



# **Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education – Paper #17 – Tracking engagement and views on reconciliation in education**

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to track and analyse engagement with Reconciliation Australia's Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education program, and the relationship this engagement has with a range of observed outcomes. We draw on two sources of data – administrative data collected as part of the operation of the program, and a specially targeted survey focusing on the views and attitudes of parents and carers in Australia.

## **Acknowledgements**

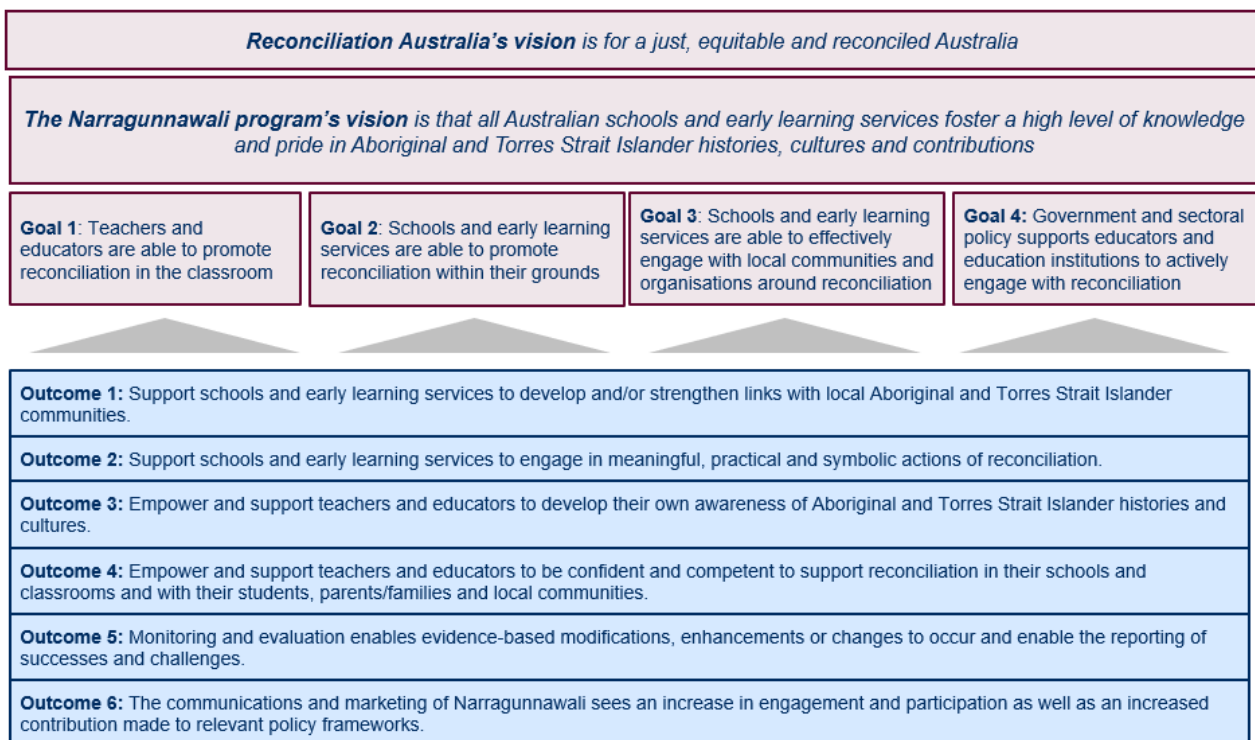
The analysis presented in this paper was supported by funds and data from Reconciliation Australia as part of an evaluation of the Narragunnawali program. Reconciliation Australia's support and comments on an earlier version of this paper were greatly appreciated. Comments on the paper were also received by Dr Susan-Marie Harding, Principal, Research and Evaluation at the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, for which the authors are thankful for. Dr Harding also contributed to the design of the survey questionnaire, as did Jennifer Rickard from the Australian Parents Council. The results presented, however, should be attributed to the named authors only.

# 1 Introduction and overview of Narragunnawali

Reconciliation Australia's Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education program is designed primarily to support all Australian schools and early learning services in developing a high level of knowledge and pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and contributions. While it is intended that this knowledge and pride be held by all students and educators in Australia, regardless of their Indigenous status, it is also intended that there will be flow-on benefits to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and communities.

*Narragunnawali* (pronounced narra-gunna-wally) is a word from the language of the Ngunnawal people meaning alive, wellbeing coming together and peace (the Ngunnawal people are the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands in and around Canberra, where Reconciliation Australia's head office is located). The word *narragunnawali* is used with the permission of the United Ngunnawal Elders Council.

The following diagram captures the vision, goals, and projected outcomes of the Narragunnawali program at the time of data collection and analysis:



The Narragunnawali program consists of four key areas (Reconciliation Action Plans, Professional Learning, Curriculum Resources and Awards), each of which are simultaneously underpinned by dedicated foci on Research and Evaluation, Stakeholder Engagement, and both Education Sector and Regional Engagement. The program comprises an online platform which is free to access and provides practical ways to introduce meaningful reconciliation initiatives in the classroom, around the school/service and with the community. While the platform can be accessed by any individual interested in reconciliation in education, it also provides a framework and aligned resources for driving reconciliation at the whole school or early learning service level. Through the Narragunnawali platform, schools and early learning services can develop a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), and teachers and educators can access professional learning and curriculum resources to support the implementation of reconciliation initiatives.

The program and actions within the Narragunnawali RAP framework are designed to address the five interrelated and interdependent dimensions of reconciliation that Reconciliation Australia has identified. These are: Race Relations, Equality and Equity, Institutional Integrity, Unity, and Historical Acceptance. Specifically:

- Within the Race Relations dimension all Australians understand and value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous cultures, rights, and experiences. This, in turn, fosters stronger relationships based on trust and respect and that are free of racism.
- Equality and Equity recognises the need for equal participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in a range of life opportunities. Further, that the unique rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are recognised and upheld.
- The Institutional Integrity dimension acknowledges that active support for reconciliation from our nation's political, business and community structures is needed.
- Unity is reflected through an Australian society which values and recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage as a proud part of our shared national identity.
- Lastly, the Historical Acceptance dimension documents the importance of all Australians understanding and accepting the wrongs of the past and their impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Additionally, that Australia makes amends for these past policies and practices, and ensures that they are never repeated.

## 1.1 Evaluation of Narragunnawali

Since early 2015, the Australian National University (ANU) has been involved in the evaluation and monitoring of Narragunnawali. One of the principles of the evaluation was a genuine collaboration between the ANU project team and Reconciliation Australia (RA). In addition to a collaborative approach, four further principles were followed as part of the methodology. Specifically, the project aimed to:

- Use a mix of qualitative and quantitative data collection and analytical techniques;
- Provide information to Reconciliation Australia at regular intervals in order to ensure lessons learned can be incorporated as the program is developed;
- Collect information where possible from those who are directly involved in Narragunnawali; and
- Make use of available data where possible and data collected as part of the program.

For Phase 1 of the evaluation (2015-2018), the methodological approach was structured around a set of questions. Given the voluntary nature of the program, there are a set of main questions guiding the analysis:

- **Process:**
  - Why are certain schools and early learning services participating and others not?
  - For those who are participating, what are the strengths, weaknesses and suggested improvements for the program?
- **Outcomes:**
  - For those who are participating, what is the effect of the program on four main outcomes, namely does Narragunnawali lead to:
    - A higher level of understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage?
    - A higher level of pride in our shared national identity?

- Increased trust between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the rest of the Australian population?
- Reduced prejudice experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and teachers?

For Phase 2 of the evaluation, a more expansive set of research questions were used to guide the analysis. These questions were structured around 7 themes or areas as outlined below. While Phase 2 originally included for research from January 2018 to June 2020, the questions were designed to support a longer-term research agenda that aligned with Reconciliation Australia's 2017-2022 Research Agenda. These were

1. Growth, uptake and usage
2. Information sharing and within-institution knowledge
3. Effectiveness of resources
4. Teacher knowledge and confidence
5. Community interaction and engagement
6. Student experience
7. Expansion of Narragunnawali

During phase 2 of the evaluation, there was unprecedented disruption to Australian schools and early learning services. These disruptions have been primarily caused by the COVID-19 global pandemic and the 2019-2020 Australian bushfire season (known now as the Black Summer bushfires).

