

Evidence for Learning Summary

The pilot evaluation found that students who reported lower initial levels of academic self-concept (English and Maths) and academic resilience made small gains on those measures after being involved in the Resilient Families Plus program.¹ However, this finding needs to be treated with caution due to the small number of students who completed the pre- and post-surveys (34 students from two schools), inconsistent and incomplete program delivery, other well-being programs that schools were running concurrently, and the lack of a control group to compare gains made over time.

Parental participation was low as only eight per cent of parents whose children participated in the evaluation (or two per cent across Year 8 enrolment numbers from the two participating schools) attended the parent programs. Schools reported time and resource constraints running all sessions of the program's school curriculum, and faced challenges securing parents' attendance and participation in the parent sessions. Given these reasons, this pilot was not able to determine the extent to which the Resilient Families Plus elements implemented were effective.

Program summary

Resilient Families Plus is a 10-week school-based program designed to help students and parents develop knowledge, skills and support networks that promote students' health and well-being as well as academic outcomes during early Secondary school years.

Program Developer

Deakin University, Centre for Social and Early Emotional Development.

Independent Evaluator

Western Sydney University

Type of Trial

Pilot

Students

34

Parents

7

Schools

2

Program Grant

\$100,00

Evaluation Grant

\$83,000

Costs

\$\$\$\$\$

Security

-

Months

Impact





-

Note: Security ratings and months' impact are not reported in our pilot evaluations as it lacks robust estimates of impact.

¹ Resilient Families Plus is an extension of the original Resilient Families program. The program comprises the same five core elements of Resilient Families but with two extra components which focus on academic and learning outcomes in addition to the health and well-being outcomes central to the original program.

The program and schools involved

Resilient Families Plus is a program delivered by Deakin University to support students in their early years of Secondary school and their parents, to support their well-being and improve students' academic learning outcomes. The two participating schools were situated below the Australian average on the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) and had a disproportionally high percentage of students from the lowest quartile, 64% (School 1) and 57% (School 2) compared to the Australian national average of 25%.

 Mode Whole-school intervention	 Delivered to students by Teachers Delivered to parents by Program Developer	 Cost per student \$93.53*	 Intervention length 10 weeks
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*Based on the approximate cost per student per year of implementing the intervention.

Research results

Recruitment challenges resulted in the pilot trial design differing from the original evaluation protocol. The revised design entailed comparing Resilient Families Plus Year 8 students' pre and post-intervention outcome data for academic self-concept (English and Maths) and academic resilience. Academic self-concept and academic resilience are precursors to academic achievement and were the primary outcomes in focus for the pilot trial. Assessment of the program's implementation occurred through interviews with participating parents, school leaders and the program developer as well as through inventories completed by school leaders and validated with data collected from the program developer. Table 1 summarises the pilot findings.

Table 1: Summary of pilot findings

Question	Finding	Comment
Is there evidence to support the theory of change?	No	The Resilient Families Plus program was not fully delivered and therefore the findings are inconclusive as to whether the theory of change can be supported.
Was the approach feasible?	No	There was low program fidelity, schools truncated the student curriculum, there was low parent uptake for the educational activities and the program was not delivered within the allocated time.
Is the approach ready to be evaluated in a trial?	No	A number of barriers to implementation need to be addressed prior to any future trial.

Evaluation conclusions

- 1. Impact of the intervention:** Students reporting at baseline low levels of academic self-concept and academic resilience may benefit from Resilience Families Plus more than students who initially reported higher levels on these academic precursor measures. This is because students with lower baseline measures of academic self-concept and academic resilience showed small increases in these measures after being involved in the program. These increases however were not statistically significant and need to be treated with caution given the small number of schools involved in the project and students who completed the both pre- and post-surveys (2 schools, 34 students, 7 parents), incomplete program delivery at the time students sat their post-intervention survey, other well-being programs that schools were running concurrently, and the lack of a control group to compare gains made over time.

