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NAB Education Insights Special Report

Part 1: Student wellbeing – how young people really feel about their lives

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Part 1 – Student wellbeing – how young people really feel about their lives

New NAB research reveals how young Australians really feel about their lives. The results pose challenges and opportunities for schools with an increasing focus on mental health and wellbeing and growing parental expectations around comprehensive, proactive and tailored wellbeing solutions for all students. Wellbeing not only positively influences student learning outcomes, but success in learning enhances student wellbeing. Educators understand this only too well, and with that comes increasing pressures on budgets, teachers and support staff.

1 in 5 high school age students identify as having ‘low’ levels of mental wellbeing. Compared to a year ago, on balance just 1 in 10 students said their mental wellbeing had improved. Almost 1 in 2 students said school wellbeing programs did not help much. Around 1 in 5 parents believe their children don’t have any personal concerns or worries. This is not to imply that parents don’t care. In fact, there is much to suggest quite the opposite. But it does raise some important questions, particularly for schools, around how young people feel.

Wellbeing is not just the absence of disease or illness. It integrates mental and physical health, and both are inextricably related. Physical injuries can impact mental health, and vice versa. Regular physical activity can relieve tension, anxiety, depression and anger, while healthy eating can also improve mental health. Wellbeing recognises how people see life from their own perspective and it can change over time depending on personal circumstances. The Australian Catholic University has defined student wellbeing as a “sustainable state of positive mood and attitude, resilience, and satisfaction with self, relationships and experiences at school”. Put simply, when students feel well, happy, secure and are thriving socially, they can fully participate in and learn from their daily routines, play, interactions and experiences at school.

Various surveys of student wellbeing are employed across Australian schools providing significant existing data sets. For more than a decade, NAB has been producing its own measure – the NAB Wellbeing Index – based on a series of questions exploring life satisfaction, life worth, happiness and anxiety. The personal nature of some of the questions can elicit different levels of honesty from respondents (particularly children), depending on how self-aware and how comfortable they feel. They can also be triggering for



some. For this reason, in Part 1 of this NAB Education Special Insight series of reports focussing on wellbeing, we have chosen to simply ask students (around 400 of them across years 7-12) how they would score themselves in regard to their emotional/mental wellbeing and physical wellbeing, along with a range of other questions exploring school life, optimism, their worries (and how schools can help) and wellbeing programs (and how they could be improved to better help them). We also asked parents (around 500 across the country) how they think their children are feeling to see if perceptions align. The purpose is not to produce another measure of student wellbeing, but simply to gain a better understanding of how students view their lives, both in school and beyond.

Wellbeing is the shared responsibility of governments, educators, students, wider communities, extended families and parents. When children complain that their parents don’t understand them, often they mean

they don't understand their feelings. Misperceptions are a natural part of parenting. Often, we see children filtered through our own fears, desires and issues. This is not to imply that parents don't care. So called "helicopter parenting" (typically describing a time and resource-intensive style of child-rearing), has become a well-worn phrase.

Overall, Australian students perceive themselves as having only 'moderate' levels of physical (66.5 pts out of a possible 100 pts) and emotional/mental (64.3 pts) wellbeing. Parents view their children's wellbeing much more positively (scoring on average 80.9 pts for physical and 79.1 pts for emotional/mental wellbeing). Boys (70.2 pts physical and 69.0 pts emotional) reported higher wellbeing scores than girls (62.9 physical, 60.1 emotional). Parents however rated the wellbeing of their children by gender much closer, with boys perceived as having only slightly higher levels of wellbeing than girls - both physical (81.6 boys vs. 80.2 girls) and mental (80.2 vs. 77.9).

By year level, student perceptions of their physical wellbeing were highest in years 7-9 (74.6) and lowest in year 11 (63.3). Emotional/mental wellbeing was highest in years 7-9 (72.8) and lowest in year 12 (61.9). Parents particularly under-estimated the emotional wellbeing of children in year 12 (82.3 parents; 61.9 students).

We can also split the data according to the type of school the student attends. In terms of physical wellbeing, students at private independent schools rated their wellbeing highest (72.3). Physical wellbeing in boys only schools (71.5) was also much higher than for girls only

schools (64.3). When it came to emotional or mental wellbeing, there is very large "wellbeing gap" between boys only schools (74.0) and girls only schools (59.3). Students at private independent schools again rated highest (68.7).

Average wellbeing scores often mask significant numbers of people that are struggling. Of concern, 1 in 5 students (20%) identified as having 'low' levels of emotional or mental wellbeing (i.e. scoring less than 40 pts), and 15% 'low' physical wellbeing. Around 1% of all parents thought their children had 'low' levels of physical wellbeing, and 4% emotional or mental wellbeing.

Perceptions of low emotional or mental wellbeing was much higher for girls (where 26% identified as having low wellbeing) than boys (just 13%), and in years 11 (23% of all students) and 12 (21% of students). Low wellbeing was around 5 times more prevalent in girls only schools (26%) than for boys only schools (5%). The number of students with 'low' physical wellbeing trended in a narrower range, though nearly twice as many girls overall (19%) reported a 'low' sense of physical wellbeing than boys (11%), as did twice as many students in year 11 (19%) than years 7-9 (9%).

