

REPORT FROM THE 2016 BIG PICTURE SCHOOLS SURVEY

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Introduction

In June 2016 Big Picture Education Australia (BPEA) completed a survey of Big Picture schools, in part drawing on questions we have asked in past years, especially during the 2011-14 evaluation. Nine schools completed the survey. Given the diversity of these schools and BPEA schools in general it remains difficult to aggregate most findings. However, the information gained from this survey provides valuable insights into the achievement of schools and into some changes over the last few years. In this report, school names have been removed so the data is anonymous.

Survey Findings

a) Student enrolment

If anything responses show the growth of Big Picture advisories in Years 11 and 12 since 2012. The sample of responses is an excellent illustration of diverse settings, indicating the limited extent to which information from schools can be aggregated into an overall picture of the implementation of Big Picture.

b) Implementation of the design

The excellent information provided by the schools about participation in learning plans, exhibitions, parent participation reflects – and in some cases improves - the findings of earlier surveys. In the current survey schools most commonly reported that

- all students have a written learning plan,
- almost all (around 95% on average) regularly display their work at an exhibition,
- a similar percentage have at least one parent/caregiver attending their exhibitions.

The percentage of students with a mentor has been quite low in the past. It seems to be much higher now, even given the variations (from 0% to 100%). The percentage of students in internships has also increased (less than 50% in 2013), probably reflecting the priority given by Viv White and John Hogan (amongst others) to internships. If the current figures can be averaged (something which has to be done carefully) around 85% of students are in or



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preparing for internships. What the data also suggests (e.g. for School C) is that variations can be explained by differences between teacher advisors as much as between schools.

"I have been a part of Big Picture from the start at School A. My journey has been amazing, it has given me my independence and a sense of self-worth, most of all excellent management skills. Big Picture gave me experience in the work force and how to deal with other members of the community. I thank Big Picture for my first job. I am now the Assistant Manager, I love my job in retail and working with my peers and customers."

c) Stories of success

These stories coming out of schools touch on such a terrific range of issues:

- Big Picture is a success for the younger students, giving them individual learning, connections and a future focus. It builds the students into confident learners. The response refers to the possibility of Big Picture for the younger secondary students and as an elective in Years 9 and 10.
- A great success has been having a LTI co-ordinator, building strong connections with community and mentors. Students feel safe and connected.
- LTIs have helped open a post-school pathway for the majority of Big Picture students. It makes them confident and gives them a real life experience at a much earlier age. They are piloting three students into the University through the portfolio entry program in 2017.
- One school has grown to three advisories and has a waiting list. Personalisation and connections very powerful and parents continually report the benefits of close student/teacher connections.
- Students love to share and talk about their projects. Their love for learning is seen more than in mainstream programs. Big Picture allows students to be connected to adults and the adult world – students are given a negotiating voice and authentic respect.
- Advisory teachers responded with their stories. One reports on the success of having a Big Picture coach two days each week. Teachers' commitment is renewed. Students have one day each week for internships but are also well-engaged in subject electives in Years 9/10. Teachers are motivated and really care about their students. Another teacher points to "that something special" e.g. visiting a student's home for the exhibition as a family member was ill.



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- Big Picture is hugely successful, in part evidenced by the number of students who want to enrol. Students are growing and developing in ways which are enriching their lives. Staff are involved in presenting on Big Picture at conferences.
- One school attributes the success of Big Picture to it being a safe place in which students explore their interests and passions. The school has many success stories to relate to the forthcoming Big Picture conference.

"This term I have been helping a lot of people with their projects and helping them stay on task with their work. The reason why I love to help people all the time is because when someone is happy it makes the environment happy and when the environment is happy it makes me happy and when I'm happy I can work to my best and stay on track with my work. That's why people say when you're doing something for someone or helping them with their work it always come back and helps you in life as well."

d) Student work

In responding to the survey the schools have taken a variety of approaches to this task. They have presented very significant stories. The summary below of work examples received doesn't do justice to the students but using the firsthand accounts from the schools and students must await agreement from the schools and students concerned.

- Details of Year 8 group projects
- Several student websites are available
- An extensive account from two current students and four past students
- Photographic display of student internships

"This term I have been concentrating on maths a lot more than I usually do because my project is on carpentry and that's what I want to do when I'm older and to be a carpenter you got to be very smart at maths. Every single little thing in Carpentry involves measurement. Mrs Lewis has been coming down to my Big picture class and helping out with all the students in my class and especially me because I told her I was concentrating on



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maths a lot more this term. So we sat down and worked together one on one and we have been working on Pythagoras, volume, area, angles, measurement and perimeter. I really thank my teacher for coming down and working with me a lot because I really think I have learnt a lot more about maths and I'm really happy about that because maths is going to be the most useful thing you need to know in carpentry."

