



MEDIA RELEASE

Australian Council of State School Organisations Limited

RULES, RATs AND RETURN TO SCHOOL

“The majority of families are anxious about their children returning to school at beginning of the 2022 school year” stated Sharron Healy, President of the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO). ACSSO recently conducted a national survey of parents with school aged children, and the data from it is in line with data from other surveys released – there is grave hesitation, especially with the high case numbers and the short period of time for kids aged 5-11 years to have had their first vaccination”.

Almost half the respondents (44%) felt that the school year should be delayed, with a significant number (38%) indicating they would withhold their children from attending.

ACSSO’s survey goes further in identifying three major areas causing the most concern -ventilation, vaccination and verification.

The major cause for concern was the air quality and appropriate ventilation in our classrooms. The simple fact is air purifiers are the only way for many classrooms to maintain reduced viral load. “

“Simply opening windows and doors has proven in the past to be ineffective in dealing with nitrous oxide emissions from gas heaters and current research suggests that it is ineffective in dealing with high Co2 levels, why then would we be expecting it to be effective in reducing viral load. Governments need to invest and ensure suitable air quality in the learning space of our children.” Sharron continued

Vaccination protection was the next level of concern. “Families who are supportive of mandatory vaccination (almost 70%) of school staff are equally in support of vaccination for their children – their level of concern going back to school comes with the availability and timing of vaccination for younger students, the timing of boosters for staff and the approval of boosters for 12- to 18-year-old students.”

ACSSO specifically asked if parents would be happy if school staff administer the Rapid Antigen Test (RATs). Whilst most parents are happy for RATs to be part of the safety measures, it is interesting to note 58% responded positively to this suggestion. However, it is also significant of the parents happy for the testing to occur, 42% were not comfortable for the testing to be done by school staff. If governments are insistent of RATs tests being part of the school regime, then additional trained workers should be provided to conduct the process for consistency. We believe that a positive RATs test should be verified by Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) testing.

In line with community concerns there was a level of community feedback that reflected their objection to mandatory vaccination and the current health advice relating to the COVID virus.

“We call on National Cabinet to give school communities a level of certainty in this uncertain world, a tangible, detailed plan on school re-opening - what are the safety measures in place, how will they differ from last year, what are the triggers for closure, what happens if there is an outbreak, what constitutes an outbreak, what is a close contact and what happens if there are teacher shortages due to illness/quarantine. We demand that governments invest in the necessary levels of technology* and staff to provide the confidence for school communities that schools are safe places for students and staff” stated Mrs Healy.

The level of concern and confusion can be summed up with this particular response to our survey - “It’s hard to know what the right thing to do is.”

The national survey, conducted over the past 10 days by the Australian Council of State School Organisations, returned over 5,700 responses and included families from every state and territory and every sector. A more detailed analysis of our survey is currently underway.

*Air purifiers, PPE, RATs

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