

Media Release

Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

Wednesday 12 August 2015

Improving the learning and wellbeing needs of low SES students in regional Australia

A study into the learning and wellbeing needs of low socio-economic status students in regional Australia has received a \$424,174 funding boost from the Australian Research Council's 2015 Linkage Project scheme.

The project is a collaboration between the University of Tasmania's Faculty of Education, Deakin University and La Trobe University with partner schools in Launceston, Geelong and Bendigo.

These areas were selected for the study due to their relatively high levels of unemployment, schools with large proportions of low SES students, and recognised disadvantage.

"The current low educational performance of this student cohort has significant negative effects on individual employment prospects and broader national productivity," University of Tasmania lead researcher Professor Bruce Waldrip said.

"Their underachievement and disengagement from schooling contributes to many antisocial, harmful short and long-term outcomes for individuals; with significant health and other costs to the broader community. We hope that the outcomes from this project could have the potential to improve this scenario and also be applicable to similar settings."

The study aims to address the learning and wellbeing needs of more than 7,000 predominantly low SES students by researching the conditions that enable refinement and extension of a successful curricular and wellbeing program.

The Northern Tasmanian schools involved are: Exeter Primary and High Schools, Port Dalrymple District High School, Lilydale District High School, Invermay Primary School and Ravenswood Primary School.

Professor Waldrip said there was an extensive body of research that indicated the need for a multi-faceted approach to improve students' learning and wellbeing outcomes generally, and low SES students in particular.

These include a whole school approach to develop a positive learning culture; catering for students' diverse learning and wellbeing needs through a comprehensive, motivating curriculum and expert teaching; and building strong teacher-student relationships.

“Similarly, diverse strategies are proposed to promote and sustain student wellbeing. Our research study will identify conditions that enable a sustainable, practicable systemic approach to achieve the integration of both educational and wellbeing goals for low SES students,” Professor Waldrip said.

“We recognised the need to augment these strategies through other complementary approaches, including enhanced school-parent-community partnerships to support low SES student learning and wellbeing gains.

“To this end, we aim to collaborate with participant schools and other stakeholders to evaluate parent-school partnerships around student homework, school-community links around community-based learning, and the development of student school refuser programs.”

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