What young people have told us about their wellbeing: results from a wellbeing survey

System Performance

2016
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Introduction

The term “wellbeing” is broadly used to describe non-cognitive skills, executive functioning, mental health, resilience, connections with other people and the ACARA General Capabilities (Personal and social capability). The international evidence shows that these skills and characteristics are critical for young people to succeed in the education system and in adulthood.1,2

Schools and communities use a wide range of strategies to support and build the wellbeing of students. Valid and reliable evidence collected directly from young people is needed to help guide and monitor the success of these strategies.

The Department for Education and Child Development (DECD) has collected whole-of-population student wellbeing data using validated survey scales since 2013. This work to measure wellbeing was initiated to provide systematic measures of the wellbeing skills and outcomes which are recognised as key priorities in the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians and other key policies which guide the directions of the education department.

The development and implementation of a wellbeing measure called the “Wellbeing and Engagement Census” was one among a raft of initiatives which aimed to give schools and the system better evidence about what approaches and interventions were working or not and guide responses to young people.3

Since starting to measure wellbeing using the “Middle Years Development Instrument” in 2013 the department has seen a steady increase in the number of students and schools participating. In 2016 500 schools (including more than 90% of government schools) and more than 43,000 year 6 to 9 students in participated in the collection.4 These are very strong levels of participation compared to other voluntary data collections of this kind and highlight the shared commitment to listen to the views of young people.

A range of reports have been produced with the aim of helping schools, education partnerships and other community stakeholders to describe patterns in wellbeing, monitor progress in efforts to improve wellbeing and to inform them in decisions on what to do in the future.

This report was produced to provide an overview of what has been learnt to date at a whole-of-State level.

After providing an overview of the evidence for measuring wellbeing, the wellbeing results are reported within the following chapters:

- Mental and physical health
- Experiences at school
- Engagement and beliefs about learnings
- Emotional wellbeing for boys and girls
- Wellbeing and the implications for lifting educational achievement
- Breakfast and sleep
Measuring wellbeing across the education system

An overview of the international evidence

Success in schooling and in adulthood does not depend on cognitive abilities and technical expertise alone – but also on emotional resilience and the ability to engage with others.\(^5\)\(^6\)\(^7\) This encompasses motivation, attitudes towards schooling, being connected with others, self-regulation and the ability to persevere in the face of challenges.

Non cognitive skills, such as perseverance, self-esteem, self-efficacy, attentiveness, resilience, openness, empathy and tolerance were once thought to be “traits” or “personality factors” that were fixed, permanent or inherited. This is not the case.\(^8\)

Research shows that wellbeing and non-cognitive skills can be reliably measured, changed through experiences and interventions and have ongoing impacts across childhood, adolescence and adulthood, including health behaviours, academic performance and vocational outcomes.\(^9\)\(^10\)

Both cognitive skills and non-cognitive skills can be improved or shaped by experiences. Importantly, non-cognitive skills are more malleable at later ages than cognitive abilities (as the prefrontal cortex continues to develop well into adolescence).\(^11\) Strengths in more than one domain produce greater gains than simply adding the different domains together. Non-cognitive skills develop over time and build on each other (“skills beget skills and abilities beget abilities”\(^12\)) thus there are potentially greater gains from earlier intervention than later intervention.

Longitudinal data has allowed researchers to examine the relative influence on adult outcomes of factors like poverty and language development in early childhood or academic achievement and social relationships in middle childhood and adolescence. This research has shown that one non-cognitive skill measured at three years of age – self-control – has been found to predict wealth and income, health and criminal behaviour.\(^13\) Individuals tended to bounce back from ‘risky’ behaviour in adolescence if they possessed good self-control in the early years. Other analysis has shown that general wellbeing or satisfaction with life in adulthood is more strongly driven by social connectedness/relationships in adolescence, which has its roots in social functioning in early childhood and less so in cognitive development (although these tend to ‘go together’ for many individuals).\(^14\)

Measuring and responding to the wellbeing of children and young people has also been proposed as a key element of a positive or strengths-based approach to addressing poor mental health amongst young people. Approximately half of all life-time mental health disorders emerge during the teenage years, making this an important time to respond early and prevent future problems.\(^15\)\(^16\) Poor mental health at ages 14 and 15 has been shown to lower a young person’s prospects in
the workforce, education or training above and beyond a range of other factors, including academic achievement.\textsuperscript{17} \textsuperscript{18} It is expected that building strengths or protective factors in young people is a key means to addressing poor mental health in addition to identifying and responding to mental health problems as they arise.

