

## From The President's Desk – October 2020



### Where is the long term thinking when we need it?

**Hello friends,**

I want to welcome our Victorian families back to classroom learning for Term 4. It has been and continues to be a challenging time particularly in that state and on ACSSO's behalf I want to celebrate the flexibility and understanding shown by school staff, students and families while learning from home.

#### **Budget outcomes**

As the budget wraps up, it leaves us wondering, what could have been? This year has highlighted so many areas of education, both government and non-government, that could do with more support.

Parents have been crying out on behalf of their schools and themselves, and it was disappointing to see budget cuts where we could have seen more investment in our schools. Where is the long-term thinking for our nation's leaders and the next generation? What opportunities have been missed?

Learning continuity has been tested in all jurisdictions this year and, while face to face teaching is irreplaceable, we've all made do with a combination of face to face and home learning. This was surely a prime target for greater investment. Our schools across Australia are back in the classrooms now with eased lock downs, and while I sincerely hope it remains that way, there is no guarantee what will happen.

We've also seen the contrast in the way our states address their educational needs and the strain the national voice is under to support each of them, but without being in the way. Unfortunately, it is still up to each state and territory jurisdiction to make

changes as they see fit, and cause a further divide between the haves and the have nots.

## **A market for community**

We are often told that the “market will work itself out”, and according to the Australian Stock Exchange, we are well on our way to a recovery. But does it feel like that for our society as a whole? What kind of market measures our investment in our society or community?

I’m optimistic for our communities, not businesses or organisations supporting an educational pathway for all Australian students, where organisations and businesses do not dictate what is and isn’t allowed to be studied and learnt, where our future generations can create opportunities and be fully supported by our leaders and communities.

Yet, how is success measured? Is it the number of patents registered to a person or a company? Is it the current index on our stock exchange? Is it for the benefit of society and an engaging community? Is it a market of caring, interest and need, or a market of jobs, money and services?

## **Job readiness**

What is a job-ready graduate? According to our current leaders it is someone who can slot right into a job position, ready to be charged out to the highest bidder at higher fees than they cost to hire. Like many former graduates, I certainly found it wasn't as simple as that.

There is a quote from a movie I remember well, stating that the graduates of a particular university expected to “invent their own jobs”. This approach, while an enterprising and potentially “market thinking” mindset, restricts young minds to what jobs there are, not what could be. After all, innovation is easy, all you have to do is strike out the wrong ideas. This mindset also leaves little room for education for education’s sake and for study pathways that enrich us and our communities in other ways, such as the arts, which according to the Australia Council in 2015, contributes \$50 billion to Australia’s GDP.

## **Student wellbeing**

School staff and student wellbeing have always been of concern but emerged as particularly critical issues this year. Qualified counsellors are greatly needed but remain unavailable at many schools.

ACSSO has long opposed the federal funding of chaplains to provide this role, as this program is not acceptable for all students in all our schools. What our school communities need are trained and credentialed counsellors who can deal with the full array of wellbeing issues individuals may experience.

Chaplain programs can of course produce some fantastic people who do good work, but they remain affiliated to their own religion and cannot help but have preconceived beliefs directing their guidance.

We maintain that the policy focus must be on experienced and qualified professional counsellors to produce the best outcomes at school for our students – they deserve the best care and we must invest wisely.

**Andrew Bidwell**

**Chair**

**Australian Council of State School Organisations**

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