

Submission to the Productivity Commission's National School Reform Agreement Interim report

ARACY

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About ARACY

ARACY aspires to see all Australian children loved and thriving. We catalyse change by bringing people and knowledge together for the benefit of children and young people in Australia. We strive to achieve this by advocating for evidence-based policy and practice, focusing on prevention and early intervention. Our consultations with over 4000 children and young people, their families, and experts have shown us what wellbeing means to them: to be loved, valued, and safe; to have material basics; to be physically and mentally healthy; to be learning; to be participating; and to have a positive sense of identity and culture. These six domains are reflected in Australia's National Wellbeing Framework for Children and Young People — [the Nest](#). ARACY sees the education system as a critical opportunity to enhance the lives of Australian children.

ARACY acknowledges and appreciates the incorporation of our recommendations from our previous submission reflected in the interim report and applauds the Productivity Commission's acknowledgement of importance of "supporting wellbeing to support learning"ⁱ.

Response

Information request 4.1 Should there be National Policy Initiatives to improve student wellbeing?

- 1. Are there common steps that the Australian, State and Territory Governments could take in the next intergovernmental agreement to improve student wellbeing, or programs that could be implemented nationally?**
- 2. Is knowledge in recognising and responding to poor wellbeing and trauma sufficiently covered in Initial Teacher Education and Teacher Performance Assessments? If not, how might this be improved?**

There are two programs ARACY recommends that could be implemented nationally to improve student wellbeing. These include:

Ei Pulse, a digitised program available via an App that provides a rapid, evidence-based wellbeing check-in based on ARACY's Nest wellbeing framework. During each check-in, students are asked 5 randomised evidence-based questions from the ARACY framework, starting with a simple yet crucial question, "How are you feeling today?". It enables schools to get a snapshot of student wellbeing in real-time in addition to providing students with a 'low stakes' way of asking for support when they need it. Ei Pulse has been implemented in 145 schools across Australia supporting over 84 000 students. Furthermore, Ei Pulse aligns with the federal government's intention to develop a national wellbeing measure and indeed has viability for federal funding through the election promise to "invest \$10.5 million in a new voluntary mental health check tool that schools will be able to use,

with parents' permission, to identify kids who are struggling and make sure they can get the help they need"ⁱⁱ.

A digitised program alone is not enough to meet young people's wellbeing needs. The digitised approach needs to be paired with a relational approach. Hence ei Pulse can be implemented in parallel with ARACY's Common Approach, an evidence-based training program upskilling all adults who work with young people in the "what" and "how" to have best practice wellbeing conversations. Having regular 'Common Approach' conversations has demonstrated that issues are identified earlier than if the Common Approach is not used and causes of behaviour are identified quicker. The Common Approach is used anyone with direct, regular contact with children and young people; these could include teachers, sport coaches, administrative staff in schools, essentially anyone a student might trust and feel comfortable discussing their wellbeing. It is an evidence-based approach with internal and external evaluation and is well received by training participants.

An additional means of supporting student wellbeing is through enhanced parent and family engagement (PFE). Evidence demonstrates that when parents and families engage in their children's learning we see positive impacts on student achievement and wellbeing outcomesⁱⁱⁱ. Embedding mechanisms within the NSRA to support parents, families, teachers, and schools grow and foster PFE is a third means by which both wellbeing and academic outcomes of students can – and should – be supported.

As a final note, ARACY acknowledges the use of the Nest in Figure 4.2 of the Interim Report^{iv}, and would like to clarify that as part of our continuous cycle of improvement Loved and Safe has been updated to Valued, Loved, and Safe based on feedback from the Education sector^v.

References

ⁱ [Interim Report - National School Reform Agreement - Productivity Commission \(pc.gov.au\)](https://www.pc.gov.au/research/interim-report)

ⁱⁱ [Labor's Plan to Help our Schoolkids Bounce Back | Policies | Australian Labor Party \(alp.org.au\)](https://www.alp.org.au/policies/labor-plan-to-help-our-schoolkids-bounce-back)

ⁱⁱⁱ Barker, B., & Harris, D. (2020). Parent and Family Engagement: An Implementation Guide for School Communities. Canberra: ARACY, retrieved from: <https://www.aracy.org.au/documents/item/647>

^{iv} [Interim report - Review of the National School Reform Agreement \(pc.gov.au\)](https://www.pc.gov.au/research/interim-report)

^v https://www.aracy.org.au/publications-resources/command/download_file/id/452/filename/WhatsInTheNest2021_EVersion.pdf