

A message from ACSSO Chair Sharron Healy



A mental health professional in every Australian school?

Time for serious support

I recently attended the [Child & Adolescent Mental Health Conference](#), where presenters shared their experiences of working with young people with mental ill-health. It was at once informative, confronting, scary, and inspiring.

Professionals are seeing a rapid increase in the number of young people presenting with mental health issues. In particular, anxiety and depression are becoming much more prevalent, and at a much younger age.

Primary school teachers and principals are acknowledging their lack of expertise in recognising symptoms of mental ill-health in their young students, and are calling upon governments to fund mental health professionals in every school. Early intervention at the primary school level would have a flow-on, positive effect on secondary school students, reducing incidences of extreme anxiety and depression in the secondary setting.

For some time now, ACSSO has worked with primary school principal groups from around the country to combat mental ill-health in young children. We will continue to do so.

The use of peer support workers, particularly with adolescents, has proved invaluable in some school settings. Peer workers are much easier for adolescents to relate to, and offer proof that recovery is an achievable reality. They provide hope.

Research presented to the conference showed that schools can have a huge, positive impact on wellbeing by deliberately fostering cultures which prioritise the mental health of students, teachers, and the whole school community. Those schools which are able to support students and families through accessing professional services and achieving diagnoses are experiencing better wellbeing outcomes for everyone in the school.

Consent education

Consent education has been in the media recently, and not necessarily for the right reasons.

Those who viewed the so-called “milkshake video” resource will know that it was ambiguous, outdated and simply didn’t hit the mark. There is no doubt that appropriate resources around consent education are desperately needed, particularly as the Safe Schools and Respectful Relationships programs have not been implemented nationwide.

I’m sure new, contemporary resources will be developed very soon, however it would have been a good idea for the Department to give ACSSO and other peak bodies a briefing on the content before launching The Good Society website. The “milkshake video” would not have made the cut with us.

Having said that, I must acknowledge that there are some good resources on the site. ACSSO looks forward to an opportunity to work with the Department on future resources and messaging.

May budget anticipated

We wait with anticipation to see what the Australian Government's May budget holds for schools, early childhood and young people's wellbeing.

ACSSO would like to see a firm commitment to early years education, which makes such a crucial difference to children's lifelong wellbeing. For a long time the early childhood education sector has struggled with the uncertainty of year by year funding for universal access to a single year of preschool for Australian children. We would like to see the federal government commit permanently to two years of universal access to preschool education for every child prior to school. We’d also like to see provisions that ensure all remote and isolated children are reached.

As we continue to move through this global pandemic, we need to ensure that the federal government adequately supports our young people and their families.

Huge inequities were identified that go beyond just what is provided in school. Families also spent many dollars ensuring that their child was able to keep pace – however we know many many families did not have the ability to provide – many schools are using technology as part of their student’s “homework” – this creates further inequity that needs to be addressed urgently.

Free family webinar

Please check out our newsletter article about the upcoming webinar with Andrew Fuller on May 17 – we hope you will join us and that you can share this information widely in your school community.

Our follow-up survey is here

Around this time in 2020 we released our first Australian family survey on schooling during the Covid-19 pandemic. More than 3000 families responded and their answers have helped tremendously with our advocacy to governments and schools.

You can read the summary of our first survey [here](#). The responses were diverse: at times uplifting, surprising and even heartbreaking.

I'm pleased to say in this issue we are launching our follow-up survey, which will pursue the major themes from our first survey: family and child wellbeing; access to adequate equipment and appropriate learning formats; and questions of engagement with schools under pandemic conditions.

You can go straight to the survey on [this link](#), or scroll down for more information. You have until 21 May to complete it so please share with your school community ASAP!

Australian curriculum review opens

And finally, the review of the Australian curriculum opens this week - you can have your say here. Scroll down for more in our article.

With Term 1 done and dusted and most schools resuming at least some pre COVID activities, let's hope this year continues to improve – stay safe!

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Chair

Australian Council of State School Organisations

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