



Australian Council of State School Organisations Limited

Submission

to the

Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System

Sharron Healy  
**President**  
August 2023

*One voice for every child in government education*



acsso.org.au | ACN: 611 783 218



Please indicate your name if an individual, or your organisation name if you are responding on behalf of an organisation.

Australian Council of State School Organisations

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

The Australian Council of State School Organisations is a peak community organisation and the *One voice for every child in government education.*

Do you wish your submission to be treated as confidential?

No



Submission  
to the  
Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System

---

## Introduction

The Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) is the national voice for the families and communities of Australia's 2.6 million government school students. We are one of Australia's oldest continuously operating national parent organisations and possibly the world's oldest. We were established in 1947 to bring together various state and territory parent organisations and other families interested in public education to develop national policies that reflect how families want public education to be provided for all children. Membership varies due to differences in how our members in state and territory peak parent organisations have addressed national issues over time; however, our commitment to promoting equality and access for all young people attending government schools in Australia remains consistent.

We believe that the primary obligation of governments, both Federal and State, is to establish and maintain government systems of education that:

- *engages with family and community at all levels of education;*
- *are of the highest standard and open to all, irrespective of race, gender, religion, social economic status, geographic location, or ability;*
- *can respond to changing landscape of education and respond to develop flexible and diverse programs necessary to meet all student needs;*
- *discriminates in favour of those schools and individual students who are challenged with disadvantage and/or ability.*

The Mparntwe (Alice Springs) Education Declaration states that “*all Australian Governments will work with the education community to provide all young Australians with access to high-quality education that is inclusive and free from any form of discrimination*”.

The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration also states, “*Education has the power to transform lives. It supports young people to realise their potential by providing skills they need to participate in the economy and in society and contributing to every aspect of their wellbeing*” and that “*education plays a vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians, and in ensuring the nation’s ongoing economic prosperity and social cohesion*”.

To positively impact schools, the NSRA should prioritise implementing effective practices in the classroom instead of creating superficial reports. The OECD has previously criticised the NSRA for its lack of influence on classroom instruction, as reported in the Australia Education Review of 2011.

To guarantee that every student in school has the same chances for continuous learning, social advancement, and economic development, it is crucial to support students who struggle to meet basic literacy and numeracy standards. Regrettably, research conducted by AERO indicates that many schools and teachers are not providing these interventions, and even when they do, they are frequently ineffective (<https://www.edresearch.edu.au/our-work/current-projects/tiered-interventions>).



To ensure equal opportunities for all students, it is recommended that the Commonwealth mandates the implementation of evidence-based interventions in schools for struggling students. Additionally, adequate funding should be allocated to provide services that are comparable to those in more affluent schools. It is also important to support only techniques that have been proven effective.

Ensuring every student receives a minimum level of funding through the NSRA is critical. However, the discussion paper lacks clarity on whether this is being considered and if the Commonwealth intends to advocate for it with the states. While it's important to be transparent and justify funding distribution, every student must have access to the necessary resources.

The education of our youth is fundamental to their success and the growth of our nation. Australia should take little pride in having one of the longest equity tails in the OECD. Whilst the Australian Education Act of 2013 went some way to addressing this, the current agreements, the Australian Education Amendment Bill 2017, and the additional special provisions have allowed the inequities to grow.

What targets and reforms should be included in the next NSRA to drive real improvements in student outcomes, with a particular focus on students who are most at risk of falling behind and in need of more assistance- for students from low socio-economic backgrounds, regional, rural and remote Australia, students with disability, First Nations students and students from a language background other than English. ACSSO is committed to addressing the needs of disadvantaged students by prioritising their academic achievements. Investing more funding and resources in schools with higher concentration of disadvantaged students can achieve a more equitable distribution of educational opportunities. Personalised support programs for students with diverse backgrounds can be transformative, focusing on improving literacy and numeracy skills, English language instruction, cultural enrichment opportunities, and mentorship initiatives. Increasing opportunity for access to early childhood education in disadvantaged areas is crucial, as is incorporating cultural competency, inclusive education practices, and strategies for supporting diverse learners into teacher training programs.

Creating a supportive learning environment for students is a shared responsibility, and parents can establish a positive partnership that benefits everyone involved. Modern infrastructure and technology are essential for all students to access equal learning and digital literacy. Prioritising resources that offer tailored support, assistive technologies, and expert professionals to students with disabilities can improve the quality of available support services.

