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## Groundbreaking Findings On The State Of Student Social and Emotional Health

The results of one of the most extensive research projects ever undertaken into the social and emotional health of Australian students have been released today. Based on a survey of more than 10,000 students from 81 schools across Australia and spanning 13 years of schooling from Prep through to Year 12, The *ASG Student Social and Emotional Health Report*, commissioned and funded by the Australian Scholarships Group (ASG) reveals that a large percentage of students are experiencing social and emotional difficulties.

The *ASG Student Social and Emotional Health Report* reveals new insights into social and emotional health and shows:

- 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).

The *ASG Student Social and Emotional Health Report* is the culmination of six years of development and research of its lead author, Professor Michael E Bernard, Faculty of Education, University of Melbourne, in collaboration with Andrew Stephanou and Daniel Urbach from the Australian Council for Education Research (ACER).

ASG's Managing Director, Mr Terry O'Connell said the *ASG Student Social and Emotional Health Report* makes a valuable contribution to the expansion of collective knowledge on the topic of student social and emotional health and shows the critical importance of parents, teachers and members of the community in affecting and changing student social and emotional health.

"We know that the years of schooling, in particular the early childhood years are of critical importance to the development of our young people," he said.

"Statistics show that there are large numbers of young people not being fully engaged in education or in work, and the ramifications of unfulfilled education potential can be seen at the individual, family, community and national levels.

"Children and young people with higher levels of social and emotional health are more likely to successfully meet the physical, intellectual and social changes required through childhood and adolescence and ASG had funded the Report as part of its ongoing commitment to supporting children's education," Mr O'Connell said.

Between 2003 and 2007, both students and teachers at different year levels in 81 schools across Australia completed the ACER Social and Emotional Well-Being Surveys. Lead author of the Report, Professor Bernard said the research has successfully defined student social and emotional well-being/health as well as has identified the characteristics that make-up the student social and emotional well-being of young people. (Throughout the Report, the authors use the term "social and emotional well-being" as a synonym for the term "social and emotional health".)

"There are two distinct dimensions of student social and emotional well-being - positive and negative," Professor Bernard said. "And we have determined from this research that the level of a student's social and emotional well-being is influenced by the student's internal social-emotional characteristics such as resilience, learning capabilities and social skills and values as well as their environment (school, home and community).

Professor Bernard notes in *ASG's Student Social and Emotional Health Report* that "for the first time, we are able to describe student social and emotional health in terms of six levels ranging from very low to very high levels.

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“Students who are at the lowest or very low levels have the greatest need as they display large numbers of behavioural and emotional difficulties and the relative absence of positive emotions and behaviours.

“These students show delays in their resilience, positive social orientation and positive work orientation. They also perceive relatively few positive connections to positive adults, peers and youth-oriented programs in their homes, schools and communities. In the research sample studied, approximately 40% of students could be described as displaying lower levels of social and emotional well-being,” he said.

“One of the many benefits of the findings is that we know what a young person with strong social and emotional health looks like – and we can put in place the support mechanisms needed to help improve student social and emotional health,” Professor Bernard said.

“However; different childhood problems such as bullying, getting into trouble, stress, feeling down, and under-achievement at school are displayed across all levels of student social and emotional well-being – not just at lower levels.

“When students perceive the relative absence of positive parenting actions, they are likely to display lower levels of social and emotional health,” he said, “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 health. Students with lower levels of well-being feel their teachers don’t demonstrate the positive actions that the research shows contribute to student success and well-being.

“From the perspective of the teacher, the ability to manage a student’s emotions and help them to calm-down contributes most to high levels of social and emotional health,” Professor Bernard explained.

Other key findings from the research show:

- Social and emotional health decreases from primary to secondary school.
- Girls display significantly higher levels of social and emotional health than boys. Boys rate higher in getting into trouble a lot and not being able to follow rules while girls rate higher in helping classmates who seem unhappy and finding someone to talk with to calm down.
- Consistent differences are found in the ways that students view their social and emotional health in comparison with teachers’ perceptions. Teachers may be unaware of the extent of the emotional difficulties of students such as stress and anger.
- Unexpectedly, the ability to ‘achieve to potential in schoolwork’ and ‘being confident and persistent in schoolwork’ contributes a great deal to student social and emotional health.
- The interaction of children within their community can positively impact on social and emotional health.
- Students from the highest 10% socio-economic level rated significantly higher in their level of social and emotional health than students from the lowest 25% socio-economic level.

Professor Bernard indicates that the results provide a “call for action.” The ASG Student Social and Emotional Health Report recommends a number of critical actions parents can take at home and teachers can take at school to support the social and emotional health of all students.

Mr O’Connell said the findings would provide valuable insights for parents, educators and the community. “A series of nine recommendations is outlined in this report that addresses policies, programs and practices for improving the social and emotional health of all students,” he said.

The complete *ASG Student Social and Emotional Health Report*, along with a number of additional resources, including summaries and images is available for download from ASG’s website at: [www.asg.com.au/socialemotional](http://www.asg.com.au/socialemotional) or can be requested by telephoning ASG’s Corporate Communications on 03 9276 7775.

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