Many children have been uniquely impacted by the pandemic, having experienced this crisis during important periods of physical, social, and emotional development. On balance +18% of all students rated their physical wellbeing better than a year ago (a net +55% of parents thought it was better). In terms of their emotional or mental wellbeing, +9% of students said it improved (+51% of



parents). Emotional or mental wellbeing was on balance rated better by male students (+22%) but slightly worse on balance (-2%) among female students. Most parents believed wellbeing had improved.

Young people have a higher prevalence of loneliness than other age groups, increasing the risk of depression and anxiety. During the pandemic feelings of social isolation rose and those hardest hit were older teens and young adults. When students were asked to score how lonely they feel, on average it was a 'moderate' 44.9 pts out of 100 (100 is 'extremely' lonely). Parental perceptions were more broadly aligned (39.7 pts), with parents also identifying a similar share of students (17%) as 'extremely' lonely (i.e. scored 80+ pts) as students themselves (15%). Loneliness was somewhat higher for girls in general (47.4 girls vs. 42.4 boys). By year level, the year 10 cohort rated their feelings of loneliness highest (47.0), and the year 7-9 group lowest (41.4). Parent perceptions were somewhat mixed.

When students were asked to rate how well they were coping with their anxieties or worries, on balance they rated only 'moderately' well, scoring on average 54.0 pts out of 100 (vs. 72.2 among parents). Boys in general believe

been observed in young boys and girls. While men are less likely to experience anxiety and depression than women, they are also less likely to talk about it. From an early age, men are conditioned to believe that expressing their feelings is out of character with the male identity. This raises the possibility that boys are under-reporting their anxieties and concerns. Some researchers have however suggested that girls are also more inclined to blame themselves for negative life events, which then further elevates their anxious symptoms. This implies that in helping manage student anxiety, it's important for both parents and teachers to model positive and adaptive reasoning when discussing why stressful or negative things happen in life, particularly for girls.

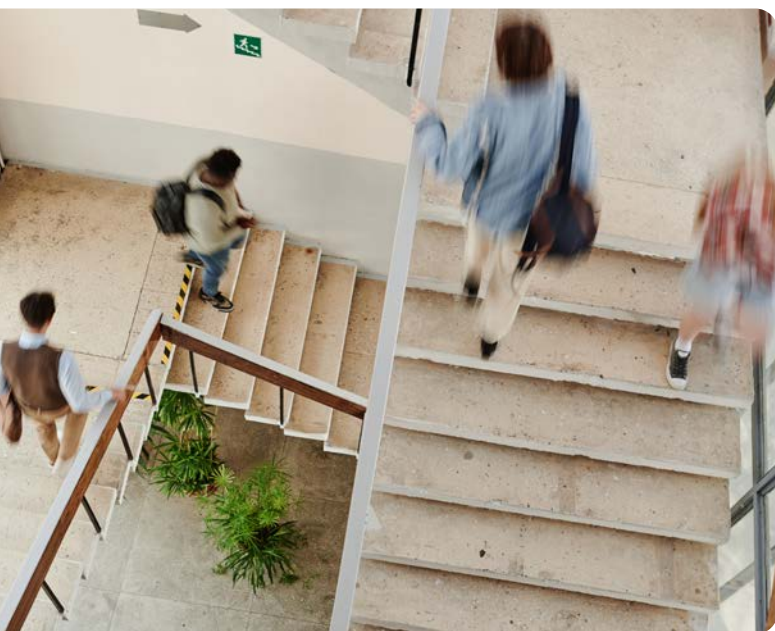
Students (and parents) were also asked to identify the top 5 causes of their anxiety or worries. The biggest driver of anxiety for students was schoolwork, tests or grades. This impacted 2 in 3 (66%) students overall. Parents also highlighted this as a key driver - though fewer (1 in 3 or 34%). Over 4 in 10 (44%) students called out looks, appearance and body image as the next most common cause of their anxiety (19% of parents did). Rounding out the top 5 for students were mental health (41%), tiredness and lack of sleep (38%) and future job prospects (30%). Parents identified their children's friendships as the second biggest cause of anxieties (28%). Mental health was the third biggest driver according to parents (21%).

Parents were also asked how well the school their children attended is helping them with their anxieties or worries. On average, they believe they are helping 'quite' well, scoring 68.5 pts out of a possible 100. However, this varied significantly by school type. Parents were notably more positive regarding private independent (74.3 pts), and private Catholic (71.3) schools compared to public or state schools (65.5). Girls (76.7) and boys (76.1) only schools were also perceived as doing more than coeducational schools (67.1). Parents also thought schools were slightly better at helping boys with anxiety (69.1) than girls (67.8), as well helping students in year 12 (71.6), compared to those in year 11 (63.1).

