

# A message from ACSSO Chair Andrew Bidwell



## Is your glass half full?

Hello, friends.

As we look to round out this utterly disrupted term, and look back at the past few months and contemplate what could have been, I'm disheartened that we continue to count what we missed out on, instead of what was saved.

We've read that students may have fallen behind by up to 6 weeks of school learning this year; but what about the countless lives saved from COVID-19 – where is that celebration? Not, what is the true cost, but rather what were the true savings.

The missed assessments and bringing our students 'back up to speed' have been clear agendas used to highlight what's been wrong with learning from home. While it seems the former normal is gradually resuming, and most of us might soon enjoy proper school holidays, spare a thought for our communities that remain in the grip of this pandemic.

### Testing our education system

Our education system has been tested by this pandemic, which raises common questions in everyone's minds for future reviews.

How can our schooling systems cope in the event of a future crisis? Do they support remote learning? Do they fully rely on face to face engagement? What will our education system look like if we continue to ask these questions and challenge the former norm? Is learning from home now a valid option?

I want to see continued and serious consideration of how we support remote learning in future. It **can** work, where there is a will, and we can benefit from it. Our education system needs to learn from itself.

## The new appreciation

Learning from home has shown us many key things such as:

- we appreciate our local teachers a whole lot more
- we acknowledge the teaching profession is a significant community contributor
- increased family engagement in school learning supports improved outcomes
- and, of course, how much many of us have forgotten since our own school days!

We are also appreciating that the need for qualified and skilled counsellors in our schools is greater than ever. This is particularly to support the continuous growing anxiety for school leavers looking at a changed tertiary landscape and their other pathways. We need counsellors, too, to establish channels for affected communities to realign with this changing environment.

## Reflect, review, revise

It is timely that curricula are under review with clear expectations to “declutter” the content. Surely this is a positive outcome to reduce learning anxiety and stress, but unfortunately not soon enough to support our 2020 school leavers. ACSSO will proudly work with national education organisations to support this review cycle.

The constant consideration of pathways in education is drilled into the minds of our students and it's a clear form of anxiety to 'be the best you can' to obtain desirable university ranks. Yet the risk from changes to funding to our university degrees has a clear impact on what our students are focusing on.

A continued concern for me is how my children will enter the workforce and in what capacity. For them to 'do what they love and are best at' is now driven not only by entrance exam marks, but also on the perceived usefulness of their choices within our society. Coupled with the recent deals to non-government schools, this shirt-front approach is, I believe, contrary to the Australian way.

## **Remember what we learn from refugees**

This past week we've remembered refugee week. There are around 16000 refugees in the public education system spread across Australia. Does your school or community support refugees?

Learning from others is a key concept in education, experiencing and appreciating differences produces better outcomes as we understand the diversity driving Australia and our global citizenship. Refugees have a lot to offer us and our communities.

## **Without families, what are schools?**

As always, thanks to all the families that contribute to your local schools and communities. Our schools and our society would fall apart if it wasn't for the volunteering, engagement, and services you provide. After this time of crisis, I sincerely hope that you are able to have a refreshed view of the schooling environment and can continue to be part of the life of your school, community and region in your part of this country.

**Andrew Bidwell**

**Chair**

**Australian Council of State School Organisations**

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