



Australian Council of State School Organisations Limited

Budget Policy Division
Department of the Treasury
Treasury Building
Langton Crescent
Parkes ACT 2600

Email: prebudgetsubs@treasury.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: ACSso Pre-Budget submission to the Department of Treasury on priorities for the 2022-2023 Budget

Please find attached the Australian Council of State School Organisations submission on our priorities for the 2022-23 Budget.

Please contact me if you have any questions in relation to this submission.

Yours faithfully

Dianne Giblin AM
Chief Executive Officer

19 September 2022

One voice for every child in government education

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Pre-Budget submission to the Department of Treasury on priorities for the 2022-23 Budget

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President

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Page 2

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Australian Council of State School Organisations

Pre-Budget submission
to the
Department of Treasury on Priorities for
the 2022-23 Budget

Introduction

As the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO), we represent the interests of the families and communities of more than 2.53 million children attending government schools in Australia. How well schools welcome and engage families in children's learning will determine the success of school improvement efforts. We believe all parents want their children to learn and to succeed in school. Families are a source of strength and knowledge.

Families are best able to help their children do well in school when schools accept families as they are and make frequent efforts to know, listen to, and learn from parents.

A wide body of evidence emphasises the importance of family engagement for student achievement and social development over time and makes a strong case that engagement can be a powerful strategy for sustainable long-term student success.

It is ACSSO's position that if the Federal Government makes a clear and transparent commitment to equitable family engagement through funding, commitment, public communications and leadership activities, schools' families and communities will be encouraged to build and strengthen communication and engagement systems.

This Budget cannot solve all of our challenges, but it can make important steps towards setting us up for success.

Advocacy

Advocacy is sometimes interpreted as being confrontational between the school and family members. In most cases, this is the furthest thing from the truth. The most effective style of advocacy ACSSO believes is developing a collaborative relationship with the school and families, at a local, regional, state, and federal levels, demonstrating that all parties respect the expertise they bring. As parents, we never stop advocating for our children, no matter what their age. As an organisation we continually advocate for, and disseminate information to parents, students, and the wider community to ensure they have their voice heard on issues that are important to them. Working to protect and promote their rights and have their views and wishes genuinely considered when decisions are being made about their lives.

A government of whatever political persuasion, which secures a popular mandate, relies on apolitical and neutral organisations such as ACSSO, to provide advice and advocacy, utilising our informal

discussions, surveys and consultation with state and territory peaks, together with the recent development of “online” communities.

ACSSO calls on the Government:

- to use the 2022-23 Budget to provide ongoing funding (CPI Indexed at a minimum, as is currently provided to community-based organisations), necessary to ensure our ability to provide continuing staffing and resources for the delivery of effective advocacy and engagement facilities to the families and communities of all children attending government schools in Australia.

School Psychologists

Mental ill-health continues to be one of the leading causes of disability in Australia, with the burden of disease grouped in the top three with cancer and cardiovascular disease. Mental health not only has a substantial impact on personal and social factors but is also an economic burden to the Australian Government.

We know that mental ill-health in young people can affect core areas such as education, achievement, relationships, and occupational success, and the prevalence of mental health concerns has increased among children and adolescents due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with mental health services struggling to keep up.

School psychologists would be uniquely qualified members of school teams that could support students' ability to learn and teachers' ability to teach. They would be able to apply expertise in mental health, learning, and behaviour, to help children and youth succeed academically, socially, behaviourally, and emotionally. School psychologists would partner with families, teachers, school administrators, and other professionals to create safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments that would strengthen connections between home, school, and the community.

During the COVID-19 crisis it was existing School psychologists and counsellors who provided a critical service supporting students with learning and emotional needs. We acknowledge that during COVID-19 restrictions, they had to change the way they provided this service. However, it's important we learn from our experiences during COVID, to ensure we continue to support students' learning and emotional wellbeing during possible future crises, including pandemics.

ACSSO calls on the Government to:

- agree to and fund a national benchmark of a minimum of one school-based psychologist to 500 students, to ensure all children and young people in Australia have access to mental health prevention and early intervention
- develop a set of national standards for school-based psychology services that includes minimum qualifications of providers and expectations of services to ensure the quality and safety of services delivered to children and young people.

Family Engagement Circle

The Family Engagement Circle is a professional learning tool and workshop that can be delivered to schools & educators for the purpose of improving family engagement practices. It is based on the current international work of Harvard researcher Dr Karen Mapp, Dr Deb Pushor, Dr Joyce Epstein and Simon Sinek and the Australian Family-School Partnerships Framework (2008 & 2017), and national work in the field of family engagement.

