

AERO's submission to the Review to inform a better and fairer education system

August 2023

The next National School Reform Agreement (NSRA) should focus on a small number of key reforms that are well supported by research. A

The next NSRA should focus on a limited number of targeted reforms which capitalise on previous national reforms and build on the evidence base of what works, in terms of both educational outcomes and system-level reform.

The number of reforms chosen by governments for the next NSRA has implications for how successfully they can be implemented. Previous NSRA initiatives have gone some way towards creating positive change in the Australian education landscape, for instance, previous NSRAs or their predecessors have seen the introduction of the Australian Curriculum¹, NAPLAN and even AERO itself. For significant reforms like these to be effective in achieving change, they need to be implemented comprehensively, systematically and universally. Focusing on fewer national policy initiatives will allow a greater focus on their successful implementation, both by policymakers and at the busy school level.

The reform or reforms chosen should reflect the evidence-base about what works to improve outcomes. We know that the main variance in student achievement comes down to two factors – teaching quality and student characteristics (see for example, Hattie, 2003 and Deloitte Access Economics, 2019). Research shows us that the most successful system-level reforms have a focus on high quality teaching, intervention for students who have fallen behind, and using data to ensure reforms are on track (Barber and Mourshed, 2007).

Reform initiatives should address both what the evidence says are the drivers and solutions to improving outcomes for students, and how system-level reforms are best implemented to achieve the desired outcomes. The evidence consistently shows that for whole system reform, there needs to be a systemic rather than fragmented approach. It also shows that reform initiatives should avoid being short-term responses to political and public aspirations, and developed in the light of careful consideration of what is actually deliverable as educational objectives

previous Productivity Commission's Review of the NSRA. It is also consistent with the implied commitment in the new NAPLAN proficiency standards – with students in the lowest performance level now identified as 'needing additional support'.

Introducing a new commitment for systematic provision of additional support for students who have fallen behind in their learning also aligns with how high performing and high equity education systems, like Singapore, Finland and Hong Kong,

Consideration should also be applied to the opportunities afforded by the use of technology to support systematic intervention in the form of small group tutoring. For example, the use of intelligent tutoring systems, which mirror the process of individualised tuition by providing diagnostic assessments at the beginning of a unit to gauge understanding, providing individualised exercises and feedback at each stage of each task (Loble and Hawcroft, 2022). This could assist in reducing costs, although the effectiveness of such methods with low performing students has not yet been established. This could be a focus of research as the reform is implemented.

An appropriate measure of success for this reform would be a reduction in the proportion of students assessed as 'needs additional support' in NAPLAN, as they progress through their schooling. Currently, the proportion of students who are struggling in numeracy and reading increases from one NAPLAN instance to the next. For example, NAPLAN data tells us that in 2015, 12.9% of Year 3 students were at or below the NMS in reading, and by the time this cohort reached Year 9 this had grown to 25.4% (ACARA, 2015 and ACARA, 2021). If these students participate in an effective program targeting their identified need, the proportion of students needing additional support should fall as they progress through school.

Recommendation 2

That in the next NSRA, governments commit to ensure small group tutoring is provided to students who are assessed as needing additional support in NAPLAN or who are at risk of this. The NSRA should specify key design features for this tutoring that have been shown to be effective, namely: groups of no more than 5 students, three or more sessions per week, with each session running for close to an hour, for a duration of 6-12 weeks, and with tutoring explicitly linked to class learning objectives. The success of this measure should be a reduction in the proportion of students assessed as 'needs additional support' in NAPLAN as they progress through schooling.

total initiative funding (for example 0.02%⁴) would be sufficient to facilitate a national research commitment.

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Box 2: Measuring student wellbeing

While all jurisdictions are collecting information on student wellbeing, differences in the conceptualisation and implementation of wellbeing measures mean that jurisdiction-based measures cannot be used to provide national insights on student wellbeing. There has been increasing national collaboration to understand and share insights from individual state and territory measures, such as through the National Student Wellbeing Project or cross-jurisdictional data linkage projects (Australian Research Data Commons, 2021)

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The Australian Curriculum was a national reform implemented over a decade ago. Currently, ACARA is in the process of disseminating a recent update to that curriculum. For this reason, AERO does not consider it timely to propose curriculum reform for the next NSRA. Rather, AERO supports efforts to develop and promote quality-assured resources that support systematic and effective implementation of curriculum for all students, noting that the current curriculum does not provide sufficient guidance to teachers.

