

A Message from our President – February 2020

2020: a vision statement, or just another year?

Many of us have had a traumatic school holiday break with fires, smoke, hail, floods and viruses threatening homes, lives and well-being. It truly was a song of ice and fire.

The generosity of our Australian community to donate anything and everything to support impacted communities has been outstanding and brings into clear focus our community engagement when most needed. How's our vision?

Trauma support must be meaningful

I thank the Australian Education Minister for providing funds to support traumatised school communities, but we must reiterate the need for this delivery to be through trauma counselling specialists.

The process of restoration will not be immediate and ongoing long-term support is required for many in our school communities. And, unfortunately, we're hearing that these disastrous events will be ever more commonplace. An established mechanism for future cases is required.

For our part, ACSSO is conscious we have a major role to play supporting our in-need communities. We can enable the mobilisation of our generous parent and volunteer groups, share stories of hope and rebuilding, and connect parents and other school supports with similar communities. Family engagement does not end at the local school gate! If you're part of this restoration process in 2020, let us know - we'd love to "Catch You Being Great" (search [#caughtyoubeinggreat](#) on Facebook for more examples).

Exclusive inclusion?

The [Religious Discrimination Bill \(second draft\)](#) is an extremely disappointing read in the context of our school communities – especially when testing against known scenarios.

We strongly oppose it, especially in light of the recent [Alice Springs \(Mparntwe\) Education Declaration](#) which we covered in our final 2019 newsletter.

How can the national declaration of educational goals, not even 3 months old, have a number of its core statements deflected through the Discrimination Bill?

Right there in Goal 1 of the Mparntwe declaration is :
*“provide all young Australians with access to high-quality education that is inclusive and free from **any** form of discrimination”.*

Institutional alienation

I struggle to see how that goal can be read any clearer, and yet it cuts across the grain of this Bill designed to institutionalise discrimination.

At a time when some of our most vulnerable school children are experiencing increased hardships, this country must provide support and not further alienation, rejection and cause for hateful vitriol. Exactly who and what is the Discrimination Bill trying to protect?

Step up, step out

If that gets you fired up, the start of the year brings opportunities to directly engage with your local community and provide your support. I highly recommend attending your local school P&C (or parent organisation, as a parent or as a local citizen) to meet your local leaders.

Meet your children's teachers and principal. Encourage them and celebrate our public schools. Help where you can, talk to your local committee and identify what's happening in your local community – sign up to their newsletters and email groups and if you can, get involved and work with your school to draw out the best outcomes for your children and your community.

A school with positive and passionate teachers and effective family engagement will always give great results for the children it serves.

Keep your passion, engage with your children and community, and give 2020 the focus we hoped for.

Andrew Bidwell

Chair

Australian Council of State School Organisations

February 2020