**Listening to the views of children and young people**

One of the Department for Education and Child Development’s strategic priorities is to engage with and incorporate the views of children and young people in planning and decision making.\textsuperscript{19} \textsuperscript{20} This aligns with Article 12 (part 1) of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*:

*States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.*\textsuperscript{21}

Self-report surveys are one means of listening to the ‘voice’ of students and allowing children to tell adults their views on various aspects of their lives relevant to their wellbeing. Collecting information directly from children and young people about their views and experiences, rather than relying on the views of adults, may lead to:

- More accurate information about the prevalence, importance or impact of issues, including the relevance of approaches which aim to support learning and development.\textsuperscript{22}
- The opportunity for children and young people to actively participate in decision making and to develop social and emotional competencies such as confidence, cooperation with others, responsibility, motivation and self-awareness.\textsuperscript{23} \textsuperscript{24}
Mental and physical health

Why are these indicators important?

The goals of Australian school systems include that children and young people should be able to develop strong self-esteem, satisfaction with life, a sense of optimism about their lives and the future and be free to learn without experiencing frequent or unmanageable sadness, worries and anxiety.25 26 27

In addition to reporting on their emotional wellbeing, young people provided information about a range of other factors which have been shown to influence mental and physical health, including:

- Connectedness with family members, educators, other children and young people is regarded to be important for the development of social and emotional skills and for protecting young people from adverse stress and worries.28 29 Better social relationships and functioning may lead to better education, workforce and social outcomes, along with greater life-satisfaction in adulthood.30
- Young people who participate in after-school activities are more likely to show increased self-confidence, self-esteem, connectedness to school and academic achievement.31 Young people involved in activities outside of school such as sports, music and arts have been found to be less likely to engage in ‘antisocial’ behaviours.32

Key findings

Social and emotional wellbeing measures include students’ reported sadness, worries about things at home and at school and optimistic thinking:

- About 1 in 3 primary school students reported feeling very optimistic most of the time. (Fig. 1). Just over half reported high levels of happiness (56%) (Fig. 2) and satisfaction with life (51%) (Fig. 3).
- Secondary students consistently reported lower optimism, happiness and satisfaction than primary students, at 25%, 45% and 41% respectively.
- Approximately 1 in 7 primary students and 1 in 5 secondary students reported high levels of sadness (Fig 4).
- Approximately 1 in 4 primary students and 1 in 3 secondary students reported often being worried about things at home and at school (Fig 5).
- Low levels of emotional regulation (ability to change their way of thinking about things) were reported by around 1 in 5 primary students and 1 in 4 secondary students (Fig 6).

Physical health measures included students’ views about their overall health, reported health conditions, body image concerns as well as daily breakfast and sleep habits:

- Almost 1 in 5 Year 6/7 students and 1 in 4 Year 8/9 students reported having a good night’s sleep three times a week or less (Fig 7).
- One in 6 Year 6/7 students and 1 in 4 Year 8/9 students ate breakfast three times a week or less (Fig 8).

- Whilst most young people reported positive views about their body image and general health, 7% reported negative views about their body image and 25% of Year 8/9 students rated their health as “low” (Figs. 9 and 10).

**Risk and protective factors** included students’ views about social support and participation in sport, music and other activities.

Most young people said that they received medium or high degrees of social support from their peers (89% Year 6/7; 88% Year 8/9) (Fig. 11).

Young people generally agreed that they belonged or fit in with their peers, although 15% of Year 6/7 students and 18% of Year 8/9 students did not feel that they belonged (Fig. 12).

Most young people undertake at least one after school activity. Approximately 1 in 2 primary and secondary students participate in 2 or more after-school sports activities with the figure only slightly less for music and arts activities (Year 6/7 45.5%; Year 8/9 36.3%) (Figs. 13 - 15).

“Organised activities” included any other structured activity after school such as art class, sports practice, educational lessons or youth group. 80% of primary students and 72% of secondary students were recorded as participating in one or more of these activities after school.

Young people were also asked about homework, watching television and playing computer games:

- 24% of Year 6/7 students and 20% of Year 8/9 students did homework every weeknight. Equivalent numbers of students said that they never did homework.

- 44% of Year 6/7 students and 43% of Year 8/9 students watched television every weeknight.

- 27% of Year 6/7 students and 24% of Year 8/9 students played video or computer games every weeknight.

Young people were also asked if there was something that they would like to do after school but were prevented from doing. The main barriers stopping young people undertaking after school activities were:

- Having to go straight home after school (41%);
- Being too busy (26%); and
- Having too much homework (22%)
Figure 1. Optimism. South Australian public school students.

