

Schools Plus

Every child has the right to
the same opportunities



**EVERY CHILD
EVERY OPPORTUNITY**

**CHILDREN'S WELLBEING -
A NEW PERSPECTIVE**



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Schools Plus acknowledges the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation as the Traditional Owners of the area where our head office is based, and the Traditional Owners and their custodianship of the lands on which we work with schools. We pay our respects to their Ancestors, the land’s first teachers, and their descendants, who continue cultural and spiritual connections to Country. We recognise their valuable contributions to Australian and global society.

Schools Plus is grateful for the generous support of a number of donors, including Origin Energy Foundation, in the production of this report.

Pictured: Arrernte Lands, Northern Territory



FOREWORD	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
Our Key Findings	6
Key Policy Recommendations	8
Policy Alignment	8
SCHOOLS PLUS’ ROLE IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR	9
THE IMPORTANCE OF CHILDREN’S WELLBEING	11
Defining student wellbeing	12
Poor wellbeing and the impact on learning	13
A slow onset crisis in disadvantaged communities	14
Exposing the wellbeing cracks	15
Attendance anxiety and absenteeism	17
SCHOOLS PLUS’ STRATEGIC OBSERVATIONS	19
KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS	24
1. Educator Professional Development and Wellbeing Learning Programs	24
2. Wellbeing Navigators	29
3. School-based ‘Live Well, Learn Well’ Hubs	34
CONCLUSION	39
APPENDICES	40
Appendix A - Methodology & Schools Plus’ Support Model	40
Appendix B - Schools Plus’ Partnership Cycle	41
Appendix C - Schools Plus’ Frameworks	42
Appendix D - References	43

FOREWORD

Children embody our hopes for the future and each day, dedicated teachers strive to give their students the best chance at succeeding.

Yet poor wellbeing is threatening to derail not only their prospects, but also the health and success of us as a nation.

We are in awe of the dedication of all educators but particularly those in a school considered 'disadvantaged'*. Children living in disadvantaged communities are often exposed to things like food and housing insecurity, domestic instability and financial hardship - all of which can have major implications on a child's ability to thrive at school.

A positive school experience is the scaffolding each child needs to help create their confidence, nurture their interest and knowledge and lay the protective building blocks for their mental health and wellbeing.

We know that for too many Australian students, school may be the only safe sanctuary in their day.

Schools Plus was born out of the "Gonski Review"¹ into the equity of school funding. Our not-for-profit organisation was established to lay a solid foundation of philanthropic support under the most challenged of school communities.

We have raised a total of \$68 million over the past 10 years, enabling us to respond to hundreds of requests by principals for bespoke programs to enhance their children's respective learning and developmental opportunities.

Through our unique lens within a disadvantaged school context, we can benchmark and track the ongoing and increasing changes in mental health and wellbeing that children from disadvantaged school communities are experiencing and the subsequent disconnect with children's ability to learn.

The changes are considerable and concerning.

Last year, 97% of support requested by schools had an aim of addressing mental health and wellbeing needs of their students. The pandemic hastened an emerging societal shift and exposed significant wellbeing and mental health challenges beyond levels previously understood.

Throughout this period, Schools Plus has continued to implement its model of place-based interventions, combining investment and educator coaching to counter some of these challenges in schools. Our learnings are documented within this report, with the view that they will support policymakers to implement long-term and cost-effective solutions, particularly in low socioeconomic communities.

While we focus on those communities, the learnings in this report have many across-the-board applications. However, by addressing our report to those in challenged communities we seek to bring change to the sector with the greatest need and equally the greatest potential for impact.

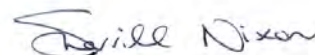
Importantly, our recommended policy reforms have already been tested with a range of schools whom we have partnered with to mitigate some of the extenuating and prolific outcomes of poor wellbeing.

By benchmarking the needs of nearly 2000 schools over the past six years, Schools Plus has been able to show just how vital schools are in their contribution to positive wellbeing and mental health for our young students.

These schools and the children and families they are tasked to nurture and care for, deserve our national attention and support. Every child should have every opportunity.



David Friedlander
Schools Plus' Chair



Sherrill Nixon
Schools Plus' CEO



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Positive wellbeing is fundamental to a child’s ability to learn, develop and thrive at school. Without a foundation of positive wellbeing and mental health, children can struggle at school, fall behind in their learning and fail to develop the healthy relationships and self-confidence they need to succeed. This can have lifelong consequences, for both individuals and the community.

For the past 10 years, Schools Plus has played a unique and very important role in the education sector. We exist to help children thrive at school and beyond, by enabling schools in underserved communities to create educational opportunities their students may not otherwise access. Alongside our place-based model of support – combining philanthropic funding, educator coaching, evaluation and knowledge sharing - Schools Plus has been monitoring, capturing and analysing data that reflects the shifting challenges facing the schools serving the nation’s low socioeconomic communities.

Our data, and the lived experience of teachers and principals we work with, back a growing national call for a greater focus on early identification, intervention and prevention strategies to support children struggling with their wellbeing, mental health and those with neurodiversity. Schools can, and should be, at the epicentre of these efforts.

We know children can’t, and shouldn’t have to, leave their emotional and mental challenges at the school gate, but educators need increasingly more complex and tailored support and resources to appropriately help students and their families.

To help illuminate and address some of the wellbeing and mental health challenges schools face, we have analysed both the needs of schools and the outcomes achieved from the interventions Schools Plus has delivered.

We believe that elevating the voices of our educators in classrooms and schoolyards paints a clearer picture of the issues these schools face and what needs to be addressed urgently at a national level.

OUR KEY FINDINGS

Our analysis of nearly 2000 requests for support from disadvantaged schools over the past six years shows:

Greatest challenge:

Children’s wellbeing has become schools’ highest priority since 2020, when a series of natural disasters occurred and the COVID pandemic began.

Fast-growing demand:

The demand for support for wellbeing-focused initiatives has grown significantly, from 31% of applications in 2018 to 48% in 2023. In addition, in 2023 a further 49% of applications said improved wellbeing would be a secondary outcome of their proposed initiative.

Underfunded area of need:

Schools need additional funding to tackle this issue. Between 2018 and 2023, schools sought \$25.8 million from Schools Plus to address the wellbeing and mental health challenges emerging in their communities.

Social and emotional skills:

The pandemic’s long tail is having a negative impact in the classroom. 49% of wellbeing-focused applications in 2023 identified the need to build children’s social and emotional skills so they can manage their emotions and behaviour and build healthy relationships. Two years of lockdowns and disruptions left many of these life skills underdeveloped.

Teachers are not equipped:

53% of teachers don’t feel well-equipped to deal with wellbeing and mental health issues.

Professional development is vital:

71% of wellbeing-focused applications in 2023 identified professional development for teachers as the best strategy to better support children’s wellbeing.

These findings are further outlined in this report, where we detail the true impacts of the deteriorating wellbeing and mental health among our most vulnerable of children.

Educators are now seeing the damage these unaddressed challenges are having on children’s learning, cognitive development and relationships with peers. Principals are reporting an alarming and increasing incidence of attendance anxiety or school refusal leading to higher absenteeism, classroom aggression and student disruption, poor attention, and a spike in general anxiety and depression.

In addition, there is the **compounding impact of teacher burnout and shortages.**

In 2020, intentions to leave the profession prior to retirement decreased to the lowest recorded level (21%), however in 2022 intentions to leave increased to their highest recorded level in the Australian Teacher Workforce Data (35%).³

Overlay these issues with a shortage of teachers⁴ and limited access to affordable and equitable mental health services within these low socioeconomic communities⁵, and a perfect storm of poor wellbeing and learning outcomes becomes significant for our most vulnerable of children.

Disadvantaged schools are responding with onsite triage and mental health intervention for the children in their care. This, often, extends to the immediate family.

Many of our disadvantaged school communities urgently need early intervention strategies and sustainable prevention pathways and resources to ensure all students can focus on their learning and social development, without struggling with unaddressed poor mental health.

Innovative solutions are shifting the dial for children and school communities.

Despite these considerable challenges, many low-ICSEA schools have demonstrated extraordinary resilience by partnering with Schools Plus to co-design interventions to address these multifaceted issues. This report showcases some of these initiatives that have delivered positive outcomes for children, teachers and families, and have the potential to be scaled for different communities and demographics according to their specific needs. These are not one-size-fits-all solutions but have common scalable attributes that can be contextualised for different communities and situations.

For instance, at Berri Regional College in South Australia, Schools Plus has supported the principal, teachers and health professionals in the community to implement a major on-site initiative so that vulnerable children can see a GP and psychologist at school – services that their families would otherwise struggle to access or afford. The outcomes have been transformational – non-attenders have returned to campus to access appointments, students are happier, more resilient and more engaged in learning and families now view the school as nurturing and supporting their children outside of the classroom. This is one of the many outstanding tested and evidence-informed projects outlined in this report that can be replicated and scaled to other disadvantaged schools.

Through our work with schools to improve children’s wellbeing, **Schools Plus has identified three key strategies that have been implemented successfully in multiple schools.** These are presented here as highly effective approaches to improve wellbeing outcomes for children and in turn, reduce the pressure on educators, families and the broader school community.

We call on state and federal governments and philanthropic supporters to collaborate with us and our low-ICSEA school communities to expand on and spread the successful interventions we have co-designed and rolled out with our school partners.

These three priority policy recommendations can be delivered as stand-alone initiatives, or work collectively to build capacity in teachers, improve communication and relationships between schools, families and health providers, deliver early intervention, prevention and triage for children needing additional support, and help school communities to coordinate responses to these challenges. They are all solutions with the potential – and proven track record - to change children’s lives.

KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Educator Professional Development and Wellbeing Learning Programs

A key challenge for educators is that they are often not equipped with the knowledge, experience or resources to effectively manage the wellbeing and mental health situations or scenarios at hand.

Our recommendation:

All educators, including trainee teachers, should have access to timely, evidence-based professional development to help them create safe and supportive learning environments, identify student needs and implement strategies to support student engagement in learning, giving them a healthy start to life. Training and resources tailored to the needs of school communities will help educators implement strategies to better support children’s wellbeing.

2. Wellbeing Navigators

The world of health and other support services is extremely complex and often difficult to navigate for families, and for educators whose main focus should be on teaching and learning.

Our recommendation:

All low-ICSEA schools should have access to trained and dedicated ‘wellbeing navigators’ to coordinate effective identification, prevention and early intervention wellbeing and mental health strategies. These navigators will liaise closely with teachers, families, healthcare practitioners and other service providers in their community to ensure children’s needs are identified and met.

3. School-based ‘Live Well, Learn Well’ Hubs

Many families do not have the financial or other resources (e.g. transport) to access health services such as GPs, psychologists and other allied health professionals.