What could schools do better? According to students, the top 5 things schools could do to help them with their worries are: putting less emphasis on grades and scores (45%); having fewer tests and exams (41%); teachers who are more calm, honest and caring (40%); less strict policy on uniforms and appearance (33%); and less homework (33%). Parents agreed one of the top things schools could do to help is having more calm, honest and caring teachers (32%). Parents also highlighted more professional counselling or wellbeing services (25%), more safe spaces and opportunities for check-ins with students (20%), more feedback on progress and academic performance (19%), and more focus on core subjects (19%). Noticeably more students identified different (earlier or later) school times

(or at least say) they are coping (60.3) much better compared to girls (47.6). Students in year 12 (52.3) and year 10 (52.4) were also finding it harder to cope than students in other year levels. Once again, the average scores mask the concerning number of students - over 1 in 3 (35%) - that believe they aren't coping well (i.e. scored less than 40 pts). This rose to over 4 in 10 for girls overall (42% vs. 28% boys). In contrast, parents identified fewer than 1 in 10 (8% or 12% of girls and 5% of boys) struggling to cope.

In general, severe anxiety symptoms, impairment due to anxiety, and anxiety disorders are more prevalent in women than in men. Similar sex-reliant patterns have



(30% students; 8% parents), more understanding of the individual person (25% vs. 16%) and more remote learning (14% vs. 5%). Interestingly, a lot more parents (15%) than students (2%) said there was nothing the school could do to help.

Educators and school communities play a significant role in supporting and developing student wellbeing. Schools use various strategies and programs to support student wellbeing and mental health including school-wide mental health and wellbeing promotion; early targeted support for students with emerging or moderate mental health concerns; and targeted or crisis response for students with complex mental health needs.

Around 2 in 3 (66%) students said their school had a wellbeing program (4 in 10 or 40% of parents, thought they did). Interestingly, 7 in 10 (69%) students at public or state schools said their school had a wellbeing program, but only 6 in 10 said so attending private independent (61%) and Catholic (59%) schools. Around 1 in 3 parents (35%) with children attending public schools said their children's school had a wellbeing program. Significantly more students at girls only schools (73%) said they had a wellbeing program than at boys only (60%) or coeducational (65%) schools. Awareness of these programs was also highest for parents of students at girls only schools (52%).

When asked to rate the extent wellbeing programs were helping, students on average scored a 'moderate' 46.0 pts out of 100 (vs. 74.5 among parents). By school type, students at private independent schools said they helped most (51.9). Students at boys only schools (54.0) said they were somewhat more helpful than those at coeducational (45.3) and girls only (47.3) schools. The impact was broadly consistent in all year levels. Overall, almost 1 in 2 (45%) students said they did not help much compared to 6% of parents.



Student Wellbeing

Wellbeing positively influences student learning outcomes, and success in learning enhances student wellbeing. For students, the deepest reality of their experience of life as students is how they feel about their own wellbeing (physical, emotional and mental). It is also a key determinant of the quality of their life - how they experience it. NAB's survey however shows a very clear divide in students' perceptions of their wellbeing and how parents think it might be.

Overall, Australian students report 'moderate' levels of physical wellbeing (66.2 pts) and emotional or mental wellbeing (64.3 pts). Parents however view their children's wellbeing much more positively, scoring on average 80.9 pts for their physical wellbeing and 79.1 pts for their emotional or mental wellbeing.

Students also rated their physical and emotional or mental wellbeing lower than parents in all demographic categories. In terms of physical wellbeing, students at private independent schools rated wellbeing highest (72.3 pts) and private Catholic schools lowest (63.3 pts). Physical wellbeing in boys only schools (71.5 pts) was much higher than girls only schools (64.3 pts). Boys overall (70.2 pts) also reported higher wellbeing than girls (62.9 pts). By year level, physical wellbeing was highest in years 7-9 (74.6 pts) and lowest in year 11 (63.3 pts).

