

**Report to the Department of Education,  
Employment and Workplace Relations**

**Scoping study into approaches  
to student wellbeing**

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

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## Executive Summary

The enhancement of student wellbeing is emerging as an important approach to the development of students' social, emotional and academic competence and a significant contribution to the ongoing battle to prevent youth depression, suicide, self harm, anti-social behaviour (including bullying and violence) and substance abuse.

The Australian Government is committed to reducing disadvantage in Australia and to improving students' educational outcomes and school retention rates. Identifying and reducing the barriers to learning, including those linked to student wellbeing, can help to maximise the educational and social outcomes for all students. The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) has identified "the active participation of young people in economic and social life" as a strategy for reducing depression, drug and alcohol abuse, crime, vandalism and other problems faced by young people.

The purpose of the present Scoping Study, commissioned by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) as a project of the National Schools Drug Education Strategy (NSDES), aims to explore the value of developing an overarching national framework/policy statement that encompasses a more holistic and comprehensive approach to student wellbeing as a first step towards embedding student wellbeing in a school's curriculum. The project will investigate current national and international research and State/Territory government and non-government approaches to student wellbeing, and make recommendations about future directions in this area.

This Executive Summary is structured as follows:

Section 1 provides an overview of the project.

Section 2 discusses "What is Student Wellbeing", exploring various definitions of this concept, leading to a proposal for a working definition that may inform future work on a National Framework in this area.

Section 3 examines the outcomes of, and pathways to, wellbeing, which is conceptualised in a model that draws together the various influences on student wellbeing and their consequences.

Section 4 examines the international literature on student wellbeing and its relationship with schooling.

Section 5 summarises the current picture in relation to student wellbeing in the Australian context, summarising the place of wellbeing in policy, curriculum and pedagogy.

Section 6 concludes this literature review, with a discussion of the evidence in relation to whole school approaches to student wellbeing.

### Section 1: Project Overview

The Scoping Study includes four phases of data gathering:

Phase 1: A review of research literature (both nationally and internationally) and relevant educational policies & initiatives in student wellbeing.

- Phase 2: Consultations with each state and territory government and non-government education authority and relevant experts in the field.
- Phase 3: Testing feasibility of features of a potential framework with school practitioners.
- Phase 4: Provide documentation and analysis of key issues and recommendations for future directions for student wellbeing.

This literature review is Phase 1 of the Scoping Study into Approaches into Student Wellbeing. Phase 1 has involved two major elements:

- A review of the current Australian and International research on evidence based links between student wellbeing and learning outcomes.
- A review of current Australian Government and state and territory government and non-government education authorities' policies, programs and practices.

## Section 2: What is Student Wellbeing?

The first step in the literature review was to explore how student wellbeing has been defined in the research literature. A comprehensive range of definitions of wellbeing is outlined in the report, drawing from the fields of education, health and social and psychological sciences. However, only three definitions were found that specifically focus on student wellbeing as opposed to general wellbeing. The limitation of these existing definitions for school practice is outlined and a new definition has been developed for this report which synthesises the most common and relevant characteristics that appear in current definitions of wellbeing, namely:

- Positive affect (an emotional component)
- Resilience (a coping component)
- Satisfaction with relationships and other dimensions of one's life (a cognitive component)
- Effective functioning and the maximizing of one's potential (a performance component)

The definition developed for this report is:

*Student wellbeing is defined as a sustainable state of positive mood and attitude, resilience, and satisfaction with self, relationships and experiences at school.*

Student wellbeing is described as pervasive in that it affects most aspects of a student's functioning at school. A student's level of wellbeing is indicated by the degree to which the student demonstrates *effective academic and social and emotional functioning and appropriate behaviour at school*

Seven pathways have been identified from the theoretical and research literature that have the power to facilitate the development of student wellbeing. The definition above is based on the assumption that student wellbeing is the outcome of a student's access to many, and sometimes to all, of these pathways. The seven pathways that have been identified from the research literature are:

1. Physical and emotional safety
2. Pro-social values
3. A supportive and caring School Community
4. Social and emotional learning
5. A strengths-based approach
6. A sense of meaning and purpose
7. A healthy lifestyle.

These pathways to student wellbeing are interrelated but still separable. They interact with each other to enhance student wellbeing. The whole (i.e. wellbeing) is greater than just the sum of the parts (i.e. the pathways).

Each of the seven pathways is discussed in terms of the research evidence on its effects on important student outcomes. The research evidence on the effects of student wellbeing and its pathways indicates that students with high levels of wellbeing and/or access to many of its pathways are more likely to have:

- higher academic achievement and complete Year 12;
- better mental health (i.e. they have lower and/or less severe rates of illnesses such as depression and anxiety); and
- a more pro-social, responsible and lawful lifestyle (i.e. they display concern for the wellbeing of others, make responsible decisions about the consequences of their actions on themselves and others [including using drugs and alcohol in a responsible way], and do not violate the laws and norms of their society).

All three outcomes contribute significantly in the long-term picture to greater participation in the workforce (and hence greater productivity), more social inclusion, and more effective building of Australia's social capital.

Enhancing student wellbeing and its pathways can increase academic achievement both directly but indirectly. The four main mechanisms by which the enhancement of student wellbeing and its pathways can indirectly improve academic achievement are:

- By increasing student motivation to participate and achieve;
- By increasing student engagement with, and participation in, learning;
- By increasing student attendance and hence increasing school completion; and
- By decreasing problem behaviour at school and hence decreasing levels of suspension and exclusion from school.

### Section 3: The Outcomes of Student Wellbeing and its Pathways

#### 1. Physical and Emotional Safety

Multiple studies have identified a strong link between bullying others at school and later violent, antisocial and/or criminal behaviour. A strong link has also been identified between being bullied at school and a range of mental health difficulties (such as anxiety

and depression) as well as loneliness, low self esteem and poor social self concept. Addressing bullying and violence in schools assists the mental health of all students and creates a learning environment in which wellbeing can thrive.

## 2. Pro-social values

Many researchers have included the teaching of pro-social values as part of their overall and moderately successful anti-bullying, anti-violence or student wellbeing interventions. Many of the school projects in the *Australian Government's Values Education Good Practice Schools Project* have been shown to extend the strategies, options and repertoires of teachers for effectively managing learning environments and for developing positive school and class environments that positively influence both student and teacher behaviour.

## 3. A supportive and caring school community

A supportive and caring school community is characterised by positive school and classroom climates; students' having a sense of connectedness and belonging to a good school of which they are proud; caring, supportive and respectful relationships with teachers; positive relationships with other students and involvement by their parents with the school. When students have these experiences at school they are more likely to have higher levels of wellbeing. Many studies have identified a range of positive benefits from being part of a supportive and caring school community such as:

- Increases in academic achievement as a result of the indirect effects of higher levels of participation, higher levels of engagement, attendance and participation.
- Reductions in anti-social behaviour such as bullying, violence and vandalism
- Reductions in students' dropping out of school
- Less drug, tobacco and alcohol use
- Increases in mental health and reductions in emotional distress
- Later age for first sexual experience
- Decreases in disruptive behaviour in school
- Greater acceptance of authority and the school's values
- More acceptance of responsibility for regulating their own classroom behaviour.

## 4. Social and Emotional Learning

It is now well established across research studies that social and emotional skills (such as the ability to work cooperatively with others, manage one's emotions, cope with setbacks and solve problems effectively) are integral parts of academic success. The outcomes of teaching such social and emotional skills include improved school performance, better problem solving and planning, more use of high-order thinking skills and higher levels of pro-social and non-disruptive behaviour.

A recent meta-analysis of 207 studies of social-emotional learning (SEL) programs conducted by a CASEL research team (Durlak, *et al.*, 2008) found that students who participated in SEL programs:

- Improved significantly in their social and emotional skills and their attitudes to themselves, others, and school

- Displayed more classroom pro-social behaviour and fewer disruptive and aggressive behaviours
- Experienced lower levels of depression
- Scored 11 percentile points higher on standardized achievement tests, relative to peers not receiving the program.

A student's level of social competence and their friendship networks have been shown to be predictive of both their current and future academic achievement. Social skills are seen as "academic enablers", that is, skills that help students to make the best of their ability. Using pro-social skills such as active listening, helping, cooperating, and sharing can help students to function more effectively in both social and academic contexts, as both contexts require similar skills.

Experiencing ongoing positive emotions has been found to enhance an individual's capacity for optimistic thinking, problem solving and decision making and to lead to more flexible, innovative and creative solutions.

#### 5. A Strengths-based Approach

A converging message from many areas (eg the Positive Psychology movement, the Collaborative for Academic and Social-Emotional Learning (CASEL) and the Positive Youth Development movement) is the importance of strengths-based approaches to promoting student wellbeing and academic engagement.

A "strength" is defined as a natural capacity for behaving, thinking and feeling in a way that promotes successful goal achievement. Strengths can be intellectual or personal (eg character traits or the ability to self-manage). A strengths-based approach is based on the assumption that having the opportunities to use one's strengths in schoolwork or in the general life of the school or classroom produces more positive emotions, leads to higher levels of engagement and produces better learning outcomes, especially for those students whose strengths are not in the traditional academic domain. The Multiple Intelligences/Bloom Planning Matrix and the VIA Strengths Survey are two tools for helping students to identify strengths and engage their strengths through a variety of diverse school-based learning tasks and activities.

Young people are more likely to be fully engaged and experience "psychological flow" when involved in an intellectually challenging activity that utilises their strength(s) and has a degree of challenge that requires a reasonably high level of skill and attention in a specific domain (eg building a model, or playing a musical instrument). Research has identified that high teacher expectations and the provision of intellectually challenging activities for students are two approaches to building strengths.

#### 6. A sense of Meaning and Purpose

A sense of meaning can be defined as involvement in a task or activity that impacts on people other than just oneself. A sense of purpose can be defined as involvement in a worthwhile task or activity. Having no sense of meaning in life has been shown to be associated with psychopathology, whilst having a positive sense of life meaning is associated with greater wellbeing. Recent research has highlighted the importance of "student voice" in giving students a sense of meaning and connectedness to the curriculum. Student participation is a recognised feature of high performing schools and has a positive effect on learning in the classroom and engagement in school.

Other school initiatives that have been found to foster a sense of meaning and purpose and enhance student engagement and learning include: peer support programs and student participation in class-wide or school-wide leadership and decision-making structures (eg circle time, classroom councils, classroom committees or school-wide Student Representative Committees). Similarly students' participation in sports teams, art and drama groups and membership of pro-social youth groups has been identified as one of the most prevalent protective factors in enhancing youth wellbeing.

Engaging students in community service (or service learning) is another approach that many schools are using to facilitate educational experiences and outcomes and provide students with a sense of meaning and purpose. It has been suggested that community service may be linked to academic success because it can give students a feeling of usefulness and being valued and can also demonstrate to students the usefulness of what they are learning in school to the "real world".

## 7. A Healthy Lifestyle

Students' health has been shown to be associated with a sense of connectedness to school, family and community. Lower levels of education have been shown to be associated with poorer mental and physical health. A study of more than five thousand American high school students found that higher life satisfaction was associated with lower levels of smoking and irresponsible use of alcohol, marijuana, and other illegal drugs, lower levels of teen pregnancy and lower levels of driving while intoxicated.

## Section 4: International Focus on Student Wellbeing

There is a clear trend for countries around the world to incorporate a focus on student wellbeing and/or its pathways into the curriculum and other school programs. However there is also a consistent message from evaluations of these initiatives that implementation is complex and requires a whole school approach which incorporates a positive school ethos, planning for sustainability and collaborative partnerships. This section provides an overview of some of the more significant international student wellbeing initiatives such as: the European Network of Health Promoting Schools, the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) program in the UK, the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) in the USA and the Positive Psychology movement.

## Section 5: Student Wellbeing in the Australian Educational Context

### 5.1: Australian Government National Frameworks in Education

The current scoping study into student wellbeing has taken consideration of a range of other frameworks, including the following:

- The National Framework for Health Promoting Schools (HPS)
- The two National initiatives based on the HPS model:
  - MindMatters: secondary focus
  - KidsMatter: primary focus

- National Framework for Values Education
- National Safe Schools Framework (NSSF)
- Principles for School Drug Education
- National Drug Strategy (2004-2009)
- National Suicide Prevention Strategy
- National Action Plan on Mental Health (2006-2011)

Although each document offers some unique features based on its particular focus, an overview and synthesis of the key national frameworks and initiatives indicates a strong focus on the promotion of wellbeing and mental health through:

- Early intervention with students who are at risk for mental illness, behaviour problems, poor physical health, anti-social behaviour and substance abuse;
- School-based prevention programs that develop student resilience and other aspects of social and emotional learning;
- The development of a safe, supportive and values-based school ethos; and
- School connectedness and social connectedness.

Many frameworks and initiatives also advocate that schools contribute to the future capacity of students to participate in the workforce in a sustainable way and contribute to community productivity, and the promotion of pro-social values and students' civic engagement.

Three other significant Australian Commonwealth goals align with these frameworks and initiatives:

- Combating economic and social disadvantage;
- Closing the gap between indigenous and non-indigenous people in terms of health and life expectancy, infant and child mortality and educational outcomes; and
- Ensuring social inclusion so that all Australians have the opportunity to fully participate through the benefits of work, education, community engagement and access to basic services.

One common thread in most of the Australian Government frameworks is that there are common risk factors that contribute to priority health problems such as drug-related risk and harm, youth anxiety/depression and youth suicide and social dislocation. Another common thread is that there are positive pathways that enhance student wellbeing and student engagement in learning.

Some of the common threads in the *Australian Government National Frameworks in Education* are consistent with many of the "active ingredients" or key components identified in the research literature as critical to the implementation and sustainability of student wellbeing initiatives. These common threads are:

- A whole child focus;
- The assumption that student wellbeing impacts on student learning;
- A whole school approach;
- A values-based & inclusive approach;

- A focus on safe & supportive school environment/ethos;
- The important role of the teacher;
- Programs should be across all school years;
- The importance of strong school leadership;
- Partnerships with parents and the community; and
- A strong focus on prevention and early intervention.

## 5.2 Report on the of the Responses of State and territory and non-government education authorities to the Concept of a National Student Wellbeing Framework

All jurisdictions were invited to complete a questionnaire in October 2007 which asked their views on student wellbeing and the advantages and disadvantages of a National Framework in student wellbeing.

A broad National Framework for Student Wellbeing was generally welcomed by all jurisdictions which they saw as needed to provide clarity, coordination, and consistency across jurisdictions and within schools. Many commented on the importance of evidence-based practice within such a framework. Respondents highlighted the importance of prevention and early intervention with a whole child and whole school focus that would strengthen the links between student wellbeing and learning outcomes. The need for both funding support and teacher professional learning was emphasised together with the need to consult with all jurisdictions. One of the main challenges was seen as encouraging schools and educators to change their traditional emphasis on welfare, student deficits, targeted populations and specific programs to a focus on universal student wellbeing and an emphasis on whole school change.

## 5.3 Student Wellbeing in State and Territory Curriculum and Policy Documents

An analysis of policy documentation of curriculum content and/or learning outcomes showed that, although there is considerable variation across Australian educational jurisdictions in their focus on student wellbeing, there is also evidence of a growing emphasis on the importance of student wellbeing and its pathways. In some cases student wellbeing is positioned at the centre of everything that happens at school (e.g. South Australia). In other states it has a strong presence within Essential Learnings, pedagogical principles, a wellbeing policy or overarching learning outcomes (e.g. Northern Territory, Western Australia, Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory). In some states wellbeing is located within the Health and/or Physical Education curriculum either as the main focus (e.g. Tasmania, Queensland) or as an additional focus (e.g. Northern Territory, Victoria, Western Australia). However it appears that very few states and territories have made available a range of effective online teacher resources for the implementation of wellbeing. In some cases (e.g. New South Wales) there are convincing objectives but a limited focus on skills, strategies, resources and implementation.

## Section 6: Whole School Approaches to Student Wellbeing: Issues of School Leadership, Implementation and Sustainability of Student Wellbeing Initiatives

Over the last decade, there has been a research shift from a focus on the short-term effectiveness of innovations towards a focus on creating conditions for longer-term sustained success in 'normal' school circumstances. There are now a great many evaluation studies and meta-analytic studies that have consistently identified school-based factors that are associated with the successful and enduring implementation of student wellbeing initiatives. Good Practice examples at the school system level (eg the Catholic Education Office in Melbourne) and individual school levels are discussed.

# Section 1: Project Overview

## 1.1 Introduction

The Australian Government is committed to reducing disadvantage in Australia and to improving students' educational outcomes and school retention rates. Identifying and reducing the barriers to learning, including those linked to student wellbeing, will help maximise the educational and social outcomes for students.

The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) has identified "the active participation of young people in economic and social life" as a strategy for reducing depression, drug and alcohol abuse, crime, vandalism and other problems faced by young people. In addition, there is a growing level of interest and discussion on the linkages between student outcomes and the factors which affect a student's capacity to learn effectively. Recent research points to academic performance being closely linked to student wellbeing. Student wellbeing encompasses a range of physical, emotional and mental health issues, all of which impact on a student's educational outcomes and school retention.

The purpose of the present Scoping Study is to explore the value of developing an overarching national framework/policy statement that encompasses a more holistic and comprehensive approach to student wellbeing as a first step towards embedding student wellbeing in a school's curriculum. The project will investigate current national and international research and State/Territory government and non-government approaches to student wellbeing, and make recommendations about future directions in this area.

The Scoping Study is funded under the National School Drug Education Strategy (NSDES) and appropriated under the Quality Outcomes Program. Funding under the NSDES is applied to projects with a national, strategic focus and for projects in Australian states and territories. Funding is directed towards fostering the capacity of school communities to provide safe and supportive school environments for all Australian school students, enhancing school drug education programmes and the management of drug related issues and incidents in schools.

## 1.2 Project Objectives

The objectives of this study are to document:

- a broad definition of student wellbeing for the purposes of this Project through research and consultation with key stakeholders
- evidence, through undertaking research and analysis of Australian and overseas literature, on:
  - links between student wellbeing and student learning outcomes and whether student wellbeing contributes to achieving these outcomes
  - the impact on student learning outcomes of student wellbeing issues such as bullying, physical and mental health, overweight and obesity, poor nutrition and student or family drug abuse, interpersonal relationships, etc.

- the impact of a whole school approach on student wellbeing.
- current State and Territory government and non-government approaches to student wellbeing;
- policies/procedures that schools or jurisdictions have in place to address student wellbeing, including
  - how these policies/procedures are implemented, the degree of effectiveness, and the performance measures currently used by State and Territory government and non-government education authorities to determine effectiveness
  - a review of the key and common principles that underpin current Australian Government policies that are conceptually linked to student wellbeing such as National Safe Schools Framework, Framework in Values Education, Health Promoting Schools, Drug Education Initiatives and School Chaplaincy
  - the extent to which student wellbeing policies and procedures are integrated into the school curriculum
  - how student wellbeing is defined and measured
  - other areas and organisations involved in student wellbeing, including for example health, sport, etc.
  - limitations and/or gaps of current approaches to student wellbeing.
- key stakeholder views and ideas about future directions in this area, including whether there is support for developing an overarching national framework/policy statement to underpin student wellbeing; and the implications of such a statement on current/future wellbeing activities.
- recommendations on key issues and future directions for student wellbeing.

### 1.3 Methodology

A four phased approach to data gathering will be used in this Study:

Phase 1: A review of research literature (both nationally and internationally) and relevant educational policies & initiatives in student wellbeing.

Phase 2: Consultations with each state and territory government and non-government education authority and relevant experts in the field.

Phase 3: Testing feasibility of features of a potential framework with school practitioners.

Phase 4: Provide documentation and analysis of key issues and recommendations for future directions for student wellbeing.

The purpose of this report is to provide a comprehensive Literature Review in relation to Phase 1 of the Methodology. This includes two key steps as detailed below:

Step 1: A review of the current Australian and international research on evidence based links between student wellbeing and learning outcomes.

Step 2: Current Australian Government and state and territory government and non-government education authorities' policies, programs and practices.

The objectives for the Literature Review are:

1. A review of the literature to develop a broad definition of student wellbeing for the purposes of this Project
2. Evidence, through undertaking research and analysis of Australian and overseas literature, on the links between student wellbeing and student learning outcomes and whether student wellbeing contributes to achieving these outcomes
3. Evidence, through undertaking research and analysis of Australian and overseas literature, on the impact on student learning outcomes of student wellbeing issues such as bullying, physical and mental health, overweight and obesity, poor nutrition and student or family drug abuse, interpersonal relationships, etc.
4. Evidence, through undertaking research and analysis of Australian and overseas literature, on the impact of a whole school approach on student wellbeing.
5. A review of the current State and Territory government and non-government approaches to student wellbeing
6. A review of the current Australian government policies/frameworks that inform student wellbeing.

## Section 2: Student Wellbeing and its Pathways

This section of the report discusses “What is Student Wellbeing”, exploring various definitions of this concept, leading to a proposal for a working definition that may inform future work on a National Framework in this area.

### 2.1 What is Student Wellbeing?

Over the last ten years there has been a gradual shift in both research and school practice away from the concept of student welfare and towards the concept of student wellbeing. This trend towards wellbeing is consistent with a positive psychology approach (e.g. Ryff and Singer, 1996; Seligman, 2002) and more recently the positive education approach (Gable & Haidt, 2005; Noble & McGrath 2008; Seligman 2008) which focuses on wellbeing and its determinants. This focus has evolved over many years. As early as 1930, mental health was defined as “the adjustment of human beings to the world and to each other with a maximum of effectiveness and happiness” (Menninger, 1930 p.1). In 1947 The World Health Organization (WHO) defined health in terms of wellness, that is physical, mental, and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease (WHO, 1958, p.1).