As well as being aligned with the methodological principles outlined below, the aims and objectives of Phase 3 of the Narragunnawali Evaluation (2020 to 2022) will align closely with the Goals and Vision of the Narragunnawali Strategic Plan:

With this in mind the overarching line of inquiry for Phase 3 of the Evaluation of Narragunnawali is:

**To what extent, and to what effect, do the Narragunnawali program's strategic priorities and enabling initiatives – and the resources and activities that these encompass – meet the program's goals and intended outcomes, in alignment with the five dimensions of reconciliation and Reconciliation Australia's wider organisational vision and strategic goals?**

Key evaluation questions for Phase 3 are:

- To what extent, and to what effect, does Narragunnawali support schools and early learning services to develop and/or strengthen links with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities?
- To what extent, and to what effect, does Narragunnawali support schools and early learning services to engage in meaningful, practical and symbolic actions of reconciliation?
- To what extent, and to what effect, does Narragunnawali empower and support teachers and educators to develop their own awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures?
- To what extent, and to what effect, does Narragunnawali empower and support teachers and educators to be confident to support reconciliation in their schools and classrooms, their students, and their students' families?

- To what extent, and to what effect, does the communications and marketing of Narragunnawali see an increase in engagement and participation in the program and wider reconciliation-in-education initiatives, as well as increased contribution made to relevant made to relevant policy frameworks?
- To what extent, and to what effect, does or could monitoring and evaluation enable evidence-based modifications, enhancements or changes to the Narragunnawali program to occur, and enable the reporting of programmatic successes and challenges?

There have been two papers released from Phase 3 of the evaluation, numbered in series as part of the overall evaluation. In Paper #15 – *The State of Reconciliation in Education, from safe to brave* we used four sources of data to help understand the state of reconciliation in education as at May 2021, and as Australia seemed to be moving towards the recovery phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. The delayed roll-out of COVID-19 vaccinations and subsequent third wave of infections meant that this recovery was interrupted and that the education (and lives) of children in much of Australia were once again disrupted by the pandemic. Nonetheless, the findings showed that there was generally positive news regarding reconciliation in education in that there has been a continued increase in the proportion of the general community who feel that the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is very important, when asked across repeated opt-in, internet based panels. Within the community of institutions engaged in the Narragunnawali RAP development process, there has also been an increase in the proportion of schools and early learning services that report to regularly and confidently incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, perspectives and contemporary issues into curriculum planning and teaching.

There were other findings in that paper that were less positive with regards to reconciliation in education. There was relatively low levels of support amongst adults in Australia for aspects of the school system related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. Only 40.8 per cent of respondents felt it was definitely the role of schools to ‘Provide opportunities for students to learn about reconciliation or engage with reconciliation activities at school’ and only 43.6 per cent of respondents saying it was definitely a role of schools to ‘Build on and include local, regional and national cultural knowledge and experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in learning’. Schools and early learning services involved in Narragunnawali were also still unlikely to say that they have regularly engaged with the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community in which they are based.

In Paper #16 – Engaging in the broader policy discussion, the aim of the paper was to consider empirically the link that might exist between ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education’ and ‘reconciliation in education’, and the positionality of the Narragunnawali program within diverse Indigenous Education policy frameworks. To do this, the main focus of the paper was a discussion of the education outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young adults in Australia, including some new analysis of the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status and literacy and numeracy measurement.

This most recent paper documented how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, youth and their families engage in education at high rates at all levels of education. However, detailed analysis of NAPLAN data showed that not only do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have measured literacy and numeracy levels that are lower than for the non-Indigenous population in early primary school, but that these outcomes do not increase by as much between Year 3 and 5 or Years 5 and 7 for an otherwise equivalent non-Indigenous student (controlling for observable characteristics like age, sex, and socioeconomic status).

A focus of Paper #16 was on the policy frameworks in Australia that incorporate education outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and youth. The main framework is the Closing the Gap framework which, although incorporating substantially more input from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations than previous versions, still has a number of limitations. In particular, there are no targets set for the school years, and that there is no focus on the attitudes or outcomes of non-Indigenous students, with no attempt within the framework to increase knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language, culture or history, nor any focus on reducing the level of discrimination perpetuated by predominantly non-Indigenous Australians on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.

## **1.2 Outline of the remainder of the paper**

The aim of this paper is to track and analyse engagement with Reconciliation Australia's Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education program, and the relationship this engagement has with a range of observed outcomes. We draw on two sources of data – administrative data collected as part of the operation of the program (described in Section 2), and a specially targeted survey focusing on the views and attitudes of parents and carers in Australia (Section 3). In Section 4, we provide some concluding comments.

# **2 Engagement with reconciliation in education**

## **2.1 Engagement at the institutional level**

As of the 30<sup>th</sup> of April 2022, there were approximately 8,977 schools or early learning services that had either commenced or completed the Reconciliation Action Plans (RAP) development process on the Narragunnawali platform. This represents a large, and continued engagement by schools and early learning services with reconciliation in education since the program commenced in 2015 when there were less than 500 schools and early learning services that had commenced the RAP process (Figure 1), as well as since April 2020 at the height of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic when there were a little under five-and-a-half thousand schools and early learning services in the program.

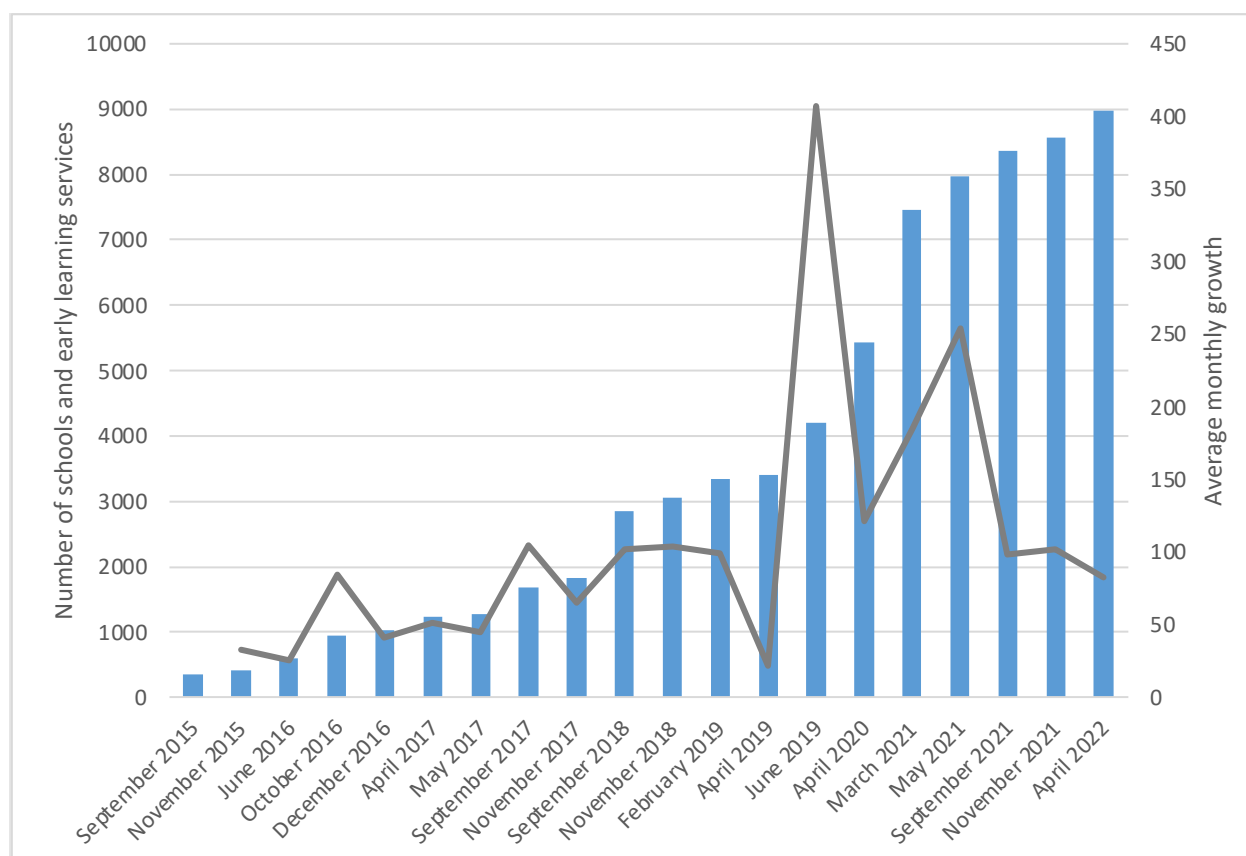
The figure also shows the average monthly increase in schools and early learning services with a RAP since the previous observation. Because reports have been generated on an irregular basis, the horizontal axis values are not represented according to consistent increments. However, the average monthly growth rates adjust for this.

Although there is some observation-to-observation fluctuation over the period, there has been a generally increasing growth, at least up until early 2021. If we take the slightly conservative average of 100 additional institutions per month as the number of non-RAP schools gets less (the actual average over the period is 111 institutions per month), then we would expect that by December 2022 there will be around 10,000 schools and early learning services with or having had a RAP, and around 15,000 by the end of June 2027, five years after the end of the current round of funding for the program.

