



## Australian Council of State School Organisations Limited

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Pre-Budget submission

to the

Department of Treasury on Priorities for  
the 2023-24 Budget

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### Introduction

As the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO), we represent the interests of the families and communities of more than 2.55 million children attending government schools in Australia. We welcome an opportunity to make a submission to the Budget.

The Productivity Commission recently issued its report on the results of the National School Reform Agreement. The outcomes were not favourable. It showed, as we feared, massive discrepancies in our school system and little overall development. Regrettably, the negotiating period for the agreements has been prolonged by 12 months. While we recognise that the findings of this study show that significant change is required, the young people who began school when Gonski was initially introduced are now in their last year, while the equity gap has grown. We cannot wait another year for an interim infusion of increased funding to government education in 2023-4 while changes are prepared.

Student well-being for learning has been substantially impacted as a consequence of the recent pandemic. This could not have been expected when thenational reform agreements were initially made, but our organisation, among others, has referenced increased student fear and trauma to successive governments prior to COVID. It is currently and should always be a financing priority. This is addressed later in the submission.

Families are most equipped to help their children achieve well in school when schools' welcome families as they are and make frequent efforts to know, listen to, and learn from parents.

A substantial body of data emphasises the importance of family involvement in student academic and social development across time, claiming that engagement is an effective strategy for long-term student success.

Families and communities will be encouraged to build and strengthen communication and engagement systems if the federal government makes a clear and transparent commitment to equitable family engagement through funding, commitment, public communications, and leadership activities, according to ACSSO.

This Budget we know will not solve all of our problems, but it will take important steps towards achievement.

*One voice for every child in government education*

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## Advocacy

Advocacy is frequently seen as a hostile relationship between the school and family members. Most of the time, this is the farthest thing from the truth. ACSSO believes that creating a collaborative connection with the school and families at the local, regional, state, and federal levels, proving that all parties value the knowledge they contribute, is the most successful manner of lobbying. We never stop being the voice for our children, no matter how old they are. As an organisation, we are always advocating for and disseminating information to parents, students, and the general public in order to ensure that their voices are heard on matters that are important to them. Working to safeguard and promote their rights, as well as having their opinions and desires properly respected when choices regarding their life are made.

A government, regardless of political persuasion, that secures a popular mandate relies on apolitical and neutral organisations such as ACSSO for advice and advocacy, drawing on our informal discussions, surveys, and consultation with state and territory peaks, as well as the recent development of "online" communities. ACSSO has received no financial increases in the last 12 years, whereas inflation has risen and the cost of delivering government services has grown significantly. As a Commonwealth-funded organisation, we are unable to qualify for or be awarded Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status, which greatly limits our capacity to support this critical work with further grants or charitable contributions.

ACSSO calls on the Government:

- to use the 2023-24 Budget to provide ACSSO with ongoing funding (CPI Indexed at a minimum, as is currently provided to community-based organisations) to ensure our ability to provide ongoing 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 is one of the biggest causes of disability in Australia, with the disease burden ranking third after cancer and cardiovascular disease. Not only does mental health have a significant influence on personal and societal elements, but it is also a financial burden on the Australian government.

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

School psychologists would be specially prepared members of school teams who could help kids learn and instructors teach. They would be able to use their knowledge of mental health, learning, and behaviour to assist children and adolescents in achieving academic, social, behavioural, and emotional success. School psychologists would collaborate with families, teachers, administrators, and other professionals to establish safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments that would enhance ties between home, school, and community.

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During the COVID-19 crisis, existing school psychologists and counsellors played an important role in assisting kids with academic and emotional needs. We recognise that because of COVID-19 constraints, they were forced to adjust the method they supplied this service. However, we must learn from our COVID experiences in order to continue to assist kids' learning and emotional well-being amid any future emergencies, such as pandemics.

ACSSO requests that the government:

- ensure that all children and adolescents in Australia have access to mental health prevention and early intervention; commit to and fund a minimum of one school-based psychologist per 500 students, in addition to the school counsellor.
- develop a set of national standards for school-based psychological services, including minimum provider qualifications and service expectations, in order to ensure the quality and safety of services delivered to children and adolescents.
- Advise and encourage state and territory jurisdictions to remove the prerequisite that all school counsellors have a teaching degree and have taught for two years.