AERO notes that the current Australian Curriculum could be improved using evidence about best practice curriculum design. For example, it could contain more specific detail about the knowledge students are expected to attain, and the means by which this learning should be demonstrated. A high quality, content-rich curriculum is key to an equitable education system. A curriculum is a social contract – it should describe the knowledge that we, as a community, agree is core for all students to acquire. It should lay out a sequence for teaching and guide to assessment that ensures learning. Equitable access to quality curriculum should be an entitlement for all students, and the curriculum should represent a guarantee of learning.

The National Teacher Workforce Action Plan agreed by Ministers in 2022 asked ACARA to consult with AERO and others to develop advice about how to support implementation of the Australian Curriculum. It also asked ACARA and AERO to advise on the curriculum review cycle. In 2024 AERO will be undertaking research to inform reform to the content and design of the Australian Curriculum in its next review. The next Australian Curriculum should be content-rich, without being over-crowded or ambiguous about what is core and what is optional. It should offer clear implementation guidance for teachers and not require them to locate or invent their own curriculum support resources. It should be of such high quality that states and territories will no longer decide they need to adapt or rewrite it for themselves. The Australian Curriculum should ensure that all teachers have better guidance and confidence about their implementation of curriculum and all Australian students have a guarantee they will attain the knowledge they need to build on and thrive in life.

Student wellbeing data and measurement in Australia

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Contents

Research suggests that wellbeing correlates with c514 m-ning outcomes, but understanding the direction and nature of this relationship, and how to ensure positive outcomes, is still something we are seeking to understand. AERO investigated whether systems and schools are measuring wellbeing components that are strongly linked to cea-ning, and how systems and schools use the data they collect to improve wellbeing and c514 m-ning outcomes.

This paper presents findings from AERO's scoping work⁵ to understand how student wellbeing is measured in Australia and highlights opportunities to improve effective data collection and use of wellbeing data in decision making.

Research shows that some components of student wellbeing (such as, sense of belonging) are associated with improved learning outcomes (such as, better literacy and numeracy scores), but there is limited available d14 mta about the pthways

There has been a growing emphasis on the importance of student wellbeing as a responsibility of schools. This paper summarises AERO's scoping work investigating the insights that can be gained from analysing the existing measurement and use of student wellbeing data across Australia.

Education systems collect a range of information on wellbeing and learning and draw on this data to inform decision-making and practice. The aim of this paper is to provide an outline of student wellbeing data and measurement in Australia. Specifically, this paper explores whether systems and schools are measuring what matters (that is, the wellbeing components that are strongly linked with learning) and what they do with the data they collect to improve wellbeing outcomes. It highlights opportunities to improve effective data collection and use of wellbeing data and concludes with potential implications for measuring student wellbeing nationally.

Research indicates that student wellbeing is correlated with higher academic outcomes, however, the nature, direction and strength of the relationship remains unclear. We need high-quality wellbeing data to determine how wellbeing affects learning and vice versa so that schools, teachers and leaders can implement practices that improve wellbeing and learning outcomes.

What is the link between wellbeing and learning?

The link between wellbeing and learning may be reciprocal

Research exploring the relationship between wellbeing and learning can provide insight into the components of wellbeing that matter for improving learning outcomes. It has found that students with greater wellbeing (defined as lack of negative affect, presence of positive affect and satisfaction with life) are likely to have higher academic scores, even when accounting for previous test scores and other confounding factors (Cárdenas et al., 2022). However, evidence also suggests that this relationship is reciprocal and that there is an interrelated link between wellbeing and learning. Learning has been found to have a positive effect on subjective wellbeing, and better language and cognitive skills upon school entry are associated with lower levels of sadness and worries later in Year 6 (Gregory et al., 2021). Improving teaching and learning, in and of itself, is an important measure that can lead to better wellbeing outcomes.

A meta-analysis exploring the association between students' general wellbeing (defined as students' subjective, psychological, social, cognitive and physical wellbeing)

schools by NSW are providing better guidance about the evidence-based programs to support student wellbeing and mental health. However, not enough is known about effective practices that target student wellbeing.

What informs measurement decisions?

