

The wellbeing challenge in Australian schools



A 2019 McCrindle survey of Australian parents shows that parent expectations of Australian schools is on the rise. In the last five years, almost half of parents (48%) have increased (significantly/somewhat/slightly) their expectations of their child's school to support wellbeing. More than one in four parents (27%) have significantly or somewhat increased their expectations.

As student wellbeing becomes an increasingly topical issue it can be challenging for schools to understand parent expectations and the school's role in the wellbeing journey. Almost all of parents (97%) believe schools should have a holistic focus and play some role in the management of student wellbeing.

Positively, parents and Gen Y teachers are mostly aligned in their perspectives on

responsibility for wellbeing. Almost half of parents (46%) believe schools should provide individualised support for wellbeing but refer on to other experts. Gen Y teachers agree, seeing themselves as a first line of defence and then referring on to other experts. The challenge for schools, however, is that almost a quarter of parents (24%) believe schools should provide extensive individualised support for all wellbeing issues.

Gen Y parents seem to be driving this viewpoint, being more likely than Gen X parents to believe schools should provide extensive individualised support for all wellbeing issues (28% compared to 21%).

The rising focus on student's mental health and wellbeing is also having negative effects on teacher wellbeing. While Gen Y teachers believe the focus on student wellbeing is necessary, they are feeling the pressure of managing multiple student wellbeing issues to the detriment of classroom learning as well as their own health. Although many teachers have experienced some level of burnout, it is not the case for all teachers. A school's leadership and culture are often key to a teacher's experience. A culture of collaboration, teamwork and care were integral for teachers who have had a positive experience. – Sophie Renton, Social Researcher.

As parent expectations increase, schools are also facing the challenge of defining their role in student and staff wellbeing. This is further complicated by the challenge schools face in an increasingly complex environment, where they are preparing students for an unknown future.

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