Incorporating Indigenous knowledge, history, and languages into the curriculum is essential for honouring First Nations students' cultural identity and heritage. Educators should receive training in identifying and addressing trauma, establishing mentorship programs that connect students from disadvantaged backgrounds with successful role models, and conducting thorough research to track progress and accomplishments.

Providing world-class education in less populated and remote areas requires considering unique difficulties such as the availability of resources, transportation, and extracurricular activities. Assisting students in exploring vocational programs, apprenticeships, and language assistance programs can ensure a personalised experience for all students. ACSSO is dedicated to supporting the implementation of necessary reforms and continuously striving for improvement over the long



term. Too many programs are introduced for short terms and rarely any longitudinal data is collected to ascertain outcomes. Programs are too reliant on government cycles and Minister appointments.

As an organisation that values the well-being and success of all students, ACSSO acknowledges the significance of offering additional support to those who may encounter extra challenges. We believe the forthcoming NSRA should prioritise the needs of students from low socio-economic backgrounds, regional, rural, and remote areas, students with disabilities, First Nations students, and students whose primary language is not English. Every student should be able to excel in their academic endeavours by implementing the following specific objectives and changes.

- Investing more funding and resources in schools with a higher concentration of disadvantaged students, especially those in regional, rural, and remote areas, can create more equitable educational access and opportunity distribution. This, we believe, could result in smaller class sizes, better-specialised support services, and improved educational resources, ultimately making a positive difference in the lives of these students.
- Creating personalised support programs for students with diverse backgrounds can be a transformative initiative. By improving literacy and numeracy skills, offering English language instruction, providing cultural enrichment opportunities, and organising mentorship initiatives, we can empower students to help them reach their capabilities.
- It's crucial to guarantee the availability of excellent early childhood education, particularly in disadvantaged areas. By implementing timely intervention programs, the gaps in learning can be reduced.
- Incorporating cultural competency, inclusive education practices, and effective strategies for supporting diverse learners into teacher training programs would greatly benefit teachers and students. With these tools, teachers will be better equipped to meet the unique needs of students from diverse backgrounds.
- We know that creating a supportive learning environment for students is a shared responsibility. As a valued part of the school community, parents can establish a positive partnership that benefits everyone involved by collaborating and actively participating. Let's work together to realise this vision and help our students thrive.
- It is imperative that modern infrastructure and technology are invested in schools in regional, rural, and remote areas. This is necessary to guarantee equitable access to opportunities for learning and digital literacy for all students.
- It is crucial to prioritise resources that offer tailored support, assistive technologies, and expert professionals to students with disabilities. This will help improve the quality of available support services and ensure each student's needs are met.
- Incorporating Indigenous knowledge, history, and languages into the curriculum is a significant step towards honouring First Nations students' cultural identity and heritage. Encouraging the preservation and revitalisation of Indigenous languages is crucial to this process.
- It is crucial for teachers and support personnel to receive training in identifying and addressing trauma. A supportive and safe learning environment can be established by utilising trauma-informed approaches to aid students.
- Establishing mentorship programs that connect students from disadvantaged backgrounds with successful role models is a great way to support them on their academic journey. These programs can provide encouragement and guidance to help these students navigate their path to success.



- It's crucial to consistently conduct thorough research and use safe data collection methods to effectively track the progress and accomplishments of students from diverse backgrounds. Utilising data-driven insights can inform and improve policies and practices, hopefully leading to a better educational experience and outcomes for all students.
- To provide quality education in less populated and rural, and remote areas, it's crucial to consider the unique difficulties that students encounter there. These obstacles include the availability of educational resources, transportation to and from school, and opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities. By addressing these matters, we can ensure that all students, regardless of location, have equal chances to succeed academically.
- Assist students in exploring a variety of vocational programs, apprenticeships, and alternative paths for continuing their education. Tailor these options to their unique strengths and interests for a truly personalised experience. Career education needs to start in early childhood.
- Provide customised language assistance programs to assist students whose first language is not English. The aim is to guarantee that all students can fully engage in and gain the most from their academic journey.

ACSSO believes that politicians, educators, families, and communities must all work together to improve student outcomes and build an inclusive education system. The NSRA can greatly enhance disadvantaged students' academic results by prioritising their needs. We are committed to assisting in implementing required changes and consistently working for long-term improvement, which we believe is the best way to improve educational outcomes for all children.

