**August message from Kevan Goodworth**

**ACSSO President and Chair**

**A new beginning**

I recently attended a parent meeting for a yet-to-be-opened Year 7-12 secondary college in Brisbane's inner city.

The meeting had been called by the principal and newly appointed senior staff as a forum for parents and to explain everything from curriculum to canteen offerings.

We met in a neighbouring apartment complex with the expansive, 'vertical' new state college taking shape next door and hopefully ready for the start of the school year in 2020.

**What goes on inside**

It was firstly heartening to see the the significant investment in infrastructure and the state-of-the-art facilities that were coming off the drawing board into the reality of a new public school.

I had just returned from an interstate public school parent conference, where their Minister for Education had explained the average age of buildings was over fifty years. I imagine that this is probably typical of our Australian public schools generally.

What interested me more, however, was the shape of the information being delivered and the quality and range of questions being asked by the nearly two hundred prospective parents.

Very little of it had to do with the fine buildings or the ergonomically designed furniture, though these were clearly presented and certainly impressive.

**Recurring themes**

When we look at the challenges that face public education nationally and internationally, there are a number of recurring themes.   It was fascinating to see the meeting falling automatically to pursuing some of these in depth as soon as the formal presentations concluded.

Student welfare in all its dimensions was clearly on the minds of the audience, and indeed the staff.  Mindfulness, bullying, personalized approaches to learning and 'no child left behind' were canvassed.

Technology and its place in learning was enthusiastically discussed, including devices and approaches, and, inevitably, the question of mobile phones.

Also thoroughly discussed were class sizes, excellence programs, opportunities to study languages other than English (LOTE), the importance of the arts, outdoor education and sport.

**Family engagement foundations**

And so, to parent and[**family engagement**](https://acsso.createsend1.com/t/i-l-pihldhk-l-j/).  I was grateful for the invitation to speak to the new school's community about their nascent parent body, the subcommittees that they might be considering and the importance of partnering with the principal and staff to shape a new and sustainable culture.

That the school administration had recognised family engagement as a need, and had begun discussing it with us before the buildings had even commenced, was instructive and speaks to a true sense of distributed leadership and partnership.

Family engagement must begin with and be led by the school administration.

We will continue to assist these parents so that their Association is in place before the new school year. Just as importantly the principal has extended this thinking to community groups in the immediate environs and has set a platform for sustainable partnerships.

**Kevan Goodworth   
President and Chair  
Australian Council of State School Organisations  
August 2019**