There is always uncertainty projecting that far ahead, but growth has been sustained over a number of years already, and there is no reason to suggest that demand for the program won't continue to grow. If it does, then it is likely that the program will continue to require significant funding in order to deliver a quality service for the schools and early learning services that are engaging with the program, as well as the broader Australian community.



**Figure 1 Growth in number of Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs) in schools and early learning services**



## 2.2 Engagement at the individual level

An innovation to the Narragunnawali program that was introduced early in the program development (in 2017) was the ability of individual users – who were not necessarily associated with a school or early learning service’s RAP Working Group - to engage through the platform. As of April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022 there were also approximately 119,059 registered Narragunnawali platform Users, of which 56,151 (approximately 47.2 per cent) were associated with one or more Narragunnawali RAP Working Groups.

The most common type of user registered for the platform is a teacher, making up 43,566 users or 46.1 per cent of the total users for which we have a user type. This high volume and percentage of users is not surprising given a focus of the platform is in large part to provide resources for in-class instruction. A further 13,130 users (13.9 per cent) were Principals or Directors for schools or early learning services respectively, with 6,691 (7.1 per cent) users being teaching assistants. Part of the engagement of Principals/Directors may be when undertaking the development of a RAP, given that the Principal/Director is a required member of a RAP Working Group. However, they may also be supporting their staff with the use of resources.

The third largest group of users on the platform is pre-service teachers, making up 9,556 users in total or 10.1 per cent of users. When you compare the total number of in-service teachers in the entire education system (i.e. outside of the platform data) with the number of pre-service teachers, the number of pre-service teachers who have registered is actually a higher percentage of the relevant cohort. This demonstrates the important role that Narragunnawali is playing in teacher training. In many ways though this is not reflected in

other aspects of the program. Given this apparent high demand, it may be worth considering explicitly expanding the focus of Narragunnawali to be 'Reconciliation in Education and Educator Training' with specific resources and a greater engagement with university programs.

A relatively small number of users were either community members (1,510 or 1.6 per cent) or parents/carers (2,474 or 2.6 per cent). In some ways that is not surprising given in-service teachers' and educators' more direct capacity to address the 'in the classroom' component of the RAP framework. However, as will be shown later in this paper when looking at the parent/carer survey, there is very low knowledge of many of the reconciliation concepts incorporated in the program amongst the general community, and a distinct lack of familiarity with the program itself. Furthermore, and as reflected in the 'Around the School' and 'With the Community' domains of the Narragunnawali RAP framework, a consistent body of research demonstrated that what happens outside of the classroom is as important in shaping the views and knowledge of students as what happens within the classroom. We will return to this point when discussing the survey results, but it is worth raising early on in this paper that strong consideration should be given by Reconciliation Australia to more proactively engage with parents/carers and community members as active participants in the reconciliation process.

While there are a large number of registered users, active engagement with the platform as measured by logging in is concentrated amongst a small group of users. Only around two-thirds of registered users (78,829) had logged in to the program at all, with many of those not having logged in for a number of years. That does not mean that those users who hadn't logged on aren't still making use of the resources available on the platform (without logging in) or that they aren't engaging with Narragunnawali in different ways (for example through some of the more offline/on-the-ground RAP development or implementation processes). However, these users who have not logged in at all or have not done so for a number of years may not be aware of improvements to the program, or the range of resources that are available. There may be a need to actively re-engage some of these users.

### **3 Attitudes and views on reconciliation of parents and carers**

The existing program data (discussed in the previous section), has a rich amount of information on the types of schools and early learning services that participate in the program's RAP development process (with some comparisons made with those that do not participate). Furthermore, the RAP reflection survey has been a key source of data for this evaluation and will be utilised in future papers to measure the change through time in the views and activities of staff in schools and early learning services. However, the Narragunnawali program data (including the targeted surveys) have very little information on the attitudes and views towards reconciliation of parents and carers.

In December/January 2021/22 the ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods in partnership with the Online Research Unit (ORU) undertook a survey of 3,558 parents and carers, taken from the Australian Consumer Panel. The ethical aspects of the 'Reconciliation in Education: The perspectives of Parents and Carers' survey (henceforth RE-P&C survey) were approved by the ANU Human Research Ethics Committee (protocol number 2021/079).

In addition to this targeted survey, In November 2020, the ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods in partnership with the Social Research Centre undertook a large survey as part of both the ANUpoll and the CSRM COVID-19 Impact Monitoring Survey programs. In

addition to a range of questions regarding the impact of COVID-19 on wellbeing, mental health, economic and social outcomes, there was a large module on the experience of education during the COVID-19 period, as well as views on the role of education more broadly. The November 2020 survey was undertaken on a probability-based online panel (Life in Australia) and some of the questions were designed to be comparable to the RE-P&C survey.

### **3.1 Demographics of the Reconciliation in Education: The perspectives of Parents and Carers survey**

Roughly one half of respondents to the survey identified as male (49.9 per cent) and female (49.9 per cent) with the remaining 8 respondents using another term or not answering the question). These respondents were included in the analysis, but due to sample size constraints and potential privacy issues were not included in analysis by sex. The two most common ten-year age groups in the dataset (amongst parents and carers) were 35 to 44 years (34.7 per cent of the sample) and 45 to 54 years (30.3 per cent of the sample). Combining the youngest three age groups, 25.1 per cent of the sample was aged 34 years or less (5.0 per cent aged 24 years or less) and combining the oldest three age groups 9.8 per cent of the sample were aged 55 years and over. Four respondents did not give their age and were excluded from any age-specific analysis in the paper.

Geographically, the sample of parents and carers is distributed across states and territories in a similar way to the Australian population of parents and carers. The two most populous states in the country also had the largest number of parents and carers in the sample with New South Wales having 31.8 per cent of respondents and Victoria 26.8 per cent. Queensland and Western Australia also had more than one-in-ten respondents (17.7 and 10.2 per cent respectively) with South Australia containing 7.6 per cent of respondents. The three smallest jurisdictions in Australia had the lowest samples, with 2.6 per cent of respondents living in the ACT, 2.2 per cent living in Tasmania and 0.8 per cent living in the Northern Territory. Eight respondents either did not currently reside in Australia or did not give their State/Territory.

Most respondents were born in Australia (71.4 per cent). However, amongst the sample born in Australia, around one-third (32.8 per cent) had at least one parent born overseas. This means that a little over one-half of the sample (51.8 per cent) were either born overseas or had a parent born overseas.

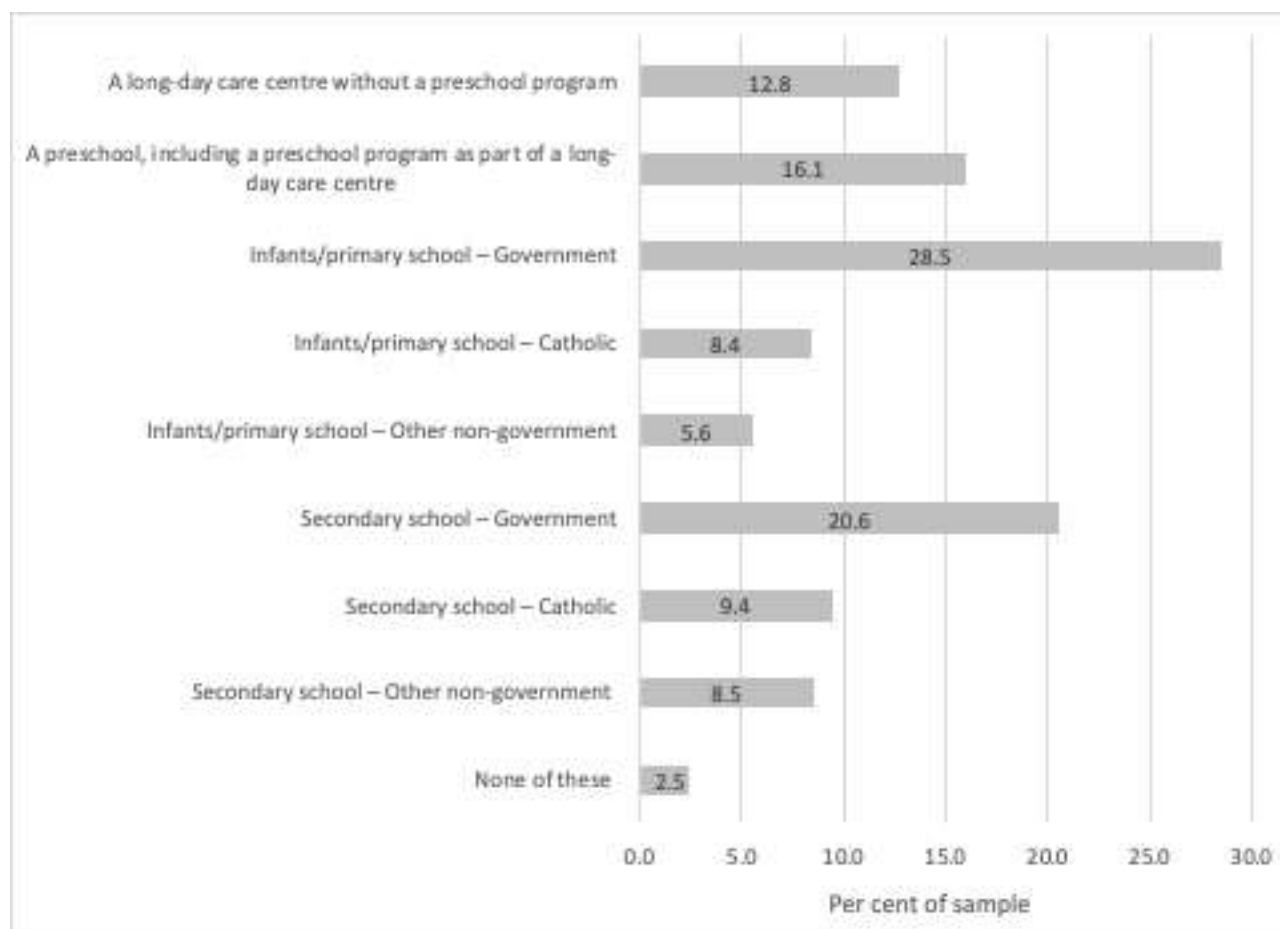
Finally, and perhaps most importantly with regards to parents and carers, 3.4 per cent of the sample identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. This is important to note, because neither the survey nor the program are targeted towards measuring the outcomes of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Australians, but are rather targeted towards all Australians.