- 2. Pilot challenges:** There were significant challenges recruiting schools to participate in this evaluation. Neither the Victorian Education Department or research funders provided assistance in recruiting schools and other well-being programs that schools were already running (e.g. one of the two schools was implementing Respectful Relationships², a Department-sponsored well-being program with similar features), may have impacted schools' willingness to adopt Resilient Families Plus. A parallel research study undertaken by the program developer³ at the same time meant schools had to disseminate information and gather student consent forms for two separate projects may have delayed return rates, resulting in lower student participation numbers. The program developer's research study was prioritised over those of the evaluation. For example, students had to complete the program developer survey questions before the evaluation's in the same sitting, which might explain the lower survey completion rates than those of the concurrently run study.
- 3. Implementation issues:** Despite schools and parents acknowledging its value, schools faced challenges implementing the full 10-weeks of the student curriculum by the time of the post-test. For example, one school only selected to use three of the 10 sessions and then complemented these with other program content. Schools also reported changing the timing and sequencing of the activities. Additionally, the program developer did not implement the full complement of the parent components and when they did, this was out of the recommended sequence. Schools valued the flexibility the program allowed given they could select how many sessions to include as well as the timing and sequencing of these, however this resulted in poor fidelity to the prescribed program.
- 4. Feasibility:** Schools were reluctant to implement all sessions of the program's school curriculum component and instead chose to supplement with alternative curriculum as they deemed it resource and time intensive. While acknowledging the value of the program's school-based parent sessions, schools questioned its feasibility given challenges in managing these activities, the low interest from parents, and the time and involvement required from families and schools. The program developer identified the barriers to implementing the parent components were related to family stress, work commitments, English as a second language and schools' own challenges with engaging parents.
- 5. Readiness for trial:** Although the program is affordable, lack of adherence to the prescribed model and barriers to faithful implementation need to be addressed prior to any future trial. Schools' interest in using the program and being involved in a trial would also need to be determined.

Main findings and impact

The evaluation is not able to determine the reported value and social significance of Resilient Families Plus due to the poor school uptake (9% or 2 out of 23 schools). It can be possibly argued as having low value because schools did not adopt all components of the program. This finding must be interpreted in the context that the Victorian Department of Education had endorsed another school-based program at the time of the pilot study which may have impacted the schools' willingness to adopt either all or some components of Resilient Families Plus.

² In 2016 [Respectful Relationships](#) education was recommended as a core component of the Victorian Curriculum. Respectful Relationships is an initiative to support schools and early childhood education settings promote and model gender respect and equality.

³ Evidence for Learning and the evaluators agreed to the program developer continuing their business as usual practices, which includes the concurrent research study to inform future improvements. However, the evaluators and Evidence for Learning were not consulted on some of the research activities that were carried out by the program team.

The pilot study revealed that Resilient Families Plus was implemented with low program fidelity as the program developer was unable to implement the intervention as intended (based on the program logic) in the time allotted. The program developer did not adhere to their program's structure or sequence of activities (Table 7 in this report compares the recommended versus actual implementation). The intervention did not reach its intended target population, namely parents, who were requested to attend the Parent committee training session (which exhibited a 2% participation rate and was only completed after the intended timeframe) and engage with the parent reading campaign brochure (delivered after the intended timeframe). In line with the evaluation design that sought to recruit disadvantaged schools, the two participating schools had a disproportionately high percentage of students from the lowest quartile (School 1: 64% and School 2: 57%) based on the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) measure, compared to the Australian national average of 25%.

There was some evidence to suggest small gains in student academic precursors (academic self-concept and academic resilience) which support the theory of change for the cohort of students whose baseline (pre-test) results were on the lower end of the scale measures employed. However, these findings were not statistically significant and should be interpreted with caution given noteworthy evaluation limitations, including: (1) the small number of schools involved; (2) concurrent use of other well-being programs that schools are implementing at the same time (e.g. one of the two schools was running the Departmentally-sponsored Respectful Relationships school-based program); (3) the failure to implement the full Resilient Families Plus intervention prior to the post-test date; and (4) the lack of a control group population to compare gains made over time.