[How the next agreement can contribute to improving student mental health and wellbeing by addressing in-school factors while acknowledging the impact of non-school factors on wellbeing.](#)

Students' mental health and well-being are crucial to their academic success and personal development. To create a conducive environment for learning and foster positive mental health outcomes, it is essential for the next agreement to address in-school factors while recognising the impact of non-school factors on student wellbeing. We have outlined some strategies and recommendations for incorporating mental health and wellbeing initiatives within the NSRA to create what we believe will be a holistic and supportive learning environment for our children.

## In-School Factors

### *Comprehensive Mental Health Education*

A comprehensive mental health education program is critical for individual and societal well-being. These programs should be age-appropriate and integrated into the curriculum to ensure that all students receive mental health education from an early age; they should aim to reduce stigma, raise awareness, and provide students with the knowledge and skills needed to deal with mental health challenges.

Mental health education can assist in reducing the stigma associated with mental health concerns, making it more straightforward for people to seek treatment and support without fear of being judged or discriminated against. It can also assist individuals in recognising early warning signals of mental health issues, preventing symptoms from worsening, and lowering the likelihood of more severe disorders. Comprehensive education helps individuals to make educated decisions about their mental health and seek appropriate care, when necessary, through increasing mental health literacy.

Increasing mental health literacy will equip young people with valuable coping tools and resilience-building techniques to effectively navigate life's challenges, stressors, and setbacks. This strengthens



social relationships and promotes a more understanding and inclusive society. Improved mental health can also enhance academic and work performance by increasing focus, productivity, and problem-solving abilities.

Encouraging mental health education can help prevent the need for costly and intense therapies in the future. It can address Australia's growing mental health crises, promote general health and well-being, and cultivate a psychologically healthy population. School communities prioritising mental health education are more resilient because individuals are better equipped to handle problems and support each other during difficult times.

#### *Strengthening School Counselling Services*

Enhance school counselling services (professionally qualified) to provide timely and accessible support for students. This includes dramatically increasing the number of qualified school counsellors, diversifying their role from just identification of issues, implementing regular mental health check-ins, and offering counselling services catering to students' diverse needs.

Qualified school counsellors are critical in detecting and addressing children's academic and emotional needs. Early intervention can prevent problems from worsening and negatively impacting students' well-being, behaviour and academic achievement.

Students could receive critical mental health care from qualified school counsellors as they provide a secure and confidential environment to share their emotional difficulties, anxiety, tension, or other mental health concerns. Counsellors can contribute to students' general well-being by giving this assistance.

Counsellors can also assist students in discovering their academic interests, abilities, and career goals. Helping students choose appropriate courses, extracurricular activities, and university or career paths, boosting academic success and long-term planning.

School counselling programs need to be geared towards fostering students' personal growth. They must help children acquire essential life skills necessary for long-term success, including communication, problem-solving, time management, and emotional intelligence.

A robust counselling programme will help to maintain a positive school climate. Students are more likely to interact well with their peers and teachers when they feel supported and understood, resulting in a healthier and more inclusive learning environment.

School counsellors can assist in preventing disruptive behaviour and disciplinary problems by addressing learning difficulties and emotional dysregulation concerns early on, creating a more conducive learning environment for all students.

School counsellors can assist children with special needs or impairments obtain necessary accommodations and services. This all-inclusive strategy ensures that every child has an equal chance of academic and social success.

In times of crisis or trauma, school counsellors should be crucial in offering emotional support and assistance to students, teachers, and school staff. They would aid in developing emotional resilience and coping skills, allowing the school community to recover and heal from adversity.

Qualified school counsellors promote communication and collaboration among parents, teachers, and other school personnel. This collaboration guarantees that pupils' needs are met at home and school.



Students are more satisfied with their school when they feel supported and appreciated. This good experience boosts student engagement, motivation, and academic performance.

Effective counselling services can help reduce dropout rates and assist students in staying on track and graduating from high school by addressing underlying difficulties and giving support.

#### *Implementing Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Programs*

Incorporating social-emotional learning programs (SEL) backed by evidence into the curriculum is a beneficial way to encourage emotional intelligence, resilience, and positive relationships among students. These programs are effective in helping students cultivate self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and decision-making skills.