Most parents or carers in the sample have one (47.2 per cent) or two children (37.2 per cent) in their care who have attended an Australian school or early learning service during 2021. There is a small proportion of carers with three children (8.7 per cent) with only 7.0 per cent of parents or carers responsible for four or more children at an education institution.

For some of the survey questions, we asked parents and carers to answer regarding the child that most recently had a birthday. Excluding those that were 20 years over or those where the parent/carer did not give a response (63 responses combined across the sample), the average age of children that the parents/carers provided detailed responses on behalf of was 9.2 years.

Narragunnawali is a program that provides resources and attempts to improve reconciliation outcomes for children and young adults across the range of schools and early learning services. Figure 2 shows that the most common institution for the child with the most recent birthday was an infants/primary school in the government sector (28.5 per cent) with the next most common type of institution being a secondary school in the government sector (20.6 per cent). There are also a large number of students who attend a long-day care centre without a preschool program (12.8 per cent) or a preschool, including as part of a long-day care centre (16.1 per cent). It should be noted that the numbers sum to more than 100 per cent as a small minority (11.1 per cent) of respondents attended more than one institution over the previous 12 months.

**Figure 2 Per cent of sample children by type of school or early learning service**



### 3.2 Awareness of Narragunnawali

Although there has been a large increase in the number of schools and early learning services that are engaged with the Narragunnawali RAP development process (Figure 2) that does not necessarily mean that parents and carers are aware that their child's school/service is participating. When asked 'Have you heard of a program called Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education' only 7.7 per cent of parents and carers said that they had heard of the program. This was slightly higher than the 5.6 per cent reported in the November 2020 Life in Australia survey. This may reflect differences in the underlying sample, or it may reflect a small improvement over the period in knowledge and familiarity.

Using some of the demographic variables discussed in the previous sub-section we can explore some of the factors that may be associated with awareness of Narragunnawali. We analyse these relationships using a probit model, which measures the association between

a set of independent variables and the probability of the outcome occurring (in this case being aware of Narragunnawali), whilst holding other characteristics constant.

The analysis suggests that there are no difference in awareness between males and female parents/carers, or the type of area that a person lives in, or the age of the child. One of the reasons for the age of the child not having an association is that in the model we control for the type of institution a child was attending, which was significant. Compared to those who attended a government primary school only (the base case) parents or carers of children who were attending a long day care centre were more aware of Narragunnawali, as were those whose child attended a government secondary school, and a non-government primary school.

While the age of the child did not have an association, the age of the parent/carer did. Specifically, those aged 34 years or less are more likely to be aware of Narragunnawali, all else being equal. Perhaps not surprisingly, parents or carers who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander were more likely to be aware of the program. While this difference held in the modelling component of the analysis, we can get a sense of the scale of this difference by simply comparing the average level of awareness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents/carers (17.8 per cent) with the non-Indigenous sample (7.4 per cent).

Another key finding is that those parents/carers who have more children under their care are more likely to be aware of Narragunnawali. While this is perhaps not surprising, it does highlight the way in which information about Narragunnawali is likely to come at least in part directly from their children.

A final finding from the analysis is that those who have a degree as a post-school qualification are more likely to be aware of Narragunnawali than those without a post-school qualification. This highlights the potential benefit of targeting areas or individuals without these qualifications in terms of building awareness.

While there was a relatively low level of knowledge of Narragunnawali, those who are aware of the program had a reasonably high level of engagement. Within the sample who were aware of Narragunnawali, 51.6 per cent said that they visited the Narragunnawali website and 26.4 per cent said that they had been a member of a Narragunnawali Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) Working Group. It would appear from the data that awareness is a bigger barrier than lack of engagement for those who were aware of the program.

While there was a lack of awareness of Narragunnawali itself, there was a very high level of support for the principles of the program. Specifically, respondents were given some information about the program and its aims and then given a short test to confirm they understood the information.<sup>1</sup> After being given this information, parents and carers were asked whether their 'child/young person's school or early learning service should or should not participate in the Narragunnawali program.' Almost half of parents/carers in the survey (48.0 per cent) said that the institution definitely should participate in the program, with a further 39.1 per cent saying that the institution probably should. This left only 7.0 per cent of parents/carers in the sample who thought their child's institution should not participate and only 5.9 per cent who thought it definitely should not.

It is unclear or not possible to determine through the survey data alone whether this is because the respondents did not agree with the principles of the program, or whether it may be because of other factors/conflicting priorities that don't necessarily reflect a negative attitude towards reconciliation/Narragunnawali, but nonetheless suggest that there may be other concerns/aspirations that parents/carers choose to preference.

There was significant variation across the sample in support for participation in such a program. We analyse this using an ordered probit model, with higher values indicating a greater level of support. Demographically, we find that female parents/carers are more

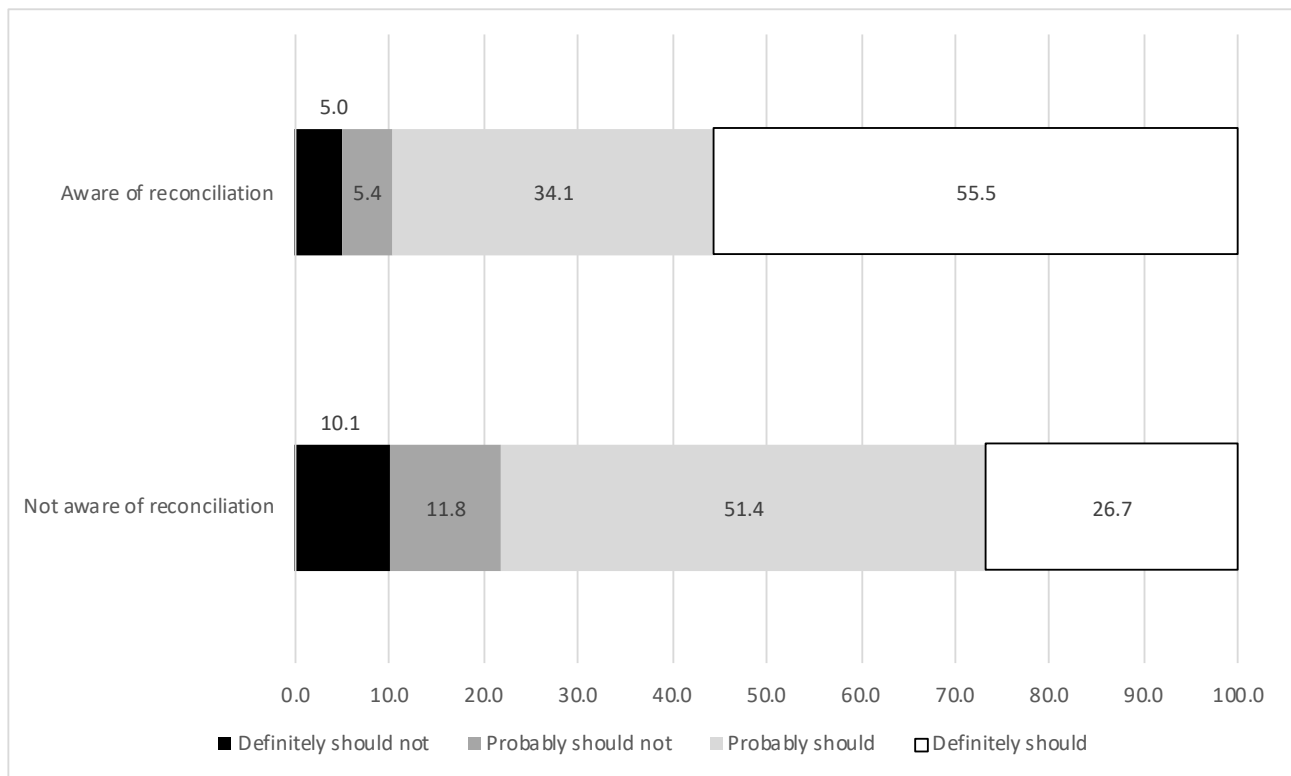
supportive of the school or early learning service of their children participating in a program like Narragunnawali, as were those aged 45 to 54 years. Those born overseas were also more supportive, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians having the highest level of support. The number of children that a person has responsibility for does not have an association, nor does the age of the child.

