

President's Piece – April 2020

One pandemic, two standards for funding

Heading into Term 2 wasn't feeling much different from the end of Term 1 for most of us.

We continued to hear and see concerns for our safety front and centre in all our media and daily interactions. Schools were at the heart of many of these debates with Ministers, unions and community leaders vying for their lines of demarcation.

But then things changed this week with the outrageous news of yet another special funding deal for the non-government sector to effectively bribe those schools to return students to classrooms in June.

As this came through just before we put our newsletter out, I have included a separate item below my message and I encourage you to [read our media release on the subject](#), too.

No easy single answer

As parents, we want to be sure our families and communities are safe, as we work through all the commentary and self-determine what is best for our own circumstances.

The parents we represent sit across all parts of the spectrum: from those who will not send their children until there is no risk of any COVID-19 infection, to the essential workers who must send their children to school, and those that just want and need their children back at school.

There is no easy single answer to support these needs. They are complex but not impossible. [Our survey](#) (read more below) is helping us understand even more.

Flexible and reasonable

ACSSO's position has been firm: the schooling outcomes must be flexible and reasonable to support all family circumstances with safety as the primary concern. There is no one best option at this time, so our schooling environments must position themselves to support the safety requirements of families and continue in some semblance of an education, and we must be on guard for any absolutism approach for remediation.

Broad range of risks

Across the past few weeks many questions have been asked. Am I an essential worker? Do I have a cold, "common" flu or COVID-19? Is it best to send my children to school, or should they remain at home? Why is it OK to send them to school, yet

I'm unable to host a (children only) birthday party? How can I know that school is truly safe? When will my school be risk free of COVID-19 infection?

Our parents don't believe their schools are risk free, they accept it is "low risk", but not "no risk". For those able to support learning from home, they're still battling with access to devices, poor or no internet connectivity, and parental support. Yet the fact remains, we must be safe. That question is at the core of what we as parents are interested in. Second to this is how we can continue to support the ongoing learning in these times.

So many unknowns

There are a lot of unknowns at present – our nation has experienced just on four weeks of learning from home. And some leaders are pushing us to get back to "normal", or rather "how it was". We must take this transition slowly, and it is the perfect opportunity to review our "how it was" environment and look to improve.

This situation has identified our weak spots in education and supporting continuity of learning – our governments and leadership bodies must seize on this time and review and improve our systems. The current review of the national architecture for schooling must use this current environment to identify our strengths and weaknesses to develop new opportunities. Our question to our governments has moved on from "what will next term look like", to "what will education look like".

For now, what to do?

But for now, what can we parents do? While the minimal requirements advised are to supervise your children I recommend that you: commit to family engagement and be part of the learning experience as much as you are able, provide your own life stories and share with your children, learn some of what they are learning, look to enjoy this time as much as you can. Think about what you can do at this time to set up a positively memorable experience for your family. In time, you will think back on this event – this is a chance to set up your future family memories.

National survey

To help ACSSO better understand our national view, we've [released a survey](#) to report on where families identify themselves. If you haven't completed it, I encourage you to share your experiences and help us work towards supporting better outcomes from our education environment.

Many of you have already shared the survey and the response rate so far is excellent. If you haven't done so yet, please check the two best ways to share in our story, below.

Tribute to our teachers and school staff.

Finally, I want to continually recognise our teachers and school staff. They have been fabulous at this time – needless to say, they've been flexible and supported significant change in their own career expectations.

We hear amazing stories of teachers going out of their way to enhance the learning experience for their students and offering innovative ways to engage through these different times.

The team at ACSSO acknowledges the tremendous effort, and for some the personal costs, that school staff have committed to their profession. Know this, that your students and their families appreciate what you do.

Please stay safe.

Andrew Bidwell

Chair

Australian Council of State School Organisations

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