Richard Eckersley (2005) argues that schools should be dedicated to creating capable, confident, young people who are equipped to face the ups and downs of life. To this end he advocates that schools should focus on developing student wellbeing to produce happier, healthier and more productive young people who flourish as human beings. Research suggests that, overall, students who have high levels of wellbeing tend to be better problem-solvers, show better work performance and achieve more highly, have more positive and meaningful social relationships, display virtues such as forgiveness and generosity, be more resistant to stress, and experience better physical and mental health (Frisch, 2000; Veenhoven, 1989).

Fraillon (2004) has argued for the development of a consistent national definition of student wellbeing that can be applied across all Australian schools in order to establish common understandings and language to support the development of national student wellbeing policies and programs.

However this is not an easy task. There are very few definitions of wellbeing to be found in the academic literature and hardly any definitions of “student wellbeing”. Pollard and Lee (2003), among others, have commented on the “elusive” nature of the wellbeing construct which has made it difficult for researchers to define and measure. Others, such as Diener, 1984, and Ryff, 1989 have also lamented the lack of an adequate conceptualisation of wellbeing especially when applied to students (Huebner, 1997). Fraillon (2004) notes that whilst most educators and psychologists advocate a focus on student wellbeing, there is very little consensus on what student wellbeing is.

There are many largely subjective hypotheses about the key ingredients of wellbeing. Park (2004) asserts that wellbeing is synonymous with the everyday term “happiness” but others disagree, arguing that happiness is short-lived but wellbeing is relatively stable and experienced over time.

Different professional disciplines have taken different perspectives on wellbeing.

The clinical and health perspective tends to define wellbeing as the absence of negative conditions such as depression, anxiety or substance abuse. Contemporary psychologists tend to operationalise wellbeing in terms of happiness and satisfaction with life (Kahnemann, Diener & Schwartz, 1999), Seligman 2002) and/or as the presence of a significant number of positive self-attributes (Keyes, 1998; Ryff & Singer, 1996). Sociologists and community workers have focused on wellbeing in terms of “*broader meanings and difficulties in social processes in young people’s lives and how these impact on individual behaviour*” (Bourke & Geldens, 2007, p.42). This report has taken an educational perspective.

Frailon (2004) in his MCEETYA report entitled *Measuring Student Well-Being in the Context of Australian Schooling*, conducted an audit of existing theoretical models of wellbeing and found significant variation in both the magnitude and scope of the hypothesized characteristics of wellbeing. The examples in the chart below illustrate this variation.

Definition	Author(s)	Key Features
<i>Wellness is an integrated method of functioning which is oriented toward maximising the potential of which an individual is capable.</i>	Dunn, 1961	Maximising one’s potential
<i>Taking responsibility for your health means making a conscious commitment to your well-being. It involves a recognition that you choose a positive existence for the pursuit of excellence affecting all four aspects of being - the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual realm</i>	Ardell, 1982	An active process Pursuit of excellence in physical, mental, emotional and spiritual realm
<i>An active process through which you become aware of, and make choices that you hope will lead to a more fulfilling, more successful, more well life. As such, wellness is an approach that emphasises the whole person, not just the biological organism.</i>	Hettler, 1984	An active process Fulfilment Holistic
<i>Wellness implies a lifestyle with a sense of balance. This sense of balance arises from a balance, or harmony within each aspect or ‘dimension’ of life.</i>	Lowdon, Davis, Dickie, & Ferguson, 1995	Balanced lifestyle
<i>The striving for perfection that represents the realisation of one’s true potential.</i>	Ryff, 1995	Maximising one’s potential
<i>Wellness, or a sense of well-being includes one’s ability to live and work effectively and to make a significant contribution to society.</i>	Corbin, 1997	Living and working effectively Contributing to society
<i>A way of life oriented toward optimal health and well-being in which mind, body, and spirit are integrated by the individual</i>	Witmer & Sweeney, 1998	Integration of mind body and spirit

Definition	Author(s)	Key Features
<i>to live life more fully within the human and natural community.</i>		Living fully in the natural community
<i>The ability to successfully, resiliently, and innovatively participate in the routines and activities deemed significant by a cultural community. Well-being is also the states of mind and feeling produced by participation in routines and activities</i>	Weisner, 1998	Resilience Successful community participation Routines and activities
<i>A holistic subjective state which is present when a range of feelings, among them energy, confidence, openness, enjoyment, happiness, calm and caring are combined and balanced.</i>  <i>(This definition is used by the Catholic Education Office in Melbourne).</i>	Stewart-Brown 2000	Holistic Positive emotions
<i>Well-being is a complex construct that concerns optimal experience and functioning.</i>	Ryan & Deci, 2001	Optimal functioning
<i>Subjective well-being (SWB) represents people's evaluations of their lives, and includes happiness, pleasant emotions, life satisfaction, and a relative absence of unpleasant moods and emotions.</i>	Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002	Happiness Positive emotions Life satisfaction Absence of negative emotions
<i>Wellbeing is not simply an absence of mental illness but the presence of positive levels of feelings and psychosocial functioning. It is about flourishing rather than languishing.</i>	Keyes, 2002	Positive feelings Positive psychosocial functioning
<i>Well-being is the state of successful performance throughout the life course integrating physical, cognitive, and social-emotional functions that results in productive activities deemed significant by one's cultural community, fulfilling social relationships, and the ability to transcend moderate psychosocial and environmental problems. Well-being also has a subjective dimension in the sense of satisfaction associated with fulfilling one's potential.</i>	Bornstein, Davidson, Keyes, & Moore, 2003	Integration of physical, cognitive, and social-emotional functions Productivity in the community Fulfilling social relationships Resilience Satisfaction Maximising one's potential
<i>[wellbeing is] peoples' positive evaluations</i>	Diener &	Satisfaction

Definition	Author(s)	Key Features
<i>of their lives which includes positive emotion, engagement, satisfaction, and meaning.</i>	Seligman, 2004	Positive emotions Meaning Engagement
<i>Well-being comprises life satisfaction and positive feelings such as joy and vitality.</i>	Headey & Wooden, 2004	Positive feelings Life satisfaction
<i>Wellbeing consists of three components: relatively high levels of positive affect (mood), relatively low levels of negative affect, and the overall judgment that one's life is a good one. Satisfaction is the cognitive component.</i>	Park, 2004	Positive mood Satisfaction Low levels of negative mood
<i>Wellbeing, especially positive wellbeing, is strongly related to meaning in life....wellbeing is about more than living 'the good life'; it is about having meaning in life, about fulfilling our potential and feeling that our lives are worthwhile.</i>	Eckersley, 2005	Meaning in life Maximising one's potential
<i>Wellbeing is a positive state of affairs, brought about by the simultaneous satisfaction of personal, organizational, and collective needs of individuals and communities.</i>	Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2006	Positive state Satisfaction of needs Wellbeing is interactive between groups, communities, and individuals
<i>Wellbeing is more than pleasant emotions; it is a positive and sustainable condition that allows individuals, groups or nations to thrive and flourish. Our concept also encompasses human resilience; there will always be setbacks inherent in the process of living and the ability to develop and thrive in the face of such adversity is a key element of wellbeing.</i>	Huppert, Baylis & Keverne, 2006	Sustainable Thriving and flourishing Resilience
<i>A state of health, happiness and prosperity. It includes subjective judgments about happiness or satisfaction about life as a whole, including its social, cultural, spiritual and emotional aspects.</i>	Babington, 2006	Health Happiness Prosperity Satisfaction with social, cultural, spiritual and emotional aspects of life
<i>Mental health can be conceptualized as a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope</i>	WHO, 2007	Resilience Maximising one's

Definition	Author(s)	Key Features
<i>with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.</i>		potential Productive outcomes Contribution to community
<i>Sustainable psychological well-being refers to lives going well. It is the combination of feeling good and functioning effectively. It includes the experience of negative emotions and managing them successfully.</i>	Huppert, 2008	Positive mood Effective functioning Resilience
<i>Having agency or power to take independent action, leading to some control and capacity to act independently in everyday life. Having a sense of security to be able to engage fully with life and do the things that one needs to do. Having a positive sense of self: that is feeling that you are an okay or good person, and being recognised as such by those around you—for who you are as well as what you do.</i>	NSW Commission for Children and Young People 2007  Views of Children and Young People on wellbeing	Autonomy Safety Engagement with life Positive sense of self Valued by others

There appear to be only three definitions that specifically focus on student wellbeing as opposed to general wellbeing:

*“Wellbeing is a positive emotional state that is the result of a harmony between the sum of specific context factors on the one hand and the personal needs and expectations towards the school on the other hand.”*  
(Engels, Aelterman, Van Petegem, & Schepens, 2004, p128);

*“Wellbeing is the degree to which a student feels good in the school environment.”* (De Fraine, Van Landeghem, Van Damme & Onghena, 2005);

*“Wellbeing is the degree to which a student is functioning effectively in the school community.”* (Fraillon, 2004).

Some researchers and writers have proposed that there are several different types of wellbeing (e.g. Pollard & Lee, 2003) such as psychological wellbeing, physical wellbeing, social wellbeing, spiritual wellbeing and cognitive wellbeing. However it seems more useful to perceive these as *dimensions* of wellbeing rather than separate *types* of wellbeing. Fraillon (2004) has advocated a multi-dimensional model of wellbeing and Park (2004) has also proposed that wellbeing is a multidimensional construct that includes both cognitive components such as judgment and satisfaction and affective components such as positive mood (Park, 2004).

The most common characteristics that appear in current definitions of wellbeing appear to be:

- Positive affect (an emotional component);

- Resilience (a coping component);
- Satisfaction with relationships and other dimensions of one's life (a cognitive component); and
- Effective functioning and the maximizing of one's potential (a performance component).

#### The Definition of Student Wellbeing Used in this Report

Seedhouse (1995) concludes that it is not possible to develop water-tight definitions of any key human concepts such as knowledge, happiness, wisdom or wellbeing but that professionals who focus on wellbeing can still proceed with their core business with a clear-enough idea of what they are aiming to do. The definition that has been developed for this report is consistent with the direction taken by Fraillon (2004) but it is more expansive. It is based on a synthesis of all of the features in available definitions of wellbeing and student wellbeing. It is a broad, overarching construct.

*Student wellbeing is defined as a sustainable state of positive mood and attitude, resilience, and satisfaction with self, relationships and experiences at school.*

#### Explanations of Key Terms in this Definition

##### *Sustainable*

Student wellbeing is sustainable in that it is relatively consistent and able to be maintained over time even though ongoing life events may result in temporary emotional reactions (Diener, 1994). Studies with young people have found that their level of life satisfaction is reasonably stable across time (Suldo and Huebner, 2004).

##### *Positive mood and attitude*

This can be described as the tendency or disposition to experience predominantly positive emotions (eg excitement, anticipation, joy, fun, confidence, affection) across situations and time (Perrewe and Spector, 2002, p. 37) and to demonstrate a mostly positive approach to all aspects of school, concentrating on and amplifying the positives.

##### *Resilience*

The ability to cope and bounce back after encountering negative events, challenging tasks, difficult situations or adversity and to return to almost the same level of emotional wellbeing; the capacity to maintain a healthy and fulfilling life despite adversity and even be strengthened by the experience (McGrath & Noble, 2003).

##### *Satisfaction with self, relationships and experiences at school*

A relatively positive cognitive appraisal by students of themselves and their lives (Huebner, Suldo, Smith, & McKnight, 2004) in terms of their own behaviour, personal characteristics, academic and other school-based performance, and their general school experiences (eg how they are treated by others at school, the kind of learning tasks they undertake, their involvement with community service, peer support, sporting teams and clubs and so on). Suldo, Shaffer & Riley (2008) assert that children's own perception of the quality of their life is probably the most important indicator of their level of wellbeing.

The construct of “satisfaction with self, relationships and experiences at school” has some similarities to self-acceptance but it is more than that. Several researchers have argued that satisfaction with aspects of one’s life is not the same as self-esteem (Bender, 1997; Huebner, 1997) and factor analytic studies have supported this distinction (Huebner 1995; Terry and Huebner 1995). Global self-esteem generally refers to an overall evaluation of one’s behaviour and personal characteristics, whereas life satisfaction is a more comprehensive construct that involves cognitive judgments of satisfaction in a number of life domains (Huebner, 1997). The concept of self-esteem does not have the currency in schools that it once had. Seligman (1995) pointed out some of the pitfalls of the construct of self-esteem when he said:

*“Armies of ... teachers, along with ... parents, are straining to bolster children’s self esteem. That sounds innocuous enough, but the way they do it often erodes children’s sense of worth. By emphasizing how a child feels, at the expense of what the child does-mastery, persistence, overcoming frustration and boredom and meeting a challenge-parents and teachers are making this generation of children more vulnerable to depression”. (Seligman, 1995 p.27).*

### The Assumptions Underpinning this Definition

This definition assumes that:

- Student wellbeing is an *outcome* for which there are a number of key determinants. The more user-friendly term “*pathways*” has been adopted to identify the key determinants.
- Student wellbeing is *pervasive* in that it affects most aspects of a student’s functioning at school.
- There are seven different pathways to student wellbeing which, although inevitably interrelated are also discrete enough to be separable.
- There are different levels of student wellbeing and that the more pathways that a student can access, the higher their level of wellbeing is likely to be.
- Levels of student wellbeing are indicated by the degree to which a student demonstrates *effective academic and social and emotional functioning and appropriate behaviour at school*. The concept of maximising one’s potential, although a common thread in the academic literature on wellbeing is considered not to be helpful either as part of a definition of *student wellbeing* nor as an indicator of student wellbeing. The concept of effective functioning is a preferred alternative for its practicality. As noted by Fraillon (2004) effective functioning is more readily observed and measured and it is almost impossible to identify what a student’s “potential” (across a range of school contexts) actually is.

## 2.2 The Pathways to Student Wellbeing

This report uses the more user-friendly term “*pathways to student wellbeing*” in place of the more clinical term “determinants of wellbeing” to indicate that there are many directions that schools can take to enhance student wellbeing. These pathways are, as

mentioned in an earlier section, interrelated but able to be articulated and detailed separately. Each of the seven pathways is described below with some explanation as to how it is linked with wellbeing.

In Section three each of the seven pathways will be discussed in terms of the research evidence on its effects on important student outcomes. The three most important of these are academic achievement, mental health and pro-social, responsible and lawful lifestyle. These three outcomes contribute significantly (in the bigger and longer-term societal picture) to productivity, social inclusion and the building of social capital. In the school context, the building of social capital refers to the ways in which schools enhance the productive capacity of students to work collaboratively and productively to contribute to the school community and later to the broader community. Student equity and access are also facilitated through academic achievement.

The seven pathways identified from the research

In summary the seven pathways are:

1. Physical and emotional safety;
2. Pro-social values;
3. A supportive and caring school community;
4. Social and emotional learning;
5. A strengths-based approach;
6. A sense of meaning and purpose; and
7. A healthy lifestyle.

These seven pathways are explained in more detail below.

### **1. Physical and emotional safety**

Feeling safe from violence, putdowns, being bullied or harassed is an important pathway to wellbeing (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Lee & Smith, 1999). A “safe school” is one in which all members of the school community share and enact a “Safe School’ vision which includes:

- A clear and transparent “safe school” policy
- Procedures and training which ensure that all staff effectively manage situations involving actual or potential victimisation, harassment or violence, and
- A “safe school” curriculum.

### **2. Pro-social values**

Pro-social values are the relatively stable, pervasive and enduring holistic beliefs that people hold about what is right and wrong and the principles that underpin how they live their life. Values form a “moral map” which can guide student behaviour and choices. *Pro-social* values emphasise the importance of harmony and respect, care and concern for others. Eckersley (2005) has commented that most societies have tended to reinforce values that emphasise social obligations and self-restraint and discourage values that promote self-indulgence and anti-social behaviour. Fraillon (2004) has noted that making

contributions to others is implicitly and explicitly indicated as a desirable educational outcome in all Federal, State and Territory Curriculum Standards documents.

The key pro-social values are:

- *Compassion*: Caring about the wellbeing of others and helping where you can;
- *Cooperation*: Working together to achieve a goal;
- *Acceptance of differences*: Recognising the right of others to be different and not excluding or mistreating them because they are different; acting on the inclusive belief that others are fundamentally good;
- *Respect*: Acting towards others in ways that respect their rights eg to have dignity, have their feelings considered, be safe and be treated fairly;
- *Friendliness*: Acting towards others in an inclusive and kind way;
- *Honesty*: Telling the truth and owning up to anything you have done;
- *Fairness*: Focusing on equity and addressing injustices; and
- *Responsibility*: Acting in ways that honour promises and commitments and looking after the wellbeing of those less able.

A caring and supportive classroom environment with a focus on pro-social values and behaviours makes it less likely that students will behave in anti-social ways (Wentzel, 2003). Several studies in the US have provided evidence of a link between improved academic outcomes and the quality teaching of values and student wellbeing and social development (Benninga *et al.*, 2003, 2006; Zins *et al.*, 2004).

Many other researchers have identified the importance of teaching pro-social values as part of enhancing student wellbeing (eg Battistich *et al.*, 2001; Cowie & Olafsson, 2000; Cross, *et al.*, 2004; Flannery *et al.*, 2003; Frey *et al.*, 2000). Pro-social behaviour and positive relationships are underpinned by pro-social values.

### **3. A Supportive and Caring School Community**

Research studies have identified a supportive and caring school community as one in which students regularly experience:

- Positive school and classroom climates (e.g. McMillan & Reid, 1994);
- A sense of connectedness and belonging to a good school of which they are proud (e.g. Anderman, 2003);
- Caring, supportive and respectful relationships with their teachers who also hold high expectations of them (e.g. Nettles, Mucherach and Jones, 2000);
- Positive relationships with other students; and
- Involvement by their parents with the school.

When students consistently have these experiences at school they are more likely to act resiliently and have higher levels of wellbeing (Benard, 2004; Kaplan & Maehr, 1999; Ma, 2005). Gonzalez and Padilla (1997) found resilient students' sense of belonging to school was a significant predictor of their academic resilience.

The research in relation to the factors that contribute towards a safe and caring school community is examined in more detail below.

*Positive school and classroom climate*

Connectedness to school and a sense of belonging are influenced by the overall climate of the specific school and the classrooms within that school (Ma, 2005; Simons-Morton, Crump, Haynie, & Saylor, 1999).

Comer, Haynes, Joynes, & Ben-Avie (1996) and Haynes, Emmons & Ben-Avie, (2001) have identified some of the dimensions of a positive educational climate:

- There is *order and discipline* and students feel safe because the rules are being followed by students and the discipline policy is consistently and fairly enforced. Suldo, Shaffer & Riley (2008) found that students who frequently violated school rules tended to have lower wellbeing;
- Students *treat each other well*;
- *Teacher-student relationships are positive* because of both the competence and relational ability of teachers;
- There is *parental involvement* with the school eg frequent communication between home and school and parent visits to the school);
- Students have *equal access to the school's resources*; and
- The *school building* has a positive appearance and it and the school grounds are well maintained.

*A sense of connectedness and belonging to a good school of which they are proud*

Connectedness involves a subjective perception that one has a close relationship with, and belongs to a specific group of people (Lee & Robbins, 1998). School connectedness involves a sense of being cared for, accepted, valued and supported and finding enjoyment and fun with others within the school environment (McGraw, Moore, Fuller & Bates 2008). Baumeister & Leary (1995) have argued that the need to belong is a basic human and pervasive drive and that a student's perception that they are cared about and supported is especially significant in creating a sense of belonging and wellbeing. Pride in belonging to what students perceive to be "a good school" has also been linked to student wellbeing (Anderman, 2003).

Involvement in extra-curricular activities and exposure to a challenging curriculum can also contribute to school connectedness as well as resilient behaviour (Alva, 1999; Gonzalez and Padilla, 1997; Waxman and Huang, 1996; Catterall, 1998; Finn & Rock, 1997; eg Nettles, Mucherach and Jones, 2000; Floyd, 1996; Hymel, Comfort, Schonert-Reichl, & McDougall, 1996; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Waxman et al., 2003).

*Caring supportive and respectful relationships with their teachers who also have high expectations of them.*

Caring, supportive and respectful teacher-student relationships are critical to many aspects of student wellbeing (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Osterman, 2000). A study conducted by Suldo, Shaffer & Riley (2008) affirmed the link between positive relationships with teachers and levels of wellbeing a finding consistent with research that shows that students who perceive high levels of support from teachers also have higher life satisfaction (Natvig, Albreksten, & Qvarnstrom, 2003; Suldo & Huebner, 2006). Similarly Opdenakker and Van Damme (2000) and Wubbels *et al.*, (2006) found that secondary students had higher wellbeing when they perceived that their teacher cared for them, was attuned to their

needs and was willing to help and lower wellbeing when their teacher was perceived as strict and admonishing. Wentzel (1997) conducted a longitudinal study of 248 middle school students and found that their perception of the level of “pedagogical caring” in their teachers (i.e. how much they cared about the student as a person and their learning, listened to them and provided helpful feedback and support) was strongly and significantly related to their levels of motivation.

A meta-analytic study by Marzano, Marzano & Pickering (2003) found that the quality of the teacher-student relationship was the most important factor in effective classroom management and students’ engagement in learning. Similarly Hattie (2004) identified that one of characteristics of highly skilled teachers as communicating high respect for students. Deakin, Crick and Wilson (2005 and Cawsey (2002) claim that quality classroom relationships are critical for promoting the values and dispositions that are for necessary for students to undertake personal responsibility for life-long learning.

Marzano *et al.*, (2003) have argued that positive student-teacher relationships cannot just be left to chance and that it is a teacher’s professional responsibility to ensure that they establish a positive relationship with each student,. Having high expectations of students is one aspect of this support (National Research Council, 2004).