Our recommendation:

Establish ‘Live Well, Learn Well’ hubs that place all low-ICSEA schools at the epicentre of tailored and tiered wellbeing and mental health support, including timely and affordable access to on-site experts such as GPs, psychologists and social workers, speech therapists and occupational therapists.

POLICY ALIGNMENT

The core focus of these key recommendations is strongly aligned with the approaches recommended by the following organisations and recent publications:

- **Department of Education, Independent Expert Panel**
Improving Outcomes for All: The Report of the Independent Expert Panel’s Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System 2023.⁶
- **National Mental Health Commission**
The National Children’s Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021.⁵
- **Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA)**
National Report on Schooling in Australia – Student Attendance 2023.⁷
- **Turner Institute for Brain and Mental Health, Monash University**
The urgent need to secure the future of the ‘post-pandemic child’ 2023.⁸
- **The University of Melbourne and Deakin University**
School refusal needs a national response 2023.⁹
- **The Senate Education and Employment References Committee Inquiry**
The national trend of school refusal and related matters 2023.¹⁰
- **Grattan Institute**
The new NAPLAN results are a wake-up call 2023.¹¹
- **Department of Social Services**
Draft National Autism Strategy 2024.¹²
- **NDIS Review Panel**
Working together to deliver the NDIS - Independent Review into the National Disability Insurance Scheme: Final Report 2023.¹³



SCHOOLS PLUS’ ROLE IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR

Schools Plus is a not-for-profit organisation whose mission is to ensure all children, regardless of their socioeconomic background or postcode, have the same opportunities to thrive throughout school and beyond.

We enable children from disadvantaged (low-ICSEA) schools to have an equal playing field in their education, so they can develop the skills, knowledge and personal qualities they need to reach their full potential.

We fully endorse the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration¹⁴ which sets out ‘a vision for a world-class education system that encourages and supports every student to be the very best they can be, no matter where they live or what kind of learning challenges they may face.’

Schools Plus was established following the 2011 “Gonski Review”¹ into school funding to help public, Catholic and independent schools in less-advantaged communities access philanthropic funding to address their unmet students’ needs. Schools are determined as disadvantaged if they have an ICSEA (Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage) value below 1000 or are a special school. Over 4000 schools across Australia are eligible for support.

Since 2014, Schools Plus has raised \$68 million, worked with 1500 schools and impacted over 500,000 children nationally to improve educational outcomes across five key areas: learning gaps, wellbeing, rural, regional and remote communities, First Nations communities and in schools and regions impacted by crises or natural disasters.

Over the decade, our model has evolved and strengthened. In addition to investment, we now offer integrated coaching, program management and evaluation tools, tailored to the needs of each school. Our partnerships with schools vary from one to five years, and many of the projects we’ve supported have expanded from a

single school to a cluster incorporating multiple schools.

Some have been endorsed and adopted by state education departments, with additional investment to scale them. Others have been recognised by state governments, winning awards and national recognition.

Projects we support enable positive change in student outcomes in three key areas:



Through our model, we build the capabilities of school leaders and teachers to lead and facilitate transformational projects, improve teaching practice and school culture and positively engage their families and community.

We are grateful for the support and generosity of some of Australia’s leading philanthropists and organisations to help us pilot, expand and scale our work. As a result, we have been able to build a comprehensive understanding of the needs of Australia’s children and what is working well to address those needs. We believe this knowledge can inform changes to practice and policy and will make a fundamental difference to the nation’s future.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHILDREN'S WELLBEING

Wellbeing is essential for Australian children because it provides a strong foundation for success in all areas of life. Children with good physical, mental and social wellbeing are better equipped to learn and thrive at school, form positive relationships and develop the resilience needed to face challenges throughout life.

The wellbeing of a child or young person is uniquely different for those in schools in disadvantaged communities. Within lower socioeconomic, First Nations, culturally and linguistically diverse or regional, rural and remote communities, wellbeing can be influenced by distinct pressure points. These include poverty, family trauma and violence, educational inequality and cultural identity. A lack of services leading to a delayed or missed diagnosis can also be more common; for example, neurodiverse children are often overrepresented among disadvantaged and regional and rural communities.¹²

The COVID pandemic, and multiple natural disasters in recent years, have further exposed and widened the societal cracks that we now see. These are, in turn, leading to deteriorating mental health and wellbeing in children and impacting teachers' wellbeing, their ability to teach and driving them to leave the profession.¹⁵

“

Teachers were negatively impacted through an increase in work demands, including work complexity and hours. Most teachers needed to rapidly upskill in technology, juggle multiple modes of work, trial numerous digital tools and platforms and adapt their teaching approaches to find something that worked for their students. Most importantly, teacher wellbeing took a significant hit, as teachers needed to continue working and supporting their students during a time of significant community anxiety while they themselves reckoned with the risks of contracting COVID-19.

- Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership

”



DEFINING STUDENT WELLBEING

In this report, we refer to wellbeing as a child’s ability to feel safe, be physically and mentally healthy, engage successfully in learning and live a fulfilling life throughout school and beyond. To enable this, our work with schools focuses on improving student outcomes in three interrelated areas:



Social and emotional competencies

Building children’s skills so they can regulate their emotions and behaviour and maintain healthy relationships with other children and adults.



Emotional and cognitive engagement

Supporting children’s ability to engage in their learning, by building their sense of belonging at school and their learning confidence and resilience.



Physical and mental health

Supporting children so they can make healthy choices, maintain their physical and mental health and access services for specific conditions or skill development such as speech or occupational therapy or counselling/ mental health care.

POOR WELLBEING AND THE IMPACT ON LEARNING

For children struggling with poor wellbeing, their ability to learn and thrive is undermined, often for life.

Research shows a distinct and compelling link between a student’s positive and supported wellbeing and their academic achievement and engagement in learning. The opposite is just as true, but the ramifications for that child can be devastating and can create lifelong and entrenched poor outcomes for the student, their family, their community and the nation, more broadly.



A meta-analysis exploring the association between students’ general wellbeing (defined as students’ subjective, psychological, social, cognitive and physical wellbeing) and academic achievement found a significant and positive small effect size between wellbeing and academic achievement.

Specifically, the meta-analysis found that students with greater wellbeing are more likely to have better academic performance and vice versa, suggesting a reciprocally causal relationship between wellbeing and learning (Kaya & Erdem, 2021).

Similarly, longitudinal studies have found that higher wellbeing boosts academic achievement (Kiuru et al., 2020) and interventions targeting non-academic wellbeing skills in students increases their wellbeing and their academic achievement (Adler, 2016).

- AERO, Student Wellbeing Data and Measurement in Australia (2023).¹⁶



Understanding the link between poor wellbeing and a child’s ability to learn and develop is especially critical in less-advantaged communities.

Children facing disadvantage are twice as likely to experience poor wellbeing and mental health¹⁷ and it’s a major factor in the education gap. The impact on learning is apparent early.

- **Year 3 students with any mental disorder are six to nine months behind in their NAPLAN scores, compared to their mentally healthy peers. This gap grows to between 1.5 and 2.8 years by Year 9.**¹⁸
- **Students lose about eight months worth of learning from Year 3 to Year 7 if they have low wellbeing, and nearly 10 months of learning if they are bullied for two or three years.**¹⁷
- **In effect, worse mental health may account for somewhere between one tenth and one quarter of the overall gap between socially advantaged and disadvantaged students.**¹⁷

The urgency to address poor wellbeing is clear when we consider the falling achievement of Australian students. Most recently, the 2023 NAPLAN school test results showed an alarming number of children are not on track with their learning, with about one in three failing to reach expectations in numeracy, reading and writing. The greatest gap in proficiency occurs where there is the greatest disadvantage – students in remote areas, those whose parents did not complete high school, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are most likely to fall short of the benchmark. In one example highlighted by the Grattan Institute, 56% of Year 9 remote students were below expectations in reading, compared with 31% of metropolitan students.¹¹

In our own survey of principals in 2021, many expressed their frustration at the ongoing decline in student wellbeing and the subsequent consequences for the children’s respective learning outcomes.

How is poor mental health and wellbeing impacting students?

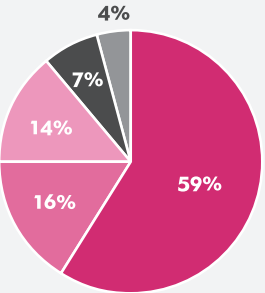
82%

of principals believe poor mental health significantly impacts a student’s success at school.

“

Disruptive, unhappy and frustrated students who demonstrate increasing levels of verbal and physical violence/abuse are the order of the day. I have worked for over 30 years in public education and this will probably end up being the hardest year ever.

”



How does poor mental wellbeing manifest?

- Disengagement from learning
- At-risk behaviour
- Disruptive behaviour
- Poor attendance
- Other

Source: Poor mental health and wellbeing in students – results from Schools Plus’ survey of principals during the 2021 COVID lockdowns.

A SLOW ONSET CRISIS IN DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES

Poor and unaddressed wellbeing in children had been emerging well before the COVID pandemic.

Prior to COVID’s outbreak, Schools Plus was seeing an upward trend in the demand for wellbeing interventions. For instance, the share of requests for support relating directly to wellbeing rose from 31% to 37% between 2018 and 2019. Already, schools were identifying rising anxiety and a lack of resilience in children as a growing issue. However, COVID and the series of natural disasters amplified this in an immediate and alarming way.

For hundreds of thousands of Australian school children, the pandemic drastically altered their lives. The community lockdowns, school closures and family and economic hardships that were endured only escalated the endemic of declining mental health and made existing challenges even more difficult for children and families in low socioeconomic communities. The sudden jolt out of routine and structured activities made students particularly

vulnerable to the psychological fallout of the pandemic.¹⁹ These observations – particularly on the perplexing social phenomena known as ‘school refusal’ or ‘attendance anxiety’ - were central to The Senate Education and Employment References Committee Inquiry, “The national trend of school refusal and related matters”¹⁰.

By the time schools reopened fully in 2022, there were unprecedented rates of children experiencing school refusal, absenteeism, anxiety, stress²⁰ loneliness²¹ and other disorders. Many children even had to regain basic social skills.²¹

Children in Victoria experienced the strictest lockdowns worldwide. These children missed out on in-person teaching and seeing their friends for about 35 weeks – just five weeks short of a full school year. Across Australia, the youngest 700,000 children entering the school system for the first time, never learnt the basics of school routines including learning in a classroom.⁸

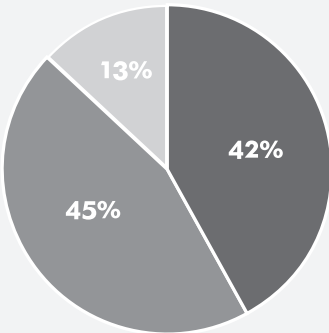
EXPOSING THE WELLBEING CRACKS

An analysis of the applications we received from disadvantaged schools between 2018 and 2023 shows how COVID helped to expose and deepen the wellbeing cracks that had been forming.

