hans, Lyla Hine, Courteney Robertson, Marina Encarnacion

states that the more engaged parents and the community are in a student's education, the more the spheres will overlap, which focuses beneficial attention on the child, increases parent knowledge and ability to participate and student performance (pp. 33, 38-39). This is evident in each and every strategy we have put forth to enhance Finley High School's outreach approach. Similarly, Bronfenbrenner's interconnectedness of one's micro- and macrosystems (Guy-Evans, 2020) demonstrates how the relationships between students and their families, communities and school can strengthen and further develop a student's academic endeavours. These models have been guiding principles for designing our strategies.

Collective reflection

Working in a diverse group of five teachers from different learning areas, enabled us to learn from each other and develop a variety of strategies that we may have overlooked individually. Writing the report collectively was also beneficial in decreasing the workload individually.

However, working in a large group also provided its challenges. Coordinating a meeting for all members, each with a different schedule, was difficult to plan. We found it was better to schedule the meetings with as many people as could attend rather than constantly reschedule. Taking minutes for each meeting was an extremely helpful means of updating absent members and also keeping a record for later reference.

Due to COVID, our group could not meet face-to-face. Whilst Zoom was effective as a discussion and planning space, we found the most effective strategy was to delegate tasks to each person. We learnt that these tasks must be clear and well-defined rather than open-ended suggestions left open to the whole group. In this way, each member had clear instructions and was accountable for a section of the report.

In conclusion, this experience of collaborative teacher learning has provided many insights for our future careers. Working in a group in general has highlighted our expectations of ourselves and others and allowed us to consider our own individual strengths and weaknesses when working collaboratively. Completing an analysis of a school's region and the engagement strategies in relation to the community, is a useful exploration to have practiced in an attempt to better understand a new school environment that may be unfamiliar to us. Furthermore, understanding that engagement strategies are not a one size-fits-all model helps us understand the diverse nature of students, communities and parents.

TeachMeet reflection

      We found the presentations to be quite diverse in their style and content. Several groups presented strategies for the same schools, but often had different approaches. Some of these approaches differed by focusing on different local concerns. Others focused on the same problems but had different ideas as to the strategy. For example, two groups presented strategies for Marrickville High School and both focused on the cultural relevance of food. However, one group's strategy concentrated on the agricultural aspect through a community garden-style project of growing mushrooms, while the other group concentrated on the culinary aspect with a proposal for a festival to highlight the cultural significance of food.

The presentations also highlighted the cultural diversity of regions in New South Wales. Racial demographics, education levels, social class, resources and so on varied wildly across the communities. Each group addressing these differences resulted in many more strategies than any one person or group could likely have created on their own. Some groups had similar strategies, such as community learning groups for areas with a lower prevalence of higher education. However, many strategies broke the mould, bearing no resemblance to the strategies shared in the modules or other common sources of inspiration. It was truly fascinating to watch.

Our first TeachMeet was an enlightening experience and has encouraged us to remain humble and keep looking to learn from other teachers.

Lauren's Group 6: Dimity Macho, Kirn Hans, Lyla Hine, Courteney Robertson, Marina Encarnacion

References

ABC Goulburn Murray. (2020, May 29). New York-based street artist brings Finley to life with murals

honouring   local   legends.   *ABC*.

https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-05-29/finley-murals-pay-tribute-to-local-legends/12299138

Arhin, V. (2018). Relationship between career aspirations and study behaviours among second year

distance learners of the University of cape coast, Ghana. *African Educational Research Journal*,

6(3), 173-180. https://doi.org/10.30918/aerj.63.18.043

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2020). *2016 Census QuickStats: Finley, October 2020.*

https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/SSC11

520?opendocument

Better Education Pty Ltd. (n.d.). *Trend of Finley high school 2713 by HSC results*. Happiness Where

Learning   Begins.

https://bettereducation.com.au/CompareSchools/year_12/nsw/compare_secondary_schools_by_hs

c.aspx?enc=iTG4nSQnaDghUEaaIxCROWbjt85L3PlEple/JCPZjiY7PlGmSARyyU/Vlywul1M0

MkRoWiZ0fpURB2vlCKqUqBebpWOinLouc26/JhtDVkM=

Clarke, M., & Pittaway, S. (2014). *Marsh's becoming a teacher* (6th ed.). Pearson.

Dietrich, J., & Kracke, B. (2009). Career-specific parental behaviors in adolescents' development.

Journal of Vocational Behavior, *75*(2), 109-119. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2009.03.005

Lauren's Group 6: Dimity Macho, Kirn Hans, Lyla Hine, Courteney Robertson, Marina Encarnacion

Ellis, M., Lock, G., & Lummis, G. (2015). Parent-Teacher Interactions: Engaging with Parents and

Carers. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, *40*(5), 160-174.

http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2015v40n5.9

Epstein, J. L. (2010). Theory and overview. In *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing*

educators and improving schools (pp. 25-90). Hachette UK.

Google. (n.d.). *Finley location in NSW*. Retrieved from

https://www.google.com/maps/place/Finley+NSW+2713/@-34.6496318,145.7623095,7z/data=!4

m5!3m4!1s0x6adf5e339cd1af91:0x40609b49043cae0!8m2!3d-35.641995!4d145.5706233

Google. (n.d.). *Map of Berrigan Shire*. Retrieved from

https://www.google.com/maps/place/Berrigan,+NSW/@-35.7515108,145.3896546,10z/data=!3m

1!4b1!4m5!3m4!1s0x6b20bad4d8ffab43:0x760749b41733b749!8m2!3d-35.7391359!4d145.7578

403?hl=en

Grinnell, F., Dalley, S., & Reisch, J. (2020). High school science fair: Positive and negative outcomes.

PLOS ONE, *15*(2), 1-17. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0229237

Guy-Evans, O. (2020, November 9). *Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory*. Simply Psychology.

https://www.simplypsychology.org/Bronfenbrenner.html

Hadar, L. L., & Brody, D. L. (2017). Creating a safe environment for learning. In *Teacher educators'*

professional   learning   in   communities   (pp.   57-70).   Routledge.

https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315645605

Nisbet, K., & Opp, A. (2017). *Effects of the Remind App on Parent-Teacher Communication at a*

Mixed-Income Middle School. St. Catherine University https://sophia.stkate.edu/maed/227

NSW   Department   of   Education.   (2020).   *Finley   High   School   2019   Annual   Report*.

https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/doe-nsw-schools/annual-report/2019/8360/2019_Finley

_High_School_Annual_Report.pdf

NSW   Department   of   Education.   (2020).   *School   Performance   -   HSC*   [Infographic].

https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/doe-nsw-schools/annual-report/2019/8360/2019_Finle

y_High_School_Annual_Report.pdf

NSW   Department   of   Education.   (2020).   [Finley   High   School   Logo].

https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/doe-nsw-schools/annual-report/2019/8360/2019_Finle

y_High_School_Annual_Report.pdf

Olmstead, C. (2013). Using Technology to Increase Parent Involvement in Schools. *Tech Trends, 57*,

28–37. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11528-013-0699-0

Lauren's Group 6: Dimity Macho, Kirn Hans, Lyla Hine, Courteney Robertson, Marina Encarnacion

Spaaij, R. (2019). The glue that holds the community together? Sport and sustainability in rural Australia.

The Social Impact of Sport, 24-38. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315875057-3