

# A message from ACSSO Chair Sharron Healy



## What a term it will be!

Welcome back to Term 2!

I hope everyone was able to spend some quality time with family and friends over the break and is ready to tackle a new term of connecting and learning.

### **Pre-election webinars**

With Federal Election only weeks away, it is a good time to reiterate ACSSO's position on behalf of government school students and families. ACSSO is very political, in that we work with the Federal Government to increase opportunities for students and families attending Australian government schools.

But at the same time we are definitely apolitical.

We have no alignment with any party, and as such have reached out to the LNP, ALP, Greens and education leaders to join us in a series of webinars to discuss their education policies before we head to the polls. Full details will be on our website and socials as soon as possible, and we will be pleased to offer the opportunity for you to submit questions in advance.

**This Wednesday, 11 May, I'm pleased that Senator Mehreen Faruqi has accepted our invitation to have a conversation about where the Greens see education going in Australia. Head to [this registration page](#) for more information and to lock in your invitation.**

As the Australian Greens Education spokesperson, Senator Faruqi has stated *education has been smashed by a budget hostile to public schools, universities, TAFE, and early childhood education and care and this is a government hostile to public education and its final budget proves this beyond a shadow of a doubt*

Senator Faruqi says the Greens believe every Australian, regardless of their postcode or financial situation, should have access to a high quality education. Lifelong learning, from

early childhood education to school, TAFE and university, is the cornerstone of a strong, productive nation.

*Invitations for webinars have also been accepted by Tanya Plibersek (ALP) and Correna Haythorpe (AEU) with arrangements needing to fit into busy schedules - watch our socials. We hope to have the full range of political perspectives represented and accepting their invitations before 21 May!*

## **Education issues for the 2022 Federal election**

Education has many critical issues; although if you watch the nightly news or 24/7 news channels, you will most likely see very little when it comes to education in the current political climate. The election has taken over the news, and it seems as though education once again takes a back seat. It sometimes makes me wonder how much education is valued by Australia's politicians?

ACSSO has just completed a survey asking you for your education Issues for the election. Some of the key issues identified include:

- support for student wellbeing which includes additional personnel and resourcing to enable 'readiness to engage' and reconnect with school
- Indoor air quality (IAQ) – Indoor air problems can be subtle and do not always produce easily recognized impacts on health and wellbeing, we know that IAQ contributes to a favourable environment for students, performance of teachers and staff. These elements combine to assist schools in their core mission - educating our children.
- support to ensure that students with additional needs have the appropriate adjustments to access their learning
- early childhood: when it comes to early childhood education programs, quality is critical. Early childhood education can help children make friends, develop independence, and learn new routines. High quality early childhood education gives children the best start in life.
- authentic family engagement is a shared responsibility that values the equal partnership between families and school. Recognising that students will succeed when families, educators and schools work together as equal partners.

Could one vote — your vote — swing an entire election? That's a very small probability, but it's big compared to your chances of winning the lottery, and it's big relative to the enormous impact your vote can have on the education of Australian children. Please make yourself aware of the education policies of all political parties.

## **Mental health initiatives**

With everyone's wellbeing and mental health being the most important factor right now to getting back to some sort of normality in schools (and life in general) I took the opportunity to attend both the Frontline Mental Health and the Child & Adolescent Mental Health conferences held in March.

The Frontline Mental Health conference's main message was that a holistic approach to wellbeing is essential, incorporating not just the person affected by mental ill-health, but their family and community, too. There needs to be a move from responsive to preventative practice, with appropriate and adaptable services and resources being available to everyone individually – one size does not fit all.

This very much mirrors ACSSO's vision for public education: a system where the family is engaged as partners by the school in order to create the best learning and wellbeing environment for the child or young adult. Tailored support is essential, and in both an academic and wellbeing sense, individual engagement and understanding is the key to effective support. Family engagement and good mental health practices and policies cannot be stand alone; they must be embedded into every aspect of education.

The Child & Adolescent Mental Health conference centred around lived experience being recognised as expertise, and that the best way to achieve better mental health and wellbeing for young people is through co-design. It was recognised that this can be very challenging for some professionals, but that when the collaboration was viewed as an equal partnership, and there was a "sharing of the power", the programs, resources, and outcomes were genuinely more successful.

Overall, the presentations concluded that schools are trying their best to combat the growing mental health crisis being faced by our young people, but that they currently do not have the appropriate training and resources to do this properly. They need to know how and where to refer students for professional help. They need to be given the tools and the language to ensure they can teach the students how to recognise potential mental ill-health symptoms, in themselves and their peers. Both students and staff need to know it is not their job to have all the answers.

There needs to be a huge push to de-stigmatise mental ill-health in the community in general. And all of this work needs to be done in a truly collaborative manner, with school personnel, students, families and the community, and especially with those who have lived experience.

## **National Check In Week**

To that end we have been working with Life Skills-GO in the lead up to both National Check In Week and NAPLAN.

During this time the team have conducted a series of webinars with valuable discussions surrounding the mental health and well-being of our young people. You can watch the replay of these [here](#)

Their check in tools have been made available free of charge to trial – we hope schools have taken advantage of this.

## **Speaking of NAPLAN...**

This week is NAPLAN week and tests will take place between Tuesday 10 May and Friday 20 May. All students are expected to sit NAPLAN online this year.

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) advises parents that:

*NAPLAN tests are constructed to give students an opportunity to demonstrate skills they have learnt over time through the school curriculum, and NAPLAN test days should be treated as just another routine event on the school calendar. The best way you can help your child prepare for NAPLAN is to reassure them that NAPLAN tests are just one part of their school program, and to advise them to simply do the best they can on the day.*

You can visit ACARA's public [demonstration site](#) to find out more about NAPLAN Online.

For families there is additional information on the [ACARA parent and carer support webpage](#), or you can read [ACARA's leaflet with information for parents](#).

This year also marks the final year of transition to an online assessment, with all schools doing NAPLAN online in 2022. Find out all about NAPLAN's move online here [nap.edu.au/online-assessment](http://nap.edu.au/online-assessment)

As of 2023, NAPLAN will be moving to March. Further information is available [here](#).

**Sharron Healy**

**Chair**

**Australian Council of State School Organisations**

**May 2022**