Figure 2. Happiness. South Australian public school students.
## Satisfaction with life

- **Low**: 21.3% (DECD schools 6/7), 27.7% (DECD schools 8/9), 24.3% (Total)
- **Medium**: 50.5% (DECD schools 6/7), 32.6% (DECD schools 8/9), 30.2% (Total)
- **High**: 28.2% (DECD schools 6/7), 39.6% (DECD schools 8/9), 45.5% (Total)

**Figure 3.** Satisfaction with life. South Australian public school students.

## Sadness

- **High**: 60.7% (DECD schools 6/7), 51.6% (DECD schools 8/9), 56.5% (Total)
- **Medium**: 24.5% (DECD schools 6/7), 28.5% (DECD schools 8/9), 26.4% (Total)
- **Low**: 14.8% (DECD schools 6/7), 19.9% (DECD schools 8/9), 17.1% (Total)

**Figure 4.** Sadness. South Australian public school students.

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In most ways my life is close to the way I would want it to be.
The things in my life are excellent.
I am happy with my life.
So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.
If I could live my life over, I would have it the same way.

I feel unhappy a lot of the time.
I feel upset about things.
I feel that I do things wrong a lot.

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Worries and anxiety

Figure 5. Worries and anxiety. South Australian public school students.

Emotional regulation

Figure 6. Emotional regulation. South Australian public school students.

I worry a lot about things at home.

I worry a lot about things at school.

I worry a lot about mistakes that I make.

I worry about things.

When I want to feel happier, I think about something different.

When I want to feel less bad (e.g. sad, angry or worried), I think about something different.

When I’m worried about something, I change the way I’m thinking about it.

I control my feelings about things by changing the way I think about them.

When I want to feel less bad (e.g. sad, angry or worried) about something, I change the way that I’m thinking about it.
Sleep

How often do you get a good night's sleep?

![Chart showing sleep habits]

Figure 7. Sleep habits. South Australian public school students.

Eating Breakfast

How often do you eat breakfast?

![Chart showing breakfast habits]

Figure 8. Breakfast habits. South Australian public school students.
Figure 9. Perceptions of body image. South Australian public school students.

Figure 10. Perceptions of general health. South Australian public school students.
Peer support

![Graph showing peer support levels]  
**Figure 11.** Support from peers. South Australian public school students.

Peer belonging

![Graph showing peer belonging levels]  
**Figure 12.** Peer belonging. South Australian public school students.

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**Organised activities after school**

![Bar chart showing organised activities after school](chart.png)

**Figure 13. Organised activities after school. South Australian public school students.**

Note: “Low” refers to students who reported that they did not participate in any after-school activities. “Medium” refers to students who participated in one activity. Students were categorised as “high” if they reported participating in 2 or more activities outside of school.

**Sport after school**

![Bar chart showing sport after school](chart.png)

**Figure 14. Participation in sport outside of school. South Australian public school students.**

Note: “Low” refers to students who reported that they did not participate in any sport outside of school. “Medium” refers to students who participated in one sport. Students were categorised as “high” if they reported participating in 2 or more sports outside of school.
Figure 15. Participation in music and art outside of school. South Australian public school students.

Note: “Low” refers to students who reported that they did not participate in any music or arts activities. “Medium” refers to students who participated in one activity. Students were categorised as “high” if they reported participating in 2 or more types of music or art.
Experiences at school

Why are these indicators important?

Perceptions of the school climate as a whole are believed to help build students’ wellbeing.  Although establishing the causality is difficult, students who feel that they belong at school and have positive experiences at school tend to attend school more often and have higher academic achievement.

Bullying is commonly defined as targeted intimidation or humiliation which cannot be avoided or defended by the victim and may be physical, verbal, social or cyberbullying.  Young people who are bullied are more likely to show elevated stress responses and report emotional and somatic problems, which in turn is associated with absences from school and lower academic achievement.

Key findings

School climate is a measure of students’ views about the interactions among teachers and students at the school.

A majority of young people viewed the climate of their school as being strong (either medium or high), however while 44% of students in year 6 and 7 rated their schools as having a “high” climate, only 26% of year 8 and 9 students gave the same rating (Fig. 16).

Also, around 54% of year 6/7 students said that they had important adults at their school, compared to only 40% of year 8/9 students (Fig. 17).

School belonging is a measure of students’ views about belonging to school and feeling important to others within the school.