#### *Positive Peer Relationships*

One of the strongest themes in research into school wellbeing (eg Zins *et al.*, 2004) is the significant contribution of positive peer relationships to a sense of community and student wellbeing. Feeling accepted by peers and having positive peer interactions can enhance the confidence of vulnerable students and make it more likely that they will behave in ways that further encourage positive interactions with others. Friendships provide students with social support, opportunities to practise and refine their social skills and opportunities to discuss moral dilemmas and, in doing so, develop empathy and socio-moral reasoning (Schonert-Reichel, 1999; Thoma & Ladewig, 1991). The more students get to know each other the more likely they are to identify and focus on similarities between themselves and other students and become more accepting of differences (Noble and McGrath, 2008).

#### *Involvement by their parents with the school*

A study by Suldo, Shaffer & Riley (2008) identified parental involvement in schooling as another aspect of the kind of caring and supportive school community that is associated with high levels of wellbeing. Parent involvement was defined as students’ perceptions of their own parents’ presence at school and parental contact with school personnel. Suldo *et al.* (2008) note that participation in schooling may be one way through which parents express support for their children

## **4. Social and Emotional Learning**

It is now well established that social and emotional skills which assist students to get along well with others, work cooperatively with others, show empathy, manage their emotions, cope with setbacks and solve problems effectively are positively linked to wellbeing and specifically to resilience and satisfaction with relationships (Bornstein *et al.*, 2003; Huebner 1991a, 1991b; Ryff & Keyes, 1995)

#### *An Overarching Model of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)*

CASEL (The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning—see [www.casel.org](http://www.casel.org)) has identified a model of SEL using the following five basic categories of social and

emotional learning:

- *Self-awareness* (e.g. accurately assessing one's own feelings, interests, values & strengths; understanding one's own thinking and learning processes; and maintaining a well-grounded sense of self-confidence);
- *Self-management* (e.g. regulating emotions to handle stress, control impulses and persevere in overcoming obstacles; setting and monitoring progress toward personal and academic goals; and expressing emotions appropriately);
- *Social Awareness* (e.g. being able to take the perspective of others and empathise with them; recognising and appreciating individual and group similarities and differences; and recognising and using family, school and community resources);
- *Relationship Skills* (e.g. establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships based on cooperation; resisting inappropriate social pressure; preventing, managing, and resolving interpersonal conflict; and seeking help when needed); and
- *Responsible Decision-Making* (e.g. making decisions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, appropriate social norms, respect for others and likely consequences of actions; applying decision-making skills to academic and social situations; and contributing to the well-being of one's school and community).

#### *Self-efficacy and Self-discipline*

Previous research has documented moderate relationships between academic self-efficacy (that is, the belief that students have the capacity to undertake the tasks they are given) and life satisfaction among students in elementary, middle, and high school (Huebner, Gilman, & Laughlin, 1999; Suldo & Huebner, 2006). Duckworth & Seligman (2006a & 2006b) found that one likely explanation for girls' learning advantage over boys – despite no documented intellectual advantage – was that they were more self-disciplined. This may lead to girls having greater confidence in their capacity to undertake assessed tasks.

#### *Social Skills*

Most researchers agree that social competency is an essential part of a student's capacity for "effective functioning" in their school community (Leary, 2000; Mooij, 1999; Pollard & Lee, 2003; Roberts, 2002; Willard, 1993; Wyn *et al.*, 2000). Examples of learning-related and friendship-related social skills include: sharing resources and workload, cooperating, respectfully disagreeing, negotiation, having an interesting conversation, presenting to an audience; and managing conflict well (McGrath & Francey, 1991; McGrath, 2005; McGrath & Noble, 2003). Students with high levels of wellbeing are more likely demonstrate more pro-social behaviour (Gilman, 2001).

#### *Emotions*

The understanding and management of one's emotions and the capacity to generate positive emotions are commonly cited components of wellbeing (Salovey *et al.*, 2003). Emotional management includes the self-regulating processes of monitoring, evaluating and modifying emotional reactions (Pollard & Davidson, 2001). The Positive Psychology model (Fredrickson, 2001) has emphasised the importance for wellbeing of both experiencing and learning how to generate positive emotions. Major categories of positive or pleasant

emotions include those of low arousal (e.g., contentment), moderate arousal (e.g., pleasure), and high arousal (e.g., euphoria). They include positive reactions to others (e.g., affection), positive reactions to activities (e.g., interest and engagement), and general positive moods (e.g., joy) (Deiner, 2006). Fredrickson (2001) has developed a ‘broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions that proposes that positive emotions help people to be better problem-solvers through empowering them to become more open-minded and to think more flexibly.

### *Coping Skills*

Students with high levels of wellbeing are more likely to demonstrate more effective coping skills and self-reliance (Greenspoon and Saklofske, 2001; Neto, 1993).

Many researchers (e.g. Martin and Marsh, 2007; Waxman, Gray & Padron 2003) have cogently argued that there are two types of student resilience. The first can be termed “general life resilience” and the second “educational or academic resilience”. General life resilience has most commonly been seen as effective coping responses to “acute” situations or adversities (e.g Lindstroem, 2001; Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000; Masten, 2001; Werner, 2000). On the other hand education/academic resilience has been hypothesized to involve coping with chronic educational situations such as difficulties with reading, a lack of access to materials and equipment or living in a household that doesn’t support school learning. Studies into educational/academic resilience have focused on students with chronic underachievement such as those with learning disabilities (e.g. Margalit, 2004; Meltzer, 2004; Miller, 2002) and those in ongoing disadvantaging home situations characterized by poverty, (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997), a minority group background (e.g. Overstreet & Braun, 1999) or parental drug and alcohol abuse. Such students are more likely to face chronic failure and threats to confidence (Martin & Marsh, 2007) and become de-motivated and disengaged in school.

Specific coping skills that have been identified include:

- *Rational and optimistic thinking* (Peterson 2000; Seligman, 1995; Gillham & Reivich 2004; Seligman, Reivich, Jaycox & Gillham (1995), including the capacity to use optimistic explanations of why failure occurred. (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). In their overview study, MacLeod and Moore (2000) concluded that an optimistic way of interpreting and adjusting to negative life events is an essential component of coping and wellbeing. Students with high levels of resilience and hence wellbeing are more likely to use more optimistic thinking (Ben-Zur, 2003; Seligman 1995);
- *The capacity to “emotionally distance” from distressing experiences* (Benard, 2004);
- *The ability to set, plan for and achieve personal and academic goals* (Grant & Dweck 2003; McMillan & Reid, 1994; Waxman, Gray and Padron, 2003; Wayman, 2002); and
- *The use of appropriate humour* (Benard, 2004; Lefcourt, 2001).

### *Empathy*

Empathy contributes to the development of pro-social values and positive relationships have both affective and cognitive components. Cognitive empathy involves detached intellectual perspective taking and affective empathy is about the vicarious experience of another person’s feelings (Gladstein, 1983).

## 5. A Strengths-based Approach

A strengths-based approach has been advocated by many researchers and writers as an important pathway to student wellbeing (eg Elias *et al.* 2003, Seligman 2008, Fox Eades 2008; Jimerson *et al.*, 2001, 2004; McGrath & Noble, 2005; Noble & McGrath, 2008; Rhee, *et al.* 2001). It has also emerged as a significant theme from the Positive Youth Development' movement (eg Benson, 1997, 1999; Catalano, *et al.*,1999). The Positive Psychology model also includes “strengths” as one of the foundations of wellbeing (Seligman, 2008).

A “strength” can be defined as a natural capacity for behaving, thinking and feeling in a way that promotes successful goal achievement (Linley & Harrington, 2006). A strengths-based approach identifies and builds on strengths but doesn't ignore the fact that weaknesses also need to be understood and managed (Clifton & Harter, 2006).

## 6. A Sense of Meaning and Purpose

A sense of meaning can be defined as involvement in a task or activity that impacts on people other than just oneself whilst a sense of purpose can be defined as involvement in a worthwhile task or activity (Noble & McGrath, 2008). Finding meaning and purpose is a core developmental task for all young people and especially for adolescents (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006).

Opportunities for students to participate in and make a significant contribution to the school community can also assist the development of resilience (Benard, 2004). Community service (or service learning) both within and outside the school is one way in which schools can facilitate educational experiences that provide students with a sense of meaning and purpose. Participating in structured extracurricular activities such as team sport or clubs (Gilman, 2001; Mahoney, 2000; Mahoney and Cairns, 1997; Mahoney and Stattin, 2002; Mahoney, Stattin, and Magnusson, 2001; Wong and Csikszentmihalyi, 1991) or in community service activities (Maton, 1990; Wong and Csikszentmihalyi, 1991) has been shown to be associated with higher levels of student wellbeing. It has been suggested that the opportunity for structured peer social interaction that occurs in such activities is part of this link (Park, 2004).

Helping others in a less structured way has also been shown to link with high levels of student wellbeing (McCullough, Huebner & Laughlin, 2000). Post (2008), reports that the research literature indicates that volunteering and altruistic behaviour impacts positively on student wellbeing and mental health, positive mood, social competence and self-esteem and increases an individual's sense of meaning or purpose.

Student autonomy has been shown in many studies to contribute to a sense of meaning and purpose and enhance student resilience (e.g. Benard, 2004; Bridges, 2003). Autonomy can be described as behaviour that is willingly chosen and endorsed (Chirkov, Ryan, Kim, & Kaplan, 2003) and is similar to the concept of self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In the school context a student can demonstrate autonomy in many ways such as acting on curiosity to instigate and make plans for a project, reflecting on and evaluating their own learning (Ryff & Singer, 1996), making choices in relation to learning tasks and topics and being involved with student leadership, representation and peer support structures. Research has demonstrated that students who have a reasonable degree of autonomy at school are more effective learners, are more motivated to achieve and have more positive mood and satisfaction at school (Wubbels, Brekelmans and Hoodmayers, 1991).

Spirituality has also been described by many as part of a positive sense of meaning and

purpose in life (Adams & Benzer, 2000; Burrows, 2006; Ryff & Singer, 1996; Tsang & McCullough, 2003) and as contributing to wellbeing.

*“Spiritual well-being is often seen as a sense of connectedness to something larger than oneself, bringing with it a sense of meaning, purpose and personal value”* (Burrows, 2006, p 6).

The right to a sense of spiritual well-being is mentioned in the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and Burrows (2006) has argued that schools have a duty to ensure that a student’s spirituality is nurtured.

Spirituality has begun to be recognized as a construct distinct from religion for many people (Ingersoll, 1998). Spirituality can be distinguished from religiosity in that religiosity involves an active search for and maintenance of faith in a notional divine entity or object (Hill, Pargament, Hood, McCullough, & Sawyers, 2000). The broader notion of spirituality also incorporates individual systems of moral and social beliefs and purpose that are not linked to a belief in the sacred. Adams and Benzer (2000) argue that it is possible to be either spiritual or religious or both. Tacey (2000) has outlined a concept of “generic spirituality” which is more about seeking truth and what’s meaningful and sacred about life and does not necessarily focus on a specific religious tradition. Burrows (2006) notes that for some schools there is still some reluctance to use the terms “spiritual” or “spirituality” (Chittenden, 2000) because of its connotation with religion.

## 7. A Healthy lifestyle

The “healthy lifestyle” pathway includes self-protective behaviours that minimise risk and maximise wellbeing such as:

- Sensible eating and a good diet;
- Physical activity;
- Avoidance of drug use;
- A self-protective approach to sexuality; and
- Sun protection (Bornstein *et al.*, 2003; Pollard & Davidson, 2001).

School-based health programs have been shown to improve student health (Blanksby & Whipp, 2004; Bornstein *et al.*, 2003; Luepker *et al.*, 1996) but Fraillon (2004) concludes that, although this conclusion is unequivocal, he is not convinced that the physical pathway to wellbeing is significant. On the other hand Frisch (2000) has concluded that wellbeing in young people is positively linked to both physical health and healthy lifestyle behaviours such as exercise and healthy eating and negatively linked to health-compromising behaviours such as tobacco, drug and alcohol use and poor diet. In one study, non-resilient students were found to frequently report feeling tired (Waxman and Huang, 1996).

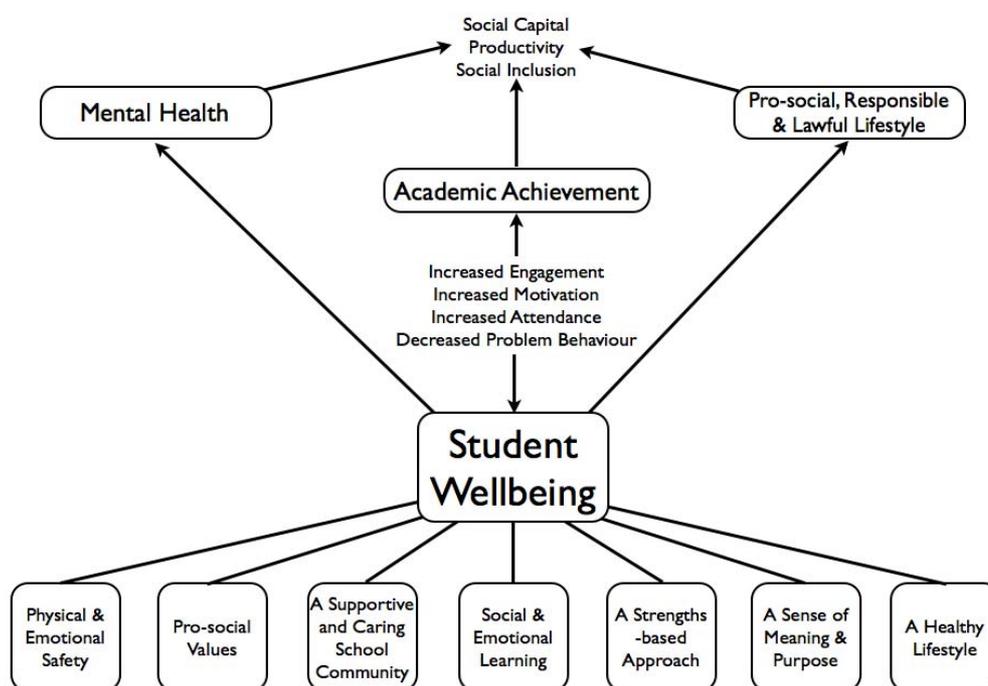
Students’ health has links with their sense of connectedness to school, family and community (AIHW 2007). Taking part in physical activity has been shown to contribute to wellbeing in both the short and long term by generating positive emotions and reducing feelings of stress, anxiety and depression (Dunn *et al.* 2001).

## Section 3: The Outcomes of Student Wellbeing and its Pathways

### 3.1 Introduction

In this section, each of the seven pathways will be discussed in terms of the research evidence about its positive impact on important student outcomes. The three most important of these are academic achievement, mental health and pro-social, responsible and lawful lifestyle. The student wellbeing pathways model (see Figure 1) explains the overall picture.

Figure 1: The Student Wellbeing Pathways Model



In summary, the research evidence on the effects of student wellbeing and its pathways indicates that students with high levels of wellbeing and/or access to many of its pathways are more likely to:

- Have *higher academic achievement* and *complete Year 12*
- Have *better mental health* (i.e. lower and/or less severe rates of illnesses such as depression and anxiety)
- Engage in a *more pro-social, responsible and lawful lifestyle* (that is, they display concern for the wellbeing of others, make responsible decisions about the consequences of their actions on themselves and others [including using drugs and alcohol in a responsible way], and do not violate the laws and norms of their society). In some ways the term “ethical choices” may be preferable to “lawful

lifestyle” but it was felt that “ethical choices” is a more difficult concept both to articulate and to measure.

All three outcomes contribute significantly (in the bigger and longer-term societal picture) to greater participation in the workforce (and hence greater productivity), more social inclusion, and more effective building of Australia’s social capital.

### Productivity

The rates of Year 12 completion and participation in further education are much lower in disadvantaged groups such as students from low socio-economic backgrounds, indigenous Australians, and Australians from regional and remote areas (Gillard, 2008). Student equity and access are facilitated through improvements in academic achievement. Academic achievement and completion of Year 12 leads to greater employability, less reliance on welfare support and a higher likelihood of participation in further education. These outcomes in turn further increase the likelihood of sustainable employment, adequate income and self-sufficiency.

On the other hand an Australian early school leaver can expect to earn approximately \$500,000 less in the course of their working life than someone who completes Year 12 (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2005). It has been estimated that early school leaving (and the associated lower levels of educational achievement) costs Australia \$2.6 billion a year in higher levels of social welfare, costs associated with health and crime prevention, lower revenue from income taxes, lower levels of productivity and a smaller Gross Domestic Product. There is also a social impact in terms of repeated inter-generational problems of low academic outcomes, unemployment and poverty, lower levels of participation in the political process and less contribution to the community (Black 2006; Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2005; Muir *et al.*, 2003).

In school contexts, depression adversely affects school performance (Andrews, Szabo and Burns, 2001). Mental illness can be a barrier to participation in the workforce and, in many cases, to self-sufficiency. This is especially true when it is accompanied by substance abuse. Enhancing student wellbeing and some of its pathways can contribute to lower levels of mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety.

Students who (as adolescents and later as adults) have a lifestyle which enhances their relationships with others in their community, and does not involve substance abuse nor bring them into contact with the justice system are more able to participate in the workforce and the life of their community. Costs associated with road trauma, the justice system, hospital care and welfare are also reduced.

### Social Inclusion

Social inclusion is the process of enabling all Australians to share in the nation’s prosperity by ensuring that everyone has the opportunity and skills to gain employment, access community services, be socially connected, deal with personal crises and have their voices heard (Australian Social Inclusion Board, 2008). Students who have opportunities to achieve academically, to be assisted with the prevention and amelioration of mental health difficulties and to engage in behaviours that are indicative of a pro-social, responsible and lawful lifestyle are more able to fully participate in their community.

## Social Capital

In a school context, the building of social capital refers to the ways in which schools enhance the productive capacity of students to work collaboratively and productively and contribute to the school community and later to the broader community. Academic achievement, mental health and a pro-social, responsible and lawful lifestyle can help students to become adults who are able to contribute to Australia's social capital

## 3.2 Academic Achievement

The relationship between many of the pathways and academic achievement is bi-directional. For example school connectedness contributes to student academic outcomes but student academic outcomes also contribute to school connectedness (Mok, 2006).

Enhancing student wellbeing and its pathways can increase academic achievement both directly but indirectly. The four main mechanisms by which the enhancement of wellbeing and its pathways can indirectly improve academic achievement are:

- By increasing student motivation to participate and achieve;
- By increasing student engagement with and participation in learning;
- By increasing student attendance and hence increasing school completion; and
- By decreasing problem behaviour at school and hence decreasing levels of suspension and exclusion from school.

### Increasing Student Motivation

Many studies have identified a link between increased motivation and increased academic achievement (e.g. Croninger & Lee, 2001; Resnick, Bearman & Blum, 1997).

### Increasing Student Engagement

Engagement with classroom learning appears to be a good predictor of early academic skill development (DiPerna, 2006). Engagement is evidenced by a student's active participation in classroom learning tasks (Greenwood, Horton, & Utley, 2002) and a student's attention, interest and investment of time and effort (Mark, 2000).

Increases in engagement have been linked to improvements in academic outcomes and reductions in school absenteeism (e.g. Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Croninger & Lee, 2001). Many researchers (e.g. Alexander, Entwisle & Horsey, 1997; Alexander, Entwisle & Kabbani, 2001; Finn, 1989, 1993) have used research evidence to argue that dropping out of school is a long-term process of disengagement that starts as early as the second year of primary schooling.

### Increasing Student Attendance and School Completion

Improvements in school attendance are very strongly linked to improvements in academic outcomes (Croninger & Lee, 2001). On the other hand absenteeism is a predictor of leaving school early, future criminality, alcoholism, and occupational difficulties (Hersov & Berg, 1980). Absenteeism among indigenous students is markedly higher than among non-Indigenous students as is low academic achievement and lower Year 12 completion rates

(Bourke, Rigby and Burden, 2000).

Regular school attendance is a critical factor in student success and poor school attendance and the associated loss of learning time can have lifelong consequences for students. Students who are regularly absent from school are at the greatest risk of: becoming disconnected from their teachers and peers, dropping out of school early, becoming long-term unemployed or homeless, working in unskilled jobs, being caught in the poverty trap, becoming dependent on welfare and being involved in the justice system (DeRosier, Kupersmidt, & Patterson, 1994; Gerics & Westheimer, 1988; Hersov, 1960; Lee and Burkham, 1992; *National Strategy for Equity in Schooling*, 1994). Students from disadvantaged backgrounds have higher rates of school absenteeism than other students (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, 1996).

Lower levels of academic achievement are the inevitable outcome of missing significant amounts of learning time through not regularly attending school. Bampton, Daniel & Dempster & Simons (2008) have reported the results of a study into rates of absenteeism and mobility amongst students attending Queensland state schools. The results indicated significant prediction of levels of student achievement from levels of student attendance.

One of the most concerning aspects of student absenteeism is the fact that it is associated with dropping out of school before completion of Year 12 (and in some cases before completion of Year 10). Leaving school early is associated with:

- Poorer mental and physical health: Students who do not complete secondary school are almost four times more likely to report poorer health;
- A higher likelihood of child abuse and neglect when early leavers become parents;
- Higher instances of homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse and criminal activity; and
- Mortality rates up to nine times higher than the general population (Black 2006; Chapman *et al.* 2002; Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2005; Long, 2005; Pallas, 1995; Vinson, 2004).

#### Decreasing Problem Behaviour at School

Disruptive and other problem behaviours at school are associated with lower levels of academic achievement (Farrington, Loeber, Elliott, Hawkins, Kandel, Klein *et al.*, 1990; Hinshaw, 1992a, 1992b). There is usually an associated loss of learning time through suspension and exclusion from school. Indigenous students have higher rates of suspension than non-indigenous students (Bourke, Rigby and Burden, 2000). Decreasing problem and disruptive behaviour can contribute to higher levels of academic achievement.