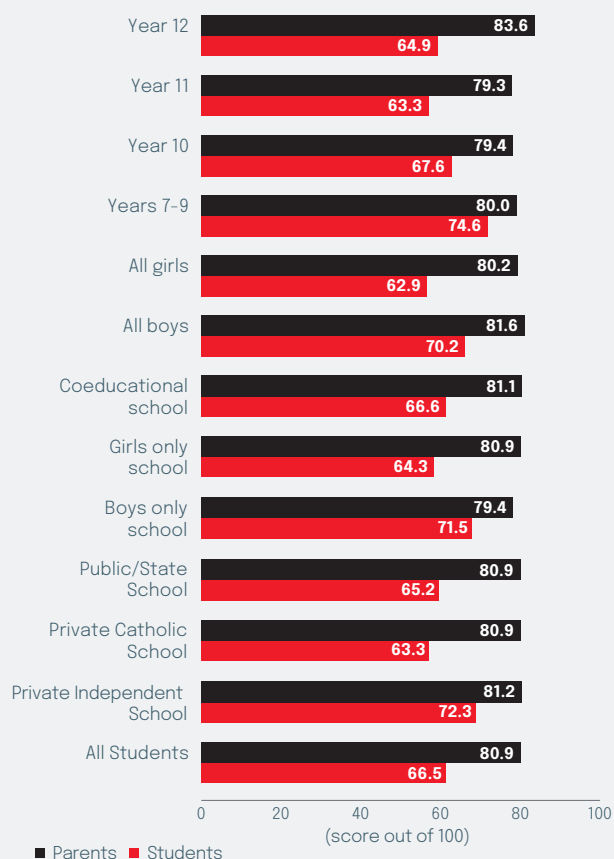
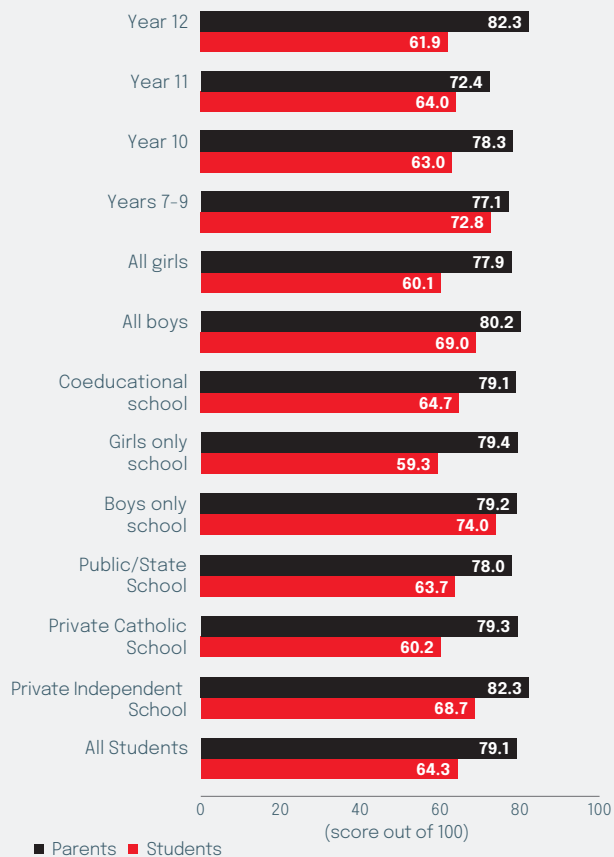
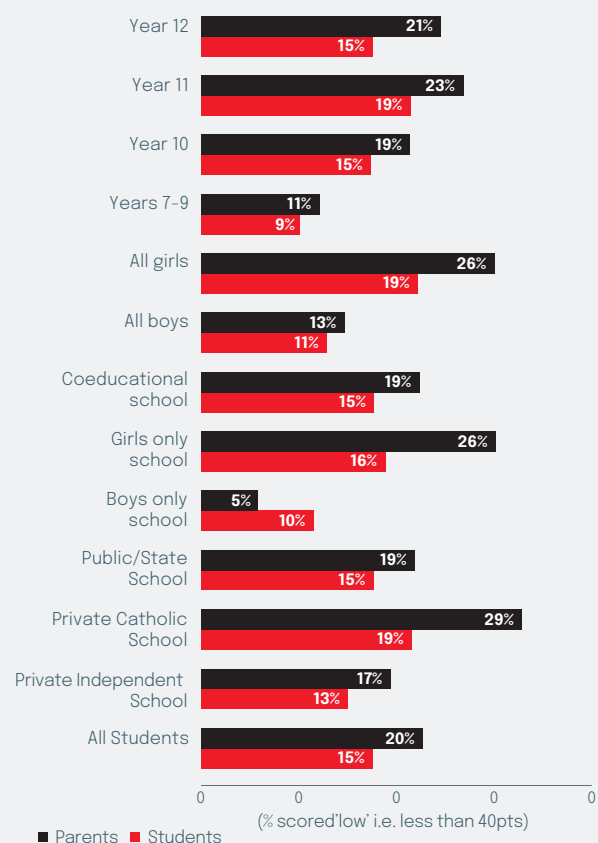
Parents however rated the wellbeing of their children across a much narrower range - from 79.3 pts in year 11 to 83.9 pts in year 12. Their perceptions against that of their children were widest in year 12 (83.6 pts parents; 64.9 pts students), private Catholic schools (80.9 pts parents; 60.3 pts students) and for girls (80.2 pts parents; 62.9 pts). The gap was narrowest in years 7-9 (80.0 pts parents; 74.6 pts students).

When it came to emotional or mental wellbeing, we also noted a very large wellbeing gap between boys only schools (74.0 pts) and girls only schools (59.3 pts), and between boys (69.0 pts) and girls (60.1 pts) in general. Students at private independent schools rated highest (68.7 pts) and private Catholic schools lowest (60.2 pts). By year level, emotional or mental wellbeing was highest in years 7-9 (72.8 pts) and lowest in year 12 (61.9 pts).