Given the timing of the pre/post student testing, the two new (parent) components of Resilient Families Plus were not included in the quantitative findings presented. Furthermore, neither school had completed the full 10-week student curriculum at the time of post-test due to either a) implementation of a selective set of curriculum components (School 1) and/or b) post-test deployment by the program developer prior to the conclusion of the student curriculum delivery (School 2). The two new components of Resilient Families Plus were deemed by the school participating in the process evaluation to be inappropriate since parental participation in the school has been historically low. This school valued the flexibility the program allowed and was able to nominate what elements of the program they were going to include and how it would be implemented. Importantly though, this level of flexibility undermined the fidelity of implementation as the program logic was not adhered to, and raises questions about the program's readiness for trial.

The stakeholders participating in the process evaluation identified three primary barriers to the effective implementation of Resilient Families Plus. First, the program developer felt that a lack of support to recruit schools for Resilient Families Plus hindered school recruitment markedly. Secondly, the school leader, program developer and parents believed that improved communication in terms of timing and content amongst the stakeholders could bolster implementation of and participation in Resilient Families Plus.

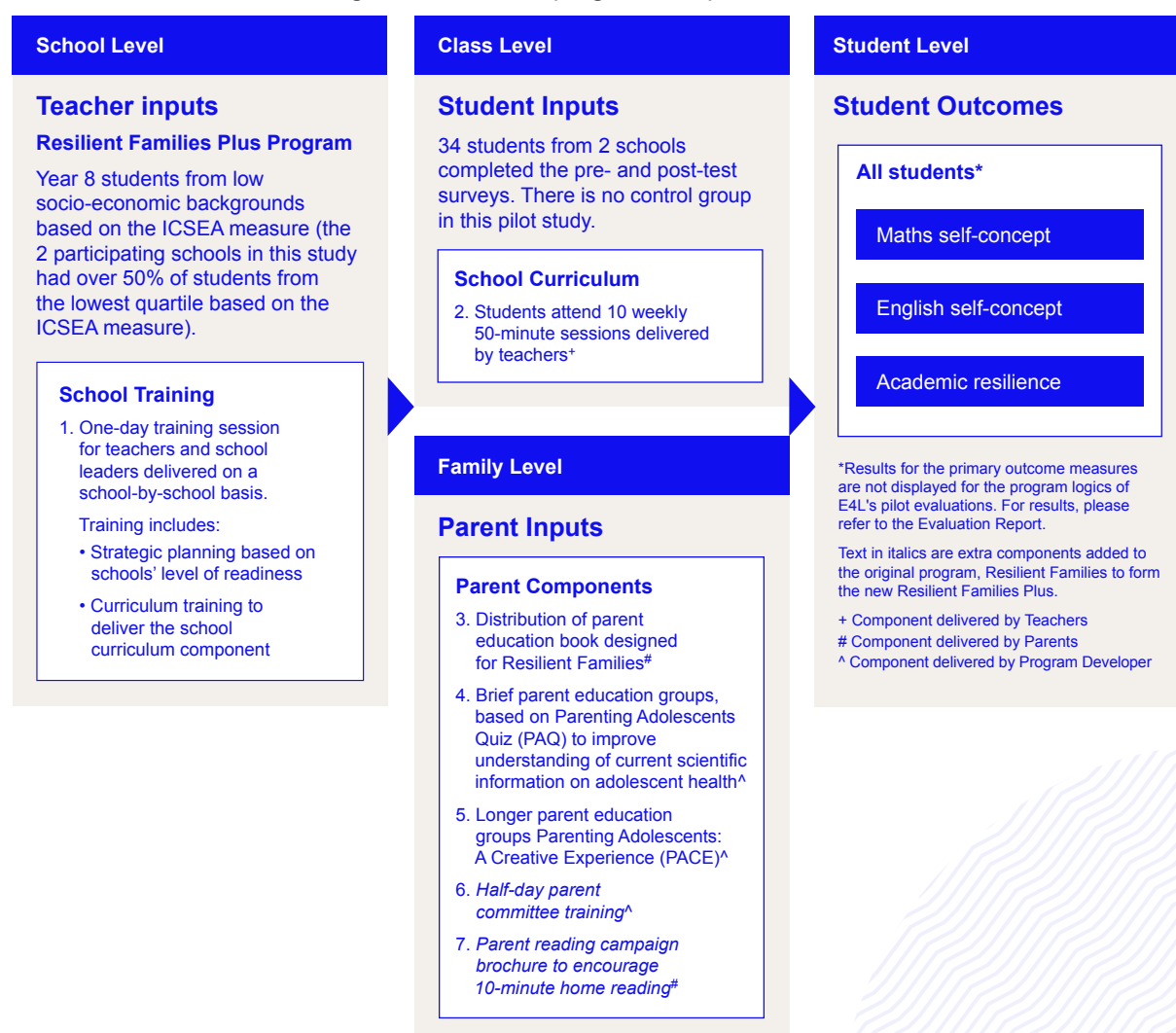
Thirdly, the recurring theme of low parental participation was also identified as a barrier. Whether the origin of this barrier lies within the characteristics of parents, the school or the Resilient Families Plus program itself warrants further consideration.