"I am currently attending my internship at a school with the aspiration of becoming a primary school teacher librarian; I have been attending for four terms so far. From my internship I have gained many opportunities alongside my mentor gaining real experiences. I have created wall displays, I return books for students, borrow their new books out and shelve all the books they have returned. I have also learnt to fix torn books, cover the books and write the old books off. I have also on occasions participated in the class lessons; such as helping my mentor create posters for a kindergarten class. A major project I also completed was organising the storeroom, this helped my mentor because of her not having the time for the job and I learnt where different resources were placed. Furthermore I created labels for boxes that was difficult to indicate what books were in them. My mentor and I also created a S/6 reading corner to encourage reading for the older students. Recently I even rearranged computers to make areas more user friendly. My favourite experience would have to be meeting and assisting the author / illustrator that visited the school; this was an experience I will never forget. My opportunities so far have helped me greatly in understanding the work that goes on behind the scenes of the classes that students walk into and I am truly grateful and would like to thank my mentor for the experience I am having."



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e) Retention and pathways

Schools were asked about the extent to which they agreed with a number of statements.

- When asked to comment on the statement that Big Picture students are generally retained in Years 10 to 12, three schools strongly agreed, four agreed and one was neutral.
- When asked to comment on the statement that student retention in Big Picture is generally better than that of mainstream students in the school, two strongly agreed, three agreed and two were neutral.

We also asked about post-school destinations - a difficult ask given that school data about this in general is rarely gathered in consistent ways. In its earlier years School E reported very useful and encouraging findings about post-school destinations, especially given the previous school experiences of its enrolment. It's too early for the reconstituted School E to report this time.

In this survey other specific data came from School A, School B and School F. School A reports 95% of its Big Picture leavers going to employment or tertiary education. School B report two-thirds going to tertiary education and one third to employment. School F Big Picture students have a profile different to others in the school, but still 70% (note that numbers are small) of its Big Picture leavers go to tertiary education or employment. Such numbers are very encouraging.

The comments from respondents provide more insights. Previous data from School E showed a quite high percentage going to tertiary study. School G has a relatively advantaged enrolment (ICSEA value high at 1069) so retention and eventual tertiary study is likely to be high. But the excellent work at School G demonstrates the relevance of Big Picture to more advantaged kids. School A comments that many students gain employment through their LTI experiences. School C goes to Year 10 with most students subsequently attending the nearby senior college. The school reports that a small number of others go elsewhere. Often to pursue a passion – several examples are mentioned.

"When I started in Big Picture I was overwhelmed with the helpful guidance from my advisor, other teachers, my mentor and class mates. My opportunities were endless through this program. Since leaving at the end of year 10 I have created my own small business Emily Michelle Photography (EMP). Big Picture has helped me follow my passion as a photographer and the confidence to start my own career. I now have experience in photographing weddings, engagements, fashion and surf shoots, catwalks,



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modelling portfolios and family shoots. I have also have set up my own studio. I totally recommend Big Picture, it helped me with my confidence, knowledge, awareness and attitude towards chasing my dreams. The endless opportunities and all the support has helped make me who I am today."

f) Attendance

Information about student attendance, including in comparison with non-Big Picture students, is not particularly useful in the absence of detailed info about the socio-educational characteristics of each group of students. Further, schools often measure attendance in different ways. School A showed improved attendance for Big Picture compared with other students, School B showed similar attendance for both groups.

Comments from respondents were very useful, especially comments from School B. The school reported that even where absences exist the students retain close contact with advisory teachers. In small groups high absenteeism due to ongoing illness affects data. The School C data has been reported by the school for many years and the improving percentage of students with over 90% attendance is very revealing. School D's comments reflect their previous positive data....both School D and School B previously showed big gains in attendance when students shifted to the Big Picture school/program. Data from both School E and School F remind us that longer term changes in attendance data for each student are more important.

g) Student suspensions

The 2011-14 evaluation had limited information to draw on about suspension rates. In the 2016 survey we asked for impressions about suspensions based on the data held by schools. Seven of the nine schools reported that their suspension rates had decreased and that the data for Big Picture students showed that suspension rates are lower for Big Picture students compared with others in the same school – and rates are lower for Big Picture students compared with their track record in their previous schools. The exceptions to this trend were indicated by two schools, one very disadvantaged and another enrolling quite advantaged students. Their suspension rates had not changed. Overall the information reported about student suspensions is very positive.



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h) Conclusion

The 2016 survey has provided very useful data, other information, reflections and student stories about the progress of Big Picture in a diverse range of schools. We are now in the process of disseminating the findings, including to the participating schools.

"I have so far gained experience cutting the stone, polishing and cleaning it ready for installing. We then go out into the community on work sites and private homes to install. I love helping my mentor work, keeping his shed clean and I would really like to be a Stone Mason for my career. Big Picture has given me the opportunity to experience the real world of working, it's hard, but I love it."



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