Parents again rated emotional or mental wellbeing of their children across a much narrower range in all groups - from 72.4 pts in year 11 to 82.3 pts in year 12 and in private independent schools. Interestingly, parents seem to most under-estimate the emotional wellbeing of children in

year 12 (82.3 pts parents; 61.9 pts students). They are also well off the mark when considering the emotional or mental wellbeing of children at girls only schools (79.4 pts parents; 59.3 pts students), and private Catholic schools (79.3 pts parents; 60.2 pts students). The gap in perception was narrowest for students in years 7-9 (77.1 pts parent; 72.8 pts students), and at boys only schools (79.2 pts parents; 74.0 pts students).



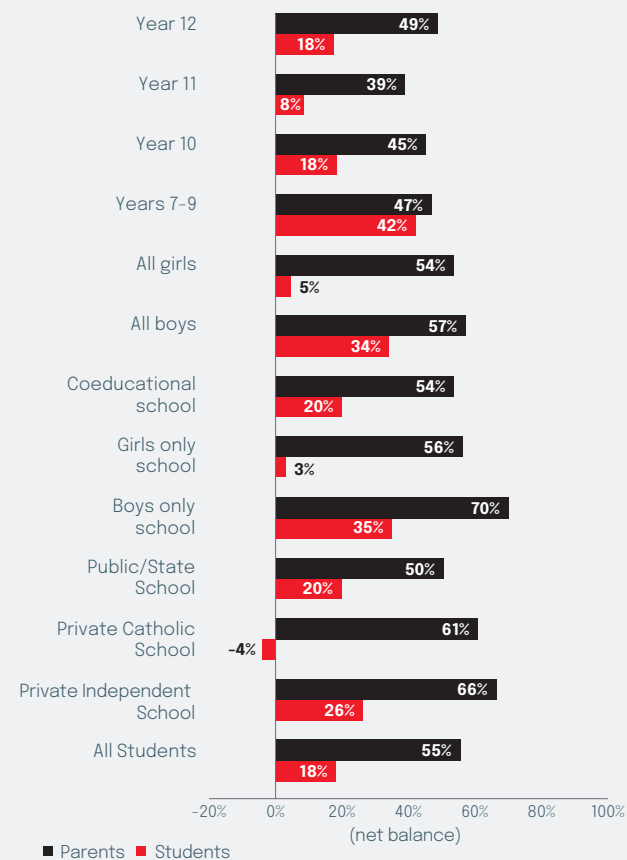
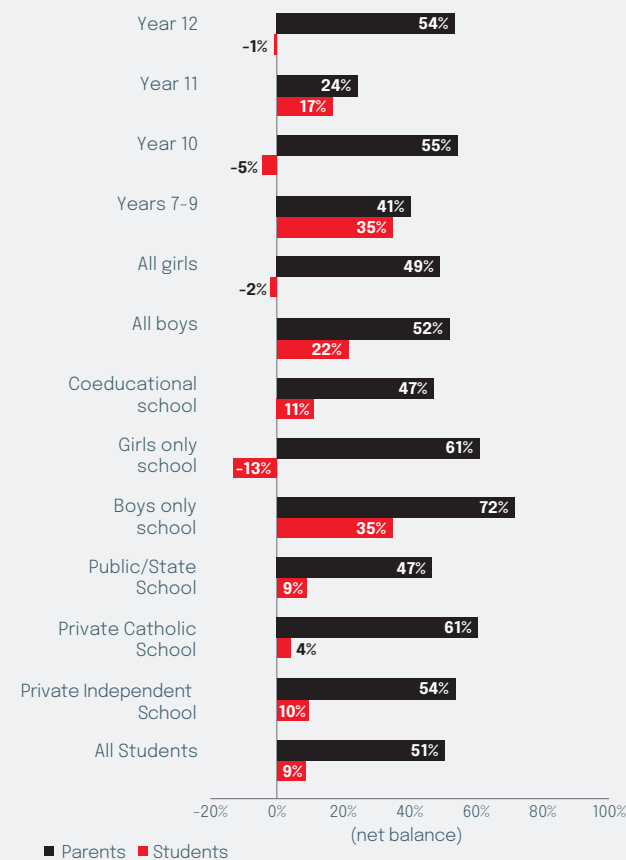
Chart 1: Student Physical Wellbeing**Chart 2: Student Emotional/Mental Wellbeing****Chart 3: Student Physical & Emotional/Mental Wellbeing (Students)**

Average wellbeing scores however often mask significant numbers of people that are struggling. Of concern, NAB's survey found 1 in 5 students (20%) had 'low' levels of emotional or mental wellbeing (i.e. scored less than 40 pts), and 15% 'low' physical wellbeing. Worryingly, only 1% of all parents thought their children had 'low' levels of physical wellbeing, and 4% emotional or mental wellbeing.

Around 3 in 10 (29%) students at private Catholic schools report 'low' emotional or mental wellbeing - nearly twice as many than private independent schools (17%). It was 5 times more prevalent in girls only schools (26%) than boys only schools (5%). It was also much higher in general for girls (26%) than boys (13%), and in years 11 (23%) and 12 (21%) than other years.