Schools Plus Applications 2018 - 2023

- 1982 in total
- Average of 330 applications for support each year, seeking funding to help over 92,000 children and young people annually.
- \$61 million requested from Schools Plus to support all initiatives to support student outcomes.

Student wellbeing Academic outcomes Learning dispositions



WELLBEING FOCUS:

Student wellbeing is increasingly at the forefront of the applications for support.

- Pre-2020, an average of 34% of applications per year focused on wellbeing-related interventions.
- Since 2020, an average of 45% of applications per year have called for Schools Plus’ support to help mitigate the consequences of poor and declining mental health and wellbeing among their students.
- In 2023, 48% of applications had wellbeing as their primary focus. Staggeringly though, a further 49% - or 97% of all applications - said their intervention would impact students’ wellbeing.
- Schools have sought more than \$25.8 million from Schools Plus to address wellbeing issues over the past six years.



48%

of applications in 2023 had wellbeing as their primary focus

97%

of applications in 2023 said their intervention would impact students’ wellbeing



\$25.8M

in funding sought by schools to address wellbeing issues

The collective concern for student mental welfare spiked during the pandemic in 2020, before increasing again last year.

Supporting children with their emotional and mental wellbeing has been a significant challenge for disadvantaged communities, but the pandemic and the subsequent disruption to classrooms and households have exacerbated the pressures on children and further undermined their mental health and wellbeing. This was also compounded by a wave of devastating natural disasters throughout 2020.

This underpins the concept of the slow-onset wellbeing and mental health crisis among our most vulnerable of children and their families.

“

The area has had a turbulent few years post-COVID, resulting in increased anxiety, stress and family pressures. Being situated remotely makes it challenging to establish and maintain social connections. This leads to loneliness and disconnection, impacting social and emotional wellbeing.

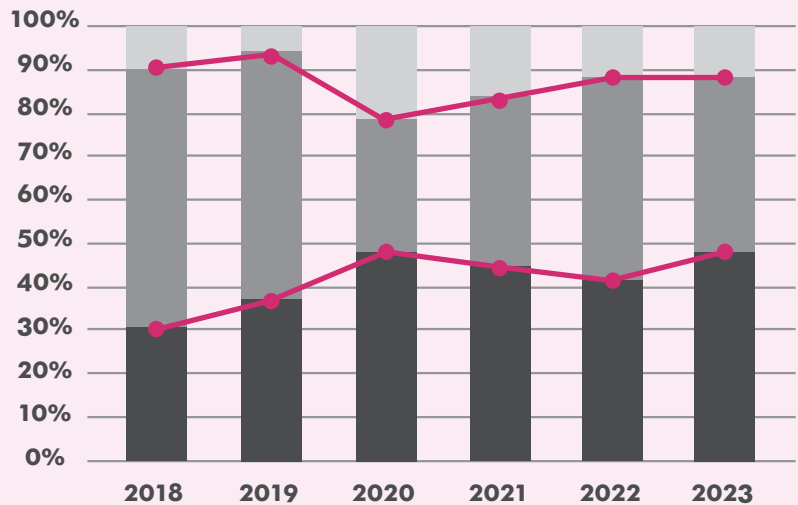
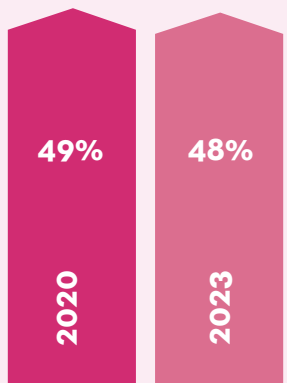
- South Australian Primary School

”

Two demand peaks for wellbeing support

2020
49% - urgent response to the immediate challenges of COVID and natural disasters.

2023
48% - the long tail of COVID playing out across Australian schools.



Intended primary student outcomes of Schools Plus applications

- Student wellbeing
- Academic outcomes
- Learning dispositions

ATTENDANCE ANXIETY AND ABSENTEEISM

The evidence provided to The Senate Education and Employment References Committee Inquiry¹⁰ by parents, education peak bodies, and mental health and education researchers reflects the trend we are seeing in schools' demand for support to manage rising absenteeism. Almost all parents who participated in the Senate Inquiry had also sought assistance from health service providers, including youth mental health services, paediatricians, psychiatrists, psychologists, and other therapists.

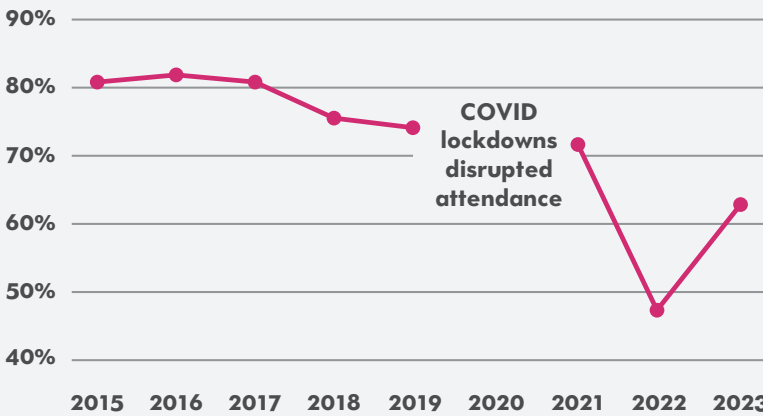
Children cannot learn if they are not engaging with their school and their educators, and the longer the disengagement, the longer the impact on children's wellbeing and future potential. One expert providing valuable insights into 'school refusal' is Associate Professor Glenn Melvin, a world-renowned child psychologist from Deakin University and Co-leader of Mental Health Care of SEED Lifespan. He says 'attendance anxiety' (a term he prefers over 'school refusal') is a physical manifestation of this rise in emotional distress among children. Anxiety around being at school – or being away from home – is also common. Associate Professor Melvin works closely with Associate Professor Lisa McKay-Brown, Learning Intervention expert in the Faculty of Education at the University of Melbourne, to research the impacts of unaddressed mental health and wellbeing issues among school children. Since 2016, they have been delving deep into the issue of attendance anxiety and the explosion of occurrence in schools since the pandemic and lockdowns.⁹

Each year from 2020 to 2023, an average of 24% of school applications cited absenteeism as impacting children's education and wellbeing.

National data clearly shows the steady decline in attendance. The recent Expert Panel report advising the National School Reform Agreement noted that attendance levels across Australia fell from 77.8% in 2015 to 73.1% in 2019 and then further, to 71.2% in 2021. In 2022, they dropped even further to 49.9% as schools reopened fully but COVID-related restrictions, high levels of illness and other factors such as anxiety bit.⁶ While attendance rates are recovering (see graph below showing NSW attendance), disadvantage again plays a negative role with a notable and ongoing attendance gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, and between students from metropolitan and remote locations.⁷

Student attendance level for all schools in NSW

Attendance level is defined as the proportion of full-time students in Years 1-10 whose attendance rate in Semester 1 is equal to or greater than 90%.



Source: ACARA - Student attendance in NSW schools 2015 - 2023.⁷

“

We have proven programs in place that increase literacy and numeracy skills, but the challenge is that the students who need these programs the most are the ones with poor attendance, so these programs are unable to gain any traction.

- Queensland Primary School

”

Educators from our school partners have identified the following drivers of children not wanting or not being able to attend school:

Family engagement

“Education is not always valued as a priority by some of our families, therefore making it difficult to engage parents and the community. As a result, there are high levels of absenteeism and negative behaviours, poor aspirations for the future and low rates of students completing Year 12.... we also have high levels of staff absenteeism due to staff managing their own wellbeing and constantly dealing with challenging behaviours in the classroom.”



Inadequate access to technology

“The current Year 9 student cohort hold the bulk of these [obsolete] iPads and are the group with the lowest attendance and engagement in this remote learning period - we believe as a direct result of this.”



Connection to school

“Every day counts when it comes to attendance, with a negative correlation between absence from school and achievement, which is cumulative and can affect academic outcomes in future years of schooling.”



Link to trauma and regulation of behaviour

“COVID, bushfires and drought in our area have created a series of factors for many of our students that has stalled their growth in learning and interrupted their ongoing connection with the school community. We understand the negative effects of these events will be with our community for a number of years and we want to act immediately, so we can begin to reduce any gap that is created between our non-disadvantaged and our disadvantaged students’ growth in learning.”



Inequity of access

“A large percentage of our Indigenous students do not have private transport, and regularly miss the school bus due to a variety of reasons. This has resulted in significantly lower academic outcomes for these students. Staff regularly collect students in their own vehicle, however there are often not enough seats to fit all of the students, requiring staff to make multiple trips.”



SCHOOLS PLUS’ STRATEGIC OBSERVATIONS

As an organisation partnering with over 150 school communities and receiving applications from 350 to 500 schools annually, Schools Plus can lay claim to a unique perspective on the needs and challenges of students, teachers and families and the interventions that best address them. These observations are drawn from the past decade of our work, including the analysis of nearly 2000 submissions for support since 2018.

OBSERVATION #1

There has never been a more urgent need to empower and resource schools to strengthen children’s social and emotional skills.

Our applications for bespoke initiatives in 2023 are proof points that our disadvantaged schools, across Australia, need well-resourced access to early intervention and prevention strategies. These are central to mitigating the potential lifelong impacts of unaddressed deteriorating wellbeing and mental health among disadvantaged students. We need to equip schools with the tools and resources that will allow them to effectively improve children’s social and emotional skills and address issues such as negative behaviour and school refusal.

In 2023:

- 49% of applications sought to improve children’s social and emotional skills in response to poor behaviours, anxiety and other social and emotional challenges. The greatest wellbeing issue facing disadvantaged schools right now is helping children regulate their behaviour and emotions, and to build healthy relationships with their peers, educators, families and carers.
- 36% wanted to support children’s emotional and cognitive engagement, while 15% wanted to improve students’ physical and mental health.



An estimated 30% to 65% of children who come to school have observed, or experienced, violence or drug or alcohol abuse. Trauma, violence and neglect have debilitating effects on self-regulation, behaviour control skills and academic learning.

- Western Australia Primary School



This is supported by evidence from leading researchers about thousands of young children affected by losing two years of social and emotional growth during lockdowns, or not developing those skills in the first place (in the case of young learners), as well as the general impact of disadvantage.⁸



In Australia, there are evidence-based parent resources for school refusal including a parenting guide and online modules for families struggling with school reluctance or refusal – but there is currently little available for schools.⁹

- Associate Professor Glenn Melvin - Deakin University



OBSERVATION #2

Teachers are not well equipped to support children’s mental health and wellbeing needs.