There are differences by the type of institution that the particular child is attending. Compared to those children who were attending a government primary school only, there was no difference in support for those parents/carers of children who were attending a long daycare centre or a preschool. There was, however, a lower level of support amongst those who were attending a non-government primary school or any form of secondary school. It would appear that parents/carers see a program like Narragunnawali being better suited to younger children.

Where a person lives has an association. Compared to those who identify that they live 'in a big city', those who live in the suburbs or outskirts of a big city have greater support for a program like Narragunnawali. Finally, education has a strong association, with less support amongst parents/carers who have not completed Year 12 but greater support for those who have a degree qualification.

In a second model looking at support for a school early learning service to participate in a program like Narragunnawali, we also control for whether the parent/carer was 'aware of the concept of reconciliation between non-Indigenous Australians and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.' Across the sample, around three-quarters of parents/carers (76.0 per cent) were aware of the concept, with awareness having a strong association with support. Outside of the modelling context, 26.7 per cent of those who were not aware of the concept of reconciliation thought their child's school or early learning centre should definitely have such a program, compared to 55.5 per cent of those who were aware of the concept (Figure 3). Furthermore, when we control for awareness of the concept of reconciliation in the analysis, we find that differences in support by education and geography are no longer significant. This highlights that a key way to build support for a program like Narragunnawali is to raise general awareness of reconciliation in the general community.

**Figure 3 Support for a program like Narragunnawali, by awareness of the concept of reconciliation**

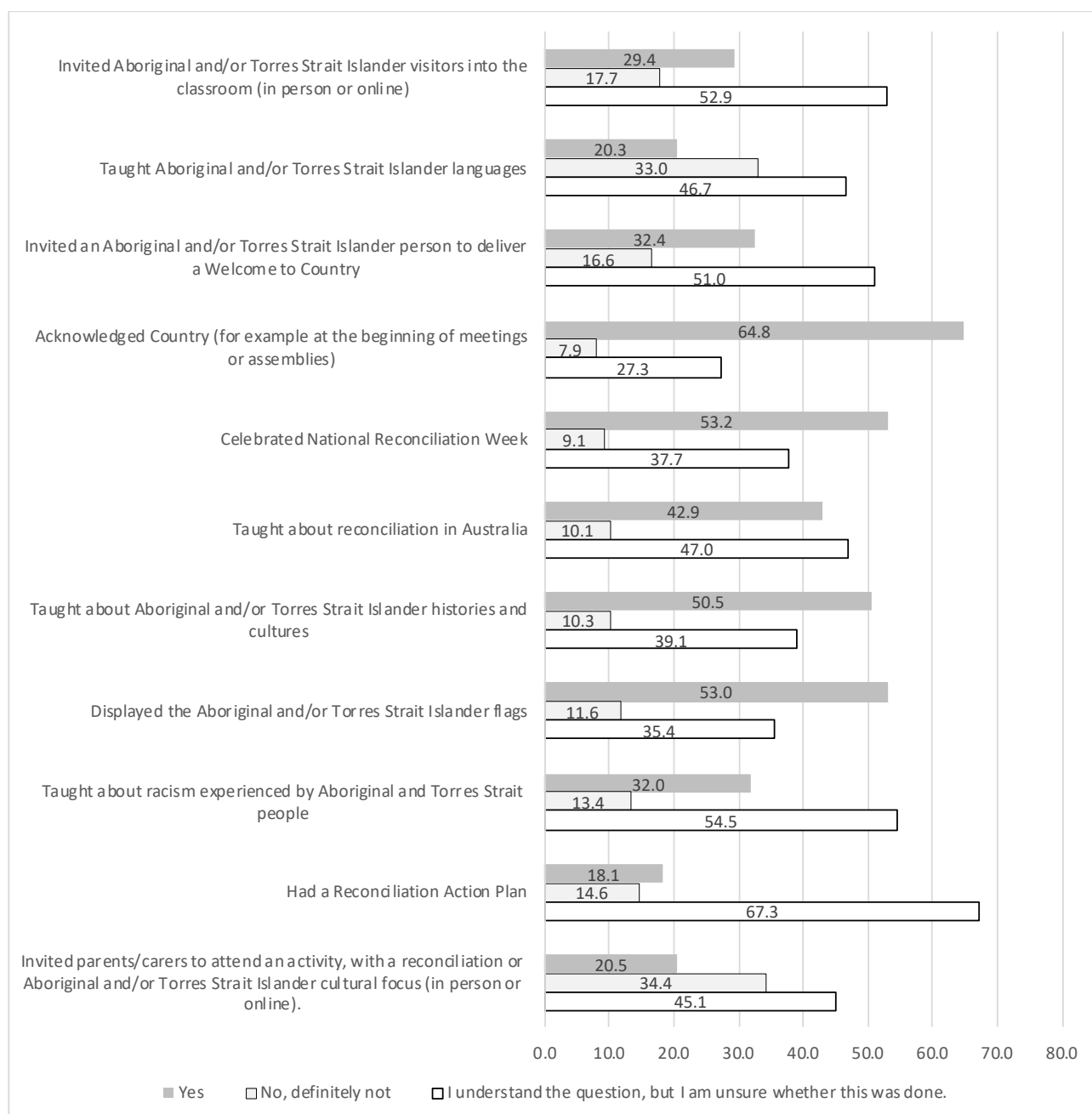


### 3.3 Reconciliation related activities

While a program like Narragunnawali can support activities related to reconciliation in schools and early learning services, it is not necessary for education institutions to be involved in the program to do so. In the RE-P&C survey we asked respondents 'Has the school or early learning service your child/young person attends done the following during 2021?' with 11 potential activities asked about. In terms of response options, parents/carers were able to answer Yes, or definitely not, but also whether they don't understand the question or whether they are unsure whether the activity was done. Leaving aside those who did not understand or did not answer the question, the following figure gives the per cent of respondents who answered yes, no, or were unsure.

A key finding from the survey was the level of uncertainty about the activities that are undertaken at schools and early learning services. For 7 of the 11 activities this was the most common response, with more than two-thirds of respondents (67.3 per cent) saying that they were unsure whether their school or early learning service had a Reconciliation Action Plan or RAP (a key activity for those schools that engage with Narragunnawali). There were, however, four activities that at least half of the parents/carers in the survey knew for sure were undertaken in the school of their reference child – Acknowledgement of Country (64.8 per cent), celebrated National Reconciliation Week (53.2 per cent), displayed the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander flag (53.0 per cent) and taught about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures.

**Figure 4 Types of reconciliation-related activities undertaken at schools and early learning services**



Leaving aside the development of a RAP which is as much a process as an activity, we summed the number of activities that the parent/carer knew was undertaken at the school or early learning service of the reference child. The most common number of activities was zero, given by 18.3 per cent of parents/carers in the sample, but the mean and median across the sample was 4.

Female parents/carers reported a greater number of activities than male parents/carers (4.15 on average compared to 3.83) though this appears to reflect a greater level of uncertainty for male parents/carers. There were no other standard demographic, geographic or socioeconomic characteristics that had a significant association.

Importantly, but not surprisingly, those parents or carers that reported that their child's school or early learning service had a RAP reported a far greater number of other activities (7.62 compared to 3.26). This may represent a greater level of knowledge – if you know either way whether there is a RAP that is likely to mean that you know about other activities. However, even leaving that aside, it is likely that the presence of a RAP supports other reconciliation related activities.