The number of students with 'low' physical wellbeing trended in a narrower range between private independent (13%) and Catholic (19%) schools, and 10% in boys only schools to 16% in girls only schools. However, nearly twice as many girls overall (19%) reported 'low' physical wellbeing than boys (11%), as did twice as many students in year 11 (19%) than years 7-9 (9%).

Parents grossly under-estimated students with low physical, emotional or mental wellbeing in all groups, except boys only schools and in years 7-9.

Chart 4: Student Physical Wellbeing (better/worse)**Chart 5: Student Emotional/Mental Wellbeing (better/worse)**

Not only did parents with school children over-estimate how they were tracking with their physical, emotional or mental wellbeing, they were also well off the mark when rating how their wellbeing had changed compared to a year ago. According to NAB's survey results, a net +18% of all students rated their physical wellbeing better than a year ago, whereas a net +55% of parents thought it was better. In terms of their emotional or mental wellbeing, a net +9% of students said it improved, compared to a net +51% of parents - see charts above.

A closer look across schools highlights some even bigger discrepancies. In terms of physical wellbeing, a net +26% of students at private independent schools rated their wellbeing better than a year ago, whereas in private Catholic schools the number that said it was worse outweighed those who said it was better (-4%). Wellbeing also improved for far fewer students in girls only schools (+3%) than in boys only schools (+35%), and for girls in general (+5% girls; +34% boys). By year level, physical wellbeing improved for significantly more students in years 7-9 (+42%), particularly when compared to students in year 11 (+8%).

The net number of parents who rated their children's wellbeing better than a year ago, was significantly higher

than student's own perceptions in nearly all groups, particularly private Catholic schools (+61% parents; -4% students) and in girls only schools (+56% parents; +3% students). Perceptions were however almost on par for parents (+42%) and students (+47%) in years 7-9.

Emotional or mental wellbeing was on balance rated better by students in most groups except (girls only schools (-13%), year 10 (-5%), girls (-2%) and year 12 (-1%), where the number who said it was worse exceeded those who said it was better. Wellbeing improved for most students at boys schools only (+35%), in years 7-9 (+35%), and for boys in general (+22%). Wellbeing was better according to a broadly similar number of students at private independent (+10%) and public or state (9%) schools, but somewhat lower in private Catholic schools (+4%).

The gap in perceptions between students and parents around emotional or mental wellbeing were also wide. This was most true for parents of students in girls only schools (+61% parents; -13% students), in year 10 (+55% parents; -5% students), and in private Catholic schools (+61% parents; +4% students). Perceptions were closest for year 7-9 students (+41% parents; +35% students) and students in year 11 (+24% parents; +17% students).

Loneliness

Loneliness can be harmful to both mental and physical health. It is also considered a significant wellbeing issue because of the impact it may have on people's lives. School students are not immune, and were among the most impacted by feelings of loneliness during the pandemic. Studies have also found connections between teenage loneliness and poorer grades in school. But how prevalent is loneliness among Australian students? More so than their parents think.

When students were asked to rate how lonely they feel, on average they scored a 'moderate' 44.9 pts out of 100 (100 is 'extremely' lonely). Parents however thought their children were somewhat less lonely (39.7 pts) when also asked. Interestingly however a slightly higher number of parents (17%) said their children were 'extremely' lonely (i.e. scored 80+ pts) than students themselves (15%) – see charts below.

Loneliness among students was highest in private Catholic schools (48.0 pts) and public or state schools (47.0 pts), and somewhat lower in private independent

schools (36.8 pts). Loneliness was also noticeably higher for students at girls only schools (52.5 pts), particularly when compared to boys only schools (40.5 pts). It was also somewhat higher among girls in general (47.4 pts girls; 42.4 boys). By year level, the year 10 cohort rated their feelings of loneliness highest (47.0 pts), and the years 7-9 group lowest (41.4 pts).

Parent perceptions were somewhat mixed. For example, parents of students at private independent schools rated the loneliness of their children much higher than the students themselves (49.6 pts parents; 36.8 pts students),