Educators, particularly those from disadvantaged school communities, are being stretched beyond their teaching duties. They are often required to have multiple roles including family therapist and crisis counsellor, for which they are inexperienced or have limited capacity and resources to do. They are increasingly being tasked with managing students with ever-increasing complex presentations of emotional and behavioural disorders.

There is a need to address this through improved professional development and for overwhelmed educators to be better supported through access to dedicated school-based resources to help triage and support children.

Of the wellbeing-focused applications in 2023:

- 71% sought support for professional development for teachers, particularly to help educators with their capacity and knowledge to better support children with their wellbeing needs.
- 73% proposed interventions running over three years, reflecting the complexity of the challenges and the length of time required to address them.

In a survey of teachers and principals conducted by Schools Plus during lockdowns in 2021, it was clear that unaddressed and declining mental wellbeing among students directly correlated to educators feeling overwhelmed and under-prepared to help. As a result, teacher wellbeing also suffered.

- 53% of teachers said they did not feel well equipped to deal with the complex challenges arising from children’s wellbeing and health issues.
- They identified the primary challenge as a lack of resources (time/staff/space) followed by inadequate access to support services.
- Only 39% of teachers said they were given adequate support to manage their own mental health and wellbeing.

Disengaged learners can contribute to educator stress and burnout. Increased learner engagement is expected to lead to improved educator wellbeing and job satisfaction, creating a positive classroom atmosphere.

- Collective of South Australian Schools

Teachers need to be upskilled and able to manage the diverse range of needs within classrooms.

- New South Wales Primary School

There are no Child and Parenting Family Centres that currently service our area. Parents are on extended waitlists, due to not being able to afford private services to help diagnose their children. This has an effect on our classrooms and the regulation of students can be challenging.

- Western Australia Primary School

OBSERVATION #3

The nature of interventions schools want to implement to improve children’s wellbeing are growing in sophistication and are more targeted. Schools are also seeking to introduce multi-tiered levels of support, not just for the students in need, but for professional development opportunities.

In our earlier years, a majority of requests from schools were holistic and more simplistic in their approach to improving children’s wellbeing, with proposed interventions such as sensory spaces and outdoor learning gardens.

Post 2020, the interventions proposed are more strategic, sophisticated, evidence-based and targeted. They also regularly take a multi-tiered approach. There will be an element of support that is put in place to elevate whole-school wellbeing (e.g. a resilience or mindfulness program), a more detailed level of activity and resources that target a higher at-risk cohort (such as these students with significant non-attendance or behavioural issues) and then a tier delivering a complex and highly personalised intervention to support students with very specific needs (e.g. urgent clinical support).

At the most sophisticated end of the spectrum of support and resources being created, schools are developing ‘wellbeing hubs’ and introducing a specific role of a ‘wellbeing navigator’ to ensure the needs of children and their families and teachers are being met.

We have observed increasingly sophisticated and multifaceted approaches being implemented by schools – a response to a growing need to navigate changing and complex wellbeing challenges. Where impactful, these approaches are nuanced to reflect the needs of the community, engage multiple stakeholders and importantly, are resourced.

- Bronwyn Burr, Leader - Evaluation and Impact, Schools Plus

Multi-tiered approach

When analysing the more complex issues schools are attempting to deal with, in terms of poor student mental health, behaviours, neurodiversity and attendance anxiety, we observed among the most effective were schools that adopted a multi-tiered approach.

This allows schools to better tailor resources and intervention programs for those students who need simple confidence and resilience building programs and to the more extreme cases of children experiencing family violence, neuro-disorders, self-harm and suicide ideation, classroom aggression and entrenched school refusal.

The Senate Education and Employment References Committee Inquiry into school refusal¹⁰ recommends using multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS)²³ for school refusal interventions. Whilst the inquiry was focused on helping schools and families overcome a child’s phobia of attending school, the principle can be adopted by schools to meet other wellbeing and mental health challenges.

OBSERVATION #4

Educators can be empowered through scaling successful projects and incorporating key characteristics for initiatives.

Schools should be at the centre of a whole-of-community solution, contributing to a vital and well-supported early intervention and prevention resource to help children, their families and carers to positively reconnect, and stay connected with the school experience.

Many of our schools are successfully navigating the multifaceted challenges of wellbeing and positively addressing absenteeism and school refusal challenges through targeted interventions, but there is a need for a more consistent and scalable approach to solutions that we know work in these disadvantaged contexts.

Schools Plus has already incubated several evidence-based pilots, and we believe some of these could be scaled nationally. Our recommendations for a nationally consistent but contextualised approach are outlined later in this report.

Whilst we are calling for a national approach, Schools Plus is conscious that each school community is unique and that implementation of these interventions could require tailoring to reflect different contexts.

We've identified the following characteristics as key to driving positive outcomes in student wellbeing.

Key characteristics of interventions driving positive student wellbeing



KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Through a decade of working on the ground with educators and trialling interventions with a diverse range of schools, Schools Plus has developed a unique lens over the strategies that are shifting the dial for children’s wellbeing. We have discovered commonalities in these strategies across the disadvantaged school context, and with a contextualised approach we believe these strategies are now ready to be scaled nationally to allow more children, families, carers and educators to benefit.

These strategies include:

1. Educator Professional Development and Wellbeing Learning Programs

Recommendation:

We recommend all educators in low-ICSEA schools have access to professional development programs tailored to understand how best to develop students’ social and emotional competencies and emotional and cognitive engagement in learning.

We also recommend that, where possible, these programs are implemented with contextually relevant approaches so that they meet the specific needs of each school community.

These might include a program like the one adopted in the Berry Street Education Model (see page 35), the engagement of expert consultants and/or combinations of both. These evidence-based professional development strategies can target entire cohorts of teachers, i.e. across whole school, stage or years or smaller groups focused on specific needs.

Schools Plus has an extensive network of educators who can contribute to a national conversation about children’s wellbeing. We stand ready to convene an expert panel of educators (from low-ICSEA schools) and mental health experts to help advise on national guidelines that would enable the contextualised roll-out of professional development to all disadvantaged schools.

This must be accompanied with funding from state and federal governments for professional development programs and toolkits, and be supported by adequate teacher release from face-to-face classroom duties to ensure educators can participate fully.

This has been recognised by the recent Independent Expert Panel’s Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System.⁶



In addition, the Panel heard that access to specialist staff, professional development, and evidence-based resources for staff, as well as better linkages between schools and allied services, can more effectively meet the wellbeing needs of students. For example, the presence of ‘wellbeing coordinators’, access to professional counselling and psychology services either inside or outside schools as appropriate, strategies to promote safe and inclusive environments, whole-of-school preventative approaches, and approaches to create positive cultures and environments provide possible ways to improve student wellbeing.



Schools Plus has captured the lived experience of schools and educators to highlight the impact of successful interventions.

Case study: Hill Top Primary School, New South Wales

Hill Top Primary School has a moral imperative to bring about positive outcomes for students and to support its families to break a cycle of disadvantage. As an aspirational community, Hill Top families truly value educational improvement, but the 2019-2020 bushfires and COVID threw a spotlight on the endemic challenges they face. Many students have lived through or are undergoing trauma, and these experiences manifest at school in inconsistent attendance, irregular behaviours, and low resilience, which in turn impacts their learning outcomes.

Hill Top recognised that the community already viewed the school as a hub where families could find guidance to care for their children and deal with trauma, and approached Schools Plus to establish a Wellbeing Professional Development project to embed trauma-informed teaching from Kindergarten to Year 6, supported by the school counsellor and wellbeing facilitator.

As a result of Schools Plus coaching and funding, in 2021–2022 all existing and newly appointed school staff were fully trained in the Berry Street Education Model, equipping them with strategies to enable students’ cognitive and behavioural change, and in doing so increasing student engagement and improving their learning outcomes. In addition to this, the school established a regular Seasons for Growth intake across the school, in which the school counsellor and wellbeing facilitator regularly meet with students who have been screened through existing learning and support team processes, thereby developing student strategies to deal with grief and increase their resilience.

Hill Top Primary School has placed trauma-informed practice as the core, consistent expectation in each classroom, benefiting every child and family within the school community. Establishing an all-staff uniform point of reference has enabled the school to have better quality conversations about how to support students collectively and as individuals. All staff, including office staff and learning and support officers, now have a shared understanding of trauma and the impact this has on the developing mind. The school describes the change as ‘transformational’ and is better equipped to deal with emergent behaviours with consistency.

This Schools Plus and Hill Top School initiative has had unexpected outcomes: significant support from the P&C community, and, after interruptions to learning following COVID lockdowns, several new enrolments. Families have enrolled children into the school specifically because they are drawn to a school culture that adopts trauma-informed practices throughout.

In taking a whole school/staff approach, Hill Top Primary School focused on supporting the development of their students’ social and emotional competencies, and emotional and cognitive engagement in learning. The school continues to build on the project’s success, allocating funding for new staff to be trained in the Berry Street Education Model, and refresher training for existing staff is written into the school’s ‘Strategic Improvement Plan.’ The school is strengthening their Seasons for Growth program, making it a regular intake in Terms 2, 3 and 4. Finally, they ensure that regular updates on positive behaviour education are shared on school social media for parents and community members and to keep the wider school community informed and engaged with Hill Top.

Case study: Ingleburn Primary School, New South Wales

Ingleburn Primary School has a vision to create an innovative and collaborative learning environment that empowers all students to become future-focused global citizens. As the lead school in a cluster of southwestern Sydney primary schools in a community of diverse cultural and sociodemographic backgrounds, Ingleburn knows the importance of enabling staff, students, and families to manage the behavioural challenges that many children present with at school. Together, these schools are working to build strategies to develop their youngest students’ self-regulation and social skills, recognising that these are key to preventing disciplinary consequences and improving learning outcomes.

When the Ingleburn cluster approached Schools Plus for support in 2020, they knew the value of Wellbeing Professional Development and an early intervention program at the Kindergarten - Year 2 stage that supports parents and teachers to align behavioural expectations at home and at school. Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT) is known to be one of the most effective programs for treating behavioural problems in young children, and recent evidence shows it also addresses a variety of common developmental and psychological problems. The schools’ pilot program was awarded a 2020 Secretary’s School Achievement Award from the Department of Education.

PCIT is innovative in its use of ‘bug in the ear’ technology to provide parents and teachers with real-time coaching from behind a one-way mirror (or directly in the classroom) as they interact in play-based activities with the student. Embedding the PCIT approach in each of the schools was made possible by the Ingleburn cluster’s partnership with Schools Plus, which funded this project from 2020 to 2023. Taking a co-design approach, Schools Plus coached the participating primary schools through the project’s design and implementation, developing a clear and shared vision for the scheme.