The qualitative interviews with the school leader and parents provided some insight into the proposed theory of change given that the parent handbook, Parent committee training session and parent reading campaign brochure had just been completed at that time. While no parent support was evident for improved student academic precursor outcomes, one parent reported a shift in the "family outcomes" preceding level of the program logic. Although untested, it could be suggested that the parent components that were implemented prior to their interviews with the evaluators, may lead to future improvements in student academic precursors and should be investigated further.

The pilot study has identified that Resilient Families Plus is not yet ready to be evaluated in an efficacy trial. There are some important issues that need to be addressed before an efficacy trial of Resilient Families Plus could be recommended. These key recommendations include:

- Identify the school recruitment rates for the program with consideration to whether Respectful Relationships or any other similar school-based program is being implemented by schools recruited for implementation.
- Adhere to the timing and activities as specified in the program logic in future implementation of Resilient Families Plus.
- Increase compliance to the parent components of the program through:
 - Strategies to partner with schools to engage parents. For example, review program components that require parent participation and assess the communication to parents, their level of commitment, and the structure of activities in the sessions.
 - Review strategies to promote inclusion and participation of parents with an additional language other than English as well as families from low socio-economic backgrounds with challenging work conditions.
 - The program developer adapts their program to attract parent participation.
- The program developer adapts the student curriculum because in its current form, schools chose not to use most of it because there were other preferred programs.
- Conduct a follow-up survey after the post-intervention survey since previous research on Resilient Families shows that the program's effects occur in the medium to long-term rather than in the short-term.

The Resilient Families Plus logic model and its program components is below:



How secure is the finding?

The original evaluation protocol of this evaluation included a comparison of two intervention groups (Resilient Families and Resilient Families Plus) and a control group. However low recruitment (two schools and 34 students) resulted in the need to amend the evaluation design to a smaller scale study of one intervention group (Resilient Families Plus). The final design of the pilot trial remained as a mixed methods approach but on a much smaller scale thereby reducing the potential for robust estimates of impact. The process evaluation (qualitative findings) which occurred through interviews with participating parents, school leaders and the program developer as well as through inventories completed by school leaders and validated with data collected from the program developer provided feedback on the assessment of the program's implementation.

How much does it cost?

The program cost was calculated from the data provided by the program developer throughout the pilot study. It is rated as very low with a cost of \$14,965 per school and \$93.53 per student according to the Evidence for Learning Cost Rating approach, based on the approximate cost per student of implementing the intervention in one year.



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To read more on the findings visit
evidenceforlearning.org.au/lif/our-projects/resilient-families/