National goals for education guide systems and schools

Systems and schools turn to a variety of sources to determine what components of wellbeing and learning are useful to measure and why. In Australia, all governments, education systems and sectors are guided by nationally agreed goals for improving educational outcomes of children and young people. These are most recently set out in the National School Reform Agreement (2018), and the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration, which both declare that wellbeing is fundamental to achieving student success. Specifically, the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration states that education must support the wellbeing, mental health, and resilience of young people alongside the focus on literacy, numeracy and learning the curriculum (Education Ministers, 2019).

'Education plays a vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians, and in ensuring the nation's ongoing economic prosperity and social cohesion.'

(Education Ministers, 2019, p. 2)

These documents do not explicitly define wellbeing, but reference to intellectual, physical, social, and emotional wellbeing suggests that they are elements schools should consider monitoring in the context of learning.

Similarly, the Australian Student Wellbeing Framework and accompanying Student Wellbeing Hub (the Hub)⁶ are based on evidence that recognises the strong linkages between student safety, wellbeing and learning outcomes (Education Services Australia, 2018). The Framework and the Hub were designed to support all Australian schools to build and maintain safe, inclusive, and positive learning communities. The Hub provides teachers, parents, students, and leaders with resources to help students

that the data and tools they are using are fit for purpose. For example, ensuring that school or system-level wellbeing surveys are not inadvertently used as clinical diagnostic tools; and/or understanding the duty of care requirements if wellbeing surveys ask sensitive questions about mental health.

Strategic plans and curriculum inform approaches in schools

In schooling, student wellbeing outcomes are outlined in multiple declarations, strategic plans, and frameworks. In many cases, these documents differ between jurisdictions. Wellbeing is not an official outcome at the national level⁷ in the same way that it is in, say, ECEC.

Australian schools are required to set curricula according to their state or territory curriculum authority. From 2010, all states and territories agreed to embrace the Australian Curriculum, which refers to wellbeing in its 'general capabilities' section. The general capability 'personal and social capability' has a focus on students learning to understand themselves and others, and manage their relationships, lives, work and learning more effectively.

In addition to curriculum frameworks, the [Australian Professional Standards for Teachers](#) and the [Australian Professional Standard for Principals and the Leadership Profiles](#) explicitly outline teacher and principal responsibilities to support student wellbeing. Teachers at the proficient career stage are expected to 'ensure students'

and safe, material basics, healthy, learning, participating and positive sense of identity and culture and one overarching theme ('connectedness').

How is wellbeing currently measured?

In 2019, the Education Council established the National Student Wellbeing Project to investigate student wellbeing, its links to learning (specifically between measures of subjective wellbeing and NAPLAN scores) and valid measures within the literature. The purpose of the project was to support the development of a national approach to understanding student wellbeing. The project sought to develop student wellbeing measurement tools that could support decision-making to improve school climate, at both the system and school levels. The project was completed at the end of 2021. It

Summary of student wellbeing measures

There is considerable overlap in what jurisdictions measure and how they administer their student wellbeing surveys (Appendix 3).

Almost all jurisdictions collect data on 'relationships with peers and staff', 'sense of belonging' and 'school engagement'.

Many also collect data on emotional wellbeing, physical and/or mental health, and bullying/behaviour.

Most jurisdictions consider engagement with learning alongside student wellbeing. Engagement with learning measures may include measures such as academic self-concept, learning readiness and academic buoyancy.

Student wellbeing surveys are not the only source of information about wellbeing in schools. Systems and schools also use other system data, such as attendance and or suspension rates as proxy indicators of wellbeing. This information can provide a real-time signal about student engagement with learning or highlight other underlying issues that schools may need to address.

School and systems also use other measures and tools

Australian Early Childhood Development Census

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) is a measure of how children develop in the years before starting school. It is a nationwide data collection of early childhood development at the time children commence their first year of full-time school and has been endorsed by the Council of Australian Go...

The [ACER Social Emotional Wellbeing survey](#) which is a school-wide survey for ages 3 to 18 that provides insights into a wide variety of social, emotional and behavioural outcomes.

[ARACY's EI Pulse](#) which is a weekly pulse style check-in that lets schools collect data on school wellbeing and engagement that is frequent, familiar or formative.

The [Pivot Wellbeing Tool](#) which was developed in response to COVID-19 and measures wellbeing for learning through resilience, belonging and safety via weekly student check-ins.

