



The ASG Student Social and Emotional Health Report Media Summary

The Australian Scholarships Group (ASG) has commissioned and funded the *ASG Student Social and Emotional Health Report* as part of its ongoing contribution to supporting children's education.

We know that the years from early childhood through to schooling are of critical importance to the development of our young people. Statistics show that there are large numbers of young people not being fully engaged in education. The ramifications of unfulfilled education potential can be seen at the individual, family, community and national levels.

Young people who aren't learning or working experience more financial and personal stress, and lower levels of participation and integration within the community. They are less satisfied with their lives.

The *ASG Student Social and Emotional Health Report* provides one of the most in-depth analyses of what makes our students 'tick' and provides an opportunity for parents, teachers, and the community to help students fulfil their education potential.

The Report's name reflects ASG's holistic approach to supporting children's education and the range of programs it has initiated within the broader community to achieve this aim.

The *ASG Student Social and Emotional Health Report* unveils groundbreaking findings into the social and emotional well-being (the authors use the term "social and emotional well-being" as a synonym for the term "social and emotional health") of more than 10,000 Australian students from Prep through to Year 12, as perceived by both students and their teachers.

International researcher Professor Michael E Bernard, from the Faculty of Education, University of Melbourne, co-authored the report in conjunction with Andrew Stephanou and Daniel Urbach from the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER).

The findings show that social and emotional well-being of young people is a product of internal factors, such as resilience, learning capabilities and social skills, and the external influences of school, home and the community.

Key findings

- A large percentage of students are experiencing social and emotional difficulties:
 - Four in 10 students worry too much.
 - Three in 10 students are very nervous/stressed.
 - Two in 10 students have felt very hopeless and depressed for a week and have stopped regular activities.
 - A third of students lose their temper a lot and are sometimes quite mean to others (bully).
 - Two-thirds of students are not doing as well in their schoolwork as they could.
 - Four in 10 students have difficulty calming down (poor resilience).
- Students who bully tend to have difficulty in thinking before they act when angry. Surprisingly, approximately half of the students who bully actually have high self-esteem.
- Different childhood problems such as bullying, getting into trouble, stress, feeling down and under-achievement are displayed across all levels of student well-being – not just at lower levels.

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Key findings continued

- ❑ The lower the well-being of students, the greater the likelihood that students will display emotional, social and behavioural difficulties such as feeling lonely, losing their temper and drinking to excess
- ❑ Both students and teacher surveys have shown that the higher the level of student social and emotional well-being, the percentage of students who experience problems in their lives decreases.
- ❑ Of significant interest and concern is that the percentage of students with higher levels of social and emotional well-being does not increase with age/years of schooling.
- ❑ When students perceive the relative absence of positive parenting actions, students are likely to display lower levels of social and emotional well-being. Talking about children's feelings and how to cope with them is the parental action that contributes most to children's well-being.
- ❑ Teachers' behaviour has a direct correlation to student social and emotional well-being. Students with lower levels of well-being feel their teachers don't demonstrate many of the positive actions that the research shows contribute to student success and well-being.
- ❑ Consistent differences are found in the ways that students view their social and emotional well-being in comparison with the ways in which teachers perceive them. Teachers may be unaware of the extent of the emotional difficulties of students such as stress and anger.
- ❑ Girls display significantly higher levels of social and emotional well-being than boys. For example boys rated higher in getting into trouble a lot and not being able to follow rules while girls rated higher in helping classmates who seem unhappy and finding someone to talk with to calm down.
- ❑ Students from the highest 10% socio-economic level rated significantly higher in their level of social and emotional well-being than students from the lowest 25% socio-economic level.
- ❑ The interaction of children within their community can positively impact on social and emotional well-being.

Considerations for governments, parents, schools and communities

- Almost 50% of students reported they are not learning about their feelings and how to manage stress, while 40% say they are not learning about how to make friends or how to solve interpersonal problems. However; for many schools, academic achievement still remains at the core of school mission statements with social and emotional learning and well-being relegated to student welfare and pastoral care.
- High levels of student social and emotional well-being are associated with parents who are not only actively involved in their children's lives but who spend time discussing the skills they need to both understand and manage emotions, including coping with stress, how to make friends and manage conflicts. At federal, state and local levels there should be an increased investment in parents with a particular focus on strengthening school-home links, so that parents can have ongoing access to effective parenting practices.
- It is also clear that teachers are important contributors to student social and emotional well-being and there is now a collection of good teaching practices that support student well-being. Student social and emotional learning and well-being should become an integral part of initial teacher training and ongoing teacher professional learning and development programs.
- Intervention programs for individual students with low levels of social and emotional well-being should identify ways that they can be better connected to positive adults in the community, develop stronger connection with their family as well as strengthen their connection with teachers and programs at school. Increasingly, student support programs feature a team consisting of personnel responsible for student welfare, teachers, specialist staff, parents and, when necessary, members of community organisations and agencies.

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Considerations for governments, parents, schools and communities continued

- Schools with high percentages of students with lower levels of social and emotional well-being need to work in close partnership with community members, organisations and agencies to help strengthen the links between ‘at risk’ students and their families and support services, positive programs and adults outside of the home and school.
- Boys’ achievement (and behavioural problems) can partly be explained by the lower levels of social and emotional well-being of boys relative to girls. To close the gender gap in achievement and provide full equity and access for boys, a broad-based approach is advocated that includes strengthening community, school and home practices that meet the unique learning style, sex-role identity and social-emotional needs of boys.
- While state governments are employing questionnaires that survey student attitudes, they generally do not comprehensively measure the internal and external social and emotional characteristics that comprise overall student social and emotional well-being. It is recommended that on an annual basis, data is collected on the various domains of student social and emotional well-being and the results are used to guide government as well as school planning and decision making.

Recommendations

As a result of the research, nine key recommendations have been identified to help support parents, teachers, schools and the community:

1. Make social and emotional well-being as important to the mission of education as academic achievement.
2. Introduce preventative social and emotional learning curricula at all levels of schooling for all students.
3. Schools need support to develop the capacity to deliver social and emotional learning.
4. Ongoing professional learning for teachers that support students with social and emotional well-being difficulties.
5. Ongoing assessment of student social and emotional learning and well-being.
6. The staffing and design of student welfare services should cater for the level of student social and emotional well-being in the school.
7. Parent education in children’s social and emotional well-being.
8. Focus on social and emotional learning for boys.
9. School-community partnerships to support student social and emotional well-being.

For further information

The *ASG Student Social and Emotional Health Report* shows the methodology, key findings, recommendations and actions that parents and schools can undertake to help improve student social and emotional well-being.

The complete *ASG Student Social and Emotional Health Report* and a range of additional information are available from the Australian Scholarships Group website at: www.asg.com.au/social-emotional or can be sent to you on request, please phone ASG’s Corporate Communications on 03 9276 7775.