Around 43% of young people reported a strong sense of belonging to their school. Similar to the results regarding school climate, school belonging appears to decrease for older students – 53% of Year 6/7 students placed themselves in the ‘high’ category compared with only 36% of Year 8/9 students (Fig. 18).

In addition, around 7 in 10 year 6/7 students and 6 in 10 year 8/9 students report a high degree of emotional engagement with their teachers (Fig. 19).

Social support from adults at school was measured by questions asking students to rate the degree to which an adult at school cared about them, believed that the student would be a success and listened when the student has something to say.

A majority of young people viewed their connectedness with adults at school as being strong for both year 6 and 7 students (90%) and for year 8 and 9 students (85%) (Fig. 20).
Just over 70% of students said that they were bullied at least once during the school year (Figs. 21-24). Verbal and social bullying were the most common types of bullying reported. Around 60% of students experienced verbal bullying at least once during the school year, with over 14% of children experiencing it weekly. Around 50% of children experienced social bullying at least once and around 10% said that they were bullied at least every week.

The proportion of students reporting bullying declines as students move into secondary school. The exception to this finding is for cyber bullying where 24 per cent of year 6 and 7 students reported experiencing this compared to 31% of year 8 and 9 students.
School climate

Figure 16. School climate. South Australian public school students.

Important adults

Figure 17. Important adults at school. South Australian public school students.
School belonging

![School belonging chart]

Figure 18. School belonging. South Australian public school students.

Emotional engagement with teacher

![Emotional engagement with teacher chart]

Figure 19. Emotional engagement with classroom teacher. South Australian public school students.

Teachers and students treat each other with respect in this school.

People care about each other in this school.

Students in this school help each other, even if they are not friends.

I feel like I belong in this school.

I feel like I am important in this school.

I get along well with most of my teachers.

Most of my teachers are interested in my well-being.

Most of my teachers really listen to what I have to say.

If I need extra help, I will receive it from my teachers.

Most of my teachers treat me fairly.
**Connectedness with adults at school**

![Bar chart showing connectedness with adults at school.]

**Figure 20.** Connections with adults at school. South Australian public school students.

**Bullying - verbal**

![Bar chart showing bullying - verbal.]

**Figure 21.** How often students are bullied verbally. South Australian public school students.

At my school there is a teacher or another adult...

- Who really cares about me.
- Who believes that I will be a success.
- Who listens to me when I have something to say.
Figure 22. How often students are bullied socially. South Australian public school students.

Figure 23. How often students are bullied online. South Australian public school students.
Figure 24. How often students are physically bullied. South Australian public school students.
Engagement and beliefs about learnings

Why are these indicators important?

Perseverance refers to the skills required to exercise control over efforts, to regulate attention, disregard distractions and pursue or persist with longer term goals. These skills have been found to predict a range of health, education, social and workforce outcomes. Academic self-concept refers to students’ beliefs or expectations about their likelihood of success in learning and school work if they put in effort.

Key findings

Engagement was measured by questions asking students to rate how much they became absorbed and involved in activities and lost track of time when learning something new.

- Low levels of engagement in activities or challenges were reported by around 4 in 10 primary students and almost half of all secondary students (Fig. 25).
- Cognitive engagement questions asked students about how much care they took in what they were doing, trying a different approach when finding something hard and beliefs about whether people can change their intelligence.
- Just over half of year 6/7 students reported high engagement compared to 37% of year 8/9 students (Fig. 26).

Perseverance was measured by students reporting how often they stuck to a plan once they had made one, persisted with schoolwork until they were done with it, finished whatever they had begun and whether they were a hard worker.

- Low levels of perseverance with tasks were reported by approximately one quarter of year 6/7 students and one third of year 8/9 students (Fig. 27).

Academic self-concept was measured by questions asking students to rate how certain they were that they could learn the skills taught at school, whether they could complete school work if they had enough time and whether they believed that they could learn the material taught at school, even if it was hard.

- Almost 7 in 10 Year 6/7 students and 6 in 10 Year 8/9 students had a very positive academic self-concept (Fig. 28), indicating that they were confident that they could learn the concepts and skills taught at school. A small group of students reported low levels of confidence (10% of students in years 6/7; 12% in years 8/9).
Figure 25. Engagement in activities (flow). South Australian public school students.

Cognitive engagement

Figure 26. Cognitive engagement. South Australian public school students.
Perseverance

![Bar chart showing perseverance levels among South Australian public school students.]

**Figure 27.** Perseverance with challenges. South Australian public school students.

Academic self-concept

![Bar chart showing academic self-concept levels among South Australian public school students.]