### 3.3 The Seven Pathways to Wellbeing

This review of the literature has identified that, in summary, there are seven pathways to student wellbeing. These are as follows:

1. Physical and emotional safety;
2. Pro-social values;
3. A Supportive and caring school community;

4. Social and emotional learning;
5. A strengths-based approach;
6. A sense of meaning and purpose; and
8. A healthy lifestyle.

These pathways to student wellbeing are interrelated but still separable. They interact with each other to enhance student wellbeing. The whole (i.e. wellbeing) is greater than just the sum of the parts (i.e. the pathways). Each of these pathways is discussed below in relation to student learning.

## 1. Physical and Emotional Safety

Concern about bullying reflects a growing awareness of the rights of all people to be safe from victimisation and abuse, including women, those with a different sexual orientation, people from different ethnic or religious groupings and people with disabilities (McGrath & Noble, 2006).

Multiple studies have emphasised the link between bullying others at school and later violent, antisocial and/or criminal behaviour. (e.g. Nansel, Overpeck, Haynie, Ryan & Scheidt, 2003; Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton & Scheidt, 2001; Sourander, Jensen, Rønning *et al.*, 2007). Olweus (1993) found that approximately 60 percent of boys identified as regularly bullying others were convicted of a crime by the age of 24 and 40 percent of them had three or more convictions by age 24.

Rigby and Slee (1999) have noted that adolescents who bully others have a higher likelihood of school absenteeism, engaging in vandalism and graffiti, shoplifting and getting into trouble with the police. Students who bully others are not only at risk of becoming serious violent offenders but are also at risk of engaging in domestic violence and raising children who themselves engage in bullying others.

Students who are bullied are likely to react with a range of mental health difficulties such as anxiety and depression (Rigby, 2001; Slee 2006). In a meta-analytic review of 20 years of research Hawker and Boulton (2000) concluded that it was clear that being a target for bullying was associated with depression, loneliness, anxiety, low self esteem and poor social self concept. Similar data showed that young people who reported lower levels of wellbeing were more likely to report feeling unsafe at school and to have been harmed at school through school bullying or school violence (Valois *et al.*, 2001). Nansel *et al.* (2001) also found that students who had been bullied demonstrated poorer social and emotional adjustment, greater difficulty making friends, poorer relationships with classmates and poor academic achievement.

Addressing bullying and violence in schools assists the mental health of all students and creates a learning environment in which wellbeing can thrive. Low levels of bullying are more likely in schools where there is effective leadership which articulates a vision for student wellbeing underpinned by pro-social values (such as respect and acceptance of differences) and an effective and consistent whole school positive behaviour management program (McGrath & Noble, 2007).

## 2. Pro-social Values

Values education is defined as any explicit and/or implicit school-based activity which

promotes student understanding and knowledge of values and which develops the skills and dispositions of students so they can enact the particular values as individuals and as members of the wider community (National Framework in Values Education, p.10). Values education is now seen to include moral, character, and civics or citizenship education in response to the need to discover new ways of dealing with the ongoing problems of racism, drug abuse, domestic violence, sexual abuse, AIDS and new terrorisms (Lovat & Clement 2008).

From their experience in working with schools implementing the National Framework in Values Education, Lovat and Toomey (2007) have concluded that values education is at the heart of all pedagogy and curriculum. Teaching values is seen by several researchers as an inextricable part of any effective teaching and schooling because values education encapsulates the moral dimension of all effective learning (Carr, 2006; Halliday, 1998; Lovat & Clement 2008). Based on data from the Australian Government's Values Education Good Practices Schools (VEGPS) project Lovat & Clement (2008) argue that any educational regime that excludes a values dimension in learning will be weakening the potential effects of all learning (including academic learning) and weakening the potential impact on student wellbeing.

Values are the basis of any school culture, and they articulate the essence of the school's philosophy, its goals and how it goes about achieving them. Many researchers have included the teaching of pro-social values as part of their overall and moderately successful anti-bullying, anti-violence or student wellbeing interventions (Battistich *et al.*, 2001; Cowie & Olafsson, 2000; Cross *et al.*, 2004a; Flannery *et al.*, 2003; Frey *et al.*, 2000). Both Lovat & Clement (2008) and Lovat and Toomey (2007) have focused more on the benefits of values education to enhance quality teaching than to achieve specific student learning outcomes. They highlight the key role of teachers in forming positive relationships (commitment and care) with their students through their implementation of values education initiatives. These class or school initiatives become the basis for developing their students' personal character and their citizenship skills.

In the VEGPS projects values education initiatives have been shown to extend the strategies, options and repertoires of teachers for effectively managing learning environments and for developing positive school and class cultures that positively influence both student and teacher behaviour (Lovat & Clement 2008). It is difficult to establish a strong causal link between values education and student learning. However the documented results of the VEGPS project, stage one indicate the beneficial effects of values education on student motivation to learn "with even more than a hint of improved academic achievement" (Lovat & Clement, 2008 p.12). This quotation, however, does not appear to do justice to the rich range of the projects that were part of the VEGPS project and which are discussed in Lovat & Toomey (2007) and/or presented at the Values Education conferences. Many of these initiatives were part of the formal and/or informal school curriculum and engaged students in purposeful authentic learning activities that were valued by the students, had broader community value and met or exceeded mandated curriculum goals (Holdsworth, 2002).

### **3. A Supportive and Caring School Community**

Being part of a supportive and caring school community has many benefits for students.

#### *School Connectedness*

A comprehensive Australian longitudinal study of adolescents showed that 40 percent of the students surveyed felt that they did not have anyone in or outside of school who they perceived

knew them well or who they could trust. Young people reporting low connectedness were two to three times more likely to experience depressive symptoms compared to peers who felt more connected (Glover, Burns, Butler & Patton, 1998). Baumeister and Leary (1995, p.497) characterise the need to belong or feel connected as “a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive and significant interpersonal relationships”. They state the failure to fulfil this need can create long lasting pathological consequences. They argue that a student’s perception that they are cared about and supported in class and school is especially significant in creating a sense of belonging. On the other hand, when students experience feelings associated with a lack of belonging, rejection or isolation, such as grief, jealousy, anger and loneliness, they are less likely to conform to school rules and norms (Wentzel & Asher, 1995) and more likely to have negative perceptions of school and schoolwork, avoid school and leave school at an early age (Ladd, 1990).

Many studies have identified links between school connectedness and a range of positive outcomes in relation to student learning. These are summarized below.

*School connectedness is linked to increased engagement and participation at school*

Not surprisingly research has shown a strong link between school connectedness and students’ levels of engagement, enjoyment of school and investment of themselves in the process of learning (Benard, 2004; McGraw *et al.*, 2008). In her review of research Osterman (2000) identified trends that suggested that when students experience a sense of belonging and acceptance they are more likely to participate more at school, be more interested and engaged with classroom and school activities, show more commitment to their school and their schoolwork and have a positive orientation towards school and teachers.

*School connectedness is linked to higher levels of academic achievement*

Students are more likely to succeed academically when they feel connected to school (Battistich & Hom, 1997; Catalano, Haggerty, Oesterle, Fleming, Hawkins 2003; Goodenow, 1993; Lee, Smith, Perry & Smylie, 1999; Schapps, 2003; Voelkl, 1995). One study (Anderman, 2003) found that the grade point averages of students in years 6-8 were positively associated with their sense of belonging to their school.

*School connectedness is linked to school completion*

An Australian study (Bond, Butler, Thomas, Carlin Glover, Bowes & Patton, 2007) found that the likelihood of completing school was reduced for students with low school connectedness. Other studies have obtained similar results Connell, Halpern-Felsher, Clifford, Crichlow & Usinger, 1995; Finn & Rock, 1993; Goodenow, 1993; Wentzel, 1998).

*School connectedness is linked to reductions in anti-social or disruptive behaviour and increases in pro-social behaviour*

Several studies have identified that school connectedness can lead to reductions in anti-social behaviour such as bullying, violence and vandalism (Lonczak, Abbott, Hawkins, Kosterman & Catalano 2002; Resnick, Bearman & Blum, 1997; Schapps, 2003; Wilson & Elliott, 2003). Studies of social development have demonstrated that students who do not find rewarding experiences and positive relationships in school will seek them elsewhere, potentially in behaviors and relationships that place them at risk (Bond, *et al.*, 2007).

Osterman (2000) identified trends in her overview of research for students who felt more connected to school to act supportively towards others, demonstrate more pro-social behaviour, demonstrate greater acceptance of authority and accept more responsibility for

regulating their own behaviour in the classroom.

*School connectedness is linked to lower rates of health-risk behaviour (e.g. drug, tobacco and alcohol use) and mental health problems*

Young people are more likely to have mental health problems and to use substances in the later years of schooling if they report low school connectedness and interpersonal conflict in early secondary school (Blum & Libbey, 2004; Bond, *et al.*, 2007; Resnick, 2000). In one study, Australian adolescents who reported low school connectedness were two to three times more likely to experience depressive symptoms compared to peers who felt more connected (Glover, Burns, Butler & Patton 1998). These results are consistent with those from other studies that have demonstrated that school connectedness has the power to reduce student substance abuse and mental health difficulties (Blum & Libbey 2004; Bond, Butler, Thomas, Carlin Glover, Bowes & Patton, 2007; Catalano, Haggerty, Oesterle *et al.*, 2004; Glover, Burns, Butler *et al.*, 1998; Lee, Smith, Perry & Smylie, 1999; Libbey, 2004; Lonczak, Abbott, Hawkins, Kosterman & Catalano 2002; McNeely & Falci, 2004; Resnick, 2000; Resnick, Harris & Blum, 1993).

School connectedness has also been linked to a later age for first sexual experience (Lonczak, Abbott, Hawkins, Kosterman & Catalano 2002; Samdal, Nutbeam, Wold & Kannasm 1998).

*Teacher-student relationships and peer relationships*

A positive school culture is characterised by both positive peer relationships and positive teacher-student relationships (McGrath, 2007) and the systematic promotion and facilitation of positive relationships at school has been identified by many researchers as a core component for improving student wellbeing, enhancing school culture, preventing school violence and bullying, successfully engaging students' intrinsic motivation to learn and improving student academic outcomes (Battisch, 2001; Battisch *et al.*, 1995; Benard, 2004; Resnick *et al.*, 1997).

When a school works to facilitate positive school-based relationships bullying is less likely to thrive, student wellbeing is enhanced and there is a greater likelihood of higher student engagement with school (Blum & Libbey, 2004; Galloway & Roland 2004; Schaps & Lewis, 1999; McGrath & Noble, 2003). Schaps (2003) has argued that a positive school culture underpinned by the intentional facilitation of positive relationships predisposes students to:

- Adopt the goals and values of the school
- Show more compassion and concern for others and more altruistic behaviour
- Be more prepared to resolve conflicts fairly
- Engage in more altruistic and pro-social behaviour
- Adopt an inclusive rather than exclusive attitude toward others.

Eaton (1979) found that poor or conflicted relationships between teachers and students was the most significant factor related to absenteeism and other studies have supported this conclusion (Bealing, 1990; Harte, 1994). Corville-Smith and colleagues (1998) found evidence that a student's negative perception of school and school personnel may be a predictor of future absenteeism. Moos and Moos (1978) also found that a negative classroom environment and a perceived lack of teacher support led to increased student absenteeism. Studies of students who drop out have shown that the most common reason given is that their teachers do not care about them, do not offer academic and social support and are

unwilling to help with problems (Fine, 1986; Macleod, 1987). Croninger & Lee (2001) found that the secondary students who benefited most from a supportive relationship with their teachers were those most at risk of dropping out, especially if they were from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

Young people who have poor relationships with peers and/or teachers are more likely to use drugs and engage in socially disruptive behaviours, report anxiety/depressive symptoms, have poorer adult relationships in general and fail to complete secondary school (Resnick, Harris & Blum, 1993; Bond, Carlin, Thomas, 2001; Barclay & Doll, 2001; Catalano, Kosterman, Hawkins *et al.*, 1996; Doll & Hess, 2001; Marcus & Sanders-Reio, 2001).

Positive teacher-student relationships contribute significantly, not only to student wellbeing and pro-social behaviour but also to their learning outcomes (Benard, 2004; Fraser & Walberg, 2005; Fredriksen & Rhodes, 2004; Pianta *et al.*, 2002; Battisch, 2001).

If students feel valued and supported by their teacher then they are more likely to be motivated to learn (Wentzel, 1997). Benard (2004) has written about the importance of “turn-around teachers” in helping children develop educational resilience. Such teachers refrain from judging, and do not take students’ behaviours personally. They may also proactively seek referrals to social service agencies for overwhelmed families. Many students feel they “owe” something to a teacher who shows genuine interest in and care for them (Davidson, 1999; Stipek, 2006) and may be less likely to disappoint them by failing to complete assignments or engaging in anti-social behaviour. Children who recognise the satisfaction that derives from teacher approval may also be more likely to work towards academic achievement (Fredriksen & Rhodes, 2004).

In a meta-analysis of more than 100 studies, Marzano *et al.* (2003) found that the quality of the teacher-student relationship was also the most important factor in effective classroom management and students’ engagement in learning. Over a year, teachers who had high-quality relationships with their students had 31 per cent fewer discipline problems, and related problems than other teachers. Many different research studies are remarkably consistent in their conclusions about students’ ideas about the qualities of a “good teacher”, focusing mostly on the interpersonal quality of their relationship with their teachers (e.g. Arnold, 2005; Rowe, 2004, Trent, 2001; Werner, 2000; Ruddick *et al.*, 1997). These qualities include being respectful and friendly, showing affection and support, listening, being empathic, noticing when a student is absent and being interested in them.

Marzano *et al.* (2003) argue that positive student-teacher relationships cannot just be left to chance and that it is a teacher’s professional responsibility to ensure that they establish a positive relationship with each student. Possible research-based strategies/approaches include: teachers working harder to get to know students, treating them as individuals and expressing interest in their personal lives outside school (Slade & Trent 2000); teachers using more effective classroom management (Marzano *et al.*, 2003); and students having more contact over time with fewer teachers. In secondary schools, block scheduling (classes of at least 90 minutes long) offer teachers more opportunity to interact with students for sustained periods of time. Since the classes are less rushed, informal teacher-student interactions as well as academic interactions are more likely to occur (Stipek, 2006).

Positive and supportive peer relationships can also motivate students to engage in learning activities and socially appropriate behaviour (e.g., Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Wentzel, 1991, 1999). Students who believe that their peers are supportive and care about them tend to be more engaged in positive aspects of classroom life, pursue academic and pro-social goals more frequently, and earn higher grades than students who do not perceive

such support (e.g., Goodenow, 1993; Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, 1989; Wentzel, 1994, 1998).

Friendships provide students with social support, opportunities to practise and refine their social skills and opportunities to discuss moral dilemmas and, in doing so, develop empathy and socio-moral reasoning (Thoma & Ladewig, 1991; Schonert-Reichel, 1999). The more students get to know each other the more likely they are to identify and focus on similarities between themselves and other students and become more accepting of differences. Criss *et al.* (2002) have demonstrated that peer acceptance and peer friendships can moderate aggressive and acting-out behaviour in young children with family backgrounds that are characterised by family adversity (such as economic/ecological disadvantage, violent marital conflict and harsh family discipline).

One of the most comprehensive evidence based teaching strategies that link student wellbeing with academic and social-emotional learning and positive peer relationships is cooperative learning. Over a thousand research studies have documented the many student benefits of cooperative learning (Benard, 2004; Marzano, *et al.*, 2001) which include improvements in academic outcomes, positive peer relationships, social skills, empathy, motivation, acceptance of diversity (ethnic, racial, physical), conflict resolution, self-esteem, self-control, positive attitudes to school, and critical thinking (Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Johnson, *et al.*, 2001; Slavin, 1995). Cooperative learning and cooperative group work have also been associated with lower levels of bullying, an increased ability to tolerate different perspectives on the same issue and increased levels of assertive problem-solving skills (Johnson, *et al.*, 2001; Ortega & Lera, 2000).

Circle Time is another pedagogical process that builds classroom community and teaches social-emotional learning. Research outcomes for the use of Circle Time demonstrate an improvement in classroom ethos, inclusion and greater teacher and peer support and improvements in peer relationships, reduced behaviour problems and more engagement and attention to work (Roffey 2006, 2008; Taylor 2003). Teachers also identified significant positive changes in individual students relating to their social-emotional skills and oral literacy. These skills included self-confidence, expression of feelings, problem solving, conflict resolution and social skills.

Other strategies that have been found to improve peer relationships and enhance student learning include Restorative Practices (eg Armstrong & Thorsburne, 2006), and peer support structures (such as peer counselling, peer mediation, peer mentoring/buddy systems and peer tutoring) (Stanley & McGrath, 2006).

#### **4. Social and Emotional Learning**

It is now well established that social and emotional skills such as the ability to work cooperatively with others, manage one's emotions, cope with setbacks and solve problems effectively are integral parts of academic success. The learning outcomes of teaching such skills include: improved school performance; improved learning-to-learn skills; better problem solving and planning capacity; and greater use of higher level reasoning strategies as well as higher levels of pro-social behaviour; and a better understanding of the consequences of their behaviour (Devaney, *et al.*, 2006.; Greenberg, *et al.*, 2000; Zins, *et al.*, 2004).

Other research studies have demonstrated that students who experience opportunities for social-emotional learning participate in class more, demonstrate more pro-social behaviour,

have fewer absences and improved attendance, show reductions in aggression and disruptive behaviour and are more likely to complete school (Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg 2004; Devaney *et al.*, 2006).

Zins *et al.* (2004) also report several studies that have demonstrated that students' pro-social behaviour is directly linked to positive intellectual outcomes and predicts their performance on standardised achievement tests. Several research studies have provided evidence for positive associations between socio-emotional skills and both social and academic success (eg see reviews by Brackett & Salovey, 2006 and Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). Gil-Olarte Márquez, Martín & Brackett (2006) used a self-report instrument to assess the socio-emotional skills of high school students and found that the results predicted students' final academic results. A student's level of social competence and their friendship networks has been found to be predictive of their later academic achievement (Caprara *et al.* 2000; Wentzel & Caldwell 1997).

High levels of social-emotional competency is also linked to a number of student wellbeing and mental health outcomes such as improved coping abilities (Salovey *et al.*, 1999), limited drug and alcohol addiction (Trinidad & Johnson 2002), capacity to mediate aggression (Jagers *et al.*, 2007), enhanced general psychosocial functioning (McCraty *et al.*, 1999). Increases in social and emotional competency have also been shown to lead to increased school connectedness (Whitlock, 2003) and reductions in school bullying (Bear *et al.*, 2003)

A major new American meta-analysis of 207 studies of social-emotional learning (SEL) programs conducted by a CASEL research team (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2008) involving more than 288,000 students from urban, suburban, and rural elementary and secondary schools reveals that students who participate in such programs profit in multiple ways. The programs included values/character education, anti-bullying prevention programs, conflict-resolution training and resilience programs. To be included in the meta-analysis, research studies had to involve students 5-18 years old who did not have any identified problems, that is, the intervention was directed at the general school population of students, not a specific "problem" group and to include a control group.

Students who participated in these programs (when compared to students who did not) showed positive benefits such as: improved social and emotional skills; more positive attitudes about themselves, others, and school; more pro-social classroom behaviour; fewer conduct problems such as classroom misbehaviour and aggression; less emotional distress (e.g. stress and depression) and higher academic results. Across the studies evaluating academic outcomes, students who had participated in SEL programs scored 11 percentile points higher on standardized achievement tests compared to peers who did not have the opportunity to participate in the program. Moreover, among those studies that collected follow-up data in each of the above categories, the positive benefits to students were found to persist over time.

The meta-analysis identified three major types of school-based SEL programs:

- *Classroom Programs Conducted by Teachers.* These usually took the form of a specific curriculum or set of lesson plans delivered within the classroom setting only.
- *Classroom Programs Conducted by Researchers.* These were similar to those conducted by teachers, with the major difference that researchers administered the intervention.

- *Multi-Component Programs.* These types of programs added another component to classroom-based strategies that varied depending on the investigation—for example, a component involving parents or a school-wide component that stressed the importance of reorganizing school structures and practices in order to encourage and support students’ positive development, for example, through school climate improvement strategies.

The study found that the classroom programs conducted by teachers were effective in each of the six outcome areas and that multi-component programs (also conducted by school staff) were effective in four of the six outcome areas. Furthermore, only when school staff (not researchers and developers) conducted the intervention did students’ academic performance improve significantly. The clear implication is that school-based social-emotional programs should become a part of routine school practice. If conducted by personnel from outside the school there is a lower likelihood of good results.

However these CASEL findings from USA school-based programs need to be treated with some caution if applied to other countries such as Australia. Many of the American SEL programs do not ‘fit’ the Australian education context because they are highly structured, highly sequenced and “manualised”. This is not the way Australian teachers teach. When 100 schools participating in the KidsMatter project were given the choice of Australian SEL programs or American SEL programs most of the participating schools chose Australian programs such as the Bounce Back! Classroom Resiliency Program (Peterson, 2007) a literacy-based program which provides curriculum resources but also provides teachers with professional autonomy to choose and integrate material and activities that are appropriate to their students’ wellbeing needs and school context.

Elias (2003) argues that SEL curriculum programmes are a high priority for education. Elias & Weissberg (2000, p.264) explain it thus:

*“Social and emotional development and the recognition of the relational nature of learning and change are the fundamentals of human learning, work and accomplishment. Until this is given proper emphasis, we cannot expect to see progress in making schools safer, drug-free, with fewer students who don’t care and want to drop-out, or with better tolerance of people who are different”.*

### *Social skills*

Schools are social centres and students’ academic engagement and success in that milieu depends on their capacity to develop positive relationships with peers and their teachers. Social skills allow students to actively participate and engage in any group work or learning activity that involves cooperation with their peers.