SEL programs aim to positively impact students' emotional well-being, resilience, and self-regulation. When students feel supported and emotionally secure, they can focus on their studies and achieve success. Through SEL programs, students learn vital skills like empathy, communication, conflict resolution, and teamwork, essential for building healthy relationships in and outside school.

They help children develop emotional intelligence, empowering them to understand and regulate their emotions better, leading to better mental health and decision-making abilities. These programs also aid in reducing behavioural issues like hostility, bullying, and disciplinary concerns, making the learning environment safer and more conducive for all students.

SEL can establish a positive and nurturing atmosphere that puts the well-being of children first. These programs encourage students to actively participate, feel appreciated and valued, and develop a strong sense of belonging. Additionally, SEL programs equip students with practical coping skills and techniques to handle stress and anxiety.

These programs benefit students and teachers, who can incorporate SEL ideals into classroom management and student-teacher relationships, leading to more effective classroom management. They also help to reduce bullying incidents by targeting the root causes and providing students with tools to develop empathy and understanding for others.

Developing empathy and understanding for others is crucial in imparting essential life skills such as perseverance, adaptability, and effective communication that are fundamental for achieving success outside the classroom. The investment in SEL programs can reap significant long-term social and economic benefits, ultimately leading to a more productive and harmonious society.

SEL programs are indispensable in creating a positive learning atmosphere, mitigating behavioural disruptions, and equipping children with the necessary tools to face real-life obstacles. Essentially, they are pivotal in nurturing a healthier, happier, and more productive future generation.

#### *Creating a Positive School Climate*

Establishing a positive school environment is essential for the prosperity and happiness of students, teachers, families, and the entire school community. Parents and caregivers play a vital role in supporting and advocating for their children. However, schools may sometimes overlook certain events or problems, leading to disagreements with families. ACSSO has gathered anecdotal evidence supporting this claim.

A positive school climate promotes a sense of safety, support, and value for students. This feeling of belonging and emotional stability enhances focus, motivation, and participation, ultimately improving academic performance and learning outcomes. It also encourages students to develop their social skills and interact positively with others. Nurturing students' social and emotional





development and encouraging the development of empathy, respect, and kindness, contributing to better mental health, reduced stress, and stronger social connections.

A positive school climate is also associated with decreased bullying and disciplinary problems. When students feel respected and included, we know they are less likely to engage in harmful behaviours and more likely to support each other in creating a safe and caring environment.

A safe and caring environment not only benefits students but also supports teachers. When educators feel appreciated and supported, job satisfaction increases, leading to higher teacher retention rates and a more stable learning environment, fostering community and collaboration among students, teachers, parents, and staff. This cohesion promotes teamwork and shared responsibility for the success of the school.

A successful and positive school climate also celebrates diversity and embraces inclusivity. Students from different backgrounds and cultures feel welcome and accepted, creating a richer and more tolerant learning environment.

Students who feel excited about attending school are more likely to have regular attendance, which creates a desire to be present and actively participate in learning.

This active participation promotes the development of essential life skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and conflict resolution. These skills are valuable for students transitioning to higher education and the workforce, supporting the development of resilience and effective coping strategies. Students are more likely to persevere and overcome obstacles positively when encountering challenges.

Fostering a positive school climate will help create a generation of students more likely to become empathetic, responsible, and compassionate adults. These individuals are better equipped to contribute positively to their communities and society.

#### *Providing Access to Recreational and Extracurricular Activities*

Sports, dance, and outdoor games boost physical health and combat sedentary lifestyles. Regular exercise improves cardiovascular health, bone strength, and coordination and lessens the risk of obesity and other health concerns.

Extracurricular activities can help a student's mental health as well. Music, art, drama, and writing can all be utilised to relieve tension and anxiety. Participating in team-based activities can also boost feelings of belonging, reduce loneliness, and boost self-esteem.

Participating in extracurricular activities allows students to communicate with their peers outside of the classroom, which supports the development of crucial social skills such as teamwork, communication, leadership, cooperation, and dispute resolution, which are helpful throughout life.

Balancing academics and extracurricular activities provide youngsters with valuable time management skills. They learn to prioritise tasks, manage their time effectively, and successfully handle obligations, which are crucial for future success.

According to research, participating in recreational and extracurricular activities can improve academic achievement. Participating in such activities can help enhance cognitive powers, concentration, and problem-solving skills, leading to higher academic accomplishment.