**Figure 28.** Academic self-concept. South Australian public school students.

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**Items**

- Once I make a plan to get something done, I stick to it.
- I keep at my schoolwork until I am done with it.
- I finish whatever I begin.
- I am a hard worker.

- I am certain I can learn the skills taught in school this year.
- If I have enough time, I can do a good job on all my school work.
- Even if the work in school is hard, I can learn it.
Gender and mental health: girls report lower wellbeing than boys

The issue

The wellbeing of many young people drops in adolescence. Around half of all young people with a mental health problem will still have these issues when they are 25. It is well-recognised that ‘internalising’ problems such as emotional disturbances, depression and anxiety are more common in girls than boys. Because schools play an important role in building the wellbeing and coping skills of students and responding to mental health problems, the South Australian wellbeing data was compared for boys and girls.

Findings

Girls report lower emotional wellbeing than boys and this is largely due to girls reporting a decline in wellbeing as they transition into secondary schooling.

A quarter of girls in years 8 and 9 reported that they were often sad, compared with about 14% of boys. These students agreed with statements such as that they feel unhappy a lot of the time, feel that they do things wrong a lot, and feel upset about things.

Girls also reported feeling regularly worried at up to twice the rate of boys. About 40% of Year 8 and 9 girls say that they worry a lot about things at home, school and in general, compared to only 20% of boys.

Satisfaction with life declines between Year 6 and Year 9 for both boys and girls, but the decline is more pronounced for girls. About a third of year 8 and 9 girls disagree with statements such as that they are happy with their lives and have the important things they want in life.

Although boys and girls are equally optimistic in Year 6, by Year 9, 41% of girls report low levels of optimism compared with 31% of boys.
Implications

Girls in secondary schools in South Australia report emotional distress at up to twice the rate of boys. The gender gap increases over the transition from primary school to high school. While the wellbeing of many boys and girls is stable over this transition, there are some girls whose emotional wellbeing will decline and this may have an impact on their health, school engagement and educational achievement.

Source: 2016 wellbeing and engagement survey (N = 42,577).
Wellbeing and the implications for lifting educational achievement

The issue

Longitudinal studies which have followed young people over time have shown that both wellbeing and academic skills are important for young people’s later success in the workforce and further education. There is a “multiplier effect” seen for wellbeing/social skills and academic achievement with both sets of these skills being important for later social and workforce outcomes.50

While improving wellbeing is recognised as a goal in its own right, there is also an interest in the relationship between wellbeing and academic achievement. Important questions are:

- Which wellbeing factors matter most for learning and achievement?
- To what extent can these factors be changed by education systems?

For government school students who participated in the wellbeing survey in 2014, it was possible to link their wellbeing responses with their achievement on NAPLAN in the same year. This has enabled preliminary analysis of how educational achievement could be improved through lifting certain aspects of wellbeing.

Findings

Academic self-concept, perseverance and eating breakfast every day are the three wellbeing factors most strongly related to young people’s educational achievement in:

- Year 7 reading, and
- academic progression in reading from Year 5 to Year 7.

Academic self-concept, perseverance levels and breakfast habits impacted on Year 7 reading achievement over and above the influence of student demographic factors:

- Students with high perseverance scored approximately 17-points higher than children with low perseverance, equivalent to 1/4 of a standard deviation or 1/3rd of an achievement band.

- Students with high academic self-concept scored approximately 18-points higher than children with low/medium academic self-concept, equivalent to 1/4 of a standard deviation or 1/3rd of an achievement band.

- The effect of eating breakfast regularly differed for male and female students — eating breakfast five or more times a week is associated with a 16-point score increase for males, but only a 5-point score increase for females.
increase for females. On average though, students who reported eating breakfast five or more times a week scored approximately 11-points higher than those who ate breakfast fewer than five times a week.

These wellbeing factors were also associated with better academic progression between Year 5 and Year 7, over and above the influence of student demographic factors:

- High perseverance was associated with increased growth in reading between Year 5 and Year 7, equivalent to 6-points or 0.1 of a standard deviation, relative to low perseverance.

- High academic self-concept was associated with increased growth in reading between Year 5 and Year 7 however it has a greater impact for students with high prior achievement than students with low prior achievement. For students who scored in the Higher Bands in Year 5, those with higher academic self-concept gained an additional 17 points over those with lower academic self-concept. However, for students scoring below the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement in Year 5 there was no additional ‘boost’ to Year 7 performance regardless of how they perceived their academic abilities.