Positive peer relationships are more likely when students are directly taught the skills for empathic responding and pro-social behaviour, and when students have opportunities to practise them in authentic and naturally-occurring settings over time rather than simply being urged to use them (McGrath, 2005). Prevention programmes that focus on teaching social skills and social perspective taking have shown considerable promise in promoting student wellbeing, and reducing anti-social and bullying behaviours (Tolan & Guerra, 1998; Dryfoos, 1990). Systematic programmes for teaching social skills and empathy can help to reduce aggression and contribute to higher levels of achievement and resilience (Caprara et al., 2000; Catalano et al., 2003; Hawkins et al., 2001; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2003; Wentzel, 2003; Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997; Wentzel & Watkins, 2002).

Several research studies (such as Bursuch & Asher 1986; DiPerna & Elliot 2000) have demonstrated that social skills facilitate academic success. Wentzel (1993) and Malecki and Elliot (2002) found students' social behaviour in years six and seven predicted their academic point averages. DiPerna, Volpe and Elliott (2005) found that social skills was one of two factors that predicted engagement with classroom learning which in turn was shown to be linked to academic achievement in primary-aged students. Teachers have identified competence in the social skills of cooperation and self-control of critical importance for school success (Lane, Givner & Pierson 2004; Meier, DiPerna and Oster 2006).

Several other research studies have provided evidence for positive associations between social skills and both social and academic success (e.g. see reviews by Brackett & Salovey, 2006 and Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). A student's level of social competence and their friendship networks are predictive of their academic achievement (Caprara et al. 2000; Wentzel & Caldwell 1997). Wentzel and Watkins (2002) point out that social skills are academic enablers, that is, skills that help students to make the best of their ability. They also note that students who enact pro-social behaviours such as active listening, helping, cooperating, and sharing may function more effectively in both social and academic contexts as both contexts require those skills.

### *Positive Emotions*

Positive emotions have been found to enhance an individual's capacity for optimistic thinking, problem solving and decision making and to lead to more flexible, innovative and creative solutions (Isen 2001, 2003). Children's negative emotions such as anger, sadness or anxiety narrow their capacity for learning. In contrast positive emotions have the ability "to undo" the effects of stress and recover more quickly from the effects of negative emotions and encourage both emotional and physical resilience (Fredrickson & Tugade 2004). Positive emotions are also related to developing more pro-social behaviours, positive relationships and support networks and better physical health, less sick days and a quicker recovery from illness (Lyubormirsky, King & Diener, 2005). One study that explored the links between students' positive emotions, coping and engagement in learning in a sample of 293 students in grades 7 to 10 (Reschly, Huebner, Appleton & Antaramian 2008). As expected frequent positive emotions during class lessons were associated with higher levels of student engagement and negative emotions with lower levels of engagement.

### *Coping skills*

Educational resilience increases the likelihood of success in school despite adverse environmental situations and backgrounds that have resulted from by early traits, conditions and/or experiences (Waxman, Gray & Padron, 2003). Waxman and Huang (1996) found that resilient students (compared to non-resilient students) had significantly learning involvement, task orientation and satisfaction than non-resilient students. Resilient students also reported higher social and academic self-concept and achievement motivation. Alva (1991, p.19) found educationally resilient students' were able to maintain high levels of achievement, motivation and performance, despite stressful events and conditions that placed them 'at risk' of academic failure and dropping out of school. These resilient students reported higher levels of educational support from their teachers and friends and had higher aspirations to attend school and college. Waxman, Gray & Padron's (2003) comprehensive review of research studies identified that students with high levels of educational resilience appear to:

- Be more persistent and attentive;
- Demonstrate leadership skills;
- Work well with other students;
- Frequently volunteer answers;
- Be more engaged in their school work;
- Be generally more enthusiastic, energetic and better behaved; and
- Receive more teacher attention and praise.

While educators cannot control what happens to their student within their family and community contexts, they can change educational policies and practices to ensure they address the specific needs of students at risk of academic failure (Waxman, Gray & Padron 2003). In this context it is noteworthy that most Australian teachers who were surveyed in a large research survey believed that the most influential factor which fostered student resilience was firstly the students' personal dispositions and character strengths and secondly the role of the family (Oswald, Johnson & Howard 2003). In this study, apart from those at junior primary level, the teachers tended to undervalue the importance of their own support and influence and the resilience and social-emotional skills they can teach to foster student resilience. Similarly in a US study that compared 250 resilient, average and non-resilient students in 3 elementary schools the teachers perceived the major factors that contributed to the low levels of success of non-resilient students was the lack of parental involvement or low student motivation and the low self-esteem of the students. They did not mention any school, teaching or classroom factor (Waxman, Gray & Padron 2003).

## 5. A Strengths-based Approach

A converging message from many areas including the Positive Psychology movement (Fox Eades 2008; Noble & McGrath 2008; Seligman, 2008), the Collaborative for Academic and Social-Emotional Learning (CASEL), educational psychology (eg Jimerson *et al.* 2004; Rhee, *et al.*, 2001) and the Positive Youth Development movement (eg Benson, 1997, 1999; Catalano, *et al.*, 1999) is the importance of strengths-based approaches in the promotion of student wellbeing and academic engagement. Leading researchers in CASEL argue that:

*... there is no good alternative to a strengths-based approach to working with children. It involves a) establishing positive relationships with children based on their assets and their potential contributions as resources to their schools and b) finding naturally occurring contexts in which they can enact positive roles for which they must learn skills to be successful (Elias, Zins, Graczyk & Weissberg 2003 p.305).*

A "strength" can be defined as a natural capacity for behaving, thinking and feeling in a way that promotes successful goal achievement (Linley & Harrington, 2006). A strengths-based approach is based on the assumption that using one's strengths in schoolwork (or in one's job) produces more positive emotions, is more engaging and productive and produces better learning outcomes than working on one's weaknesses, especially for those students whose strengths are not in the traditional academic domain (Noble 2000). As Spreitzer (2008) states, individuals who are given feedback on their strengths are significantly more

likely to feel highly engaged and to be more productive than those who are just given feedback on their weaknesses.

A strengths-based approach does not ignore weaknesses but rather achieves optimisation when strengths are built upon and weaknesses are understood and managed (Clifton & Harter, 2006). When people work with their strengths they tend to learn more readily, perform at a higher level, are more motivated and confident, and have a stronger sense of satisfaction, mastery and competence (Clifton & Harter 2006; Linley & Harrington, 2006; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Strengths are either cognitive/intellectual or personal (ie about 'character'). Schools can play an important role in helping students to firstly identify their relative strengths and weaknesses and secondly engage their strengths through a variety of diverse school-based activities.

### *Cognitive Strengths*

Howard Gardner's (1999) model of multiple intelligences (MI) is consistent with a strengths orientation and provides directions for the identification and development of students' cognitive/intellectual strengths. MI theory has been widely adopted in schools since its publication over twenty years ago and identifies eight intelligences. The eight intelligences are linguistic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, visual-spatial intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, naturalist intelligence, interpersonal (people) and intrapersonal (self) intelligence.

With the increasing diversity of students in the same classroom differentiating the curriculum to effectively cater for the wide range of student differences is now seen as one of the greatest challenges facing teachers today (Tomlinson & Eidson, 2003). A key national policy recommends that teachers use a "flexible range of pedagogical and curriculum approaches which provide for a range of individual differences" (Australian Curriculum Studies Association, 1996). Curriculum differentiation has been defined as consistently using a variety of teaching approaches to vary curriculum content, learning processes and products, assessment and the learning environment in response to the learning readiness and interests of academically diverse students (Tomlinson & Eidson, 2003).

Philosophically there appears to be widespread acceptance by Australian teachers for the need to differentiate the curriculum to cater for student diversity in every classroom and it is a focus in most curriculum documents. However many teachers still lack confidence in their ability to know 'how to' differentiate and thereby enhance their student engagement in the curriculum. For example the most common research focus identified by the school's executive staff in a current project involving 24 Catholic primary and secondary city and country schools in NSW is how to develop their teachers' skills in differentiating the curriculum to enhance their students' engagement in learning (Noble, 2008a). Similarly the major focus of a recent NSW Association of Heads of Independent Schools Directors of Curriculum/Studies conference was curriculum differentiation (Noble, 2008b).

The integration of Gardner's multiple intelligences (MI) model and Bloom's revised taxonomy (McGrath & Noble, 2005a) has been widely advocated in curriculum documents and in educational resources as a systematic framework for teachers to differentiate the curriculum based on different cognitive strengths. MI theory is the only theory of intelligence that incorporates interpersonal (understanding others) and intrapersonal (understanding self) intelligences. Using MI theory as a framework for curriculum

differentiation encourages teachers to embed tasks that develop students' skills in these social-emotional domains as well as the more traditional academic domains.

The use of MI theory for curriculum differentiation has been shown to build positive educational communities in which students value and celebrate student differences and for students who struggle with learning to achieve more academic success (Kornhaber, *et al.*, 2003; McGrath & Noble, 2005a, 2005b; Noble 2004). Kornhaber *et al.* (2003) evaluated outcomes in forty-one schools that had been using MI theory for curriculum differentiation for at least three years and found significant benefits of the MI approach in terms of improvements in student engagement and learning, in student behaviour, and in parent participation. There were particular benefits for students with learning difficulties who demonstrated greater effort in learning, more motivation and improved learning outcomes. A widely used curriculum planning tool in Australian schools for curriculum differentiation is the MI/Bloom Matrix (McGrath & Noble, 2005a, 2005b). Teachers' use of the matrix in two primary schools over eighteen months was shown to increase their sense of professional competency in effectively catering for diverse students' learning needs and developed their competencies in helping their students to set goals and make meaningful choices about their learning tasks and products (Noble, 2004).

#### *Character Strengths and Values*

Peterson & Seligman (2004) have developed a model of 24 character strengths that are ubiquitous (widely recognised across cultures), contribute to individual wellbeing, are morally valued, are trait-like and measurable, and are distinct and malleable (Peterson, 2006). They have also developed an online self-survey for use by adults and children. Both the adult and youth version have been demonstrated to be reliable, valid and stable over at least 6 months (Park & Peterson 2005). Peterson (2006) and Seligman (2002) argue that everyone has signature strengths (typically two to five top strengths) and that the engagement of these signature strengths at school or in the workplace enhances an individual's wellbeing.

The benefits of both Gardner's framework of multiple intelligences and Peterson and Seligman's character strengths are that both offer systematic frameworks for adaptation in educational contexts. Firstly the two frameworks can be used by educators to help students identify their cognitive and character strengths. Secondly they can be used to help educators to make student wellbeing a priority by creating strengths-based school environments that value different strengths and provide curriculum and instruction that actively engages students with a diverse range of abilities and character strengths. Although Gardner's model has been widely used in schools the application of the VIA strengths in education is in its infancy.

Csikzentmihalyi *et al* (1993) has identified that young people are more likely to be fully engaged and experience 'psychological flow' when involved in an intellectually challenging activity that utilises their strength(s) and has a degree of challenge that requires a reasonably high level of skill and attention in a specific domain (eg building a model, or playing a musical instrument). Being in a state of "flow" also increases young people's satisfaction (from the completion of a task or the creation of a product or performance) and enables them to have some respite from worries and problems they may be experiencing. In their comprehensive review of studies of students with low levels of resilience, Waxman, Gray, & Padron, (2003) found these students demonstrated low levels of student engagement in learning. Csikmentihalyi's work indicates the importance of providing challenging and strengths-based activities that would help students develop new skills, focus their attention and give them relevant feedback and clear goals.

Other research has found that in classrooms where teachers provided intellectually challenging and socially supportive environments, pressed students for deeper understanding and supported their autonomy, students had higher engagement, more positive emotions and were more strategic about their learning (Stipek, 2002; Turner, Meyer, Cox, DiCintio & Thomas, 1998). In contrast where teachers focused only on academic content and created a negative social environment, students were more likely to be disengaged and more apprehensive about making mistakes. However if teachers focus only on the social dimensions and fail to intellectually challenge students then they are less likely to be cognitively engaged in learning (Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris 2004). Cognitive engagement is enhanced when students actively discuss ideas, debate points of view and critique each other's work (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Meloth & Deering, 1994; Newmann, 1992).

Research over the last thirty years or so has clearly demonstrated the powerful effect of teacher expectations on student wellbeing and learning. As Weis and Fine (2003) have observed, low teacher expectations about what students can learn and understand often reproduce and reinforce social inequalities along racial, ethnic, social class and gender lines. Schools in the NSW Priority Action Schools Program (PASP) were identified as schools that have "deep needs". The 74 schools in the program are in communities that have sustained periods of cumulative disadvantage so that community strength and wellbeing are seriously eroded. Many teachers in the program noted that when they raised their expectations of their students and made their students clearly aware of this, they were consistently rewarded by improved student learning performance. Students' confidence in their learning and self esteem increased and their behaviour improved (Groundwater-Smith & Kemmis, 2004). One school noted that supporting students without intellectually challenging them can actually lead to learned helplessness. This school indicates there needed to be a shift in this mindset of teacher "support" to one of teacher high expectations with challenging curriculum which encourages students to reach their "personal best" levels of performance in learning and behaviour.

This school's observations are supported by Dweck's (2006) research on the importance of teachers shifting from a 'fixed' mindset of student abilities which can't be changed to a 'growth' mindset that highlights that good pedagogy can build on strengths and enhance student academic engagement and success. Brendtro, Brokenleg and Van Bockern's (1990) research with youth at greatest risk stated that too often educators aspire to "fix" youth and make them "OK" but a focus on remediation alone is not sufficient to give them the maximum chance to strive and thrive in school and in life.

In the same way that individual students can develop learned helplessness, schools can also be seduced by pervasive pessimism, that is, "these students can't learn and there is nothing I can do about it" or "these students come from such dysfunctional or disadvantaged backgrounds that schools cannot make a difference". Hoy, Tarter and Woolfolk-Hoy's (2006) research documents the importance of collective teacher efficacy or academic optimism in schools where teachers perceive that students are willing to learn, that parents are supportive and that the task of improving student learning outcomes is achievable. Their research in 96 high schools (Years 9-12) indicated that teachers' collective efficacy or academic optimism that they could improve student learning outcomes was more important than the students' socio-economic status and other demographic data and previous achievement history in determining students' academic achievement. The crucial importance of enhancing teachers' academic optimism or efficacy about their capacity to "make a difference" especially for non-resilient students is highlighted in recent large scale Australian study (Oswald, Howard & Johnson 2003) which

showed that teachers attributed students low resilience to personal or family factors rather than factors under teacher control.

## 6. A Sense of Meaning and Purpose

A sense of meaning can be defined as involvement in a task or activity that impacts on people other than just oneself. According to Seligman (2002 p.260) “a meaningful life is one that joins with something larger than we are - and the larger that something is, the more meaning our lives have”. He states that life is given meaning when we use our signature strengths every day in the main realms of living “to forward knowledge, power or goodness”. A sense of purpose can be defined as involvement in a worthwhile task or activity (Noble & McGrath, 2008).

In a review of work on the construct of “meaning”, Yalom (1980; in Zika & Chamberlain, 1992) found that a lack of meaning in life was associated with psychopathology, while positive life meaning was associated with strong religious beliefs, membership in groups, dedication to a cause, life values, and clear goals. Lazarus and DeLongis (1983; in Zika & Chamberlain) suggested that sources of personal meaning influence processes of coping. Ryff (1989) and Ryff & Keyes, (1995) have proposed and tested a theoretical model of psychological well-being that includes 6 dimensions of wellbeing, one of which is purpose in life. She suggested that a critical component of mental health includes “beliefs that give one the feeling that there is purpose in and meaning to life” (Ryff, 1989, P. 1071).

A key issue in student wellbeing is the degree to which social changes, including the processes of social fragmentation and individualisation have increased uncertainty in young people’s lives. This uncertainty underscores the need for young people to develop a sense of meaning and purpose. The Australia 21 research 2007 report “*Generations in Dialogue about the Future: the hopes and fears of young Australians*” and the 2020 Youth Forum both demonstrated that young people value the opportunity to discuss the future and that schools can provide such opportunities to facilitate their making sense and meaning of their world and their lives. These opportunities offer the potential to increase their engagement and their capacity to cope well with daunting challenges.

Most current curriculum initiatives focus on the importance of an authentic curriculum for students that has relevance, meaning or “connectedness” to their lives. The importance of student voice in giving students a sense of meaning and connectedness to the curriculum is emphasised in recent research (Fielding & Bragg, 2003; Johnson & O’Brien 2002). Significant in this research is that, when students are given a “voice”, they become more engaged in learning and they build more positive relationships with their teachers. A strong theme that emerged the National Safe Schools best Practices Grants Program involving 171 schools was that project effectiveness and satisfaction was high in schools where students had significant ownership of the projects (McGrath, 2007).

Student participation and voice is a recognised feature of high performing schools and has a positive effect on learning in the classroom and engagement in school (Black, 2007). Participation in initiatives in school and community projects like Education Foundation Australia’s ruMAD (*Are you making a difference?*) program and Student Action Teams (Holdsworth, 2002) have been found to create genuine and meaningful contexts in which students have investigated issues of real concern to them and have taken action to bring about change both in their school and in the community. In such initiatives students worked in a team to identify and tackle a school or community issue, research it, make plans and proposals about

it and take action on it. Many of the projects chosen were based on student wellbeing topics such as values, health, drug use, safety, homelessness, environment and thread through programs addressing issues of Civics and Citizenship education (Holdsworth, 2002; Chapman *et al.* 2007). Such initiatives were part of the formal or informal school curriculum and engaged students in purposeful authentic learning activities that were valued by the students, had broader community value and met or exceeded mandated curriculum goals (Holdsworth, 2002).

Community service (or service learning) is another way in which schools are facilitating educational experiences that provide students with a sense of meaning and purpose. Community service has been shown to enhance students' academic learning, transfer of knowledge, critical thinking skills as well as their personal efficacy and moral development, social skills, empathy and social responsibility and civic engagement (Elias, 2006; Astin & Sax 1998; Astin, Sax & Avalos, 1999, Eyler & Giles, 1999; Rhoads, 1997; 1998; Markus, Howard & King, 1993)

Wierenga, *et al.*, (2003) concluded that community-based projects are most successful when students believe in what they are doing, have opportunities to make real decisions, are heard, have the skills to see the task through and do it well and work with others to be part of something bigger than just themselves. Morsillo & Fisher (2007) worked with year 10 students who were disengaged from school and alienated from their neighbourhoods. This project incorporated the active ingredients of 'service learning' where students are placed in the active role of problem-solvers confronting a relevant but loosely structured community-based problem or goal. The intent is that the outcomes benefit both the recipients and the students who provide the service (see [www.servicelearning.org](http://www.servicelearning.org)). In Morsilla and Fisher's study students worked in small groups to create meaningful community projects of their choice designed to show how "we will make a difference in our community". The projects included a public underage dance party, and the development of children's activities at a refugee cultural festival.

Billig's (2004) extensive review of the service learning research concluded that students participating in service learning generally do better than others on school engagement, attitudes towards school, attendance, communication with parents about school, test scores, grade point average and problem-solving skills. Most of this research however is cross-sectional and cannot inform causality. Hanson, Austin and Lee-Bayha (2003) studied 7<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students in nearly 1700 schools and reported that student 'opportunities for meaningful participation' in schools, homes, communities and among peers were strongly related to standardised test scores. From these data the causal connection can work in both directions, with academically well-performing students enjoying closer relationships with adults and more opportunities for leadership, responsibility and meaningful contribution.

Scales *et al.* (2006a) reported on a longitudinal study that indicates the contribution that service can make to academic achievement. They found students who had greater "connection to community" in middle school, including participating in community service, youth programs and religious community were three times more likely than others to have a B+ or higher average three years later in high school. In another study Scales *et al.* (2006b) reported that principals in low-SEP (socio-economic position) schools were more likely to positively judge service learning's impact on academic achievement, engagement and student attendance for their students. In these schools students from low SEP backgrounds scored better on most academic success variables than low-SEP peers with less or no service learning.

In their study Benson *et al.* (2006) also found greater academic benefits for students from low SEP backgrounds and speculated that it may be because a sense of empowerment and playing useful societal roles may be in shorter supply for these students compared to students from higher SEP backgrounds. Moreover service learning may provide students with multiple sources of instructive feedback, high teacher expectations and a positive relationship with these teachers and the service learning recipients. In support of such reasoning, Follman and Muldoon (1997) reported that students' school attendance increased on days they had service learning which the authors interpreted as the students' concern that they would disappoint the service recipients if they skipped school. As noted by Benson *et al.* (2006, p.55) "community service and service learning may be related to academic success because they provide young people with two key resources: a feeling of usefulness and being valued, and a way of tangibly demonstrating to students the utility of the 'real world' of what they learn in school".

Eyler (2000) concludes that "we know that service learning has a small but consistent impact on a number of important outcomes for students. Now we need to empirically answer questions about improving the academic effectiveness of service learning" (p.16). Although there appear to be benefits in student learning in their engagement in service learning Butin (2003) argues there is little empirical evidence that service learning provides substantive, meaningful and long-term solutions for the communities they are supposedly helping. Both Butin (2003) and Eyler (2000) conclude that service learning needs more rigorous and sustained research.

Another longitudinal study linked volunteering in adolescence with positive mental health and wellbeing in adulthood. Wink and Dillon (2007) examined data gathered from two adolescent research cohorts first interviewed in the 1930s and subsequently interviewed every ten years until late 1990s. They used a multidimensional measure of generative behaviour, defined as behaviour indicative of intense positive emotions extending to all humanity was measured on three dimensions: givingness, pro-social competence and social perspective. The results of the study indicated that generative adolescents become both psychologically and physically healthier adults. Wink and Dillon's study lends support to the notion that "it is good to be good", that there is a lifelong benefit for young people who begin being altruistic in their teens and that the benefits of altruism accrue across the entire lifespan.