We also asked about the activities that parents and carers themselves were involved in. Leaving aside those who were unsure or who did not answer the question, the most common activity was to have discussions about reconciliation or Indigenous Australian cultures (48.1 per cent). There were also almost three in ten (29.9 per cent) parents and carers in our sample that helped complete a homework activity related to reconciliation or Indigenous Australian cultures. Even amongst the activities with low uptake, there appears to be a relatively high level of latent demand. Specifically, 47.0 per cent of respondents said that they didn't help organise an activity that was about reconciliation or Indigenous Australian cultures (in person or online) but would like to, with 53.3 per cent of respondents saying that they did not attend an activity that was about reconciliation or Indigenous Australian cultures (in person or online) but would like to.

While there was still a non-negligible proportion of parents or carers who did not and did not want to undertake the activities, for all four that we asked about the majority of parents/carers either did undertake the activities or would like to.

Although it is difficult to demonstrate causality with observational data, those parents/carers whose children attend schools or early learning services where it is known that there is a RAP are more likely to report that they undertook the activities. Specifically, the following lists the per cent of parents/carers who engaged in that activity first if the school or early learning service had a RAP and second if they did not:

- helped organise an activity at your child/young person's school or early learning service that was about reconciliation or Indigenous Australian cultures (in person or online).
  - 42.6 per cent with RAP, 8.2 per cent without
- attended an activity at your child/young person's school or early learning service that was about reconciliation or Indigenous Australian cultures (in person or online).
  - 46.8 per cent with RAP, 12.1 per cent without
- helped your child/young person complete a homework activity related to reconciliation or Indigenous Australian cultures
  - 59.0 per cent with RAP, 22.7 per cent without
- had discussions with your child/young person about reconciliation or Indigenous Australian cultures
  - 69.8 per cent with RAP, 43.2 per cent without

### **3.4 Attitudes to reconciliation in education**

Children and youth are likely to form beliefs and attitudes about reconciliation through their experiences in schools and early learning services. Indeed, that is one of the ways in which a program like Narragunnawali is designed to achieve long term change in society. However, children and youth are also likely to be strongly influenced by the attitudes and beliefs of their parents and carers. Although the mechanism is a little less clear, it is also quite possible that the attitudes and beliefs that children and youth develop in an educational institution can influence the views of parents and carers. That is, the influence can go in both directions.

To help to begin to understand these relationships, the last module of the RE-P&C survey focused on attitudes to reconciliation held by parents and carers. A particular challenge with this module is avoiding social desirability bias and accurately identifying the true beliefs held by parents and carers, not what they think a survey data collection company would like to hear. This is never going to be completely possible, but to make it more likely we utilised two approaches. First, we presented a long intro to the module, as follows:

For these next questions, please remember that we are really interested in your personal opinions.

We acknowledge that the following questions may be sensitive for some people. These questions are about reconciliation and what you would support or not support happening within your child/young person's school. You can tell us that you would definitely support, probably support, probably not support, or definitely not support each of the statements in the following questions. You are also able to choose not to respond to any given question.

We aim to capture the range of different opinions held by Australian parents and carers.

We have strong measures in place to ensure your answers cannot be linked back to you and we encourage you to answer as honestly as possible.

The second mechanism that we used to elicit more accurate responses was to use both negatively and positively framed versions of the same concepts. Each respondent was randomly assigned to receive one of either the positively or negatively worded options for each pair of aspects of reconciliation. So, for the questions on reconciliation in the classroom, all respondents were first prompted with 'In your child/young person's classroom, would you support or not support...?' For the pair of options on race relations, half the respondents were given the positively worded option (teachers encouraging mutual respect between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous children/young people) whereas the other half were asked about the negatively worded option (teachers taking no notice of discriminatory language or behaviour between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous children/young people). The response options for both the positively and negatively worded options were:

1. Definitely support
2. Probably support
3. Probably not support
4. Definitely not support
5. I don't understand the question.
6. I understand the question, but don't have an opinion about this.

In the analysis presented in this section, we exclude those that do not understand the question, but include those who say they 'understand the question, but don't have an opinion about this' as a valid response option.

With 12 aspects of reconciliation asked about (24 questions in total when you include the positively and negatively worded framing), there is a lot of information in these questions that could be examined in substantial detail. For the analysis presented in the remainder of this section, we combine the positive framed responses with reverse coded negatively framed responses. So, using the example above, someone who definitely supports 'teachers encouraging mutual respect between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous children/young people' is coded the same as someone who definitely does not support 'teachers taking no notice of discriminatory language or behaviour between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous children/young people.' It is recognised though that the negatively and positively framed questions aren't perfect inverses of each other, and combining the results in this way involves a loss of information.

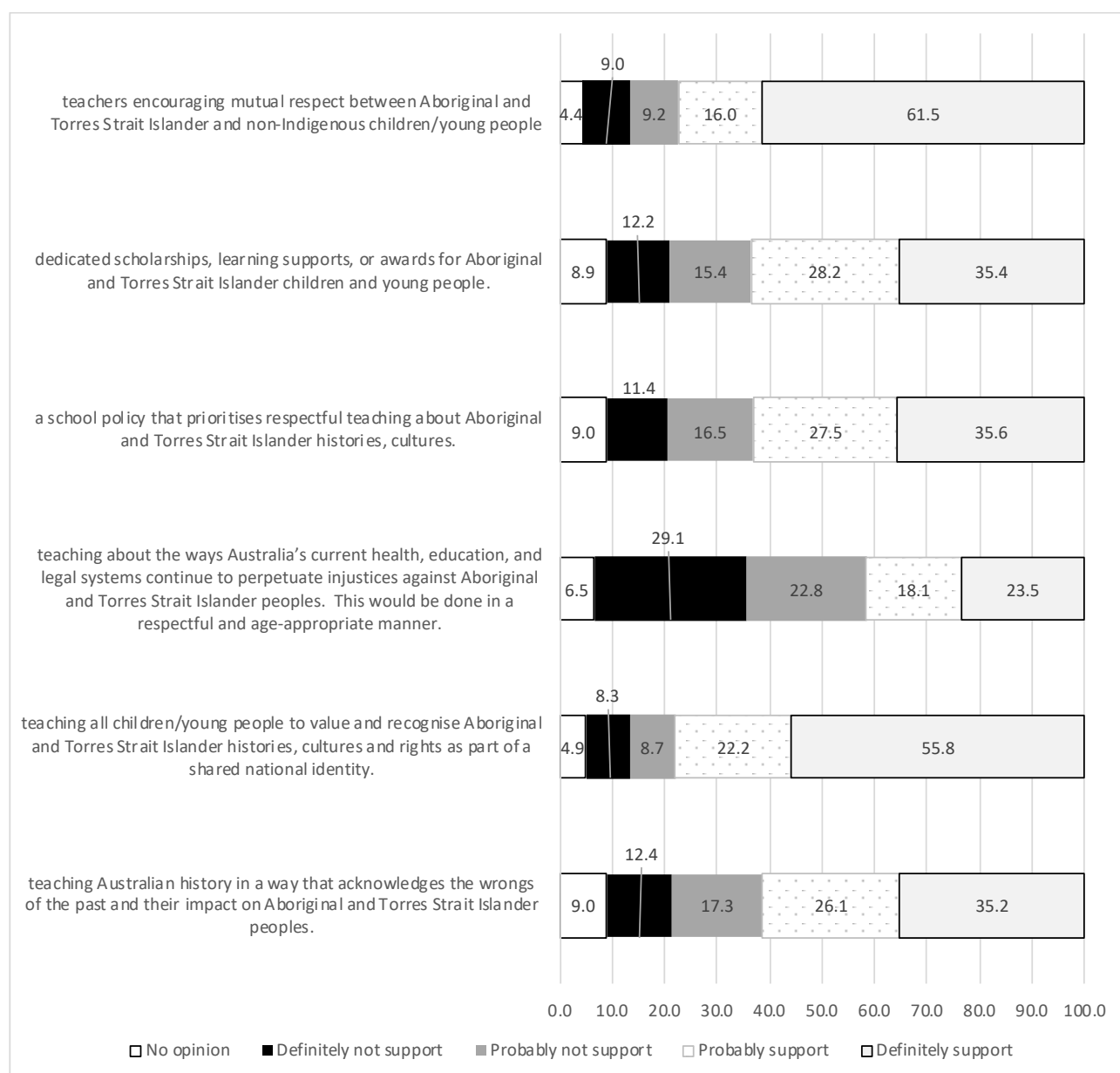
### 3.4.1 Reconciliation in the classroom

We begin our analysis of attitudes towards reconciliation by looking at views that relate to the classroom domain of reconciliation activities. Figure 5 gives the per cent of respondents who give the particular response to the positively worded version of the questions **or** the reverse coded responses to the negatively worded questions. The first thing to note from

Figure 5 is the minority of respondents who said they did not have an opinion on the particular aspect of reconciliation. This was greatest for the questions on dedicated scholarships, respectful teaching, and teaching histories.