Chart 6: Student Loneliness

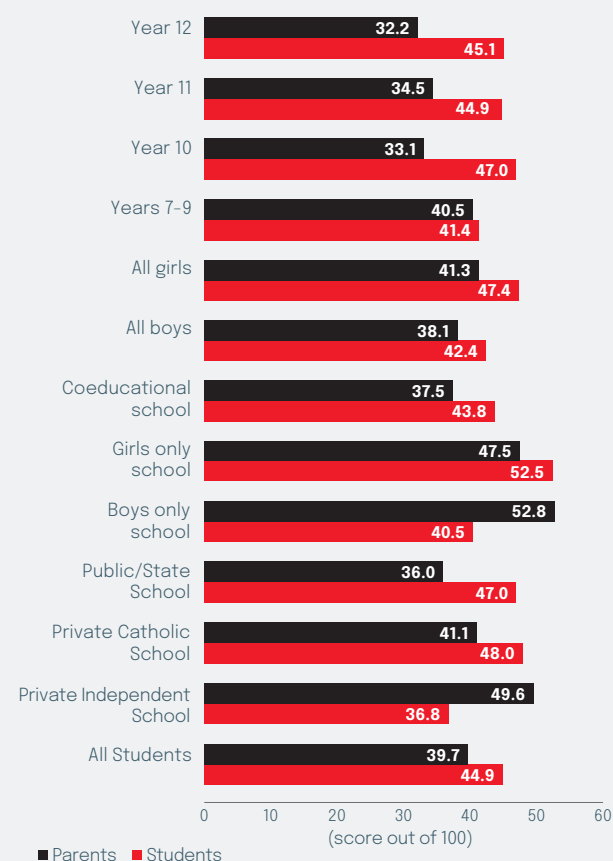
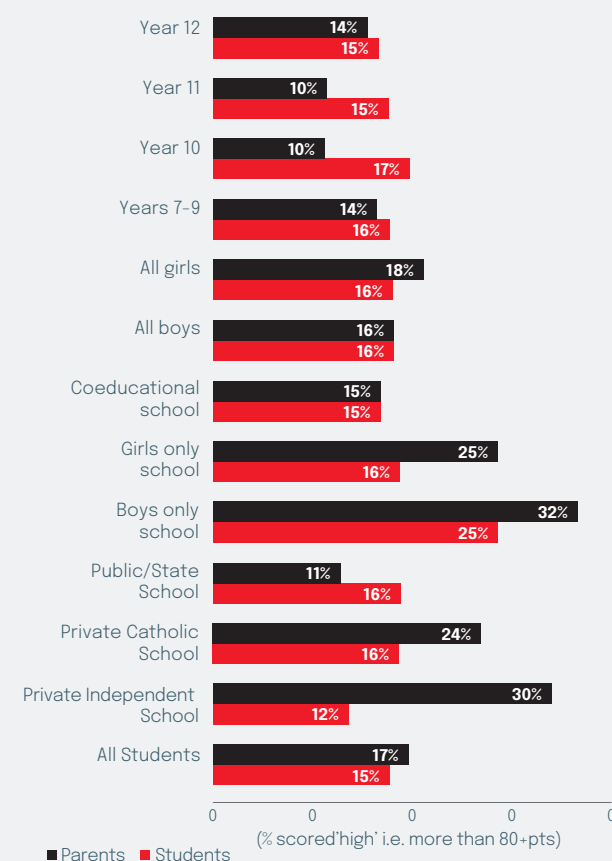


Chart 7: Student Loneliness





as did parents of boys only schools (52.8 pts parents; 40.5 pts students). In contrast, students in years 10 (47.0 pts vs. 33.1 pts parents), year 12 (45.1 pts vs. 32.2 pts parents) and year 11 (44.9 pts vs. 34.5 pts parents), rated their own feelings of loneliness much higher than did their parents.

Looking at the number of students who rated their feelings of loneliness 'extremely' high (80+ pts) also revealed a significant number of students who were 'extremely' lonely in boys only schools (around 1 in 4 or 25%) relative to all other student groups.

The survey found that parents also over-estimate the number of children who were 'extremely' lonely, especially at private independent schools (30% parents; 12% students), private Catholic schools (24% parents; 16% students), and girls only schools (25% parents; 16% students). In contrast, parents under-estimated the number of 'extremely' lonely students in year 10 (10% parents; 17% students), year 11 (10% parents; 15% students) and public or state schools (11% parents; 16% students).

Anxiety

All people including students experience anxiety. It is a natural human state and part of life. Common sources of stress and anxiety for students often include school demands and frustrations, negative thoughts or feelings about themselves, problems with friends and or peers at school, issues at home to name a just a few. For some, this can weigh heavily on their overall sense of personal wellbeing. Though anxiety in itself can be problematic for students, how they cope with it is key to building resilience around their anxieties.

Coping

When Australian school children were asked to rate how well they were coping with their anxieties or worries, on balance they rated only 'moderately' well, scoring on average 54.0 pts out of 100 (where 100 is 'extremely' well). Parents however believe they are coping much better, scoring on average 72.2 pts when also asked how well they thought their children were coping with their anxiety or worries.