### Family Engagement Circle

The Family Engagement Circle is a professional development tool and workshop that may be used by schools and educators to strengthen family engagement practises. It is based on Harvard researcher Dr. Karen Mapp, Dr. Deb Pushor, Dr. Joyce Epstein, and Simon Sinek's current worldwide work, as well as the Australian Family-School Partnerships Framework (2008 & 2017) and national family participation work.

Decades of research indicate that regularly involving families in educational and community development activities improves outcomes for individuals and their families, enhances family relationships, and contributes to overall family well-being. Children and teenagers who have their families engaged in their learning and development make greater academic gains and have higher graduation rates, as well as increased motivation, confidence, and higher objectives, regardless of socioeconomic, racial/ethnic, or educational background.

A high degree of trust between families and programme workers is required for successful family engagement activities. Families will be more eager to engage if they feel knowledgeable about a programme, accepted, appreciated, and linked to other families and professionals, and have the opportunity to lead. They become active supporters and activists.

In this time when student well being is the key driver to their readiness to learn strong connections between home and school are paramount.

The Family Engagement Circle, which ACSSO established in 2017, is a continuous endeavour that necessitates a paradigm change from seeing families as part of the issue to collaborators in developing solutions.

ACSSO requests that the government:

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- approve and support a review and updating of the Family Engagement Circle resources.
- finance and assess a pilot programme using the redesigned Family Engagement Circle's resources

### Addressing student wellbeing

It is well acknowledged that student well-being enhances academic achievement, behaviour, social integration, and satisfaction. Student well-being increases teachers' capacity to communicate with students, explain ideas, deal with problems, and prevent burnout.

Promoting children's and young people's well-being is an important component of keeping them safe, assisting them in their development, and ensuring they have great outcomes as adults. Anyone who works with children and young people is expected by ACSSO to promote their well-being, 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 performance in and out of school are dependent on their ability to use democratic cultural competencies. Because well-being has multiple dimensions, boosting children's well-being in schools requires a whole-school strategy that includes both teachers and parents.

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

- a policy development process which integrates 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.
- a well-being check in tool as an important data collection to allow 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

ACSSO examined the effect of remote learning on economically disadvantaged and vulnerable students in surveys conducted during and after the first COVID-19 phase. The COVID-19 problem highlighted the degree to which many students lack the ICT equipment required to participate successfully in school. Even if children have prior experience with information and communication technology at school, digital inclusion does not occur automatically for vulnerable kids (and their families and caregivers). According to the US National Digital Inclusion Alliance, digital inclusion necessitates deliberate strategies and investments to minimise and remove historical, institutional, and structural obstacles to technology access and usage.



With presence on the Public Education Foundation scholarship panels by ACSSO, it was obvious that over 70% of applicants indicated no access to a device while not at school.

Because digital ability, affordability, and access are critical to student learning, ACSSO urges the federal government to agree to and fund: -

- a full digital equity audit in government schools; and
- significant additional investment in ICT equipment and internet access for vulnerable and disadvantaged students, as this is urgently needed to identify unmet need and bridge the divide.
- Assist all students in obtaining a device

### Discuss, Display, Do

In 2010, ACSSO members collaborated on a DEEWR-funded initiative called Discuss, Display, Do, which connected skills developed by "parents" via voluntary activities at school with recognised certificates or modules inside certificates and diplomas. While building a volunteer-based project, the project recognised the community capacity development that happens via volunteer activity.

While the initiative was halted owing to a lack of funds and ability to continue, it was a huge success, with participants earning Diploma level accreditation and many returning to further study or entering the workforce. Successful applicants were often presented with their awards in the presence of their children, sending a powerful message of lifelong learning in low-income regions, in particular.

ACSSO believes there is a need to revisit this initiative with some changes as part of capacity development among our "on the ground parents," as well as tangibly recognise and celebrate the work of our families who support our schools beyond their child's involvement and acknowledge the skills they learn.

ACSSO requests that the federal government agree to and support the following: -

- A review of the Discuss, Display, Do project by ACSSO and an evaluation of a pilot programme using the updated Discuss, Display, Do resources.