Other school initiatives that have been found to foster a sense of meaning and purpose and enhance student engagement and learning include:

- Peer support programs (e.g. peer mediation, buddy systems, mentoring systems and peer tutoring) (Stanley & McGrath 2006)
- Circle of friends (Frederickson & Turner, 2003; Newton & Wilson, n.d)
- Student participation in class-wide or school-wide leadership and decision-making structures (e.g. circle time, classroom councils, classroom committees or school-wide Student Representative Committees (McGrath & Noble 2003).
- Participation in sports teams, art and drama groups and membership of pro-social youth groups has been identified as one of the most prevalent protective factors in enhancing youth wellbeing (Bond et al 2000).

## 7. A Healthy Lifestyle

A study of more than five thousand American high school students found that higher life satisfaction was associated with decreased likelihood of smoking and irresponsible use of alcohol, marijuana, and other illegal drugs (Zullig *et al.* 2001). This negative association

between life satisfaction and drug use/abuse was especially robust for children younger than 13 years of age. Other important outcomes related to lower life satisfaction include teen pregnancy (e.g., Guijarro *et al.*, 1999), driving while impaired, and being a passenger in a car driven by an intoxicated driver

Students' health has been shown to be associated with their sense of connectedness to school, family and community (AIHW 2007). Individuals with higher rates of education report fewer illnesses and have better mental health and wellbeing than those with lower levels of education (Turrell *et al.*, 2006). The health behaviours of young people, including levels of physical activity, eating habits, substance abuse (tobacco, alcohol and drugs) and sexual practices are all important determinants of their current and future health and wellbeing status. Childhood and adolescence is a critical time for the development of health behaviours and the patterns that develop during their school years often continue into adulthood (Dimitrakaki & Tountas, 2006; WHO, 2004).

Schools can have a direct and indirect impact on student health and wellbeing. For example schools directly teach students the benefits of physical activity, good nutrition and sun care and the adverse effects of substance abuse, alcohol abuse and smoking within the Physical Health and Wellbeing curriculum. However there is now sound empirical evidence that a safe and pro-social school environment where students feel connected, and supported by peers and teachers and experience a sense of meaning and purpose in their academic engagement in learning has an indirect effect but plays a critical role in students' health and wellbeing. Students without social supports have higher rates of morbidity and mortality than those with social networks (AHIW, 2007). Schools play an important role for some students who are not coping well physically and/or mentally by providing psychological and social-emotional support and also directing them to quality health services (Benard, 2004). These school protective factors in turn positively influence health-related factors such as their resilience, injury risk, diet and ability to acquire quality medical care (AHIW, 2007).

Appropriate health and education programs are also cost effective. For example, each additional year of secondary education attained reduces the probability of public welfare dependency in adulthood by 35 percent (NHMRC 1996). A World Bank Report (1993) cited strong economic evidence of the cost effectiveness of tobacco, drug and alcohol education and education to prevent early and unprotected sex.

The Minister for Health and Aging, Nicola Roxon (2007) quotes the figures of one in four Australian children as now being overweight or obese. The Minister notes that the consequences go beyond personal consequences to national concerns about the future effect on both the economy and productivity. Access Economics estimates that the total cost of obesity to the Australian economy, including productivity costs and lost wellbeing, is already \$21 billion a year. New national figures incorporating a sample of younger children will be available in the next few months (National Children's Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey). Obesity is linked with social isolation and lower educational and income attainment throughout life (Schwimmer *et al.*, 2003; Christoffel & Ariza, 1998).

Physical activity is important in maintaining good health, including reducing risk of overweight/obesity, high blood pressure and cardiovascular risk. In 2004-5 only 46 percent of boys and 30 per cent of girls aged between 15-24 participated in levels of physical activity recommended in the national guidelines (AHIW 2007). Taking part in physical activity also improves mental wellbeing in both the short and long term by reducing feelings of stress, anxiety and depression (Dunn *et al.* 2001).

For children and young people who are still growing, a sound nutritional intake is needed to support their growth and normal development. In 2004-5 only one quarter of young people aged 12-18 met the daily guidelines for 3 or more serves of fruit per day. In some disadvantaged school communities providing nutritious meals to children had been found to be an important factor in their participation in classroom learning activities.

Important school, family and community factors that prevent adolescents engaging in unsafe or unwanted sexual behaviour include a connection to school, a strong relationship with parents and open communication with sexual partners (WHO, 2005).

## Section 4: International Focus on Student Wellbeing

Most Western democracies are experiencing similar social and health issues, including rising rates of mental illness and high levels of social exclusion. Many international governments are looking to education services to support prevention and early intervention initiatives to address these issues.

Some of the more significant international student wellbeing initiatives include:

- The European Network of Health Promoting Schools: (ENHPS)/ Schools for Health: (SHE)
- The International Union for health Promotion and Education and the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) program in the UK
- The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) in the USA
- The Positive Psychology movement.

International research and evaluation on effective educational practices consistently shows that implementation for student wellbeing initiatives is complex, the different pathways to student wellbeing are interdependent, and the promotion of wellbeing involves whole school approaches which incorporate a supportive ethos, strong relational values and skills, student participation, collaborative partnerships and learning integrated in the curriculum (Dryfoos, 1990; ENHPS, 2002).

### 4.1 The European Network of Health Promoting Schools (now known as the Schools for Health in Europe)

The health-promoting schools (HPS) model is a global concept aimed at achieving both educational and health outcomes for all young people. Education and health are considered to be inextricably linked. A health-promoting school is defined as one that *is constantly strengthening its capacity as a healthy setting for living, learning and working (WHO 1996)*. The international HPS movement reflects a conceptual shift from a sole focus on individual lifestyle factors to include addressing the broader social and environmental determinants of student wellbeing. This means that in addition to developing personal competencies it is necessary to influence policies, re-shape environments, build partnerships, and bring about sustainable change through participation and ownership of change by all stakeholders.

The European Network of Health Promoting Schools (ENHPS) was initiated in 1992 as a pilot approach involving 4 countries, and now has over 40 members. It is a partnership between participants in European countries with international institutional support from: The European Commission, The Council of Europe and the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe (Barnekow *et al.*, 2006).

In Australia the health-promoting schools model takes a multi-faceted approach and incorporates the integration of three important aspects:

1. Curriculum, teaching and learning practices;
2. School organization, ethos and environment and

### 3. Partnerships and services.

#### 4.2 The International Union for Health Promotion and Education (IUHPE) (1999)

IUHPE commissioned a comprehensive review of the evidence about the factors that contribute to effectiveness in school health promotion. This review revealed the following factors contributed to the effectiveness of school health interventions:

- Having a focus on cognitive and social-emotional outcomes as a joint priority with behavioural change.
- Implementing comprehensive and holistic programs that link the school with agencies and other sectors dealing with health.
- Ensuring that an intervention is substantial, implemented over several school years and relevant to changes in young people's social and cognitive development.
- Giving adequate attention to capacity building through teacher training and the provision of resources.

#### 4.3. Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) program (UK)

England is a member of the ENHPS. Work in England has focused strongly on the social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL,) developing programs for both primary (Weare & Gray, 2004) and secondary schools and social emotional and behavioural skills (DfES, 2005). The implementation of the SEAL program is in its infancy but there has been some criticism about its overly narrow focus. Carol Craig (2007), Director of the Scottish Centre for Confidence and Wellbeing, has written of her concerns about the SEAL program, arguing that it needs to be less prescriptive and more flexible and should include a wider range of skills such as those more closely associated with resilience (eg optimism thinking). She has also recommended that SEAL incorporates a strengths-based approach and that the social and emotional learning is embedded in other aspects of the classroom and the general curriculum and supported by engaging pedagogy.

#### 4.4. The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (USA)

CASEL ([www.casel.org](http://www.casel.org)) is a consortium of researchers and educators based at the University of Illinois, Chicago. It is a not-for-profit organisation whose major goals are educational improvement and children's health and wellbeing. CASEL publishes major reviews of the research evidence about what approaches are effective and what whole school practices influence implementation and sustainability of student wellbeing initiatives (see Durlak *et al.* 2008 in Section 3 for a summary of a recent CASEL comprehensive meta-analysis). CASEL is currently working to establish Illinois as a state model for fostering the implementation of widespread, evidence-based, integrated SEL programming into schools through collaborations with state agencies, districts and schools.

## 4.5 The Positive Psychology Movement (USA)

This relatively new field of psychology began in the USA in 2000. It has been defined as the scientific study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing and optimal functioning in people, groups and institutions (Gable & Haidt 2005). The aim of positive psychology is to shift the focus in psychology from a preoccupation with weaknesses and repairing what's not working to building and enhancing an individual's positive qualities (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Positive Psychology has three central concerns: positive emotions, positive individual traits, and positive institutions.

- *Understanding positive emotions* is defined as “the study of contentment with the past, happiness in the present, and hope and optimism for the future”.
- *Understanding positive individual traits* is defined as “the study of the strengths and virtues, such as the capacity for love and work, courage, compassion, resilience, creativity, curiosity, integrity, self-knowledge, moderation, self-control, and wisdom”.
- *Understanding positive institutions* is defined as “the study of the strengths that foster better communities, such as justice, responsibility, civility, parenting, nurturance, work ethic, leadership, teamwork, purpose, and tolerance”

([www.ppc.sas.upenn.edu](http://www.ppc.sas.upenn.edu)).

The potential application of this Positive Psychology framework to education has only been considered for a short time (e.g. Noble & McGrath, 2008). So far there is considerable evidence to support the positive effect on wellbeing of some of the individual components of Positive Psychology but no evidence to support the application of the model *per se* to a realistic and whole-school setting in which classroom teachers attempt to teach it through the curriculum and embed it in the daily life of the classroom. There is mixed research evidence on the effectiveness of one program (the Penn Resiliency Program-PRP) that has features of a Positive Psychology approach but this program has only been used as a short-term small-group program delivered after school by multiple leaders, not as a school-based curriculum program.

As a number of researchers (e.g. Clift & Jenson, 2005; Rowling & Jeffreys, 2006) have explained, randomised control trials that are advocated as the best forms of evidence in clinical trials of approaches and programs in Health and Psychology (such as the PRP) do not easily translate into curriculum programs that involve classroom or school change. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, the theoretical understandings and practical processes of educational change are ignored in the process of randomisation in which concerns about sampling override concerns about optimal school/classroom implementation conditions. Secondly, the statistical assumptions that underpin randomised control trials are less valid in contexts requiring organisational or structural change and therefore the conclusions that are likely to be drawn are limited in terms of their effective translation into whole-school programs (Rowling & Jeffreys, 2006).

A clear message in the research literature is that implementing a whole school and whole system initiative that leads to successful outcomes is complex and it can be difficult to achieve enduring changes in school practices that have the potential to impact on student wellbeing (Elias *et al.*, 2003). Whole-school programs also need to be a good fit with the culture of the school and its community. In their review, Elias *et al.*, (1997) found that no

projects or initiatives lasted very long if they had not been designed to be a “good fit” with the school. Pre-packaged initiatives that may have been developed in one cultural context (eg some of the heavily manualised programs in the USA which have a “minute-by-minute” script) have also been shown to “fade out” more quickly than those which are put together by the school itself from available evidence-based components (Moos, 1991).

## Section 5: Student Wellbeing in the Australian Educational Context

This section of the report examines Australian Government National Frameworks in Education relevant to student wellbeing. It then goes on to discuss state and territory and non-government education authorities' reactions to the concept of a National Student Wellbeing Framework. This section concludes with a review of Student Wellbeing in state and territory curriculum and policy documents.

### 5.1: Australian Government National Frameworks in Education

An overview and synthesis of key national frameworks and initiatives indicates a very strong focus on the promotion of wellbeing and mental health through:

- Early intervention with students who are at risk for mental illness, behaviour problems, poor physical health, anti-social behaviour and substance abuse
- School-based prevention programs that develop student resilience and other aspects of social and emotional learning
- The development of a safe, supportive and values-based school ethos
- School connectedness and social connectedness

Many frameworks and initiatives also advocate that schools contribute to:

- The future capacity of students to participate in the workforce in a sustainable way and contribute to community productivity
- the promotion of students' civic engagement

Three other significant Australian Commonwealth goals align with these frameworks and initiatives:

- combating economic and social disadvantage
- closing the gap between indigenous and non-indigenous people in terms of health and life expectancy, infant and child mortality and educational outcomes
- ensuring social inclusion so that all Australians have the opportunity to fully participate through the benefits of work, education, community engagement and access to basic services.

#### Common Threads

The following National frameworks and directions were reviewed:

- National Framework for Health Promoting Schools (HPS)
- The two National initiatives based on the HPS model:
  - MindMatters: secondary focus
  - KidsMatter: primary focus
- National Framework for Values Education

- National Safe Schools Framework (NSSF)
- Principles for School Drug Education
- National Drug Strategy (2004-2009)
- National Suicide Prevention Strategy
- National Action Plan on Mental Health (2006-2011).

Reference to the Healthy Children, Australian Early Development Index and Civics & Citizenship Education frameworks will also be made where appropriate.

A common thread in all the Australian Government frameworks is that there are common risk factors that contribute to priority health problems such as drug-related risk and harm, youth anxiety/depression and youth suicide, social dislocation and mental health problems). A similar common thread is that there are positive pathways that enhance student wellbeing and student engagement in learning. Arguably a key underlying principle of all the frameworks is that school based prevention and early intervention can make a significant difference to student wellbeing and student engagement in learning.

The vision statement for health-promoting schools in Australia is that:

All children in Australia will belong to school communities which are committed to promoting lifelong learning, health and wellbeing.

The KidsMatter initiative aims to:

- Improve the mental health and well-being of primary school students;
- Reduce mental health problems among students (eg., anxiety, depression and behavioural problems) and iii) Achieve greater support and assistance for students experiencing mental health problems.

The MindMatters initiative is a mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention program for secondary schools with the aim of building positive school environments.

The vision statement for the National Framework in Values Education includes:

*Developing student responsibility in local, national and global contexts and building student resilience and social skills.*

The three other points in the vision statement refer to values being incorporated in school's mission/ethos, policies, teaching programmes and practices.

The vision statement for the National Safe Schools framework is

*All Australian schools are safe and supportive environments*

The vision statement of the National Drug Strategy (under review) is:

*To improve health, social and economic outcomes by preventing the uptake of harmful drug use and reducing the harmful effects of licit and illicit drugs in Australian society.*

The Principles of School Drug Education have been accessed for this report as they provide a framework to support effective drug education practice in schools.

All of the above frameworks advocate:

#### **i) A whole child focus**

Each framework focuses on the wellbeing of the whole child in terms of their social, emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual dimensions.

### **ii) The assumption that student wellbeing impacts on student learning**

None of the frameworks explicitly define student wellbeing. However student wellbeing is inferred by their focus on the development of the whole child and/or the dimensions of child development. All infer that adversity, such as poor mental or physical health, substance abuse or physical or psychological unsafe home and school environments, adversely affects student development and student engagement in learning.

### **iii) A whole school approach**

All frameworks infer the key role of schools in promoting student wellbeing for lifelong learning. All adopt a whole school perspective and focus on the protective environmental factors that schools can provide as well as the skills, knowledge and understandings they can teach to enhance student wellbeing. They all advocate an integrated, comprehensive, multi-dimensional approach linking curriculum with the school ethos/environment and the community. A recurring emphasis is the importance of fostering positive relationships and a safe and supportive school environment.

### **iv) The need for a coherent framework for student wellbeing & whole school improvement**

Although each framework has a different emphasis (eg drug education vs values education vs safe schools vs healthy schools etc) arguably the theme of student wellbeing underpins each framework. Each National framework is offered as a unifying framework for school policy for school improvement, and by implications, a framework to enhance student wellbeing. The frameworks all advocate a system-wide approach that seeks a comprehensive and unifying response across each school's policies, practices and programs.

### **v) The importance of evidence-based practice**

All frameworks advocate evidence-based practices that take the best available evidence from a variety of credible sources, evaluate the relevance of the evidence to the students/school context and apply it to achieve effective prevention and intervention.

### **vi) The need for collaboration**

Although there is some reference to the importance of collaboration, for example teachers working in teams (HPS), it is not proposed as a key ingredient in the success of implementation and sustainability of frameworks. The Values framework does not mention staff collaboration but does stress the importance of positive relationships.

### **vii) A values-based & inclusive approach**

Each framework is underpinned by a social justice/social inclusion perspective that includes ALL students based on values of respect, caring and support.

### **viii) A safe & supportive school ethos**

Each framework focuses on the importance of a safe, caring and responsive school environment to connect students to school. MindMatters has the supportive environment as one of the three areas of action. Similarly Kidsmatter identifies a positive school

community as one of the four key components to support student mental health and wellbeing.

#### **ix) The important role of the teacher**

All frameworks highlight the importance of the teacher's role in enhancing student wellbeing and offering the potential to have a significant impact on students' lives. However in some frameworks such as the Drug Education framework the teacher's role in actively engaging students in the specific curriculum (e.g. NSSF and Drug Education) through student-centred learning is emphasised as one of the more important active ingredients. In other frameworks (such as HPS) the role of the teacher is part of a more holistic approach incorporating effective teaching.

Each framework emphasises the importance of the teacher in exercising autonomy over curriculum development based on the individual needs of their students and the class/school context. As noted in the NHMRC (1996) report, teacher professional autonomy and judgement is a key factor in gaining teachers' commitment to a program and to enhancing their confidence in adapting, developing and implementing the program successfully.

The professional development of teachers is seen as a key component of the implementation strategy for most of different frameworks and initiatives (for example NSSF, MindMatters project: Rowling and Mason, 2007)

#### **x) Approaches should be embedded in the curriculum**

All frameworks recommend that key learnings (for example, in drug education, values education, anti-bullying initiatives, social-emotional curriculum etc) are integrated into the curriculum rather than implemented as an "add-on" which is separate to the curriculum.

#### **xi) Approaches should be across all school years**

All frameworks recommend that the school and class practices that align with the framework be across all school years, and be developmentally appropriate and meet the social-emotional needs and contextual needs of the students.

#### **xii) The importance of strong school leadership**

Although the frameworks adopt a whole school approach in most documents (except for MindMatters) there is no elaborated reference to the role of school leadership in school improvement in document guidelines. This is in contrast to the evidence which strongly supports the key role of ongoing school leadership in the effective implementation and sustainability of wellbeing initiatives (e.g. Leithwood *et al.*, 2004, Elias *et al.*, 2003, Teddlie *et al.*, 2000).

#### **xiii) Partnerships with parents and the community**

All frameworks highlight the importance of developing school-parent partnerships and partnerships with the community. HPS also advocates partnerships with local agencies. Kidsmatter highlights parenting education and support as one of the four key components in which parents receive opportunities to access information on child development and parenting.

#### **xiv) A Strong focus on both prevention and intervention**

All frameworks advocate a focus on prevention and the frameworks that address young children such as *KidsMatter* and *Australian Early Education Index* particularly highlight the importance of early prevention “the earlier the better” and intervention in fostering student wellbeing. The Early Education Index focuses more on the role of communities in early prevention rather than schools.

#### **xv) Student ownership**

A very large number of the school-based projects funded by both the *NSSF* Best Practices Grants Program and the Commonwealth Values Education Grants Program focused on topics designed to develop students’ social and emotional wellbeing and, in particular on developing student resilience. Many *NSSF* projects also focused on values and many Values Education projects also focused on safe school cultures/learning (Holdsworth, 2002; Chapman *et al.*, 2007, McGrath, 2007).

#### Major Differences

As expected each document emphasises its particular focus. HPS particularly focuses on a whole school approach as underpinning wellbeing. Of interest is that both staff and parent wellbeing are seen as integral to student wellbeing.

- *Kidsmatter* particularly focuses on teaching students skills in social and emotional learning for students as one of its four components. Schools choose an evidence-based program based on CASEL criteria for social-emotional learning.
- *MindMatters* focuses on mental health and resilience and includes grief and loss.
- *NSSF* places importance on schools providing a physical and psychological safe environment for children that is free from neglect, abuse, harassment, violence and bullying.
- Values framework focuses on the importance of the nine values to underpin school and classroom practices.

Drug education highlights the importance of explicitly teaching students information about drugs, especially in the middle school years. However without reducing the role of drug education programs, the Principles in School Drug Education particularly highlight the shift in thinking to curriculum and classroom learning as part of a broader and comprehensive approach to drug prevention for students and school communities.

All frameworks offer a broad set of underpinning principles that collectively describe effective school practices. There is an expectation that diverse Australian schools will interpret and implement these principles to meet their own needs.

Other frameworks relevant to student wellbeing

#### *Statements for Learning for Civics & Citizenship*

The statements are designed to provide guidelines for curriculum development across Australia for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 on the following aspects of Civics and Citizenship Education, namely Government and Law, Citizenship in a Democracy, and Historical perspectives.

*Healthy Children; Strengthening Promotion and Prevention Across Australia National Public Health Strategic Framework for Children 2005-2008.* This initiative seeks to strengthen the capacity of the health sector and wider community to support communities, families, parents and professionals to promote health and wellbeing from the ante-natal period to 12 years. One aim is to close the health gap and tackle the specific needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. This document does not specifically mention the role of schools.

*The National Drug Strategy (2004-2009)*

Drug use is identified in this strategy as one of a number of social and health problems that share common determinants. A strong focus on prevention and resilience aligns this strategy with drug education.

*The Australian Early Development Index: Building Better Communities for Children Project (AEDI)*

This index focuses strongly on prevention and early intervention. It is a measure of how young children are developing in different communities and is administered through the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne and funded by DEEWR. The focus is on the importance of investing resources and energy into a child's early years, when their brain is developing rapidly in order to bring life-long benefits to them and to the whole community.