- Eating breakfast at least five times a week is associated with increased growth, although to a lesser extent than academic self-concept. The size of the gain is dependent on prior achievement. The gain is 11-points for students in the Higher Bands in Year 5, reducing to 5-points for students with ‘average’ prior achievement and then down to no additional gain for students who did not meet the Standard of Educational Achievement in Year 5.

**Implications**

Whilst these are preliminary results, they provide an estimate of the potential benefits for students of successfully building perseverance and academic self-concept and addressing the risks associated with not eating breakfast.

Work is underway to review available interventions to build perseverance and academic self-concept. More broadly, the results demonstrate that it is possible to identify levers for intervention to lift educational achievement other than the economic disadvantage indicators which are often cited and that cannot be directly changed for education systems.
### Difference in Year 7 Reading Achievement
(adjusted for demographic and school factors)

Source: 2014 wellbeing and engagement survey

### Difference in Reading score gains from Year 5 to Year 7
(adjusted for prior achievement and demographic patterns)

Source: 2014 wellbeing and engagement survey
Breakfast and sleep

The issue

Sleep and nutrition are important for general health and development and also for learning in the classroom.

The quality and duration of sleep:

- influences students’ cognitive performance (working memory) on a day to day basis, with students with lower levels of academic achievement more affected by poor sleep the night before than higher achieving children;\(^{51}\)
- is associated with diminished alertness, attention, executive functioning, mood and school achievement;\(^{52} 53 54 55 56 57\)
- may contribute to the risk of obesity.\(^{58} 59\)

Eating breakfast promotes cognitive function and academic performance, particularly in the areas of memory and attention. Evidence suggests that children who have poorer nutrition overall have the most to gain from eating breakfast before school.\(^{60} 61\)

The analysis below was undertaken because there was limited information available about these two issues for South Australian young people and in particular, the extent to which the same students are getting poor sleep and missing breakfast.

Findings

In 2016, students reported:

- on average, how many days per week they ate breakfast (0=none, 1 = one day,…,7=seven days) and
- on average, how many good nights of sleep a week they had (0=none, 1 = one night,…,7=seven nights)

These responses were classified as Low (0-2 days/nights per week), Medium (3-4 days/nights per week) or High (5-7 days/nights per week).

Overall, 10.9% of students had less than three nights of good sleep a week and also ate breakfast less than three times a week.

Skipping breakfast and sleeplessness becomes more common as students enter secondary school. Of the year 6 students, only 17.1% had less than three good nights of sleep a week, 13.5% had breakfast less than three times a week, and 5.5% of students were in both categories, whereas for the year 9 students, 29.8% had low sleep, 30.3% had low breakfast and 16.3% were low on both indicators.

Female students had higher rates of skipping breakfast and sleeplessness than male students. Of female students, 25.2% had less than three good nights of sleep a week, 27.0% had breakfast less than three times a week, and 13.6% had both, whereas for male respondents, the proportions were 21.2%, 17.4% and 8.3% respectively.
Aboriginal students reported skipping breakfast and not sleeping well more often than non-Aboriginal students – 27.2% had less than three good nights of sleep a week, 31.9% had breakfast less than three times a week, and 14.9% of students were in both groups. For non-Aboriginal students, the proportions were only 22.8%, 21.4% and 10.5% respectively.

**Implications**

More than 1 in 10 students do not get optimal sleep and do not regularly eat breakfast before school. Of all the students with poor sleep or not eating breakfast, half are in both groups. The impact of lack of sleep and nutrition on learning outcomes are as yet unknown, however the number of students reporting these issues suggest that it should be investigated further.

Source: 2016 Wellbeing and engagement census.
Appendix 1: Participation rates in 2016

Why is this important

The 2016 wellbeing survey was run as voluntary data collection for schools, with schools deciding which year-levels and classes would be invited to participate across Year 6 through to Year 9 students.

For a wellbeing measure to provide valuable evidence across the education system, the survey needs to be acceptable to schools, parents and students and be able to be undertaken at relatively low cost. These factors are equally as important as the scientific accuracy and reliability of the survey items.

