

## President's Piece, May 2020

### Are we all in this together?

#### A stark reminder

Today marks the start of Reconciliation Week.

As we are all experiencing an international health crisis, this is both an important and an apt time to reflect on the current health warning for Indigenous versus non-Indigenous Australians. Indigenous Australians over the age of 50 receive the same warnings as non-Indigenous Australians over the age of 70!

These warnings are a reminder of the stark ongoing differences between health outcomes for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, a fact that should be a source of shame for our country.

Our colonial past benefited some Australians while exploiting others and as a nation we must recognise that our shared story of Australia needs to be grounded in truth, and acknowledge privilege.

I invite you to [read ACSSO's media release](#) to mark Sorry Day this week, and scroll down the newsletter for more information about Reconciliation Week this year.

#### Return to school

A different kind of privilege is at play in our return to school arrangements around Australia. The funding advance offered to private schools but not public education remains outrageously unfair. It also places undue pressure on parents in the non-government sector.

It is the parents, in this time of uncertainty, who should be deciding whether their children will attend school based on their own risk assessments and family circumstances. It is not fair that families are punished, and some at times with fines, when they may not be comfortable sending their children to school.

Regardless of which school they support, parents should not be pressured into this decision by their school seeking eligibility for a special funding deal. Nor should state school parents have to fear their children are 'missing out' because of incentives provided to the private school sector.

Please [read our media release on this subject](#).

#### National family survey

With more than 3000 responses in a week, our *Australian Family Survey on Schooling During the COVID-19 Pandemic* has revealed a great deal about the way

families are coping right now, whether their children are at school or learning from home.

You can read more from our summary below, and watch for additional insights in this newsletter and the media as we explore the responses fully.

### **Tribute to families**

Finally, while in last month's newsletter I focused on the amazing work of our nation's school staff, today I particularly want to recognise all those families who are doing the very best to support and care for school children right now.

The team at ACSSO hears daily from parents, grandparents, guardians and mentors about their experiences of schooling and nurturing young people in this pandemic. Our hearts go out, especially, to those families whose children would normally receive additional support at school. Your efforts to sustain education and care while at home - and in transition back to school - are extraordinary and you have our deep respect.

Please stay safe.

**Andrew Bidwell**

**Chair**

**Australian Council of State School Organisations**

**May 2020**