*The National Action Plan on Mental Health 2006 - 2011 (COAG)*

There is an Australia-wide acceptance that mental health is a major problem for the Australian community. There is a strong emphasis on prevention and early intervention through building resilience and coping skills of children, young people and families and the promotion of wellbeing and mental health. The *National Suicide Prevention Strategy* is part of this overall plan.

## 5.2 Responses by State, Territory and Non-government education authorities to the Concept of a National Student Wellbeing Framework

All jurisdictions were invited to complete a questionnaire last October which asked their views on student wellbeing and the advantages and disadvantages of a National Framework in student wellbeing. All but one government jurisdiction responded as well as several Catholic and Independent jurisdictions (see Table 2 below). Individuals representing School Drug Education and Road Aware, and two catholic schools also responded. The Catholic Education Office in Melbourne updated their response in June 2008.

In summary, a broad National Framework for Student Wellbeing was generally welcomed by all jurisdictions based on a need for clarity, coordination, and consistency across jurisdictions and within schools, developed from evidence based practice. Respondents highlighted the need for prevention and early intervention with a whole child/whole school focus that strengthens the link between student wellbeing and learning outcomes. The need for teacher professional learning and funding was emphasised together with the need to consult with all jurisdictions. One of the main challenges was seen as engaging schools and educators to shift their traditional perceptions on welfare, targeted populations and

programs/curricular components to a focus on universal student wellbeing and an emphasis on whole school change.

Table 2: Responses to DEEWR survey on a potential National Framework in Student Wellbeing

	Government	Catholic	Independent
ACT	X	X	X / No information
NSW	X	X	X
NT	X		
QLD		X	X
SA	X		X
TAS	X		
VIC	X	X	
WA	X	X	SDERA

Responses to concept of a Student Wellbeing National Framework

All but one jurisdiction were positive to the idea of a National Framework, several strongly so.

Rationales for supporting a National Framework on Student Wellbeing:

- Will provide a stronger focus on and higher significance for student wellbeing;
- Student wellbeing needs to be seen as “core business” - have higher status;
- Will provide leverage / expansion for focus on student wellbeing;
- A National Framework provides leadership for schools/systems;
- Student wellbeing needs a whole school approach;
- Places the whole child at the centre of focus;
- The need for a pro-active approach;
- Provides a stronger focus on prevention / early intervention;
- Offers cohesion across current National policies;
- It will provide consistency re definition / conceptual clarity;
- Offers consistency re implementation of student wellbeing initiatives;
- There is a need to dismantle the current “silo” approach;
- We need a holistic/ integrated approach to student wellbeing – not “add on”;
- We need a dual focus on health and education outcomes;
- A National Framework would help to identify good (evidence-based/values-based) practices;
- Will provide a benchmark.

Provisos:

- Should not be imposed /mandatory (noted in particular by Independent school jurisdictions);
- A framework should not be too prescriptive / needs a broad framework;
- There is a need for teacher professional learning;
- It should be resourced;
- We should not throw out good programs that are already in existence.

Current Practices in Student Wellbeing in Jurisdictions

There is a lack of clarity about the definition of student wellbeing and current school and system practices vary widely across Australia. Several jurisdictions are in the process of reviewing current policies in area of student wellbeing.

Three jurisdictions have a major focus on student wellbeing with detailed frameworks already in place, focusing on the whole child within the whole school:

- ACT: *Every Chance to Learn*: A curriculum document with a strong student wellbeing focus – up to schools how they implement. Incorporates a visiting school wellbeing team.
- Victoria: Catholic Education Office, Melbourne: *Student Wellbeing Strategy Plan* with each primary school with school based core leadership teams consisting of school leaders and the Student Wellbeing Coordinator; most of whom have been funded by the Diocese to take university based credential training.
- South Australia: *Learner Wellbeing Framework*: The SA Department of Education and Children’s Services (DECS) has put student wellbeing centre stage with their Learner Wellbeing Framework. Wellbeing refers to the physical, social and emotional welfare of students which is integral rather than incidental to learning. This Framework refers to the whole person in five dimensions that overlap and interconnect with each other: cognitive, emotional, physical, social and spiritual.

The Framework addresses the four domains in which student wellbeing is addressed: curriculum and pedagogy, policies and procedures, the learning environment and partnerships.

Other jurisdictions (eg NT and WA) are moving in this direction with overarching learning outcomes that include student wellbeing.

In other states and territories there are numerous policies and practices that address various aspects of student wellbeing although the term “student wellbeing” is not used consistently; the terms: student welfare and pastoral care are more common.

Although some jurisdictions have developed a cohesive, pro-active, universal approach to student wellbeing with an overarching framework or policy, many continue to have a reactive “welfare” focus for targeted and vulnerable populations

Current National frameworks, especially the Values Framework and the National Safe Schools Framework are the foundations for policies that inform student wellbeing in several jurisdictions. *Mindmatters*, Drug Awareness and Health Promoting Schools are referred to but are less frequently mentioned.

Some jurisdictions have a congruent whole school approach to student wellbeing, others are more fragmented and appear to be “cherry picking” from existing initiatives without considering issues of implementation or coordination with other policies and practices

In independent schools policies/practices related to student wellbeing are the responsibility of the individual school with the support from the State Association of Independent Schools Central Office for professional development, guidance and consultancy.

All the States and Territories’ responses on student wellbeing had a stronger focus on social and emotional issues than physical wellbeing although sport and physical education were mentioned several times. Sexual orientation was mentioned once and nutrition not at all. There would appear to be a need to strengthen the links between physical, social and psychological wellbeing for students and their learning outcomes. Only a few respondents referred to the links between student wellbeing and learning outcomes.

With some significant exceptions there were very few comments on the processes of implementation and effective pedagogy to enhance student wellbeing.

Student participation/student voice did not feature strongly though partnerships with parents were often mentioned.

### *In schools*

State and Territories governments provide schools with support in the form of professional training to implement strategies such as the National Safe Schools Framework. Most schools are encouraged to develop whole school strategies and their own school policies which sit within the overarching National frameworks. There is variation in how each school’s policies and strategies are developed, monitored and evaluated although consultation with parents is often suggested.

Most Catholic and Independent schools say they comply with legislative requirements but the implementation of policies is up to schools to suit their own contexts, especially their faith based practice. The main exception is the appointment by the Catholic Education Office in Melbourne of a student wellbeing coordinator in each school, supported by a cluster approach and professional accredited learning programs. Guidance officers and counsellors were mentioned in a few responses as providing a leading role in student wellbeing in their schools, with the potential for preventative work as well as to support individual students.

### Limitations and gaps

Several respondents talked about the need to move away from an individual reactive focus to a whole school preventative focus where student wellbeing is a priority: Some suggested amendments:

- Student wellbeing is mandated at the system level and is separate from behaviour management

- Student wellbeing is considered the core business of schools
- There is a need for an on-going discussion about whole school change within a health promotion framework including the practical implementations.
- A move away from individual interventions that focus on traditional notions of welfare and counselling to whole school approaches that focus on student wellbeing.

Another issue was the plethora of programs and policies that relate to student wellbeing, yet there is a perceived lack of understanding about student wellbeing issues, a lack of cohesion between different policies and programmes and the risk of potential duplication:

- Conceptual/common understandings are inconsistent, with some definitions of student wellbeing being broad and others specifically addressing individual components of wellbeing,
- Within most jurisdictions there is a separation of functions around student wellbeing leading to duplication and a narrow understanding of, for example, drug education and how this relates to student wellbeing
- Lack of consistency in approaches to student wellbeing and to how student wellbeing is defined in different jurisdictions.

The ways in which policies and practices were developed in schools was also an issue of concern, as was the time required to implement what might be seen as additional rather than integral school business. Issues mentioned were:

- Schools' lack of consultation with all stakeholders leading to inconsistency, imposed policies, lack of support from the school community etc.
- Time pressures which may inhibit the development, implementation and reflection on student wellbeing policies
- Crowded curriculum and lack of common understanding about what constitutes student wellbeing
- Lack of evidence base, including analysis of the needs of each school and the desired outcomes and therefore a difficulty in assessing the appropriateness of different policies/programmes.

A number of jurisdictions reiterated the need for an overarching policy that incorporates all areas of student wellbeing.

A major but necessary challenge was seen in shifting the emphasis away from program implementation to strategic implementation of whole school approaches which include the key areas of:

- School culture, environment and ethos
- Curriculum, teaching and learning
- School community partnerships
- Organisational structures, processes and procedures

*"There is an ongoing need for raising awareness around the difference between wellbeing and welfare, prevention and intervention and whole school strategic approach versus programmatic responses" (CEOM June 2008).*

## The perceived role of the Australian Government and future directions

Several respondents made strong recommendations that the Australian Government take a leadership role to develop a clear definition and a common understanding of student wellbeing, to raise the profile of student wellbeing and to link student wellbeing to student learning outcomes. Such Government support was seen as important in informing and encouraging schools to broaden their understanding of student wellbeing. Some suggestions are to:

- Integrate local, state and national educational agendas into a coherent framework that clearly links student social and emotional wellbeing with the learning environment and student learning outcomes;
- Ensure a common understanding of student wellbeing and provide access to appropriate expertise across the portfolios of health, welfare and education;
- Develop an overarching framework that links everything together for schools, develop tools for implementation such as action plans, case studies, audit tools;
- Establish clear links to educational outcomes, not just health outcomes;
- Provide a continued focus on student learning; and
- Provide support and advocacy for the work that is already happening in student wellbeing to position this as central to learning and wellbeing locally and across all education sectors in Australia.

Many respondents also wanted the development of an evidence base on student wellbeing which would underpin a policy framework on student wellbeing and inform best practice initiatives. These initiatives should be appropriately funded. Some of the recommendations are as follows:

- Base a student wellbeing framework on sound research around health and wellbeing promotion rather than a deficit model;
- Fund action research in a variety of settings and evaluate;
- Continue a focus on program evaluation and improved accountability and system performance measures, linked to improved student learning and wellbeing outcomes;
- Further develop existing databases of empirically evidenced programmes; and
- Provide funding for specific populations, such as Indigenous school communities, refugees, and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Several of the respondents expressed the need for a review of current policies and practices at both Australian government and state and territory levels and the need to integrate existing programmes that inform student wellbeing into a more holistic approach. Co-ordinating different educational initiatives with other areas, such as health was also mentioned.

Support for the development of student wellbeing initiatives at the school level was also seen as a potential role for the Australian Government. Some of the issues raised included the following recommendations:

- Successful implementation requires ownership by schools and sectors;
- Further staff development/professional development is required;
- Provision of parent education opportunities that are school based; and
- Work on building and nurturing relationships in schools.

One respondent advised that the government take a minimalist approach which involved the provision of a source of existing strategies and examples of best practice.

#### Partners in student wellbeing

A broad range of areas and organizations have some involvement in student wellbeing. Primarily these include the following sectors:

- Health
- Physical education/sport
- Curriculum
- Nutrition
- Child protection/police
- Disability
- Aboriginal education and training
- Equity
- Universities (developing programmes and undertaking research)
- Community organizations/local councils/NGOs

#### Issues and further comments by respondents

- There is a need to keep the topic of student wellbeing as a central agenda item for discussion across the States
- Schools should be modelling values
- The quality of in-school relationships will need addressing
- The need for professional learning/ resources was highlighted many times across the survey
- A framework requires in-school consultation – not imposing policies
- We need guiding principles/support for implementation
- A focus on student wellbeing is congruent with positive behaviour approaches and also with restorative practices
- A focus on student wellbeing provides for student participation/student leadership
- One jurisdiction (SA) focuses on Birth – Yr 12, the rest K-12 or P-12. There is little discrimination between primary and secondary sectors although evidence

elsewhere shows that students experience less wellbeing in school as they get older.

- There is a the challenge of engaging schools with whole school change – not focusing on individuals
- The importance of partnerships
- Issues of inclusion
- A national wellbeing conference was mooted as well as a national wellbeing “think tank” to discuss, plan and progress
- Promotion of an international study tour to showcase and investigate innovative practices in the area of whole school preventions with an emphasis on school community partnerships.
- Development of a Student Wellbeing and the Arts Portfolio area of responsibility to explore, build and develop opportunities for schools to be involved in innovations in this area.

#### *Further observations*

The responses were written by individuals, not as an outcome of consultation so they do not necessarily reflect a consensus. None of the responses articulated conceptual models/beliefs on student wellbeing underlying current school and system practices, especially for “at-risk” populations and special needs. This is likely to be a challenge for the implementation of a student wellbeing framework. Deficit labels which attract funding for instance are not congruent with an interactive whole school approach to student wellbeing which focuses on inclusion, the whole child and an interactive model.

There were only indirect references to school leadership and only one reference on collaborative relationships to facilitate school improvement. There was no reference on the links between student wellbeing and teacher wellbeing.

The comments from some respondents on time and curriculum demands means that any new framework needs to emphasise doing things differently, not additionally.

There is little reference to “joined up thinking” although several mention the need for consistency across both schools and jurisdictions.

Little was said about the congruence of positive approaches to behaviour within a student wellbeing framework and what this means for students who present with more challenging behaviours. Similarly, issues in regard to students with special needs were not addressed.

### 5.3 Student Wellbeing in State and Territory Curriculum and Policy Documents

The following section briefly summarises the current position in relation to the inclusion of Student Wellbeing in State/Territory curriculum and policy document.

#### **Australian Capital Territory (ACT)**

The ACT’s Curriculum Framework, *Every Chance to Learn* is underpinned by core principles that relate to wellbeing. Seven of the 25 Essential Learnings focus on wellbeing and three

of these are considered to be interdisciplinary. The pedagogy that underpins implementation is based on the NSW Quality Teaching model which highlights connectedness, positive, caring, safe and supportive classroom environments, challenge, engagement and meaningful learning

### **New South Wales (NSW)**

Student Wellbeing appears to have a lower profile in NSW. The focus is more on *student welfare* and its links with good discipline and effective learning. There is no specific focus on wellbeing across the curriculum in NSW. However The Personal Development Health and Physical Education Curriculum does have a focus on interpersonal relationships, personal skills and decision-making about lifestyle choices. *The Early Years Strategy* (2006) aims to assist students to learn confidently, grow strongly and strengthen connections. *The Middle Years Strategy* aims to enhance student engagement, resilience and success. Both strategies appear to be more about objectives than strategies and skills and little support for teacher implementation and practice is to be found. Pedagogy is based on the NSW Quality Teaching model which highlights connectedness, positive, caring, safe and supportive classroom environments, challenge, engagement and meaningful learning

### **Northern Territory**

Wellbeing is explained thus: mental and emotional wellbeing refers to how a person feels, thinks and acts. If s/he feels “good”, this translates into positive feelings, positive relationships with other people, decisiveness about themselves and an ability to cope with the stresses of every day life

The Curriculum Framework consists of four categories of Essential Learnings (across 8 learning areas). Three of these categories focus on student wellbeing and, in particular, the development of identity, personal values, resilience, empathy, integrity, relationship skills and working cooperatively, working in groups and making a contribution to one’s own learning and the community

The *Health and Physical Education* Learning Area takes a holistic approach and is organised into three strands, each having some connection to student wellbeing. These are:

- Promoting Individual and Community Health;
- Enhancing Personal Development and Relationships; and
- Participation in physical activity and movement.

### **Queensland**

The Queensland Essential Learnings are linked only to specific discipline-based learning areas but are also broadly described as encompassing social and personal competence. There appear to be no specific curriculum areas with a significant focus on students’ own wellbeing. The Health and Physical Education curriculum focuses to some extent on personal and interpersonal skills but primarily in relation to health choices. However it is also acknowledged that there will be other aspects of curriculum, school policies and procedures, and community partnerships that will also contribute to and enhance student health and wellbeing in the school setting. Some principles of the Queensland *Productive Pedagogies* model have links with wellbeing eg connectedness, supportive classroom environment, mutual respect between teachers and students, recognition of difference, building a sense of community and identity and the encouragement of active citizenship within the classroom.

## South Australia

Wellbeing is described as referring to children and students' physical, social and emotional welfare and development which are seen as integral rather than incidental to learning. Student wellbeing is at the centre of the *Learner Wellbeing Framework* (Birth to Year 12) which refers to the whole person across cognitive, emotional, physical, social and spiritual dimensions.

Two of the 5 South Australian Essential Learnings that focus more directly on student wellbeing are (1) *Identity* (developing a positive sense of self and group, accepting individual and group responsibilities and respecting individual and group differences) and (2) *Interdependence* (working in harmony with others and for common purposes, within and across cultures).

There are a few curriculum documents that articulate how student wellbeing might be achieved but not much information about the processes of implementation, pedagogy or integration with key learning areas.

The *Health and Physical Education* Learning Area has three strands, two of which relate to wellbeing. These are Physical Activity and Participation and Personal and Social Development. *The Personal and Social Development* strand focuses on values, building a positive self-concept, relationships with others and working cooperatively, and developing skills and knowledge that will enhance students' own growth.

## Tasmania

Student wellbeing is not integrated with overall curriculum and is mainly addressed through the *Health and Wellbeing Curriculum* which focuses physical, social, emotional, mental and spiritual wellbeing. There are three main strands which focus on teaching students skills for becoming resilient, ethical, responsible, active, interpersonally effective, civic-minded and healthy people. Some of the values that underpin the *Health and Wellbeing Curriculum* also relate to student wellbeing eg connectedness, resilience, integrity, responsibility and equity.

## Victoria

The Victorian Essential Learning Standards are the basis for curriculum and assessment in Victorian schools and the strand that has a strong connection with wellbeing is the Physical, Personal and Social learning strand. It has four domains, all of which focus on student wellbeing in some way. These are: (1) Health and Physical Education, (2) Interpersonal Development, (3) Personal Learning and (4) Civics and Citizenship. The main focus of this strand is on the link between student wellbeing and learning.

## Western Australia

Three of the 13 Overarching Learning Outcomes in Western Australia focus on student wellbeing. These are: (1) students value and implement practices that promote personal growth and wellbeing; (2) students are self-motivated and confident in their approach to learning and are able to work individually and collaboratively; and (3) students recognise that everyone has the right to feel valued and be safe, and, in this regard, understand their rights and obligations and behave responsibly.

All learning areas are expected to contribute to these overarching outcomes for students. Three of the five values that are identified as underpinning the Curriculum Framework also relate to student wellbeing: Self acceptance and self-respect, respect and concern for others and their rights and social and civic responsibility,

The Western Australian *Health and Physical Education Curriculum* focuses on strategies and skills that will assist students to develop skills for safety, physical activity, self-management and relationships.

Table 3: Summary of State/Territory Curriculum and Policy in relation to Student Wellbeing

	Wellbeing: Definitions, Frameworks, Curriculum, Pedagogy etc
ACT	<p><i>Curriculum</i></p> <p>ACT Curriculum Framework: <i>Every Chance to Learn</i></p> <p>Core Principles include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The development of each student as a learner, person, community member and contributor to society.</li> <li>• The development of the whole child - intellectually, physically, socially, emotionally, morally and spiritually</li> <li>• The specific focus of student wellbeing is on supporting students to take positive action and responsibility for their physical, social, emotional, moral and spiritual health.</li> </ul> <p>Some of the other principles that underpin the curriculum framework include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The belief that every child can learn</li> <li>• Building on strengths</li> <li>• Being equitable and inclusive</li> <li>• Ethical practice</li> </ul> <p><i>Essential Learnings</i></p> <p>The following 7 of the 25 Essential Learnings focus on wellbeing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The student makes considered decisions*</li> <li>• The student acts with integrity and regard for others*</li> <li>• The student contributes to group effectiveness*</li> <li>• The student takes action to promote health</li> <li>• The student is physically skilled and active</li> <li>• The student manages self and relationships</li> <li>• The student understands and values what it means to be a citizen within a democracy</li> </ul> <p>Three of these *are considered interdisciplinary across all learning areas</p> <p><i>Pedagogy</i></p> <p>Pedagogy is based on the NSW Quality Teaching model which includes principles that relate to student wellbeing such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The importance of connectedness and a positive, caring, safe and supportive classroom environment</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Classrooms need to be challenging and engaging and students need to see value [<i>ie meaning</i>] in what they are learning.</li> </ul>
NSW	<p><i>Curriculum</i></p> <p>There is no specific focus on wellbeing across the curriculum. However The Years K-6 PDHPE (<i>Personal Development Health and Physical Education</i>) Curriculum has a focus on interpersonal relationships and making and acting on lifestyle decisions about nutrition, hygiene, consumerism, drug use, the environment and disease prevention. The Years 7-10 PDHE Curriculum also includes personal skills as part of the curriculum</p> <p><i>Student Welfare policy</i></p> <p>Student Wellbeing appears to have a lower profile in NSW. The focus on welfare is stronger. The main focus of the <i>Student Welfare Policy</i> is on the links between student welfare, good discipline and effective learning. There are mentions in the policy about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The link between positive climate and good discipline</li> <li>The importance of maximising student participation in decision making and ensuring that principles of equity and fairness are reflected in school practice</li> <li>Developing and implementing policies and procedures to protect the rights, safety and health of all school community members</li> <li>Monitoring attendance and ensuring that students attend school regularly</li> <li>Valuing and providing opportunities for all students to develop the skills involved in positive relationships, social responsibility, problem solving and dispute resolution</li> <li>Valuing difference and discouraging narrow and limiting gender stereotypes</li> <li>Incorporating students' views into planning related to school climate and organisation</li> <li>Providing resources and opportunities for students to gain leadership experience using a range of mechanisms, including student representative councils or school parliaments.</li> <li>Encouraging students to have a sense of belonging to the school community</li> </ul> <p><i>The Early Years Strategy</i> (2006) has three goals: learning confidently, growing strongly and strengthening connections. The underlying principle of this strategy is strengthening the academic and social foundations on which children's lives are built. The strategy aims to promote student health, wellbeing and resilience to ensure effective learning. There is a focus on the direct teaching of positive social behaviour and values, positive classroom environments, student leadership and participation, self-respect and the development of cross-cultural understandings. At this stage the strategy appears to be more about objectives than skills and strategies, There is little obvious support for teachers for practice and implementation.</p> <p><i>The Middle Years Strategy</i> (2006) also has three goals; engagement, resilience and success. The strategy is based on actions that improve student wellbeing and help them become responsible, resilient and successful. There is a focus on implementing whole school approaches that maintain safety, build positive peer and student-teacher relationships, provide opportunities for student leadership and participation, foster social skills, respect and strong values, develop student responsibility and provide targeted early intervention and support. There is a specific focus on conflict management, anti-</p>