The project saw substantial achievements:

- 70 additional families enrolled in the PCIT program.
- Increase in teacher and staff attendance in PCIT sessions, with almost all staff across the cluster completing PCIT workshops for K–Year 2.
- Teacher training extended to online sessions for Year 3–6 teachers.
- Successful implementation of the PCIT program in the new Bankstown District Hub.

The PCIT program has empowered staff and parents with positive strategies, fostering students’ self-regulation and socio-emotional skills, and reducing disciplinary interventions. The project’s impact on student problem behaviours at home and at school has had broader implications for the school community, creating a calmer learning environment with fewer disruptions in class. Through these activities the cluster of schools has built strong and meaningful connections with their families and their communities, strengthening parents’ sense of connectedness to their school and improving parent-teacher relationships.

‘We wouldn’t be where we are today without PCIT,’ one grandmother said when asked about the impact of the program on her family. ‘It was hard at times, but we could see the changes each week and my granddaughter has come so far. She now shows affection and hugs to her younger sister, which she would never have done previously. We are very grateful for PCIT.’

Participating schools have welcomed additional unexpected outcomes of this project. The collaborative approach that this project has taken, supported by the engagement of expert consultants, has demonstrated the value of investing in school-led community development initiatives. Despite the challenges posed by COVID and lockdown, the program maintained success, building on new capabilities and capacity and identifying ways to adapt using technology, as well as engage in further outreach opportunities, including keynote talks and workshops. Preschool recruitment has expanded to four local preschools, and connections have been established with Albury–Wodonga Region school counsellors and principals to overcome access barriers.

Next steps for the program involve ensuring professional development for all staff with children enrolled in the PCIT program, potential extension of workshop training to all K-6 teachers, and continued efforts to improve engagement through strong links with local preschools and outreach to more schools.

Case study: The Entrance Public School, New South Wales

The four schools in this cluster at The Entrance are committed to helping their students achieve their potential, but in 2020 they recognised that a higher-than-expected number of children were affected by trauma, which impacted their learning outcomes, behaviours and relationships at school. They knew that schools that embrace a trauma-informed approach to learning have fewer critical incidents and suspensions, and an increase in attendance and educational outcomes. They also knew that primary students from trauma-sensitive schools continue to benefit from improved outcomes as they transition into high school and higher education.

With coaching and funding support from Schools Plus, the schools designed and implemented a phased and multifaceted Wellbeing Professional Development initiative involving whole school staff training, program implementation and community engagement. The initiative used the BRACE training model to transform all four schools into trauma-informed learning environments. BRACE emphasises Belonging, Routine, Attachment, Capacity, and Emotion as key components for creating a trauma-sensitive environment. This approach built on the welfare support already provided by community liaison officers, Aboriginal education officers, and chaplains. The three-year project was implemented in a phased approach across the schools and their communities and included:

- professional learning in the BRACE framework
- visits to schools to see BRACE in action
- attendance at a Trauma-Informed Practices Conference
- ICT skills development and collaboration meetings
- community engagement projects like the Active Afternoon Soccer Program, School Rebranding/Toolbox Project, The Anxiety Project, and The Fathering Project/Wholesome Food Collective

Benefiting 1700 students, schools have noted significant positive outcomes. There has been a considerable improvement in student attendance, engagement, and academic outcomes, reflecting a more supportive and inclusive learning environment. Students have reported an increased sense of belonging and advocacy within the school community, and students have been empowered to self-manage their emotions and reactions, equipping them with valuable skills for navigating future challenges they may face.

The implementation of trauma-informed practices has also significantly improved community engagement in the cluster schools. Notable impacts include increased attendance at school events, a reduction in parent complaints and negative social media commentary, heightened parent support for student attendance, and a surge in community involvement in volunteer programs. One parent said:

I have really enjoyed participating in the parent learning for The Anxiety Project. I love that parents are being included in the same learning as our children. It helps to be able to use the same language and techniques that are being taught at school.

These positive changes underscore the success of trauma-informed strategies in fostering a more supportive and connected environment between schools, parents, and the broader community. Staff share an enhanced confidence when managing challenging behaviours, and a visible increase in the consistency of practices has fostered greater collaboration across all four school settings.

Working with Schools Plus, The Entrance Wellbeing Professional Development project also fostered leadership growth among project staff, contributing to a more dynamic and responsive team. Successful engagement with families surpassed expectations, and the unforeseen challenges posed by COVID, and changes in staff and P&C leadership, required flexibility and adjustments in the project’s approach.

As each school continues to consolidate the success of this project, they have identified their next steps, which include increasing community involvement, the implementation of parent forums, and the continuation and adoption of community engagement projects like The Anxiety Project and The Fathering Project.



2. Wellbeing Navigators

Recommendation:

We recommend that every low-ICSEA school has access to a Wellbeing Navigator who holds the strategic responsibility within a school or across a cluster of schools to communicate internally and with families about wellbeing issues. This role should also connect children and families with allied health and specialist medical services in the community as required.

Educators struggle with competing demands on their time and the expertise required to meet specific wellbeing needs across the school community, especially if a child's emotional state is bordering on harmful behaviour such as classroom aggression, self-harming, deep anxiety, bullying or not coming to school at all.

Educators are not trained to navigate pathways to, and partner with, mental health and family support services beyond the classroom to connect a child and the family with the services they require.

In many instances, monitoring and managing student wellbeing has been addressed by schools with the engagement of a wellbeing liaison officer or school counsellor, but as is evident by our applications for support by principals, the escalating mental health demands of students from disadvantaged schools need earlier preventive and intervention strategies.

We recommend the introduction of a navigator role, which would play a variety of functions across a school or cluster of schools. The role would:

- facilitate improved communications amongst staff, families and the community.
- collaborate with health and allied health services on behalf of the school and individual students.
- be drawn from varied backgrounds, including former or current teachers, administrators, parents or allied health roles, and be trained with the relevant knowledge and skills to triage and escalate cases, as required. There is an opportunity to utilise psychology graduates as a ready-made and untapped workforce. Every year, 15,000 psychology students graduate but more than 93% are lost each year to the mental health sector.²⁴ With additional training, these psychologist graduates can then be deployed to disadvantaged school communities as a 'Wellbeing Navigator.'
- be an integral part of a school's wellbeing strategy and have clearly defined and communicated roles and responsibilities.

The role of a well-supported and resourced Wellbeing Navigator is well aligned to the recommendation in the final report recently released by the expert panel reviewing the National Disability Insurance Scheme²⁵ in particular, where it relates to children with neurodiversity challenges such as ADHD, ASD and anxiety. In that report, a similar 'Lead Practitioner' role is described.

“

Having a social worker to support our wellbeing team to work with our most vulnerable families has been a huge asset. They have been able to be that connection between the family and school that sits outside school leadership roles. Many families have not always had positive experiences with schools through their own experiences and their role has been able to build a greater connection.

- South Australian Primary School

”

“

NDIS review

Action 1.12: National Cabinet should agree to jointly invest in early supports for children with emerging development concerns and disability.

It should include support from a Lead Practitioner to help children who are not eligible for the NDIS to build their skills and participate in everyday activities. The Lead Practitioner should provide families with information about child development, building their confidence and knowledge to support their child in everyday routines. This should be in addition to the proposed capacity building program. It should also include implementing and evaluating a range of other early support models. The delivery of these early supports should be closely linked to and integrated with mainstream services, particularly education and early childhood services.²⁵

”

Case study: Elizabeth Vale Primary School, South Australia

The Elizabeth Vale Primary School community is strong, resilient and united, and committed to ensuring its students are provided with every opportunity to achieve their social, emotional and academic potential. Over 30 languages and/or dialects are spoken by students, and many feel the effects of long-term unemployment and its compounding economic disadvantage. Many students have experienced multiple traumas in their lives and present at school with complex vulnerabilities and additional needs.

Knowing that parents are the experts in their children’s needs and their community’s culture, the school reached out to Schools Plus to support a holistic solution to the question of community wellbeing. From 2019 to 2021, Schools Plus partially funded the Elizabeth Vale Community Connections Coordinator, which placed a dedicated role at the centre of Elizabeth Vale School’s Community Connections initiative. The aim of this Wellbeing Navigator function was to initiate and coordinate a range of strategies to empower children and their parents to have a voice.

The Community Connections Coordinator has raised awareness within the school community of the services, agencies, and recreational activities available to them, including health, education, and charity organisations, including Anglicare, Northern Homelessness and NDIS. By building relationships through community development, this has helped to increase student engagement and learning:

- A multi-cultural playgroup fosters children and parent engagement with school networks from birth, as well as cross-cultural connections with one another, allowing for a smoother transition to preschool for children and their families.
- Despite disruptions caused by COVID, in 2021, 53 referrals were made to community service providers. Through a partnership with One Sight, free eye checks were provided to 175 students and 24 students received glasses at no cost. Dental in Schools provided 86% of students with onsite dental services.
- Recognising the importance of food security for children, a breakfast club was developed, and food security networks accessed by children and their families. In 2021, One Box provided 50 boxes of food per week, and 80 boxes per week in 2022.
- A partnership with Playford Council’s Playford 10 program has developed student understanding of citizenship and how they can influence what happens in their local community.
- Cultural competency training and ongoing trauma-informed practice professional development for staff was facilitated. The school adopted a ‘cultural responsiveness’ ethos that underpins all school policy and operations.

Case study: The Gateway Learning Community, New South Wales

The Gateway Learning Community, comprised of six schools in the Hunter region, are dedicated to enhancing pre-kindergarten opportunities for vulnerable early learners and their families, many of whom have identified additional learning, social and emotional needs.

Research conducted in 2018 revealed a need to create closer, tighter and enhanced connections with the 35 early learning centres and the schools: data reflected that 31 of the early learning centres had children with identified additional learning and support needs starting kindergarten in 2019, however there was a disconnect about how to access transition to school support services, or who to contact at the locally zoned primary school to discuss the student and their needs. Feedback from the schools indicated that without adequate transitional support, the majority of Term 1 was spent supporting students to engage in basic functional skills, therefore impacting on time to engage successfully with the curriculum expectations of a functioning classroom environment.

In partnership with Schools Plus, the schools developed an innovative model to support students proactively and inclusively, underpinned by the core ideal that every child deserves a strong start to become a successful lifelong learner. Central to the model is a dedicated school-based Early Years Transition Support Teacher.