Regular attendance and participation in extracurricular activities instil discipline and commitment in students. They learn to set goals, work towards them, and persevere despite setbacks.



Extracurricular activities expose kids to various interests and hobbies outside their regular schoolwork. This study can help individuals find hidden talents, interests, and prospective career paths that they may not have considered otherwise.

Debates, cultural clubs, and international exchanges expose students to various cultures and beliefs, cultivating empathy, understanding, and tolerance for others.

Moreover, schools with diverse extracurricular activities tend to have a more positive and vibrant culture. This positive atmosphere can lead to increased student engagement, reduced disciplinary issues, and a stronger sense of community within the school.

The skills, beliefs, and experiences gained from extracurricular activities stay with children throughout their lives. Whether they pursue higher education, enter the workforce, or pursue personal hobbies, the lessons learned from these activities continue to shape their character and outlook on life.

### Non-School Factors

#### *Collaboration with External Support Services*

School personnel may only sometimes possess the specialised information and skills needed to address every student's unique requirements. However, by partnering with educational consultants, psychologists, or subject matter experts, schools can access successful teaching practices, targeted interventions for challenging students, and assistance in curriculum development.

Recognising that each student has distinct needs, collaborating with external support services enables schools to provide personalised interventions for students facing academic, emotional, or behavioural challenges. This individualised help can significantly impact the student's ability to thrive academically and emotionally.

Access to specialised resources and support from external services empowers schools to address various difficulties and effectively improve students' academic achievement. Schools can promote emotional well-being and create a nurturing and supportive learning environment by offering mental health specialists and therapists, leading to increased learning engagement and overall student success.

Furthermore, collaboration with external organisations and professionals opens fantastic opportunities for teachers and school employees to enhance their professional development. Workshops, seminars, and training sessions provided by these support services can help teachers refine their skills and knowledge, ultimately leading to improved teaching practices and better student outcomes.

In addition to professional growth, collaborating with external support services enables schools to maximise their resources. Instead of hiring full-time staff for specialised tasks, schools can tap into external knowledge when needed, ensuring high-quality support without unnecessary financial burden.

Building ties between schools and the community, and collaboration with external support services allows students to gain real-world experience and extend their learning beyond the classroom. These support services are often up to date on educational trends and research, granting schools access to evidence-based techniques that can improve teaching methods and learning outcomes.

Furthermore, when schools partner with external support agencies specialising in diversity and inclusion, they can foster a greater sense of inclusivity. These services play a crucial role in times of



crisis or emergency, helping schools navigate challenging situations and ensuring the safety and well-being of all students and staff, regardless of their backgrounds.

Ultimately, collaboration with external support providers can considerably enhance the educational experience for students and benefit schools as well. By gaining access to a wider range of knowledge and resources, schools can overcome various challenges and create a more inviting and helpful learning environment. This, in turn, leads to improved student success and general well-being, making collaboration with outside support services a valuable investment in the future of education.

### *Family Engagement and Support*

Family engagement and support are crucial to students' educational success and overall well-being. When parents and families actively participate in their child's education and provide support, it yields numerous benefits for the students and the school community.

Research indicates that the impact on academic performance is significant when families actively engage in their child's education. Parents play a vital role in boosting their child's academic achievement by monitoring their child's progress, assisting with homework, and creating a conducive home learning environment.

Moreover, family engagement serves as a powerful motivator for students. When students know their families are interested and invested in their education, their self-esteem and confidence receive a much-needed boost, empowering them to diligently tackle academic challenges and pursue their dreams.

Family engagement also extends its positive influence on school attendance. When parents demonstrate interest and involvement in their child's education, students are more likely to attend school regularly and punctually, thereby fostering a sense of responsibility towards their education.

The impact of family engagement goes beyond the individual student; it shapes the entire school community. Schools that actively engage families create a warm and supportive environment. When parents feel valued as partners in the educational process, their perception of the school and teachers becomes more positive, fostering a strong sense of community.

Furthermore, family engagement is pivotal in shaping a student's behaviour and discipline. Parents impart valuable lessons on respecting authority and adhering to rules by promoting positive behaviour and upholding school standards at home.

An essential aspect of family engagement is its ability to foster cultural understanding. Teachers gain insights into a student's cultural background, beliefs, and values, enabling them to create a more inclusive and culturally sensitive learning environment.

