

A message from ACSSO Chair Sharron Healy



Despite everything, there's much to celebrate

Hello!

With only a short time left in Term 4, 2020, many will be breathing a sigh of relief that the school's year is coming to a close.

This end of school year is looking quite different - many of the celebrations with presentation days on Zoom, Facebook Live or other such platforms, incursions instead of excursions and concerts being either to small audiences or viewed online. Still we have much to celebrate!

We are grateful for *you*

I want to start by thanking all our parents and carers for your fantastic support over the last year. I am particularly grateful for everything that you have done to support your children with learning from home. I know how difficult it is to juggle working from home with supporting your own children with their schooling, and this is of course in addition to dealing with all of the normal challenges of family life.

ACSSO has also received a number of messages of thanks and support for the information provided on our Australian Families at Home web page; these messages of thanks are gratefully received. Thank you.

Vulnerable children's education hit hardest

The COVID-19 pandemic, as we are well aware, is not stopped at national borders. It affects everyone regardless of nationality, level of education, income, or gender. But it does not affect everyone equally, and its consequences have hit the most vulnerable families hardest.

Education is no exception. A common theme in [ACSSO's COVID-19 family survey](#) was the expression of ongoing inequity in our school communities, particularly in terms of computing devices and connectivity during remote learning.

Students from privileged backgrounds, supported by their families, could find their way past closed school doors to alternative learning opportunities. Those from disadvantaged backgrounds often remained shut out when their schools shut down.

Put your mask on first

Unfortunately, the true effect on disadvantaged students and families may not be fully realised for many years to come.

As mentioned in my November message, mental health in schools is taking a higher priority with governments at the moment, as well it should.

As parents, carers and school staff, we need to remember the adage from airplane safety to put on our own oxygen masks first so we can help those around us. Our mental health affects the children in our care, sometimes in hard to detect but still devastating ways.

Rather than trying to recreate the usual busy-ness of a typical festive season, I urge you to take advantage of the external limits on gatherings and events and slow down as much as you can. Replenish your mental health: put your own mask on first!

Supporting families with information when you need it

Last week we held the first of a series of family information webinars with the CEO of ACARA, David de Carvalho. We thank the team at ACARA for their support in partnering with us. The session was extremely well attended, and participants gained an insight into NAPLAN and My School straight from the CEO himself. Questions were answered frankly, and a lot of ground was covered in the hour.

We intend to hold more of these family-friendly evening sessions next year and we'd be keen to know what topics would interest you. Please take a moment to [email our office](mailto:contact@acsso.org.au) on contact@acsso.org.au and request a topic or suggest a webinar guest speaker.

Time to join your community's voice with others?

Your school community's voice counts and your perspective matters to ACSSO. Please make 2021 the year you become part of our network of parents and carers, sparking conversations on how knowledge and learning can shape our future.

Your input - whether as an individual, network or organisation - informs the work of ACSSO and helps shape the Australian education conversation.

[Email our office](#) or get in touch with our friendly team through [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#) or [Instagram](#) to find out more.

Supporting young adults with new resources

In any year's end, many young school leavers feel anxious about future pathways. This year has created even greater angst.

ACSSO has had the opportunity to work with the National Careers Institute, which has produced some amazing resources and is keen to conduct webinars early in the new year to assist with questions and decisions.

There is more information further on in this newsletter about what's available and accessible – and please keep an eye on ACSSO's social media for any January events.

A special word for school community volunteers

“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.” – Gandhi

Volunteers are worth their weight in gold. They share their time and talents without any expectation of compensation. This year has been hard on volunteers who were unable to pursue long-planned and important activities such as fetes, working bees, or even to staff their tuckshops.

We applaud the creative ways many volunteers have found to continue their contribution to school communities. To all those volunteers in our schools, on local parent, regional, state or national committees, your selfless gifts of time and energy are of some of the greatest assets in our society.

You have generously dedicated your time and labour to support the education of our children. Volunteers like you help make the world a better place with your time and efforts.

Thank you!

And finally...

When you look back at 2020 what will you remember?

For many of us, it was a year of transition and unexpected trials. While it was not an easy task, throughout 2020 as a nation I believe that we did not lose sight of our core strengths.

So, whether it's in-person or online, it's time to celebrate what you found to be most important this year - family, friendship, and the achievements leading to a bright future.

Sharron Healy
Chair
Australian Council of State School Organisations
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