Wellbeing data can support education policymakers and educators, teachers and leaders to implement effective strategies to improve wellbeing and learning for children and students. However, research suggests that teachers don't always know

Some jurisdictions link wellbeing survey results to other school data

States and territories may also use the data at the system level to inform planning and policy decisions. Data linkages connecting student wellbeing information, enrolment data and NAPLAN have created valuable data assets in several jurisdictions which facilitate a broad range of investigations into student wellbeing. Some states and territories are also linking student wellbeing data with data from agencies such as community services or health to build a broader picture of the wellbeing of children and young people or exploring cross-jurisdictional data linkages. For example, South Australia, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory have partnered with the University of South Australia to create a linked dataset that links comparable components of their state-based student wellbeing and engagement surveys with demographic, attendance and NAPLAN data. This linked dataset will support future research efforts to further map the reciprocal relationship between wellbeing and engagement outcomes and learning outcomes (Australian Research Data Commons, 2021).

Jurisdictions also use data from student wellbeing surveys to gain insights into specific programs or the impact of learning disruptions such as student experiences of COVID-19. Additionally, some jurisdictions use their student wellbeing data to evaluate the effectiveness of wellbeing programs and to better understand the relationship between wellbeing components and other student outcomes.

Expectations for how schools should use wellbeing data can vary

While wellbeing data appears to be used to varying degrees at the school and system level, it does not appear to be used systematically across systems or within schools. For example, there is significant variation in how schools are expected to use the data and the guidance provided to schools from the system about how the data should be used to inform teaching and learning. Anecdotal evidence suggests while some schools proactively use data to inform their school planning cycles, at other times, data is underutilised by schools as they are unsure how to use the data or what to do in response to insights from the data.

Research has demonstrated that components of student wellbeing (such as sense of belonging) are associated with improved learning outcomes (such as better literacy and numeracy scores). However, there continue to be gaps in the evidence base regarding the pathways through which student wellbeing impacts learning and what are the effective policies, programs and practices that improve student wellbeing.

The unclear evidence base is a challenge for education systems and sectors, who have identified improving student wellbeing as a priority. Effective use of student wellbeing data can fill the gaps in the evidence by supporting policy makers to understand trends in student wellbeing and to identify and evaluate potential strategies to improve wellbeing and learning outcomes.

While all jurisdictions are collecting information on student wellbeing, differences in the conceptualisation and implementation of wellbeing measures means jurisdiction-based measures are not always directly comparable. There has been increasing national collaboration to understand and share insights from individual state and territory measures, such as through the National Student Wellbeing Project or cross-jurisdictional data linkage projects. However, there continues to be a gap in relation to a nationally consistent measure of wellbeing.

A national measure of wellbeing could include consistent measures of student wellbeing such as sense of belonging, safety, inclusion and teaching practices linked to learning outcomes. This will enable more robust research on the in-school factors that shift student wellbeing and learning. It is important that any national measure of student wellbeing focus on the components of wellbeing that:

- have the greatest influence on learning,
- are within a school's ability to influence and
- complement existing jurisdictional measures.

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Appendix 1: Links to state and territory wellbeing frameworks and policies