The function of this Wellbeing Navigator role is to act as a conduit between the schools and early learning centres, families, and relevant service providers. Flipping the traditional delivery model by working ‘outside the gates’, this role adopts an ‘over the fence’ approach that identifies and supports pathways for incoming kindergarten students who may have a range of developmental differences, disabilities, and multiple ‘at-risk’ vulnerabilities which impact their access and participation at school. The role works as part of a tight team, across sectors involving health, early intervention, family support, NDIS providers, local education office personnel, as well as school-based learning support teams. This links together community, local schools, and regional transition practices to streamline processes, support schools to champion for children and their families, and achieve outcomes that celebrate a successful working partnership.

The value of having a specialist teacher working across the whole of community has been proven repeatedly, with significant improvements in achieving the right outcomes to effectively support students with additional learning and support needs and a reduction in the numbers of children not identified prior to school who require support.

“
With the Transition Support Teacher, there is a far greater connection between us and the local schools and a stronger, genuine avenue to share information.
”

The transformative impact of the project has resulted in significant changes across the school cluster and extended beyond the immediate community with the model being successfully replicated in the Kurri Kurri and Cessnock areas. The clustering benefits of this Wellbeing Navigator role across neighbouring regions has been exponential, with connections made to over 145 services across the network. It has enabled participating schools to collaborate further, building effective processes and consistent practices that have greater collective strength across the wider networked community.

Schools Plus’ coaching has contributed to enhancing the leadership capacity of project team members, fostering a deeper understanding of departmental and community processes, protocols, and procedures for advancing successful projects. The project team has presented the model to multiple external teams and staff members, sharing knowledge to support other targeted early education and transition projects and forums.

Investment in this project has established the model as a sustainable and integral element of transition between early learning and kindergarten in the region. It has made significant advances in building sustainable partnerships to inclusively support families and children with developmental delays, differences, and disabilities to have a strong and successful start to school. The participating schools will continue to advocate for the recognition, funding, and adoption of the model across all school communities.

Case study: Lawnton State School, Queensland

In 2018, Lawnton State School, a primary school in the greater Brisbane area, partnered with Schools Plus on a single-school project to respond to chronic absenteeism. Working together, Lawnton and Schools Plus implemented a Student Engagement Officer (SEO) within the school, to improve student attendance. For the 100 students supported by the initiative that year, 70% achieved improved attendance, with a 53% sustained improvement in 2019. Recognising the very positive outcomes of the project for at-risk and disengaged students, the school has continued to sustain the role to the present year.

Absenteeism has short and long-term impacts. Short-term, it affects students' educational outcomes, their social learning and friendships, and it contributes to low self-esteem, anxiety and disruptive behaviour. The longer-term consequences of chronic absenteeism can include school detachment, reduced career pathways, financial difficulties, criminal behaviour and homelessness.

Lawnton's SEO, with a background in social work and strong networking skills, worked with Schools Plus for a second time to co-design and expand the project into three more schools. The project design included an ongoing training package and professional development workshops, peer supervision and modelling, as well as collaboration with school administration staff to develop their parent and community engagement framework.

In 2021, the impact of this Wellbeing Navigator function on a total of 132 students was transformational, with improvements in literacy and numeracy across all four schools:

- 75% of students had improved attendance.
- In a comparison of students' performance in the previous year, 24.3% improved in English and 17.3% improved in Maths in Semester 1, and 20.9% improved in English and 23% improved in Maths in Semester 2.
- Some of these students moved from being 'not assessable' in 2020 to an E, then a D or C, in 2021.
- Of surveyed parents, 90% said their child was happier to come to school, 80% said their child was more confident in themselves as a learner and 87% didn't ask to stay home as often as before.

One of the most significant learnings from the project is that absenteeism creates absenteeism: learning gaps give rise to anxiety, shame, and a loss of self-belief, which in turn leads to more absenteeism. Likewise, students who miss out on school-based social interactions find it harder to establish friendships, with missed opportunities extending outside of school. Without friendships as a motivator for school attendance, lonely children are more likely to ask to stay at home. The Lawnton Wellbeing Navigator reflected that, thankfully, the trend can - and has - been reversed because of this ongoing project: 'The more you go, the more you know, and the more you know, the more you go!'

The organic community building that occurred was an unexpected project outcome:

- Supported students began volunteering for school leadership roles.
- Supported parents helped each other by collecting each other's children for school.
- Local churches supported parents independently of the school, with food, uniforms, and school supplies.
- A significant number of referrals were made by Wellbeing Navigators to the local family and child connect services.

Schools Plus' support was critical to this 2021-2022 cluster project: without it, Lawnton would not have had the funding to oversee the establishment of a similar role in each of the participating schools. Whilst following the Lawnton model, the Wellbeing Navigator roles in each school are an integral part of each school's wellbeing strategy, with clearly defined and communicated responsibilities. For the four schools involved, three have retained their SEO in 2022, funded from their own budgets - a testament to the success of the project. The North Coast Regional office have acknowledged the outcomes at a regional level and the Lawnton SEO has moved into a new position to support and mentor other schools to improve attendance, with 14 schools currently operating with a SEO.



3. School-based ‘Live Well, Learn Well’ Hubs

Recommendation:

We recommend the establishment of a network of wellbeing hubs, that we have termed ‘Live Well, Learn Well’ hubs. These hubs will be the focal point for all wellbeing and mental health services. These hubs should be onsite or virtual, to service a single school or multiple schools within the area.

Many children and their families lack access to professional health services due to their socioeconomic circumstances, their location and capacity to navigate the health system.

The establishment of hubs will provide connections for families to access the services and support they need to enable their children to thrive. Some of these needs are school attendance specific. Others are more generally aimed at improving access to mental health support and early intervention and prevention strategies through engaging with speech and occupational therapists, social workers, GPs, nurses, etc.

The ‘Live Well, Learn Well’ school hubs will also be the home of the ‘Wellbeing Navigator’, and also serve to test state-of-the-art digital platforms to promote positive wellbeing to the children and support interaction between the school, their families and the local communities.

Importantly, for governments and for the ongoing improvement of these school-based wellbeing initiatives, the ‘Live Well, Learn Well’ school hubs will develop a data capture mechanism to evaluate and further tailor early intervention programs that work specifically for that school community.

These hubs are closely aligned to the recommendations made in the Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System by the Panel informing on the National Schools Reform Agreement which named wellbeing as one of the three priority areas.⁶

The Panel was told that far too many students do not come to school ready to learn because they face difficulty in navigating and accessing the services they need to effectively engage in their education. They have recommended action to strengthen connections between schools and community services to support schools to better connect students to a wide range of community and health services (including allied health services so important to learning, like speech and occupational therapists). The Panel’s Report highlighted the success of ‘full-service school’ models in strengthening connections between schools and services and

recommend that such models be more widely implemented in the most disadvantaged communities. There are many models of full-service schools that aim to work in partnerships with health and community services - importantly, the Panel emphasised that these schools should not take on the funding and delivery of all services or be used to ‘cost shift’ from other portfolios into education, and should be cognisant of workforce pressures across the education, health and community sectors.

The hubs would also address a problem identified by the NDIS Review Expert Panel which found that the ‘inadequacy of mainstream and foundational supports outside the NDIS results in poor outcomes for families and children and drives many to seek access to the NDIS because there is nowhere else to go.’²⁵

Whilst we advocate for a nationally consistent response by Government, we again recommend that the hub model will need to be tailored to ensure disadvantaged schools can meet the specific needs of their students.

Case Study: Berri Regional Secondary College, South Australia

Berri Regional Secondary College and the local community are united in their vision to develop and improve connections between the school and community, to improve the learning and life outcomes of their students, and to benefit and build the whole community.

In 2022 the school’s dual campus consolidated and welcomed Year 7 students for the first time. This transition coincided with external factors relevant to students’ wellbeing, including the 2022–2023 River Murray flood event, which had an unprecedented impact on local homes, businesses, and infrastructure. This was exacerbated by the changing demographic of the community as many new families moved to the region seeking affordable housing, intensifying the existing rental crisis. Additionally, students did not feel a sense of ‘normality with learning’ since COVID.

With the aim of developing long-term, sustainable improvements in students’ wellbeing and mental health, critical for a successful and thriving community, the College set out to develop a Wellbeing Hub with a ‘Doctors on Campus’ initiative and a mentoring and volunteering scheme. Partnering with Schools Plus provided funding and coaching support that was critical to establishing the project.

‘Doctors on Campus’ has established partnerships with two external providers to deliver medical and psychology appointments on site. With approximately 100 students accessing appointments since Doctors on Campus began, this initiative demonstrates the benefits of bringing services directly to students, and the value of providing healthcare to families without the means to access these services independently. The school has seen non-attenders come onto the campus to access appointments, and families of disengaged children now view the school as nurturing and supporting their children beyond the classroom. Several students have been referred to additional support services after attending appointments: two students are now safely living out of domestic violence homes and one student, after working with the psychologist to overcome a complex trauma background, ranked in the top four of SACE results at the school.

“
Having access to a wellbeing team and a school Psych means that my family doesn’t need to pay for these things. If they had to pay, we couldn’t afford it and I wouldn’t be able to get the help I need.
”

The employment of a part-time Community Connections Coordinator, providing a dedicated resource to initiate and manage mentoring and volunteering opportunities for students within the community, has contributed to the success of the Wellbeing Hub. This joint initiative between the school, Our Town Berri and Volunteering SA/NT, was the first in South Australia. This approach has facilitated volunteer opportunities for students with approximately 45 community organisations including aged care, primary schools and childcare, charities, Land Care, and the local council. More than 60% of all students volunteered throughout 2023, achieving over 4000 volunteer hours. Over 50 students have used volunteering to contribute to their SACE, and 70% of First Nations students have engaged with the program.

As a result, the school has seen improved attendance, wellbeing, and engagement at school, and ‘unbelievable’ community engagement with the program. There has been significant improvement in attendance data when students volunteer, as well as a 7% improvement in overall happiness, an 11% increase in resilience, and an 8% decrease in worry with identified cohorts since 2022. The project has changed the perception of young people in the town, with community members seeing students making a positive contribution to the region.

Defined by a clear vision and leadership at the school and community level, this student-centred, multifaceted, and layered Wellbeing Hub model has been recognised by the Department for Education, Members of Parliament and featured in local media.

Schools Plus and the school are committed to continued improvement, moving towards an embedded and sustainable model that can be supported by the school and community in the long-term. Two local primary schools are keen to join forces on the volunteering program, and expanding this initiative to other sites will further embed and sustain this cultural shift in the community.