Leaving aside those with no opinion, the two aspects of reconciliation in the classroom that had the greatest level of support with more than 50 per cent of parents and carers in the survey saying they definitely support the positive wording/definitely not supporting the negatively worded version was 'teachers encouraging mutual respect between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous children/young people' (61.5 per cent) and 'teaching all children/young people to value and recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and rights as part of a shared national identity' (55.8 per cent).

The aspect of reconciliation in the classroom that had the lowest level of support was 'teaching about the ways Australia's current health, education, and legal systems continue to perpetuate injustices against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples', despite respondents being told that 'this would be done in a respectful and age-appropriate manner.' Only 23.5 per cent of parents and carers said that they definitely support this, with 29.1 per cent saying that they definitely did not support it. Indeed, this was the only question where there were a greater per cent of parents and carers in the sample who did not support this aspect of reconciliation than who did (or vice-versa with regards to the negatively worded version).

**Figure 5 Attitudes towards reconciliation in the classroom by parents and carers<sup>ii</sup>**

### 3.4.2 Reconciliation in the school

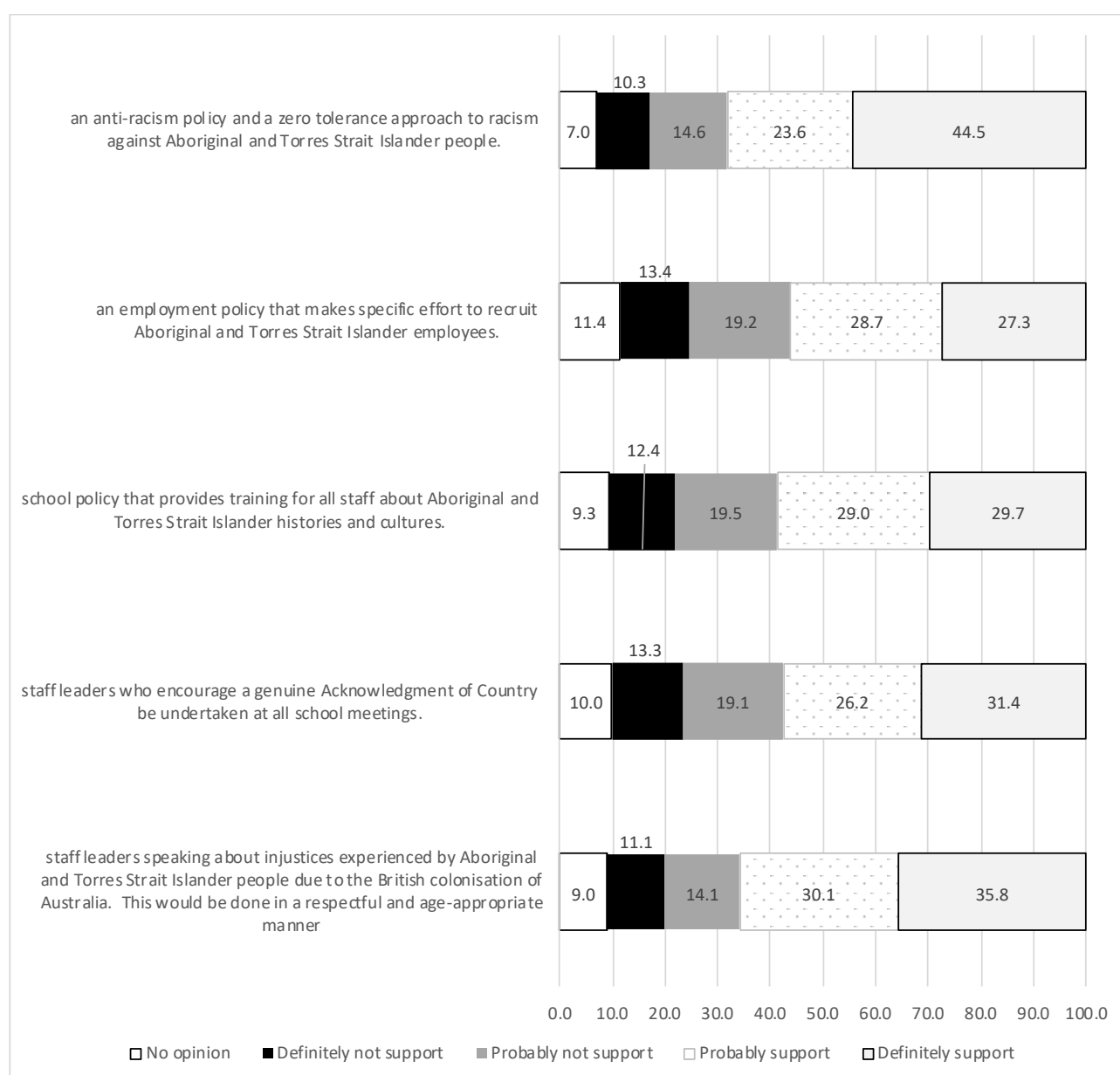
For the second set of questions regarding the wider school/service domain of reconciliation activities, we began by asking respondents 'Within your child/young person's school or early learning service, would you support or not support...?' In general, there is weaker support (as measured by the 'definite support' group) and more uncertainty with regards to the questions on reconciliation in the school (Figure 6) compared to reconciliation in the classroom (presented in the previous sub-section). There is also a greater level of uncertainty, with one-in-ten carers not knowing whether they support 'an employment policy that makes specific effort to recruit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees' (11.4 per cent) or 'staff leaders who encourage a genuine Acknowledgment of Country be undertaken at all school meetings' (10.0 per cent).

The greatest level of support was for 'an anti-racism policy and a zero tolerance approach to racism against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' with 44.5 per cent of respondents saying they definitely support such an approach and 23.6 per cent saying they probably support it (or the negatively worded equivalents). While the proportion of

respondents who report that they definitely support ‘staff leaders talking about injustices...’ is slightly lower (35.8 per cent) than for an anti-racism policy, when combined with the proportion who probably support staff leaders doing so (30.1 per cent) there is still around two-thirds of parents and carers in the survey who broadly support such an approach.

Figure 6 also shows that the lowest level of support amongst parents and carers is for ‘an employment policy that makes specific effort to recruit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees’. In addition to the 11.4 per cent who were unsure, 13.4 per cent of respondents definitely did not support and 19.2 per cent probably did not support (or the negatively worded equivalents) such a policy. However, while this is higher than for other aspects of reconciliation in the classroom there are still more than half of the parent and carer sample who support such a policy.

**Figure 6 Attitudes towards reconciliation in the school by parents and carers<sup>iii</sup>**



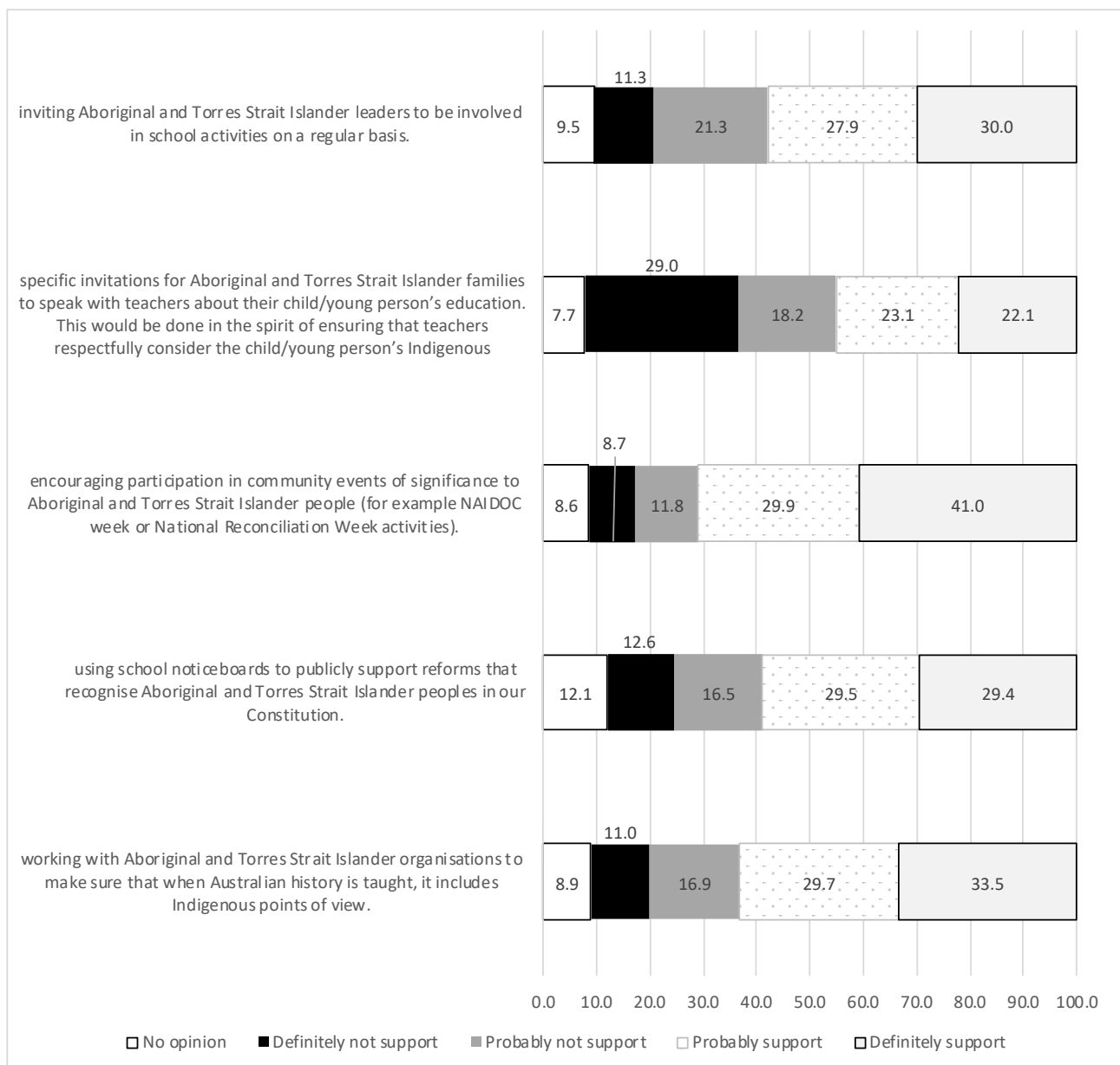
### 3.4.3 Reconciliation with the community