Key findings

The 2016 implementation of the wellbeing collection has shown that there continues to be strong interest from schools and students in measuring wellbeing:

- The survey portal was open for four weeks in Term 4 and in this time 43,000 South Australian students completed the survey across 500 schools.
- At each year level in South Australia (Year 6 to 9), approximately 10,000 students completed the survey. Both primary and secondary students participated in the survey with approximately 50% of the participants from Year 6 and 7 and 50% from Year 8 and 9.
- The measurement of students’ wellbeing as a self-complete survey undertaken during a normal classroom lesson and facilitated by the school staff allowed the data to be collected for almost all young people (minus students absent on the day of collection or opting out), as quickly as possible and at relatively low cost.
- The survey portal developed to administer the survey online proved capable of hosting students in large numbers.
- All school sectors took part, which was critical for using the survey as a whole-of-population measure. The breakdown of students and schools participating across each school sector was as follows:
  - Government – 466 schools, 36,823 students
  - Catholic – 26 schools, 4,323 students
  - Independent – 8 schools, 1,947 students
- Very few schools, parents and students ‘opted out’ from the wellbeing survey and chose not to participate, usually due to time constraints.
- Surveys and measures which are undertaken outside of school, require the involvement of staff from outside the school system or which cannot be undertaken directly by students add considerably to the challenges of collecting this information.
Compared to other national and international surveys of this kind, the quality and extent of the implementation of the wellbeing and engagement collection in South Australia is unique in terms of the number of students and schools involved, the low rate of withdrawal from participation and the continued involvement of schools over multiple data collection waves. Many other studies collect information from representative samples but census-type collections which seek to include and seek the views of all young people are rare.
Appendix 2: New aspects of the 2016 wellbeing survey

DECD has been measuring wellbeing since 2013. The survey has been adapted each year with the aim of improving the quality of the data and to respond to feedback from schools.

Changes to scales

Changes to the survey scales below were introduced for 2016:

- Optimism
- Worries/Anxiety
- Sports
- Music and Arts
- Organised Activities

The changes are summarised below.

Optimism

An alternative set of questions to measure young people’s optimism scale were added for the first time in 2016. These were added to align with the new happiness and engagement scales.

Worries and anxiety

A new worries or anxiety scale was added to cover a broader range of situations a person may worry about (in previous years the survey only covered worries about fitting in with others).

Sports participation

To reduce the length of the survey, in 2016 young people were asked about organised or team sports but not exercise for fun. Data from previous years is available on this topic.

Music and arts

To reduce the length of the survey, in 2016 the range of options for this item were simplified. Data from previous years is available on this topic.

Participation in organised activities

In 2016, the response options were simplified to reduce the length of the survey.

New scales added in 2016

New concepts or survey scales on the topics below introduced for the first time in 2016 were:

- Happiness
- Emotion regulation
- Emotional engagement with classroom teacher
- Cognitive engagement in learning
### Appendix 3: List of survey questions for 2016

#### Social and emotional wellbeing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-domain</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Happiness</strong></td>
<td>I feel happy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I have a lot of fun.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I love life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am a cheerful person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Optimism</strong></td>
<td>I am optimistic about my future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In uncertain times I expect the best.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I think good things are going to happen to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I believe that things will work out, no matter how difficult they seem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Life Satisfaction</strong></td>
<td>In most ways my life is close to the way I would want it to be.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The things in my life are excellent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am happy with my life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If I could live my life over, I would have it the same way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perseverance</strong></td>
<td>Once I make a plan to get something done, I stick to it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I keep at my schoolwork until I am done with it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I finish whatever I begin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am a hard worker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotion regulation</strong></td>
<td>When I want to feel happier, I think about something different.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When I want to feel less bad (e.g. sad, angry or worried), I think about something different.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When I’m worried about something, I make myself think about it in a way that helps me feel better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When I want to feel happier about something, I change the way I’m thinking about it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I control my feelings about things by changing the way that I think about them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When I want to feel less bad (e.g. sad, angry or worried) about something, I change the way that I’m thinking about it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sadness</strong></td>
<td>I feel unhappy a lot of the time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I feel upset about things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I feel that I do things wrong a lot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Worries / Anxiety</strong></td>
<td>I worry a lot about things at home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I worry a lot about things at school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I worry a lot about mistakes that I make.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I worry about things.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Relationships and learning in school

Sub-domain

Connectedness to adults at school
Are there any adults who are important to you at your school?
At my school, there is a teacher or another adult …
... who really cares about me.
... who believes that I will be a success.
... who listens to me when I have something to say.

Emotional engagement with teacher
I get along well with most of my teachers.
Most of my teachers are interested in my well-being.
Most of my teachers really listen to what I have to say.
If I need extra help, I will receive it from my teachers.
Most of my teachers treat me fairly.

School climate / belonging
Teachers and students treat each other with respect in this school.
People care about each other in this school.
Students in this school help each other, even if they are not friends.
I feel like I belong in this school.
I feel like I am important to this school.

Peer belonging
I feel part of a group of friends that do things together.
I feel that I usually fit in with other kids around me.
When I am with other kids my age, I feel I belong.