Case study: Melaleuca Park Primary School, South Australia

Ben*, Year 1, was finding it difficult to get to his primary school in Mount Gambier, and was frequently absent, which was having a significant impact on his learning outcomes. He and his Mum live a long way from school, and she doesn't drive. Ben's Mum has several health conditions, so she finds it difficult to accompany him on the bus. Ben's Dad lives separately, working long hours, so he can't help with transport. Ben and his family met with the social worker from the Mount Gambier cluster Wellbeing Hub to create a school attendance plan together. The social worker arranged for a school staff member to meet Ben off the bus each morning, alleviating his Mum's worries about getting him to school safely. The social worker also wrote to Housing SA to support the family's request to move close enough to school to allow Ben to walk. By Term 4, Ben only had four days off school due to illness, compared with 27 days absence in Term 2, giving him the opportunity to improve his learning outcomes. Without the additional burden of taking him into school each day, his Mum's health has also improved.

Ben is just one of many children who has benefited from the proactive social work services offered through the partnership between Schools Plus and three schools in this South Australian cluster, which began with the lead school, Melaleuca Park in 2022 and expanded to two further primary schools, Mount Gambier North and Mulga Street Primary School in 2023. The social work services complement onsite Wellbeing Hubs which connect families and carers of highly disengaged students from vulnerable and traumatised backgrounds to services like NDIS, DHS and Mission Australia.

The social work support is highly contextualised, responsive and multifaceted, providing both incidental and planned case management support aimed at improving the attendance, wellbeing and learning outcomes of the schools' most at-risk students. It is enhanced by consultation with teachers to support their capacity and capability to meet the needs of their students, and partnerships with existing site-based wellbeing leaders and pastoral care workers to deliver 'joined up' interventions to support both students and their families. By taking this approach, stronger relationships and connections between families, schools and services are formed, and the Wellbeing Hub teams can provide additional services to students and their families, such as food, clothing, and homewares at low or no cost, and information sessions on child development.

With the integration of social workers and more teachers actively using agreed strategies within their learning space:

- Melaleuca Park, Mount Gambier North and Mulga Street Primary Schools have all seen a decline in the number of students requiring a targeted social and emotional intervention.
- In 2023, 49 students and 31 families engaged with the social worker at Melaleuca Park resulting in a significant reduction in total days absent, from 337 in Term 1 to 293 at the end of Term 3 (or 13% increase in attendance) as well as unexplained absences, from 92 in Term 1 to 23 by the end of Term 3 (or 75% improvement in unexplained absences). 77% of these families are also currently accessing the school's Hub for services and support, which includes Foodbank.

- In the most recent Wellbeing and Engagement Collection Survey, 86% of students at Melaleuca Park reported they have an important adult they can go to at school, an increase of 7% from the year before. Mulga Street Primary School and Mount Gambier North Primary School also reported 7% and 11% increases in this same data set, as compared to 2022.
- Since mid-2023, the on-site social worker has worked with 39 students and 27 families across the two additional schools, providing case management support to some of the school's most at-risk students and complex families.

Additionally, at-risk families are also starting to develop the knowledge and confidence they need to self-navigate the systems and support available to them, teachers' efficacy and wellbeing is strengthening, and increased capability and capacity is supplementing services across the community. This was highlighted by Principal Consultant, the Department for Education in South Australia who reflected:

While we have a model of service provision across the community, our ability to forge trusting family-school-community relationships, via on-site school service, has been an absolute game changer. Walking alongside and being partners in learning with our complex families has resulted in improved connectedness, student attendance, family and students' sense of belonging, and students' academic self-concept. How students see themselves and manage themselves is an extremely strong driver of achievement.

Melaleuca Park Primary School was one of eight schools in Australia to receive an excellence award in the 2021 Australian Education Awards, in the category of Best School Strategic Plan. The social worker was also recognised at the 2021 Public Education Awards with the Community Engagement Award, in recognition for her work with families.

*Name has been changed

Case study: Biraban Public School, New South Wales



This link to outside agencies to support speech is critical in our school, especially in those low socio-disadvantaged communities because you know the results that we're seeing are exceptional, they wouldn't have before we had access to Schools Plus funding.

....having that different voice with a different expertise to change the mindset of teachers....

...issues within the classroom decreased significantly in terms of engagement and disruption to learning. So, by reducing that by 42%, that was increased learning time for all the students. They're on task, you know, and so it's just a totally different classroom environment.

It's impacting students, but it's also empowering our parents and giving them access to services that they didn't know they could access.

- Principal, Biraban Public School





CONCLUSION

The wellbeing of children and young people – and how it supports their ability to learn at school – could not be more critical to Australia’s future.

Yet, as this report shows, poor student wellbeing is a rapidly-growing problem in our most vulnerable communities. Exacerbated by COVID and natural disasters, it is showing up in classrooms and playgrounds in the form of negative behaviour, learning disengagement and an inability to form relationships. At its most extreme, poor wellbeing is one of a host of complex reasons a rising number of students are not showing up to school at all.

For some time, schools have needed to support more than just children’s academic outcomes – now, educators are frequently asked to help identify, manage and mitigate the wellbeing and mental health challenges amongst their students. Many don’t feel adequately equipped to do so. They want and need greater resources and training so they can do more to help children overcome the adversity they face – poverty, anxiety, familial distress, violence, natural disasters and global economic and health challenges.

Over the past decade, Schools Plus has partnered with schools across the country to implement sustainable and successful initiatives that can – and will – have a lasting and positive impact on students’ wellbeing. Through these interventions, some of our most at-risk children have now re-engaged with school as confident and committed young learners. Their future is brighter as a result.

In this report, we have identified three key policy recommendations that – if expanded to more disadvantaged schools – we know will lead to improved children’s wellbeing and learning outcomes and all the benefits that delivers for individuals and society. These interventions are not one-size-fits-all, but share common characteristics and can be adjusted and contextualised to meet communities’ unique needs.

We call on governments and the philanthropic community to work with us to scale these interventions to a significantly greater number of schools.

It is a vital step to ensure every child has every opportunity to learn, grow and build a healthy foundation for lifelong success.

APPENDIX A

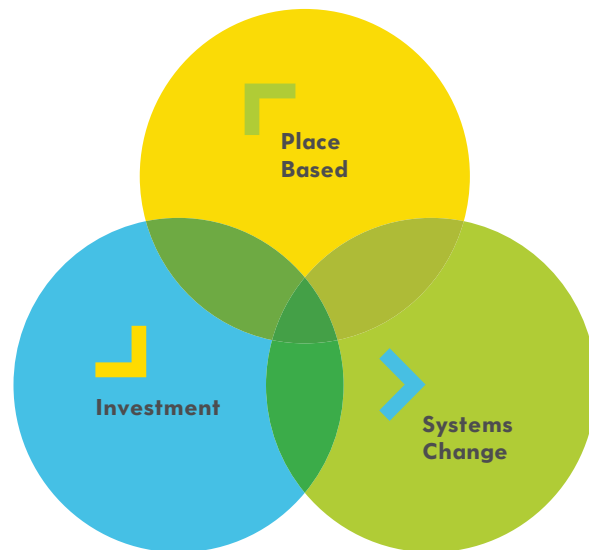
METHODOLOGY

This report draws on the analysis of multiple sources of data and other information. They include:

- Qualitative and quantitative data from 1982 applications - submitted by schools with an ICSEA value below 1000 - to Schools Plus between 2018 and 2023. In these applications, schools nominate their greatest need and request support for a specific intervention to address that need.
- Qualitative and quantitative data from 163 projects focused on improving children’s wellbeing between 2020 and 2023.
- Qualitative data and quotes from applications, completed projects and interviews with principals to convey the lived experience of educators and students.
- A survey of principals conducted by Schools Plus in 2021 during COVID lockdowns.
- External data and reports from respected organisations (including the federal government) in education and children’s mental health and wellbeing.

SCHOOLS PLUS’ SUPPORT MODEL

Our model combines three interdependent components that work together to drive change.



1. Place-based approach

We take a place-based and community led approach to target the unique needs of children within a specific community. We engage a broad range of stakeholders including teachers, health practitioners and families to be active participants in the development and implementation of interventions, because we know it is the community that knows its children best.

2. Investment to effect change

We support school communities with critical resources that help them to effect change. This includes funding to help access physical and professional resources as well as coaching to enable the project’s successful implementation and evaluation.

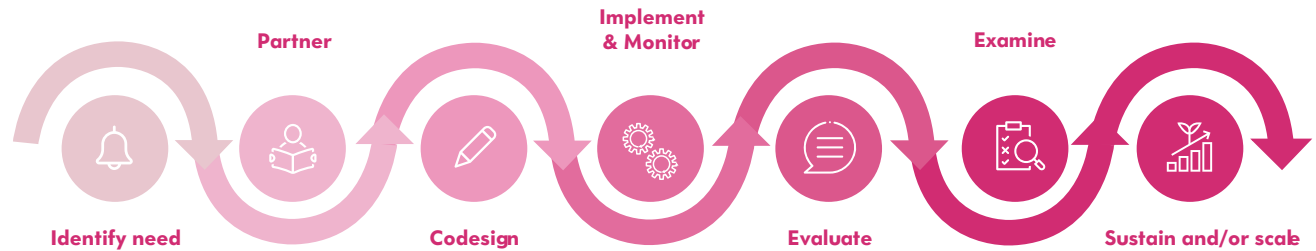
We have a group of 27 expert coaches with backgrounds in education, school leadership and coaching that empower school project teams to elevate their projects and foster meaningful and sustainable change for their students and communities. They help schools to strategically design, implement and measure the progress and impact of their projects while strengthening the capacity of school leaders to lead and adapt to change. Our coaches meet with schools on a quarterly basis though a mix of onsite and online sessions.

3. Influencing systems change

Some of our larger-scale projects are now playing a key role in influencing systems change at a sector level with some projects incubated by Schools Plus expanding and scaling into mainstream educational programs.

APPENDIX B

SCHOOLS PLUS’ PARTNERSHIP CYCLE



Identify Need:

Taking into account the local context, schools identify a key need and intervention to improve outcomes for their students.

Partner:

Schools apply to partner with Schools Plus for single or multi-year, and receive funding, coaching and evaluation support.

Co-design:

Schools and coaches co-design a plan including key goal, strategies and measures to address identified challenges - informed by local context, research and evidence.

Implement & Monitor:

Schools implement and collect information to track progress using Schools Plus’ project planning tools and evaluation framework. Coaches provide guidance and enhance project teams’ capacity and capabilities.

Evaluate:

Schools systematically evaluate what works and what doesn’t during and at the end of the project and report to Schools Plus.

Examine:

Using this evidence, project stakeholders analyse the results and make informed recommendations to improve current and future projects. This in turn contributes to broader education policy and practice.