The final aspect of reconciliation in education that we asked about focuses on interaction with the community. Specifically, we preface the questions with ‘When your child/young person’s school or early learning service engages with the local community, would you

support or not support...?’ The greatest level of uncertainty when it comes to reconciliation in the community is for ‘using school noticeboards to publicly support reforms that recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in our Constitution’ with 12.1 per cent of respondents unsure.

The aspect of reconciliation with the greatest level of support is ‘encouraging participation in community events of significance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people ...’ which is definitely supported by 41.0 per cent of parents and carers in the sample, and probably supported by 29.9 per cent (or the negatively worded equivalents). The lowest level of support is for ‘specific invitations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to speak with teachers about their child/young person’s education’ with 29.0 per cent of respondents saying that they definitely do not support such an approach, with a further 18.2 per cent saying they probably don’t. Indeed, less than half the sample (45.2 per cent) either probably or definitely support such an approach.

**Figure 7 Attitudes towards reconciliation with the community<sup>iv</sup>**



### 3.4.4 Factors associated with attitudes to reconciliation in education

In the final set of analysis on attitudes to reconciliation in education, we look at the demographic, geographic, and socioeconomic factors associated with views. We analyse these attitudes individually (in the first instance) using an ordered probit model. Once again, we combine the respondents who were asked the positively framed questions with the reverse coded negatively framed responses. We also, however, control for whether the respondent was asked the positively or negatively framed version, with the results suggesting that respondents are more likely to be in support of a positively framed question than not being in support of a negatively framed question. This is an important finding for future data collection that might ask about attitudes towards reconciliation.

In addition to controlling for the way in which the question was framed as well as the characteristics of the parent/carer and their child we also include a variable for whether or not the respondent reported that their child's school or early learning service had a RAP. Somewhat surprisingly, we did not find a consistent positive association with this variable and attitudes towards reconciliation in education. Indeed, while we found a positive relationship between the school or early learning service having a RAP and two of the attitudes – dedicated scholarships, learning supports, or awards for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people; and specific invitations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to speak with teachers about their child/young person's education – there was a negative association with five of the attitudes. These are

- teachers encouraging mutual respect between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous children/young people;
- A school policy that prioritises respectful teaching about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures;
- teaching all children/young people to value and recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and rights as part of a shared national identity;
- an anti-racism policy and a zero tolerance approach to racism against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; and
- encouraging participation in community events of significance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

It is not really possible to make causal conclusions about the relationship between having a RAP and the attitudes listed above – either when there is a positive association or there is a negative association. However, the results from the analysis do suggest that there is more that could be done by schools with a RAP to influence the views and attitudes of parents and carers.

## 4 Concluding comments and implications for Narragunnawali

Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education continues to grow as a program, with more schools and early learning services being added to the total number of institutions registered to develop a RAP each month, and a greater depth of engagement for many of the schools and early learning services that have been engaged for a number of months and years. In the final (and next) paper from Phase 3 of the Narragunnawali evaluation, we will return our focus to the impact of the program on schools and early learning services themselves, as well as the impact on children. In this paper, however, we have focused on the attitudes, beliefs and knowledge of parents and carers. We have examined this through the 'Reconciliation in Education: The perspectives of Parents and Carers' or RE-P&C survey, a

survey of 3,558 parents and carers, taken from the Australian Consumer Panel undertaken in December/January 2021/22 by the ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods in partnership with the Online Research Unit (ORU) undertook.

A few key findings and implications emerge. First, that there is a somewhat limited level of awareness of the Narragunnawali program amongst the sample of parents and carers. This awareness is higher for people from certain backgrounds – younger parents and carers; those who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander; those with a greater number of children; and those with a degree qualification. However, across the sample, and even within these groups, awareness is quite low. This is important because there is general support for a program like Narragunnawali, with almost half of parents/carers in the survey (48.0 per cent) saying that the institution definitely should participate in the program, with a further 39.1 per cent saying that the institution probably should. Low awareness is likely to be due to the fact that much of the promotion that Reconciliation Australia does with the program is with schools and early learning services and that this is not filtering through to parents and carers. A more direct interaction might be warranted.

There is some uncertainty also about the types of activities related to reconciliation that occur within schools and early learning services. More than two-thirds of respondents did not know whether or not their child's school or early learning service had a RAP. However, a positive finding from the analysis was that those schools which did have a RAP (that the parent/carer was aware of) were much more likely to have undertaken other reconciliation-related activities. RAPs do appear to be supportive of such activities, it is just that they are not always known about by parents/carers.

It does not appear, however, that having a RAP in a school or early learning has much of a positive impact on the attitudes of parents and carers. We asked about sixteen aspects of reconciliation and the level of support for them from parents and carers. For five of these aspects, the school or early learning service having a RAP had a negative association, with only two of the aspects of reconciliation having a positive association (and the remainder having no association). This does not in any way imply that having a RAP is leading to these negative attitudes. However, it does strongly imply that a program like Narragunnawali could consider more direct interaction with parents and carers, especially as the attitudes of parents and carers are likely to shape the attitudes of their children, and may also blunt some of the effects of the program.



## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> The information given was as follows: The Narragunnawali program promotes reconciliation in education. It supports Australian schools and early learning services to:

- Develop knowledge of and pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, and contributions.
- Strengthen relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.
- Implement reconciliation activities that strengthen relationships, respect and opportunities in the classroom, around the school, and with the community.

<sup>ii</sup> The negatively worded versions of the survey questions are:

- teachers taking no notice of discriminatory language or behaviour between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous children/young people.
- no dedicated scholarships, learning supports, or awards specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.
- a school policy that prioritises teaching non-Indigenous content over teaching about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures
- teaching about the ways Australia's current health, education, and legal systems provide a "fair go" for all; regardless of whether a person is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person or a non-indigenous Australian.
- teaching all children/young people that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures are not an important part of Australia's national identity.
- teaching Australian history in a way that focuses largely on the achievements of British colonisation.

<sup>iii</sup> The negatively worded versions of the survey questions are:

- parent/carers and teachers making their own judgements about what is acceptable; without the need for a specific anti-racism policy to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the school community.
- an employment policy that makes no specific effort to recruit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.
- school policy that allows teachers to choose whether or not to seek-out training about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and culture.
- staff leaders who insist that undertaking an Acknowledgment of Country should be limited to only certain occasions throughout the school year.
- staff leaders who believe the school environment is not an appropriate place to speak about injustices experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people due to the British colonisation of Australia.

<sup>iv</sup> The negatively worded versions of the survey questions are:

- inviting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders to be involved in school activities only on certain limited occasions.
- exactly the same options for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and for non-Indigenous families to meet with teachers about their child/young person's education.
- discouraging use of school hours to participate in community events of significance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (for example NAIDOC week or National Reconciliation Week activities).
- discouraging the use of school noticeboards to communicate publicly about reforms that recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in our Constitution.
- using existing resources to plan for Australian history lessons and not specifically working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations when developing these lesson plans.