Peer support
I have at least one really good friend I can talk to when something is bothering me.
I have a friend I can tell everything to.
There is somebody my age who really understands me.

Cognitive engagement
I work hard on learning.
When I found something hard I tried another way.
I took a lot of care with what I was doing.
No matter who you are, you can change your intelligence.
I was excited to come up with new things.

Academic self-concept
I am certain I can learn the skills taught in school this year.
If I have enough time, I can do a good job on all my school work.
Even if the work in school is hard, I can learn it.

Engagement (flow)
When I do an activity, I enjoy it so much that I lose track of time.
I get completely absorbed in what I am doing.
I get so involved in activities that I forget about everything else.
When I am learning something new, I lose track of how much time has passed.

Bullying
This school year, how often have you been bullied by other students in the following ways?
Physical Bullying (for example, someone hit, shoved, or kicked you, spat at you, beat you up, or damaged or took your things without permission).
Verbal Bullying (for example, someone called you names, teased, humiliated, threatened you, or made you do things you didn’t want to do).
Social Bullying (for example, someone left you out, excluded you, gossiped and spread rumours about you, or made you look foolish).
Cyberbullying (for example, someone used the computer or text messages to exclude, threaten, humiliate you, or to hurt your feelings).

Physical health and lifestyle

Sub-domain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical/Health</th>
<th>In general, how would you describe your health?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Body Image</td>
<td>How do you rate your body weight?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition</td>
<td>How often do you eat breakfast?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleep</td>
<td>How often do you get a good night’s sleep?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After school activities

During last week after school (3:00 to 6:00 pm), how many days did you:

Do organized individual or team sports (for example, basketball, swimming, cricket, football, netball, dancing, or something else)?

Go to an after school care program (in my school or someplace else)?

Do homework, and/or participate in educational lessons or activities (for example, tutoring, maths, language school, or something else)?

Watch TV (including watching videos or DVDs)? Play video or computer games (for example, Game Boy, Play Station, Xbox, multi-user online games)? Use a phone or the internet to text or chat with friends and/or go on social networking sites like Facebook?

Read for fun?

Do household chores (for example, clean your room, wash the dishes, feed a pet, work on the farm or something else)?

Music lessons or practice a musical instrument (for example, drums, guitar, violin, piano or something else)?

Do arts & crafts (including painting, drawing, or something else)?

Hang out with friends?

Participate in Youth organisations (for example, Scouts, Girl Guides, Boys and Girls Clubs, or something else)?
What stops you from participating in the activities that you want to participate in after school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have to go straight home after school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is too difficult to get there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The activity that I want is not offered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The schedule does not fit the times that I can attend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s not safe for me to go.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have too much homework to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My parents do not approve.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It costs too much.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I need to take care of brothers or sisters or do other things at home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am afraid I will not be good enough in that activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am too busy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t know what is available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of my friends are interested or want to go.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


2 Department for Education and Child Development. 2016. Wellbeing for Learning and Life framework.

3 DECD has gradually modified and trialled new items to respond to the limitations of the original tool adopted from Canada (the “Middle Years Development Instrument”). In recognition that the South Australian measure has departed significantly from the Canadian tool, the wellbeing collection is now referred to as the “Wellbeing and Engagement Census”.

4 In 2016, less than 1% of all eligible students formally opted not to take part or were withdrawn by a parent or a guardian. Seventy-two high schools, 346 primary schools and 82 R-12 or area schools participated


8 Heckman & Kautz. 2013, Fostering and measuring skills: Interventions that improve character and cognition.


13 Moffit et al. 2010. A gradient of self-control predicts health, wealth, and public safety. PNAS.


16 Between the ages of 15.5 and 29.1 years, 29% of males and 54% of females report mental health symptoms at least one stage and 60% of these individuals report ongoing problems at a later point; Patton et al. 2014. The prognosis of common mental health disorders in adolescents: A 14-year prospective cohort study. Lancet.


   [http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx]

22. For example, Parent, teacher and student assessments of young people’s wellbeing have been shown to differ Goodman et al. 2000. Using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) to screen for child psychiatric disorders in a community sample. British Journal of Psychiatry, 177, p.534-539.


Moffit et al. 2010. A gradient of self-control predicts health, wealth, and public safety. PNAS.


OECD. 2014. Do students have the drive to succeed? PISA in Focus 37.


For a summary, see Heckman and Kautz, 2013, Fostering and measuring skills: Interventions that improve character and cognition.


61 Basch. 2010. Healthier students are better learners: A missing link in school reforms to close the achievement gap. Equity matters: Research review number 6.