Effective communication is facilitated through family engagement. Regular interactions between teachers and parents allow for the exchange of information on a student's progress, the opportunity to address concerns, and collaborative efforts to support the child's growth.

Family support is invaluable during crucial transition periods, such as starting school for the first time or moving to a new grade or higher education. Emotional support and guidance from families ease students' transition, helping them confidently adapt to new challenges.

The benefits of family engagement extend far into the future. Students who experience consistent family involvement are likelier to achieve better long-term educational outcomes. They tend to graduate from high school, pursue higher education, and excel in their chosen fields.



Finally, family engagement breaks down barriers between home and school life. It assists families facing economic, cultural, or language difficulties, ensuring that every child has equitable access to a high-quality education.

#### *Identifying and Addressing Socioeconomic Barriers*

Identifying and eliminating socioeconomic barriers in school education is essential to ensuring equality of opportunity and a supportive learning environment for all children. Socioeconomic disadvantages can limit disadvantaged children's access to resources, assistance, and opportunities. Schools can improve educational equity and inclusion by recognising and addressing these impediments.

Socioeconomic issues do affect academic success. Student advancement can be hampered by a lack of educational materials, technology, or academic help outside of school. Addressing these hurdles can help schools close the achievement gap and enhance student performance.

Disadvantaged students may drop out due to socioeconomic factors. Some students drop out because of financial issues, familial obligations, or lack of support. Identifying and supporting at-risk children can lower dropout rates and enhance educational outcomes.

Socioeconomic issues might impact students' mental health. Economic, housing and food insecurity can cause stress and anxiety, making it hard for students to concentrate. Addressing these barriers makes schools more helpful and nurturing, fostering well-being.

Education can assist in moving out of poverty. Schools can help students and their families break the cycle of poverty by providing the essential support and foundation for young people to move on to higher education and open greater employment opportunities.

Addressing socioeconomic barriers promotes diversity and inclusion in education. Students can learn from each other, developing empathy and preparing them for a more varied and linked world.

Proactively identifying and eliminating socioeconomic barriers frequently requires community and government participation. This engagement deepens the school's community relationships and provides more comprehensive support for students and their families.

Recognising students' families' socioeconomic issues might boost parental engagement. Supported and appreciated parents are likelier to participate in their child's education, improving student outcomes.

When schools identify socioeconomic obstacles, they can help disadvantaged students individually.

Addressing socioeconomic barriers benefits more than students. Well-educated and financially secure people are more willing to volunteer, support education, and improve their communities.

A fair and helpful learning environment requires identifying and overcoming educational socioeconomic barriers. Equal chances and focused support can help all students achieve and contribute to society.

#### *Community Support and Outreach:*

Community support and outreach are critical in improving the overall quality of education and the well-being of children in schools. Community involvement should be more than just supplying financial resources; it should also include active participation and collaboration between schools and the broader community.



When the community actively supports schools, it contributes varied perspectives, experiences, and knowledge. This enriches the learning environment for students by exposing them to real-world applications of their knowledge and skills.

Communities can supply resources that are not readily available within the school system. This can include donations of books, technology, art supplies, and other materials, as well as access to community amenities such as sports fields or local museums. Whilst philanthropic support is welcomed, ACSSO remains committed to the belief that comprehensive supportive education for all students is the government's responsibility.

Collaboration with the community strengthens relationships between schools, parents, students, and other stakeholders. It fosters trust and a sense of collaborative responsibility for the student's achievement.

Members of the community can help students' social and emotional well-being. Mentoring programmes, counselling services, and after-school activities supported by the community can aid students with their needs that go beyond academics.

Students can acquire exposure to various professional possibilities and prospective occupational courses through community involvement. Local firms and professionals can provide insights, internships, or apprenticeships, giving students a greater picture of their future possibilities.

The community is well aware of the challenges and opportunities in its immediate surroundings. Engaging with the community enables schools to customise their instructional approaches to satisfy local needs and concerns.

Community support helps parents and caregivers to become more involved in their children's education. This involvement has a good impact on student achievement and behaviour.

Schools that get community support are frequently focal centres of community pride. This sense of ownership increases community investment in the school's performance and longevity.

Community support can also benefit teachers by giving them additional resources, professional development opportunities, and recognition for their achievements.

Collaboration with the community develops a sense of togetherness and common purpose among all stakeholders. It supports the notion that education is a collective obligation, not just the responsibility of schools.