Decades of research show that engaging families regularly in educational and community development programs leads to better outcomes for the participants and their families, enhances the connection among family members, and contributes to overall family well-being. Regardless of socioeconomic, racial/ethnic and educational background, children and youth make greater academic gains and have higher graduation rates as well as increased motivation, confidence, and higher aspirations when their families are engaged in their learning and development.

With the Family Engagement Circle designed to be delivered by family engagement practitioners with many years' experience, developing and sustaining family engagement in schools.

Successful family engagement efforts depend on a high level of trust between families and program staff. When families feel informed about a program, welcomed, valued, and connected to other families and staff, and are able to lead, they will be more willing to participate. They become advocates and active supporters.

The Family Engagement Circle developed by ACSSO in 2017 is not a one-time activity, but an ongoing effort that requires a paradigm shift from seeing families as part of the problem to partners in crafting solutions.

ACSSO calls on the Government to:

- agree to and provide funding to
 - review and update the Family Engagement Circle resources
 - Fund and evaluate a pilot program utilising the revised Family Engagement Circle resources

Addressing student wellbeing

In the recently released Productivity Commission *Review of the National School Reform Agreement Interim report*¹ it was identified that many students experience poor wellbeing but there are no focused reforms to address this in the current National School Reform Agreement. It is recognised that student wellbeing improves students' academic performance, behaviour, social integration, and satisfaction. Student wellbeing also improves teachers' ability to interact with students, teach concepts, face challenges, and avoid burnout.

Promoting children and young people's wellbeing is a key part of keeping them safe, helping them develop and ensuring they have positive outcomes into adulthood. It is ACSSO's expectation that

¹ <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/school-agreement/interim>

anyone who works with children and young people has a responsibility to promote their wellbeing, recognise any concerns about a child's welfare and know what action to take to keep children safe.

We know that students' well-being and their success in and outside school depend on their ability to use their competences for democratic culture. Since well-being has many facets, improving students' well-being in schools requires a whole-school approach, involving both teachers and parents.

ACSSO calls on the federal government to agree to and fund: -

- a policy development process which 'mainstreams' well-being as a school issue that includes,
 - taking steps to reduce the anxiety students feel about examinations and testing through the introduction of less stressful forms of assessment, e.g., formative assessment, peer assessment and involving students in the identification of their own assessment needs; and
 - working with parents to enhance students' achievement and sense of purpose in school.
 - Add a well-being check in tool as an essential data collection to enable schools to address, in partnership with parents, student's readiness to learn

The Budget must provide government schools with the technological capacity to engage students who are vulnerable or experience disadvantage

In surveys undertaken by during and after the initial COVID-19 period ACSSO identified the impact of remote learning on students who are economically disadvantaged and vulnerable. The COVID-19 crisis starkly revealed the extent to which many students do not have the ICT equipment they need to engage effectively with school. For vulnerable students (and their families and carers), digital inclusion does not happen automatically, even if the students have experience with information and communication technology at school. The US National Digital Inclusion Alliance states that *digital Inclusion requires intentional strategies and investments to reduce and eliminate historical, institutional and structural barriers to access and use technology.*

As digital ability, affordability and access is critical to student learning, ACSSO calls on the federal government to agree to, and fund: -

- Undertaking a full digital equity audit in government schools; and
- Providing significant further investment in ICT equipment and internet access for students who are vulnerable and disadvantaged as this is urgently needed to identify the unmet need and to bridge the divide.



Discuss, Display, Do

In 2010, ACSSO members worked on a project that was funded by DEEWR called Discuss, Display, Do - this particular project aligned skills built by “parents” in their volunteer activities at school and matched them up to either accredited certificates or modules within certificates and Diplomas. The project, whilst building a volunteer based was a recognition of the community capacity building that occurs in volunteer work.

The project, whilst shelved due to funding and capacity to continue, was highly successful with participants gaining recognition to Diploma level – many returning to further study or progressing into the workforce. Successful candidates were often presented their awards with their children present – in Low SES areas in particular, it gave a strong message of lifelong learning.

ACSSO would like to revisit this project, with some adjustments, as part of capacity building amongst our “on the ground parents” as well as tangibly recognise the work of our families who support our schools beyond their child’s participation and acknowledge the skills they gain.

ACSSO calls on the federal government to agree to and fund: -

- A review by ACSSO of the Discuss, Display, Do project, and
- evaluate a pilot program utilising the revised Discuss, Display, Do resources