

Findings and recommendations

The following findings and recommendations provide the starting point for an ongoing approach to building a community that values education and works together to build a system that is respectful, inclusive, dynamic and responsive to the needs of children and young people to achieve positive education outcomes to the best of every child's ability.

The findings and recommendations encapsulate the nine factors children and young people identified as influencing their engagement. As such, the recommendations focus on strengthening supportive relationships and addressing circumstances that impede engagement, with action required across all levels of the education system.

Finding 1

The views of WA school students are an invaluable but underutilised resource that provides an opportunity to challenge our approaches and beliefs regarding education and continually improve our practice.

Their voice will be critical in understanding if we have made progress, and undertaking a regular dialogue with students will be important to developing an ongoing, collaborative relationship between schools and students.

The National School Opinion Survey (NSOS) collects information from students, staff and parents on a regular basis and is an important repository of information that could be used to guide individual schools and systems level policy and practice.

Recommendation 1

- a) The Minister for Education review the way NSOS data is used and reported on to monitor the implementation and effectiveness of policy and practice at a school level across WA.
- b) Governing authorities report on aggregated NSOS data relevant to the school sector in the annual reporting framework to monitor trends over time.
- c) Schools demonstrate via their annual reports the actions they will take as a result of the NSOS survey of student's responses.

Finding 2

Aboriginal students identified a number of areas that hinder engagement in their education and learning. The nature and quality of relationships with teachers and peers, the availability of support for learning and personal health problems, particularly difficulties with mental health, emerged as areas where many Aboriginal students experienced greater challenges than their non-Aboriginal peers.

Recommendation 2

Governing authorities review and evaluate the implementation of cultural frameworks for supporting Aboriginal students across schools in WA and report publically on the findings.

Finding 3

The foundations of a student's engagement are primarily based on the quality of relationships they have with teachers, school staff and other students.

Relationships with teachers emerged as the most significant foundational factor, even suggesting this to be a protective factor for students who had difficulties with family or peer relationships. Students acknowledged they had an important role to play in developing positive, respectful relationships with teachers, and also wanted teachers to treat students with respect.

The importance of having friends and positive relationships with other students was identified as a foundational element for engagement for any child or young person. Students looked to teachers to help students foster and maintain friendships with other students and build their resilience to bullying and adverse experiences.

Students called for teachers to be skilled not only in their subject matter but also in their ability to be able to develop positive and constructive relationships with students.

Recommendation 3

The governing authorities review the use of strategies and resources, such as the Australian Government's Student Wellbeing Hub, available to develop positive and respectful relationships across a school environment and report on the uptake, implementation and effectiveness across WA schools.

Recommendation 4

Schools be resourced to implement a whole-of-school approach to improve student-peer and student-teacher relationships and monitor and report annually on the strategies and outcomes of the approach. NSOS survey results or other such mechanisms be used to monitor and report on these relationships.

Recommendation 5

Governing authorities incorporate staff selection criteria addressing personal characteristics such as the value that teacher and student support candidates place on the development and maintenance of positive, respectful student-staff and parent-staff relationships into recruitment and selection processes.

Recommendation 6

Universities review current teacher training curriculums/course content in undergraduate and postgraduate degrees with regard to a clear expectation of teacher requirements to include strong interpersonal skills with a desire to build positive relationships with students and parents. This should be incorporated into practical development and assessment.

Finding 4

Children and young people involved in the consultation valued the role that parents or guardians and their broader families played in their learning. The ability of parents or guardians and broader families to understand the significance of a balanced approach to schooling, in particular homework, was significant to students.

Students recognised that those students who do not have supportive families needed extra assistance provided through the school to address their disadvantage.

Recommendation 7

Governing authorities and other parent program providers support schools in accessing information for parents and guardians on how to support their children in their learning, such as the Australian Government's Student Wellbeing Hub website.

Recommendation 8

Governing authorities monitor and report on the effectiveness of reporting procedures and communication processes with students and parents employed by schools to ensure maximum effectiveness. NSOS data or other such mechanisms be used to monitor this.

Finding 5

The role of teachers in providing a stimulating and positive learning environment was, unsurprisingly, critical to students' school and learning experiences.

Schools offering a wide range of learning activities and demonstrating the relevance of the curriculum to students' life outside of school and their future aspirations were seen as positively influencing engagement, particularly in the high school years.

Importantly, practical, hands-on learning tasks and opportunities for physical activity were seen as highly positive by male and female students alike.

In addition, when teachers were fair to all, had clear expectations and provided a safe and consistent learning environment, students stated they were more motivated and positive towards learning.

More than half of the participating students reported 'at least some of the time' not getting the help that they need to complete their school work and this has a significant influence on their indicators of engagement.

Recommendation 9

Federal and State Ministers for Education review the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians with regard to ensuring the relevance of curriculum and other aspects of education meet the contemporary needs of students.

Recommendation 10

Governing authorities review the mechanisms for monitoring the provision of support to students who require assistance to complete their school work and develop strategies to ensure that such assistance is provided. NSOS data or other such mechanisms be used to monitor and report on this.

Finding 6

Feeling safe at school was a key issue nominated by children and young people as something that schools should address as a matter of priority. Students who reported positive relationships with other students and with teachers were more likely to report feeling safe at school. Students with disability or long-term health conditions were more likely to report feeling unsafe at school and worried about issues such as bullying.

In addition to relationships, safety was impacted by the physical environment, school culture and approaches to responding to instances of bullying, such as consistency of response and modelling of respectful behaviours by teachers and school staff.

Recommendation 11

Governing authorities review and report on the resourcing, support and ongoing monitoring of the implementation of child safe policy and practice, and positive behaviour management across all schools in WA.

Recommendation 12

All schools implement the principles and practices of child safe organisations, underpinned by their own child safe policy. NSOS or other surveying of students should be used to monitor students reporting of safety at school on an ongoing basis.

Finding 7

Feeling supported to address personal problems and challenges, and feeling physically and mentally well was also important to students being able to attend, participate and achieve at school.

Physical and mental health has an impact across a range of engagement factors. There appears to be an under-diagnosis of physical and mental ill-health in schools, particularly for Aboriginal students, which warrants further investigation.

All students with a physical or mental health issue should have access to appropriate levels of support from schools to identify and manage the issue and reduce the impact of the issue on their engagement with school and learning.

Recommendation 13

Relevant governing authorities and key stakeholders work with the Commissioner for Children and Young People to review and develop a best practice model/s for implementation of social and personal support within schools.

Recommendation 14

The Department of Education commission a research project to investigate across all school sectors the apparent under-diagnosis of health conditions and the impact on students.

Endnotes

- 1 The information and recommendations in this report apply to government and non-government schools. The term 'governing authority' is used to describe the decision-making bodies that have oversight of the education system in WA and includes the Department of Education in its recently amalgamated form and, where separate governance is responsible, the Catholic Education Office, the Association of Independent Schools WA and individual governing bodies of independent schools.