

Senate Standing Committees on Education and Employment

The national trend of school refusal and related matters

QUESTION ON NOTICE

Date of hearing: 22 February 2023

Outcome: Schools

Department of Education Question No. IQ23-000001

Senator Fatima Payman on 22 February 2023, Proof Hansard page 57

Mental health and wellbeing of students post COVID-19

Question

Senator PAYMAN: Thank you for your submission and for being here and helping answer questions that will help in our deliberation as a committee. I was wondering if you could walk us through the impact you've seen on the mental health and wellbeing of students post the COVID-19 disruptions to their learning?

Ms Birmingham: I suppose it's something we don't have a lot of data on ourselves, so what we will be reporting here, if I can find the right section, is some material that's been produced by others. For example, we've got data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare which talks about the mental health of young people declining between 2012 and 2020. That was early COVID research, I suppose, looking back to 2012. It showed that the proportion of young people aged 15 to 19 who felt positive about their future fell from 71 per cent to 56 per cent. We've also got evidence that there's a strong relationship between wellbeing and learning and that students with mental health concerns fall further behind. By year 9, they're on average 1.5 to 2.8 years behind their peers. That's a long list of authors can I provide on notice if you're interested in having a look at that particular research piece led by Goodsell. Is that the sort of information you're looking for, Senator?

Senator PAYMAN: Yes, that's definitely helps.

Answer

Goodsell B, Lawrence D, Ainley J, Sawyer M, Zubrick SR, Maratos J (2017) *Child and Adolescent Mental health and educational outcomes. An analysis of educational outcomes from Young Minds Matter: the second Australian Child and Adolescent Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing*. Perth: Graduate School of Education, The University of Western Australia

[childandadolescentmentalhealthandeducationaloutcomesdec2017.pdf \(telethonkids.org.au\)](https://telethonkids.org.au/childandadolescentmentalhealthandeducationaloutcomesdec2017.pdf)

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QUESTION ON NOTICE

Date of hearing: 22 February 2023

Outcome: Schools

Department of Education Question No. IQ23-000002

Senator Matt O'Sullivan on 22 February 2023, Proof Hansard page 59

National School Reform Agreement target

Question

CHAIR: ... Does the department have, or is it looking to set, a national target as part of the new National School Reform Agreement? Is attendance part of that?

Ms Birmingham: Attendance is part of the current school reform agreement. I don't have the information to hand to tell you how that's articulated in the agreement, but I'll provide that on notice. I think targets and measures for the new agreement would be subject to negotiation, and there would be quite a body of work to go before we know what that would look like. I suspect it will look a bit different from what we have at the moment. At the moment I think there are eight measures that are related to NAPLAN, for example. We might have a different range of measures, but I would be surprised if attendance weren't still among them.

Answer

Under the current National School Reform Agreement (NSRA), the Commonwealth and states and territories have committed to three outcomes that collectively articulate their ambition for Australian school education, including that all students are engaged in their schooling. Progress in achieving this commitment is tracked against the sub-outcome to increase the proportion of students attending school 90 per cent or more of the time, including students from priority equity cohorts.

Negotiations on the new National School Reform Agreement (NSRA), including the inclusion of national targets, have not yet commenced. In December 2022, Education Ministers agreed to extend the current NSRA by 12 months to 31 December 2024, subject to agreement by First Ministers. A new NSRA is expected to take effect from 1 January 2025.

A panel of experts will undertake a review to inform the next NSRA (the Review). The Review will build on the Productivity Commission's review of the current NSRA and provide specific recommendations on reforms to be pursued through the next NSRA. Following the Review, Education Ministers will enter into negotiations for the next agreement.

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QUESTION ON NOTICE

Date of hearing: 22 February 2023

Outcome: Schools

Department of Education Question No. IQ23-000003

Senator Matt O'Sullivan on 22 February 2023, Proof Hansard page 60

Education ministers meeting - school refusal topic

Question

CHAIR: I'm sure that's right. We heard evidence from the Catholic independent schools in New South Wales. They do work in wellbeing; they have teams, as Senator Allman-Payne was talking about, that are out there engaging with students and families. They had a table that showed they've been able to buck that trend and to improve attendance; it was 10 or 11 points higher. Some redoubling of efforts might be needed to make sure that a bad pattern of attendance isn't locked in—which is a comment, but I urge the government to look at that. In the education ministers meeting, was there any discussion specifically about school refusal? Has it ever been a topic that's come up as an issue?

Ms Birmingham: Not that I'm aware of, but I could take that on notice and have a look.

CHAIR: Yes, please.

Answer

Declining student attendance was discussed at the Education Ministers Meeting (EMM) on 27 February 2023. A copy of the Communique from this meeting, which contains reference to Ministers' discussion of this topic, is at Attachment A.



27 February 2023

Communiqué

Artificial Intelligence in schools

Ministers discussed the opportunities stemming from AI technologies, which are increasingly available in education settings. In response to the rapidly evolving technology landscape, Ministers agreed to develop an evidence-based, best practice framework to guide schools in harnessing AI tools to support teaching and learning. A taskforce, including experts, will be established to develop the framework and return to Ministers in 2023.

Early Childhood Education and Care

Ministers agreed on a consultation approach for a draft national Early Childhood Education and Care Vision that will support children's education and development outcomes and parents' workforce participation. The final vision will be presented to National Cabinet in the middle of 2023.

The Australian Government Minister for Early Childhood Education, the Hon Dr Anne Aly MP, presented for decision, initiatives that implement commitments in the Preschool Reform Agreement (PRA).

Education Ministers endorsed Principles that guide the development of a Preschool Outcomes Measure for trial, and approved the national methodology to measure preschool enrolment and attendance. EMM agreed to pursue a national research agenda in preschool outcomes.

National School Reform Agreement

Education Ministers endorsed the Terms of Reference for a review to inform the next National School Reform Agreement between the Commonwealth and states and territories, which will be released in coming weeks, subject to the Prime Minister's approval. The next NSRA is due to take effect in 2025.

Teacher workforce

Ministers noted arrangements for implementing initiatives in the [National Teacher Workforce Action Plan](#), including the development of a new campaign to raise the value of teaching and promote teaching as a career. Ministers renewed their commitment to practical action in 2023, and agreed to consider reforms that could be driven through the federal Teacher Workload Reduction Fund.

Professor Mark Scott AO, Chair of the Teacher Education Expert Panel, provided Ministers with an update on the work of the Panel, including plans to release a discussion paper in coming weeks.

Ministers asked the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership to work in consultation with the Expert Panel on how it might compact the timeframe of a Masters degree, including the feasibility of a 12-month program, without reducing quality and standards.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education

Professor Peter Buckskin presented to EMM on the progress made to establish a genuine partnership between community representatives and government on Indigenous education. Education Ministers agreed that heads of all Education departments (AESOC) and the soon-to-be-established National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Council would do further work on co-design. AESOC will report back to Ministers on progress at the next EMM.

School attendance

Ministers discussed national trends in school attendance. Attendance has been affected in recent years by the COVID-19 pandemic, recent floods, and fires; Ministers commissioned the Australian Education Research Organisation to investigate the causes of declining attendance and provide advice to Ministers on evidence-based approaches that support attendance.

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