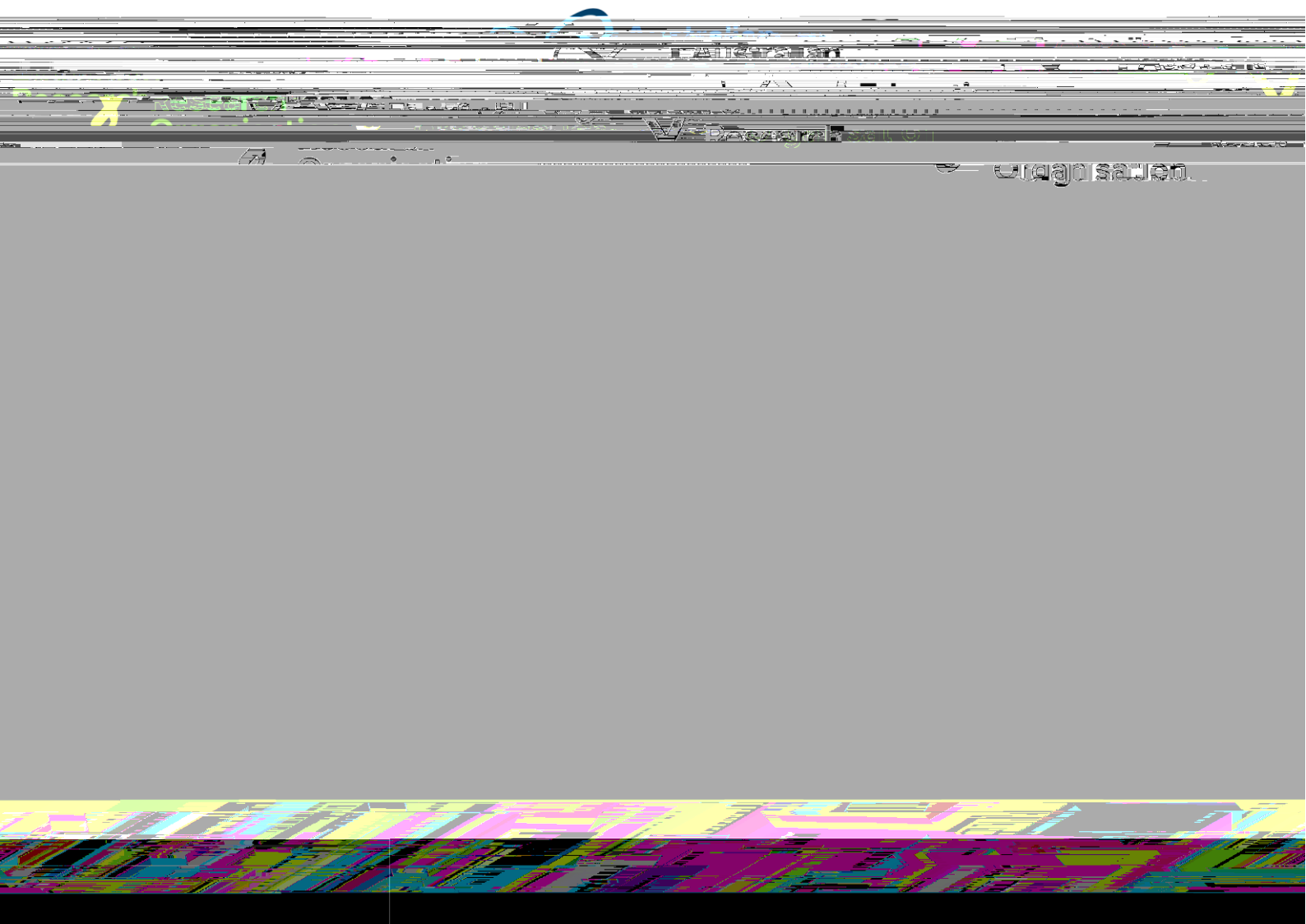
Jurisdiction	Strategy/Framework
All jurisdictions	The National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement
Australian Government	Australian Student Wellbeing Framework
	The National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy
	The Australian Government's National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan
ACT	Australian Capital Territory Wellbeing Framework
NSW	New South Wales Wellbeing Framework for Schools
NT	Northern Territory Child and Adolescent Health and Wellbeing Strategic Plan 2018-2028
QLD	Queensland Children's Wellbeing Framework
	Student Wellbeing and Learning Framework
SA	South Australia's Wellbeing for Learning and Life framework
TAS	Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework
VIC	Framework for Improving Student Outcomes (2.0)
	Wellbeing in the classroom
WA	WA.64 133.34 127.Tm0.0039dang (en-AU)›27.94 0.48004 ref84.58

Appendix 2: Map of student wellbeing surveys used by Australian state and territory governments

Appendix 3: Table of student wellbeing surveys used by Australian state and territory governments

Note: All jurisdictions collect information on relationships with peers and staff, sense of belonging and school engagement. There are other components measured by multiple jurisdictions but they are not shared by all.

Jurisdiction	Measure	Year started	Coverage	Compulsory	Wellbeing components measured
ACT	Australian School Climate and School Identification Measurement Tool	2007	Years 4 – 12	N	Academic emphasis (cognitive engagement), shared values and approach, staff/student and student/student relations, school Identification (sense of belonging), emotional and behavioural engagement, support and safety, a range of student behaviours, a range of



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