### [How the next agreement can support schools to attract and retain teachers.](#)

Ensuring the quality of teaching is vital for students' academic growth. However, it becomes challenging to determine the most effective ways to educate children due to teachers' and principals' varying teaching practices and pedagogical approaches.

Providing ongoing professional development opportunities, including training programs, workshops, and learning opportunities, is essential for teachers' career advancement and motivation. To address teacher burnout and exhaustion, administrative processes should be streamlined, and support staff should be provided to alleviate excessive workloads and responsibilities. Mental health assistance, counselling services, and work-life balance initiatives should also be priorities to ensure the well-being of teachers.

Access to current and relevant instructional materials, such as updated technology, is crucial for effective teaching. The NSRA can provide funding for these materials and classroom supplies to



improve the learning experiences of both teachers and students. Early career teachers can also benefit from tailored assistance, such as mentoring programs, decreased teaching loads, and additional professional learning.

Finally, involving teachers in decision-making and soliciting their feedback on education policies and resource allocation can lead to better solutions that meet their needs. By integrating these measures and benefits, the NSRA can revolutionise the education system by attracting and retaining the best teachers, benefiting the entire education system and its students.

#### How data collection can best inform decision-making and boost student outcomes.

Acknowledging the significance of data collection highlighted in the consultation paper is crucial. However, ensuring that the data collected is utilised effectively to support any reforms and changes is important. Simply collecting data without utilising it would waste valuable resources and time. The collected data should be used to evaluate the current situation, make informed decisions, identify successful tactics, and implement them further. It is equally important to identify areas that require improvement and address them accordingly. This approach, we believe, will help maintain standards and take appropriate action, such as performance management or additional investigations, as needed to better comprehend challenges and opportunities.

The NSRA can be crucial in supporting data collection to inform decision-making and improve student outcomes. It is important to improve the collection of data regarding school attendance records. One area that requires attention is school refusal, which can lead to disengagement from school. By identifying cases early, students can receive the necessary support to prevent this from happening. Furthermore, improved data collection will help shed light on the extent of the issue and allow for resources to be allocated accordingly. In addition, it is recommended to gather data on suspension rates, particularly for students with disabilities. There is a concern that these students may be unfairly suspended for difficult behaviour when reasonable adjustments have not been made. Collecting this data across all sectors can help determine if there is a systemic problem in providing support and how schools respond to difficult situations.

The federal Department of Education should work with ACARA, educational institutions, and organisations to support standardised data-gathering systems. These frameworks should include key measures and indicators of student achievement, engagement, and well-being. The availability of standardised data facilitates the comparison and analysis of patterns across different schools and areas.

To guarantee that data is collected and used efficiently, the department should engage in efforts that foster data literacy among teachers and administrators through the NSRA. Training and tools on data collection procedures, data analysis, and interpretation can assist teachers in making more informed decisions based on the data they collect.

Within educational institutions, the department can foster a culture of “safe” data-driven decision-making, inspiring educators to use data to discover areas for improvement and use evidence-based solutions to improve student outcomes by sharing success stories and best practices.

Technology has the potential to simplify data collection operations greatly. The department can work with edtech businesses and researchers to create user-friendly data-collecting tools, such as online surveys and evaluation platforms, to help schools collect and analyse data.



Working with educational specialists, the department should identify and prioritise the most critical KPIs related to student achievement. Such factors include academic achievement, attendance, student engagement, graduation rates, and social-emotional well-being.

The NSRA can aid in collecting and analysing longitudinal data, allowing for tracking student improvement over time. This will enable teachers to uncover patterns and trends that may be missed in short-term data analysis, resulting in a more thorough picture of student progress.

Encouragement of schools and educational institutions to exchange anonymised data can result in more extensive databases for study. Collaborative initiatives can aid in identifying successful techniques that can be repeated in diverse contexts.

It would benefit the department to allocate funds for research and evaluation purposes. These funds could be utilised to support projects that collect and analyse data to determine its impact on student outcomes. This initiative would incentivise experts to explore innovative solutions to leverage data for enhancing education.

The department should establish regular reporting procedures to distribute data analysis findings and insights to schools and teachers. Feedback loops can assist schools in understanding the efficacy of their initiatives and making required adjustments.

The department has the potential to promote the adoption of data-driven policy across different levels of governance. It can play a crucial role in shaping education policy and resource allocation by highlighting the importance of safe data in decision-making.