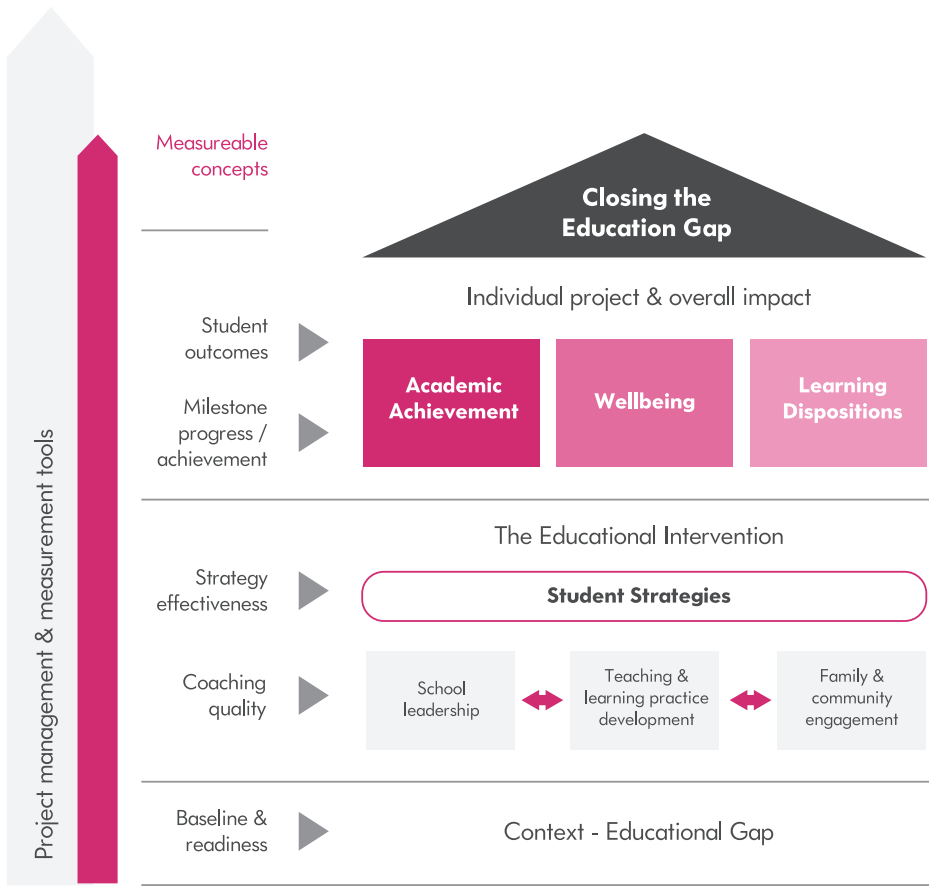
Sustain and/or scale:

At the conclusion, the school is in a strong position to sustain and/or scale the change.

APPENDIX C

SCHOOLS PLUS’
FRAMEWORKS

Conceptual
Framework



Student
Outcome
Framework



APPENDIX D

REFERENCES

1. Gonski D, Boston K, Greiner K, Lawrence C, Scales B, Tannock P. Review of Funding for Schooling – Final Report 2011. [Internet] Canberra (AU): Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations; 2011 Dec [cited 2024 Apr 11]. Available from: <https://www.education.gov.au/school-funding/resources/review-funding-schooling-final-report-december-2011>

2. Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. Guide to understanding 2012 Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage (ICSEA) values March 2013. [Internet]. ACARA; 2013 [cited 2024 Apr 18]. Available from: https://docs.acara.edu.au/resources/Guide_to_understanding_2012_ICSEA_values.pdf

3. Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership Limited. Australian Teacher Workforce Data - National Trends Teacher Workforce [Internet]. AITSL; 2023 Jun [cited 2024 Apr 23]. Available from: <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/research/australian-teacher-workforce-data/publications-and-data-tools/national-trends-teacher-workforce>

4. Jason Clare MP Minister for Education – Member for Blaxland. National Action Plan on Teacher Shortage [Internet]. 2022 [cited 2024 May 6] Available from: <https://jasonclare.com.au/media/portfolio-media-releases/5170-national-action-plan-on-teacher-shortage/>

5. National Mental Health Commission. The National Children’s Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy. [Internet]. National Mental Health Commission; 2021 [cited 2024 Apr 12]. Available from: <https://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-04/the-national-children-s-mental-health-and-wellbeing-strategy.pdf>

6. O’Brien L, Paul L, Anderson D, Hunter J, Lamb S, Sahlberg. Improving Outcomes for All: The Report of the Independent Expert Panel’s Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System. [Internet]. Department of Education; 2023 [cited 2024 Apr 11]. Available from: <https://www.education.gov.au/review-inform-better-and-fairer-education-system/resources/expert-panels-report>

7. Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. National Report on Schooling in Australia – Student Attendance 2023. [Internet]. Sydney (AU): ACARA; 2023 [cited 2024 Apr 12]. Available from: <https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia/student-attendance>

8. Turner Institute for Brain and Mental Health, Monash University. The urgent need to secure the future of the ‘post-pandemic child’ [Internet]. Monash University; 2023 Nov 28 [cited 2024 Apr 12]. Available from: <https://www.monash.edu/turner-institute/news-and-events/latest-news/2023-articles/the-urgent-need-to-secure-the-future-of-the-post-pandemic-child>

9. McKay-Brown L, The University of Melbourne & Melvin G, Deakin University. School refusal needs a national response [Internet]. The University of Melbourne – Pursuit; 2023 Aug 21 [cited 2024 Apr 12]. Available from: <https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/school-refusal-needs-a-national-response>

10. The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia. The Senate Education and Employment References Committee: The national trend of school refusal and related matters. [Internet]. Canberra (AU): The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia; 2023 Aug [cited 2024 Apr 15]. Available from: https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Education_and_Employment/SchoolRefusal/Report

11. Hunter J, Parkinson N. The new NAPLAN results are a wake-up call [Internet]. Grattan Institute; 2023 Aug 23 [cited 2024 Apr 15]. Available from: <https://grattan.edu.au/news/the-new-naplan-results-are-a-wake-up-call>

12. Department of Social Services. Draft National Autism Strategy 2024. [Internet] Canberra (AU): Department of Social Services; 2024 [cited 2024 Apr 11]. Available from: <https://engage.dss.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/draft-national-autism-strategy.pdf>

13. Commonwealth of Australia, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. Working together to deliver the NDIS - Independent Review into the National Disability Insurance Scheme: Final Report 2023. [Internet] Canberra (AU): NDIS Review Panel; 2023 Oct [cited 2024 Apr 11]. Available from: <https://www.ndisreview.gov.au/resources/reports/working-together-deliver-ndis>

14. Council of Australian Governments Education Council. The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration 2019. [Internet] Melbourne (AU): Council of Australian Governments Education Council; 2019 [updated 2020 Feb 18; cited 2024 Apr 11]. Available from: <https://www.education.gov.au/alice-springs-mparntwe-education-declaration/resources/alice-springs-mparntwe-education-declaration>

15. Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership Limited. The Impact of COVID-19 on Teaching in Australia: A literature synthesis June 2021. [Internet]. AITSL; 2021 Jun [cited 2024 Apr 23]. Available from: https://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/research-evidence/impact-of-covid-19-literature-synthesis.pdf?sfvrsn=7abdac3c_2

16. Ofei-Ferri S, Collier A., Lind R, Griffiths K. Student wellbeing data and measurement in Australia. [Internet]. Australian Education Research Organisation; 2023 Aug [p6. cited 2024 Apr 15]. Available from: <https://www.edresearch.edu.au/resources/student-wellbeing-data-and-measurement-australia>

17. Goss P. Education – Student mental health and wellbeing matters [Internet]. Grattan Institute; 2019 [cited 2024 May 6]. Available from: <https://grattan.edu.au/news/mental-health-and-wellbeing-matters/>

18. Goodsell B, Lawrence D, Ainley J, Sawyer M, Zubrick SR, Maratos J. 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. [Internet]. Perth (AU): Graduate School of Education, The University of Western Australia; 2017 Dec [cited 2024 Apr 15]. Available from: <https://youngmindsmatter.telethonkids.org.au/siteassets/media-docs---young-minds-matter/childandadolescentmentalhealthandeducationaloutcomesdec2017.pdf>

19. University of South Australia. Poor report card for children’s wellbeing [Internet]. University of South Australia; 2023 Aug 23 [cited 2024 Apr 15]. Available from: <https://www.unisa.edu.au/media-centre/Releases/2023/poor-report-card-for-childrens-wellbeing>

20. O’Connor M, Lange K, Olsson CA, Goldfeld S - The Melbourne Children’s COVID Governance Committee, and the LifeCourse cohort Investigators. Mental health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic for children and young people: Insights to date from the Melbourne Children’s LifeCourse Initiative. [Internet]. Parkville, Victoria: Murdoch Children’s Research Institute, The Royal Children’s Hospital, University of Melbourne Department of Paediatrics; 2022 Dec 1 [cited 2024 Apr 19]. Available from: https://www.mcric.edu.au/images/documents/migrate/MCRI_5_ResearchBriefdoc_LifeCourse_final.pdf

21. Queensland Family & Child Commission. Inquiry into social isolation and loneliness in Queensland Submission August 2021. [Internet]. QFCC; 2021 Aug [cited 2024 Apr 16]. Available from: <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-06/Community%20Support%20and%20Services%20Committee%20Inquiry%20into%20Social%20Isolation%20and%20Loneliness%20in%20Queensland.pdf>

22. Elder J. Wellbeing - Lockdown fallout: Young kids lacking the social skills needed for better mental health. The New Daily [Internet]. 2022 Jun 21 [cited 2024 Apr 16]: Life – Health. Available from: <https://www.thenewdaily.com.au/life/health/2022/06/20/mental-health-kids-lockdowns>

23. Kearney CA, Graczyk PA. Multi-tiered systems of support for school attendance and its problems: An unlearning perspective for areas of high chronic absenteeism. Front. Educ [Internet]. 2022 Sep 20 [cited 2024 Apr 18];7(2504-284X). Available from: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/educ.2022.1020150/full>

24. Turner Institute for Brain and Mental Health, Monash University. Turner Institute welcomes mental health workforce reform [Internet]. Monash University; 2023 May 17 [cited 2024 Apr 19]. Available from: <https://www.monash.edu/turner-institute/news-and-events/latest-news/2023-articles/turner-institute-welcomes-mental-health-workforce-reform>

25. Commonwealth of Australia, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. Working together to deliver the NDIS - Independent Review into the National Disability Insurance Scheme Final Report 2023 – Part one: A unified system of support for people with disability [Internet] Canberra (AU): NDIS Review Panel; 2023 Oct [cited 2024 Apr 11]. Available from: <https://www.ndisreview.gov.au/resources/reports/working-together-deliver-ndis/part-one-unified-system-support>



Schools Plus

Every child has the right to
the same opportunities

Contact Us

T 02 8880 0296

E info@schoolsplus.org.au

W schoolsplus.org.au