	<p>racism and anti-bullying, and other welfare and social justice programs and approaches. As with the Early Years strategy, this strategy appears to be more about objectives than skills and strategies and, similarly, there is little obvious support for teachers for practice and implementation</p> <p><i>Pedagogy</i></p> <p>The NSW Quality Teaching model which includes principles that relate to student wellbeing such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The importance of connectedness and a positive, caring, safe and supportive classroom environment</li> <li>• Classrooms need to be challenging and engaging and students need to see value [<i>ie meaning</i>] in what they are learning.</li> </ul>
NT	<p><i>Definition of Student Wellbeing</i></p> <p>Wellbeing is explained as follows:</p> <p>Mental and emotional wellbeing refers to how a person feels, thinks and acts. If s/he feels “good”, this translates into positive feelings, positive relationships with other people, decisiveness about themselves and an ability to cope with the stresses of every day life</p> <p><i>Curriculum</i></p> <p>The Curriculum Framework consists of four categories of Essential Learnings (across 8 learning areas). The following three categories focus on student wellbeing</p> <p><i>Category 1: The Inner Learner</i></p> <p>Focuses on students developing identity, personal values, resilience, empathy and integrity and valuing diversity</p> <p><i>Category 3: The Collaborative Learner</i></p> <p>Focuses on relationships, effective communication strategies, listening to others views, understanding others, developing the social values of compassion and integrity, dealing constructively with conflict, fulfilling group responsibilities, sharing own ideas, working in groups.</p> <p><i>Category 4: The Constructive Learner</i></p> <p>Focuses on students reflecting on how they can make a useful difference eg by contributing to their own learning and wellbeing (including healthy living) and contributing at a local and global level.</p> <p>The <i>Health and Physical Education</i> Learning Area takes a holistic approach based around The World Health Organisation’s definition health as “a state of complete mental, physical and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”. A Health Promoting Schools approach is recommended. THE HPE are organised into three strands, each having some connection to student wellbeing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Promoting Individual and Community Health</i> (eg physical, social, emotional, mental and spiritual dimensions of health and wellbeing, disease prevention, nutrition, first aid, safety and risk reduction in relation to drugs, sexuality etc,</li> <li>• <i>Enhancing Personal Development and Relationships</i> (eg physical, social and emotional development, sexuality and the challenging of stereotypes and shaping of</li> </ul>

	<p>identity, effective relationships, community values, attitudes and standards of behaviour)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Participation in physical activity and movement</i> (skills for physical activity and the benefits of physical activity)</li> </ul>
QLD	<p><i>Curriculum</i></p> <p>The Essential Learnings are linked only to specific discipline-based learning areas but are broadly described as encompassing knowledge, skills and attributes that are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• specific to content areas</li> <li>• required for complex, real-life challenges eg higher-order thinking skills and social and personal competence.</li> </ul> <p>There appear to be no specific curriculum areas with a significant focus on students' own wellbeing, However teachers are advised that student health and wellbeing issues should be addressed primarily in the context of the Years 1-10(HPE) <i>Health and Physical Education</i> syllabus. In this syllabus personal and interpersonal skills are linked primarily to health choices and include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working cooperatively with others</li> <li>• Building and maintaining self-esteem</li> <li>• Setting realistic goals</li> <li>• Coping with anxiety</li> <li>• Resisting pressures</li> <li>• Communicating effectively</li> <li>• Making decisions</li> <li>• Managing conflict</li> <li>• Dealing assertively with social situations in which health behaviours usually take place.</li> </ul> <p>However it is also acknowledged that there will be other aspects of curriculum, school policies and procedures, and community partnerships that will also contribute to and enhance student health and wellbeing in the school setting.</p> <p><i>Pedagogy</i></p> <p>Some principles of the QLD Productive Pedagogies model have links with wellbeing eg:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The importance of connectedness and developing a supportive classroom environment in which there is mutual respect between students and teachers and recognition of difference.</li> <li>• The importance of using teaching that builds a sense of community and identity</li> <li>• The encouragement of active citizenship within the classroom</li> </ul>
	<p><i>Definition/Description of Student Wellbeing</i></p> <p>Wellbeing refers to children and students' physical, social and emotional</p>

SA	<p>welfare and development. Evidence suggests that these elements are integral rather than incidental to learning. A learner will find it difficult to engage with learning programs if they are distracted by significant physical, social and emotional issues.</p> <p><i>Curriculum</i></p> <p>Student wellbeing is at the centre of the <i>Learner Wellbeing Framework</i> (Birth to Year 12) which refers to the whole person across cognitive, emotional, physical, social and spiritual dimensions. Wellbeing is described as being achieved through curriculum and pedagogy, policies and procedures, the learning environment and partnerships.</p> <p>There are 5 Essential Learnings, two of which focus more directly on wellbeing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Identity</i>: developing a positive sense of self and group, accepting individual and group responsibilities and respecting individual and group differences</li> <li>• <i>Interdependence</i>: working in harmony with others and for common purposes, within and across cultures</li> </ul> <p>There are a few curriculum documents that articulate how student wellbeing might be achieved eg through a positive whole school ethos and classroom environment and positive teacher-student relationships. However there isn't very much information about the processes of implementation, pedagogy or integration with key learning areas.</p> <p>The <i>Health and Physical Education</i> Learning Area has three strands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical activity and participation</li> <li>• Personal and social development</li> <li>• The health of individuals and communities</li> </ul> <p>The <i>Personal and social development</i> strand focuses on values, understanding 'self' and "self and others", building a positive self-concept and establishing relationships with others across diverse groups in the world around them. There is also a focus on working cooperatively, understanding the physical, spiritual, social, cognitive and emotional changes that occur over the life span, and developing skills and knowledge that will enhance their own growth and their relationships with others in a variety of contexts.</p>
TAS	<p><i>Curriculum</i></p> <p>Student wellbeing is addressed mainly in the <i>Health and Wellbeing Curriculum</i>, which adopts a broad definition of health which focuses on five (overlapping) dimensions of physical, social, emotional, mental and spiritual wellbeing. There are three main strands which focus on assisting students to become resilient, responsible, active and healthy people by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding health and wellbeing</li> <li>• Having concepts and skills for movement and physical activity</li> <li>• Having skills for personal and social development, based on identity, relationships and self-management skills.</li> </ul> <p>The Health and Wellbeing curriculum document makes links between health and wellbeing and outcomes such as acting ethically, developing a positive identity, gaining a sense of direction, school success at school, positive communication and skills for civic</p>

	<p>participation, advocacy and citizenship. Values that are identified as underpinning the curriculum and which also relate to student wellbeing include: connectedness, resilience, integrity, responsibility and equity.</p> <p>Wellbeing is not clearly integrated with overall curriculum and it is assumed that basic skills such as literacy and numeracy can be addressed in the Health and Wellbeing curriculum rather than the other way round.</p>
VIC	<p><i>Curriculum</i></p> <p>The Victorian Essential Learning Standards are the basis for curriculum and assessment in Victorian schools. There are three VELS strands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discipline-based Learning</li> <li>• Interdisciplinary Learning (Thinking processes, Design, creativity and technology, ICT and Communication)</li> <li>• Physical, Personal and Social learning</li> </ul> <p>The Physical, Personal and Social learning strand is the one that focuses most on aspects of student wellbeing and it has four domains:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Health and Physical Education</i> (Movement and physical activity; health knowledge)</li> <li>• <i>Interpersonal Development</i> (Building social relationships; working in teams; Managing conflict)</li> <li>• <i>Personal learning</i> (Self-knowledge; responding to feedback; self-management and organisation; values)</li> <li>• <i>Civics and Citizenship</i> (Civics knowledge and understanding; community engagement)</li> </ul> <p>The focus of the Interpersonal Development and Personal learning domains is on the link between wellbeing and learning. Teachers are reasonably well supported by on-line resources in their implementation and assessment of a these VELS domains</p>
WA	<p><i>Curriculum</i></p> <p>There are 13 Overarching Learning Outcomes (OLOs) and the following three focus on student wellbeing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students value and implement practices that promote personal growth and well-being</li> <li>• Students are self-motivated and confident in their approach to learning and are able to work individually and collaboratively.</li> <li>• Students recognise that everyone has the right to feel valued and be safe, and, in this regard, understand their rights and obligations and behave responsibly.</li> </ul> <p>All learning areas are expected to contribute to these overarching outcomes for students. Three of the five values that are identified as underpinning the Curriculum Framework also relate to student wellbeing:</p>

- *Self acceptance and respect of self*, resulting in attitudes and actions which develop each person's unique potential – physical, emotional, aesthetic, spiritual, intellectual, moral and social;
- *Respect and concern for others and their rights*, resulting in sensitivity to and concern for the well-being of others, respect for others and a search for constructive ways of managing conflict;
- *Social and civic responsibility*, resulting in a commitment to exploring and promoting the common good; meeting individual needs in ways which do not infringe the rights of others; participating in democratic processes; social justice and cultural diversity.

The *Health and Physical Education Curriculum* (HPE) focuses on strategies and skills that will assist students to develop:

- Skills to keep themselves safe, maintain their own wellbeing and reduce risks to their health.
- Skills for physical activity
- Self-management skills
- Interpersonal skills (especially negotiation, being assertive and conflict management skills)

## Section 6: Whole School Approaches to Student Wellbeing

### 6.1 Issues of School Leadership, Implementation and Sustainability of Student Wellbeing Initiatives

There are many common threads in the current National educational frameworks that are key factors in relation to effective implementation and sustainability of wellbeing initiatives. These are:

- A focus on the whole child
- An assumption that student wellbeing impacts on student learning
- The importance of a whole school approach
- The importance of staff collaboration
- The importance of a values-based & inclusive approach
- The need for a safe & supportive school ethos
- The key role of the classroom teacher
- Implementation across all school years
- The vital importance of effective school leadership
- Partnerships with parents and the community
- A focus on both prevention and intervention, preferably early intervention

The following section outlines guidelines from research into successful program implementation and sustainability.

Over the last decade, there has been a research shift from a focus on the short-term effectiveness of innovations and towards a focus on creating conditions for success in 'normal' school circumstances (Elias, 2003; National Health and Medical Research Council (1996)).

Elias, Zins, Graczyk & Weissberg (2003/CASEL) have identified from their comprehensive research of hundreds of studies of school initiatives the following school-based factors that are associated with the successful and enduring implementation of these initiatives. These factors are:

- The presence of a coordinator or team to oversee the implementation of the initiative and resolution of day-to-day problems;
- Involvement of teachers with high shared morale, good communication and a sense of ownership in the new initiative;
- Ongoing processes that foster teachers' formal and informal professional development including the involvement of acknowledged experts;
- High participation of all students in the school in the initiative;
- High visibility of student wellbeing as a priority in the school and community;

- Components that explicitly teach values such as respect, cooperation support and social-emotional learning skills that encourage classroom participation, positive interactions with teachers/peers and good study habits;
- Varied and engaging teaching methods;
- Links made to the stated goals of the school and jurisdiction;
- Consistent support from the school principal; and
- The need for a balance of support from new and seasoned leaders at the school system level.

#### *Good Practice at the School System Level*

A good Australian example of a student wellbeing initiative at the school system level is the SWAP (Student Wellbeing Action Plan) initiative of the Student Wellbeing Unit of the Melbourne Catholic Education Office. This approach includes the appointment of a school wellbeing coordinator in every primary school in the Melbourne Diocese who leads a core team of staff with responsibility for the design, implementation and evaluation of the school's student wellbeing policy, programs and practices. The Diocese has funded 800 staff to complete a Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Studies (Student Welfare) or Master of Education (Student Wellbeing) at either Melbourne University or ACU National. Many of these supported teachers have gone on to become student wellbeing coordinators. Education Officers from the CEOM Student Wellbeing Unit lead and support schools in the implementation of whole school approaches to student wellbeing with a focus on prevention and within the context of the Health Promoting Schools Framework. Organisational support is delivered through clusters of schools who are encouraged to work together to build capacity amongst teachers and leaders in the area of student wellbeing. A significant goal for the Diocese is to shift the individual school's emphasis away from program implementation to strategic implementation of whole school approaches which includes the key areas of:

- School Culture, Environment and Ethos;
- Curriculum Teaching & Learning;
- School Community Partnerships; and
- Organisational Structures, Processes and Procedures.

#### *Good Practice at the School level*

Most of the eleven schools selected as "good practice schools" as part of the research investigation by the Victorian Education Department's "Safe schools are effective schools" project endorsed student wellbeing as a school priority. This focus then provided a unifying vision for the school practices that facilitated teacher and student wellbeing such as building school connectedness and positive relationships, whole school positive behaviour management, initiatives to reduce school bullying and pedagogy that supported that vision (McGrath & Noble, 2007).

#### *School Leadership*

The research literature has highlighted the key role of school leaders, through their active, engaged support and direction, in determining the success of any teacher implementation

of student wellbeing initiatives. Even with a passion for student wellbeing it is much harder for individual teachers to initiate and sustain such initiatives if it is not seen as a school priority and their work does not have school leadership support (Kam, Greenberg and Walls 2003). In their evaluation of the primary-school-based *Friendly Schools and Friendly Families Project*, Western Australian researchers Cross and her colleagues found that the principal's full involvement was crucial to a school's successful implementation of the programme (Cross *et al.*, 2004).

Specific practices for redesigning the organisation of a school typically include leadership vision and support for strengthening school culture and building school-community connections, developing collaborative processes and modifying organisational structures to align with the vision for whole school wellbeing (Leithwood *et al.*, 2004; Reynolds & Teddlie 2000). A detailed three-to five-year strategic implementation plan has been found to be essential for successful implementation, as vague or tentative plans never lead to success (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1995). Before a new initiative is implemented, school leaders and their staff also need to take a close and honest look at the current capacity of the school (e.g. staff, skills, services and resources) to support the initiative (Elias *et al.*, 2003).

The basic principles of good practice in the development and implementation of whole school wellbeing initiatives have emerged from evaluation studies as well as large-scale reviews and meta-analyses of a wide range of studies. These are summarised below.

#### *Universal programs are better*

School-based prevention programs that are universal (i.e. delivered to all students) are more effective than remediation programs or programs delivered only to selected "at risk" students. Reviews of research suggest that it is more effective to develop strengths and protective factors than to target "at risk" factors. However, there needs to be some attention paid to risk factors as well (eg Greenberg *et al.*, 2001; Hawkins *et al.*, 1999; Hawkins, Catalona and Miller, 1992; Hawkins *et al.*, 1992).

#### *Whole school programs are more effective*

Whole school programs are more effective than those delivered only to selected classes within the school and programs should be embedded in the curriculum and general life of the classroom and school (Briggs & Hawkins (1999 National Health and Medical Research Council, 1996). A review by Wells *et al.* (2003) on the effect of school-based programmes on mental health showed that whole-school programs worked best, especially if they were implemented for longer than a year, and focused on the promotion of mental health rather than the prevention of mental illness.

#### *Embedding Programmes and Practices is Important*

School-based prevention programmes are more effective when they are embedded in the curriculum, practices and daily life of the school rather than being "added on" (Galloway & Roland, 2004, Scheckner *et al.*, 2002; Briggs & Hawkins, n.d., 1999a; Davis, Hawley, McMullan & Spilka, 1997; National Health and Medical Research Council, 1996; Orr, 1992;). Programmes for promoting student wellbeing are less effective if they are perceived by teachers as "add-on extras" rather than as an integral part of their work. Sellman (2002) has argued that if a programme or practice is just an "add-on feature" that is easy to discard, then it is less likely to be sustained over time.

When a programme is embedded, the skills, concepts and understandings from the programme are located in other curriculum areas and programmes and applied in a variety of classroom and playground contexts. The values, skills and concepts are also supported by teaching practices, interactions and other school activities and experiences. Programmes are adapted to fit with existing programmes and practices within the school.

Elias *et al.* (2003) has also highlighted the danger of using narrow programmes that do not take into account the context of a specific school and its students. Such de-contextualised materials and directions are unlikely to be sustainable. Crawford & Rossiter (2006) suggest that a focus on student wellbeing will not be perceived as realistic unless it harmonises with teachers' ordinary experience of classroom teaching and learning and does not compromise the integrity of their discipline area.

*Focusing on multiple domains is more effective*

Interventions which involve school, family and community work best (Dryfoos,1990; Greenberg *et al.*,2003). By utilising these kinds of partnerships, communities can develop common conceptual models, common language, and procedures.

*It is more effective to use a multi-strategic approach than a single focus approach*

A multi-strategic approach using a collection of coordinated 'active ingredients' works better than a single approach and is an essential feature of any successful prevention program (Blum 1998; Greenberg *et al.*, 2001; Kellerman 1998; Resnick, *et al.* 1997; Hawkins, Catalano & Miller 1992). Wilson, Gottfredson and Najaka (2001) have argued that the most important question is "which combinations and sequences of strategies works best?" rather than "which single program works best?" In their review of research, Catalano *et al.*, (2003) concluded that effective programs usually contained at least five different aspects of social and emotional learning.

*Prevention programs are more effective when they are delivered to children early in their schooling*

Most reviews of preventive research stress that programs which start when students are very young are more likely to be effective (eg O'Shaughnessy, Lane, Gresham, & Beebe-Frankenberger 2002; Severson and Walker, 2001; Durlak and Wells,1997; Dryfoos,1990; Greenberg *et al.*, 2003; Greenberg *et al.*, 2001).

*Long term prevention programs are more effective than short ones*

Short-term preventive interventions produce time-limited benefits. Multi-year programs are more likely to foster enduring benefits (Greenberg *et al.*, 2003; Greenberg *et al.*, 2001; Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 1999; Greenberg *et al.*, 1999; Weissberg & Greenberg, 1998).

*Prevention programs are more effective when teachers act in accordance with what they are teaching*

Students respond most positively to program components when they perceive that their teachers behave in a ways that are consistent with what is being taught (eg Ling *et al.*,1998); Prosser and Deakin, 1997; Williams, 1993). Adolescents who perceive their

learning environments include respectful and caring teachers and peers participate more in class and complete more homework (Trent, 2002; Murdock, 1999).

*Student Wellbeing initiatives can improve teacher retention*

Two recent studies demonstrated that teachers who use social-emotional learning strategies and programming in their classrooms or who are members of a school community using social-emotional practices are generally happier and more likely to stay in the teaching profession (Rimm-Kaufman & Sawyer, 2004; Murray, 2005). In contrast Ewing (2006) spoke about how the isolation and perceived lack of collegial or leadership support that some young Australian teachers experienced was the main catalyst that prompted them to leave their profession. The economic, social and psychological costs to both the individual and to the system are obvious.

*Partnerships with parents and the community are essential*

Research has highlighted the importance of developing close links between parents and schools to support student wellbeing and learning (Redding *et al.*, 2004). Parental involvement is associated with better student achievement, engagement, school retention and take-up of further and higher education (Black 2007). School-community partnerships can be student, family, school or community centered or a combination.

The evidence suggests that schools that work closely with parents to develop and implement school-based wellbeing programs are more successful (Cross *et al.*, 2004, Greenberg *et al.*, 2003, Schecker *et al.*, 2002). Such partnerships help schools to develop common definitions, language and procedures (Greenberg *et al.*, 2001) Unless parents are actively informed and involved they may not understand or accept the school's focus on student wellbeing and may undermine what is being taught (Kumpfer, 1997).

A recent Australian Government Report into parents' attitudes to school (DEST 2007) documents over two thousand parents' responses to the survey. Parents regarded the most important factors related to choosing a school as the "Quality of teachers" (91.3 percent); "Secure school environment" (90.7 percent); "Discipline" (86.1 per cent); "Values" (86.5 per cent); "Facilities" (82.3 percent); and "Academic reputation" (81.2 percent). *Quality of teachers* links to positive teacher-student relationships and student engagement in learning, *secure school environment* links to safe and supportive environments and *values* which have all been identified earlier in the report as pathways to facilitate student wellbeing. Parents also wanted increased consistency between States and Territories in National standards for teachers and school leaders (93.0 percent) and in curriculum (86.1 per cent).

*Employment skills are linked to the skills that contribute to wellbeing*

Of interest is the finding in the above-mentioned DEST (2007) survey that only 31.8 per cent of parents thought students had adequate "job-related" skills on leaving school. Employers in both Australia (the Mayer Report) and America (Devaney *et al.*, 2006) identify social-emotional skills as key competencies for school leavers. These skills include team (interpersonal) skills such as conflict resolution and negotiation skills, communication skills, self management skills (goal setting, self motivation and initiative), resourcefulness including creative thinking and problem solving and competence in literacy and numeracy. This list is supported by Bright and Earl's (2004) research of the eight most common qualities Australian employers ask for in job advertisements. These qualities are:

communication skills, team skills, energetic, initiative, attention to detail, ability to handle pressure, enthusiasm and leadership. This list highlights that academic abilities are only one part of the picture in determining what makes someone successful in the workplace and in life.

#### Summary

The use of evidence-based “good practice” which has been derived from research into school-wide prevention programs that meet the social and emotional needs of students can provide schools with powerful strategies for preventing and reducing bullying and anti-social behaviour and enhancing student wellbeing, positive and pro-social behaviour and learning outcomes. In the long term these practices can develop school community, enhance student safety and wellbeing and become a significant aspect of overall school improvement.

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