[How to ensure public funding is delivering on national agreements and that all school authorities are transparent and accountable to the community for how funding is invested and measuring the impacts of this investment.](#)

To ensure that public funding is used effectively in schools, ACSSO believes that it is essential for both government and non-government school authorities to be transparent and accountable to the community. This can be achieved through legal frameworks, policies, monitoring mechanisms, and community engagement. By working together, we can ensure that the funding is allocated wisely and benefits our schools positively.

To achieve this, it is essential to establish clear national agreements that outline the distribution of public funding to **all** schools. These agreements should specify the criteria for allocation, the intended outcomes, and the responsibilities of school authorities.

There is also a need to enact laws and regulations that mandate transparency and accountability in school authorities' use of public funds. This could include requirements for regular financial reporting, audits, and disclosure of information to the public. Additionally, setting up a robust monitoring and oversight system to track the flow of funds from the national level to individual schools would be helpful.

Making all school budgets publicly available and easily accessible is another essential step towards transparency. It is important to outline how public funds will be used and what specific programs or initiatives they will support. Implementing a system to measure the impact of investments made using public funds is also important.

Collecting relevant data on school performance and financial management regularly and making it publicly available can promote transparency and enable community members to assess funding investment outcomes. Establishing mechanisms to protect whistleblowers who report misuse of



funds or unethical practices can also encourage individuals within the system to come forward with concerns about financial mismanagement.

Periodic review and updating of funding agreements and transparency measures can help to adapt to changing needs and circumstances. Encouraging the involvement of NGOs and community watchdog groups, in monitoring the allocation and use of public funds in schools can also be beneficial.

Finally, launching public awareness campaigns to inform the public about their rights to access information about public funding and to hold all school authorities accountable can help to promote transparency and accountability in the use of public funds in schools.

### Final Thoughts

ACSSO believes that through access and opportunity of a world class education to all young Australians, we can build a strong foundation for the future. Key to this, funding through the NSRA must include the following:

- The inequities are immediately identified and addressed, and that all government schools receive the full 100% SRS.
- Funding to facilitate school culture change and resourcing that enables engagement of families and connection to the community. It is through shared information and reflection on community values that school education will become relevant, inclusive and valued.
- Co-location of community hubs/centres on school grounds. These can support teaching and learning through greater access to allied health professionals. These centres would not only provide assistance to the teaching staff but also to families – enabling collaborative support for the student and family. Only through a greater understanding of the whole child can true progress be made in their capacity to learn.
- A focus on student well-being for learning. Regular check in, data collection and monitoring of student well-being is essential. Even before the pandemic, we are very aware that student anxiety and mental ill-health were on the rise. Professional learning and support for teachers to assist students in strategies to identify and regulate emotions should be seen as a priority. Punitive measures to regulate behaviour is damaging to student self-worth. Challenging behaviours can be disruptive, and teachers should be given the tools and appropriate strategies to support the student.
- A supported teacher workforce is essential. The current teacher workforce level is nothing short of a crisis and requires urgent attention. We need to ensure teacher administration is minimalised and streamlined, that professional learning is tailored and relevant, and that time is given for developing essential connections with families and allied professionals. The development of incentives to encourage teachers to work in areas that are more difficult to staff is a viable option. The support to “grow your own”, that is students in these areas training and becoming teachers in their home area, would support greater understanding and build communities. This could also include moving from a teacher aide, School Learning Support Officer position into classroom teaching.
- Greater incentive to move from current career and into teaching. Many professionals are discouraged by the long study period, without pay, to move from current work to teaching.
- Universities and teaching institutions need to be more supportive of the neurodiverse learner and provide opportunities for them to move into teaching. Their lived experience provides a valuable insight into many of today’s learners.





- Transparency and accountability for the money provided. There are too many anecdotal stories of waste and hidden expenditure, overpaid school leaders in non-government schools. There needs to be an assurance that SR allocation reaches the schools and is not absorbed in sectorial provision for other items. States and Territories need to be accountable for their provision of education and need to come to the party with the full 80%
- That we collect data that matters, that informs us of student progress both academically and emotionally. That schools identify and interpret data for its true meaning, e.g. attendance as a means of examining student well-being, suspension as a means of not meeting a student's needs, and assessment results as a reflection of teaching or content, not just student ability.