Chart 8: Coping with Anxiety

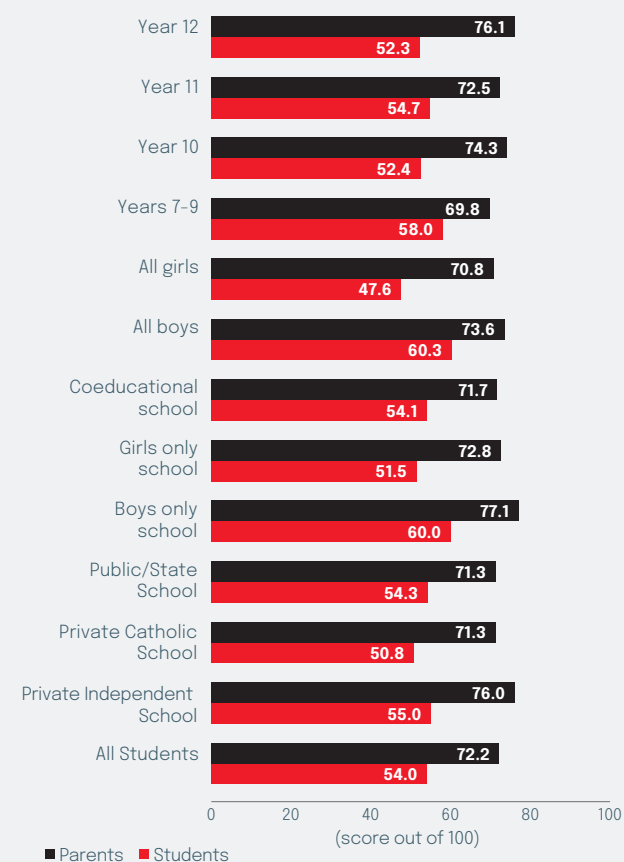
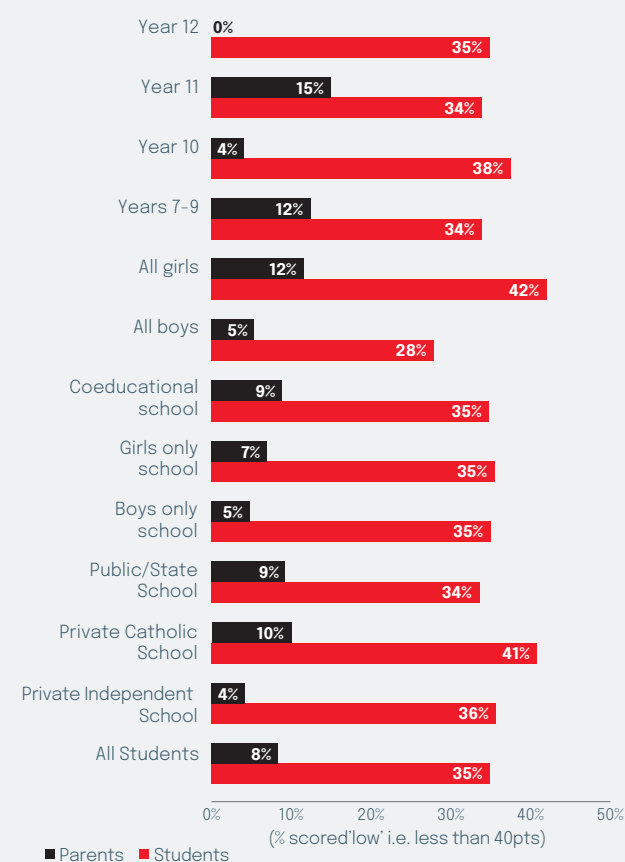


Chart 9: Coping with Anxiety



Students in all groups were coping only 'moderately' well with their anxieties. By type of school, coping ranged from 55.0 pts in private independent schools to 50.8 pts in private Catholic schools. Students in boys only schools (60.0 pts) were coping somewhat better than students at girls only

schools (51.5 pts) and coeducational schools (54.1 pts). There was a particularly large gap in how boys in general were coping (60.3 pts) compared to girls (47.4 pts). Students in year 12 (52.3 pts) and year 10 (52.4 pts) were also finding it harder to cope than students in other year levels.

Students were coping with their anxieties or worries much better in the eyes of their parents across all cohorts. The gap in perceptions was largest for students in year 12 (76.1 pts parents; 52.3 pts students), girls overall (70.8 pts parents; 47.6 pts students), in year 10 (74.3 pts parents; 52.4 pts students), in girls only schools (72.8 pts parents; 51.5 pts students) and private independent schools (76.0 pts parents; 55.0 pts students). It was narrowest (though still quite wide) for students in years 7-9 (69.8 parents; 58.0 pts) and for boys in general (73.6 pts parents; 60.3 pts students).

The survey also found that not only were students coping only 'moderately' with their anxieties, but a very large number – over 1 in 3 (35%) – were not coping well (i.e. scored less than 40 pts). This climbed to over 4 in 10 for girls overall (42%) and for students in private Catholic schools (41%). There was little difference in the number of students struggling to cope in all other groups except boys overall – though still at a quite elevated (28%). In contrast, parents identified fewer than 1 in 10 (8%) students overall that were struggling to cope, though this number was somewhat higher for students in year 11 (15%).

Causes

Students were asked to identify the top 5 causes of their anxiety or worries. Parents were also asked what they thought the top 5 causes of their child's anxieties/worries were.

The results highlight a very large disconnect between what weighs most heavily on students (and how prevalent it is among them), and what parents think is underpinning their children's anxieties and worries.

The biggest driver of anxiety for students was schoolwork, tests or grades. This impacted 2 in 3 (66%) students overall. Most parents also highlighted this as the biggest driver of their children's stress – though a much lower 1 in 3 (34%).

Over 4 in 10 (44%) students called out looks, appearance and body image as the next most common cause of their anxiety, but only 19% of their parents did. Rounding out the top 5 for students were mental health (41%), tiredness and lack of sleep (38%) and future job prospects (30%). Parents however grossly underestimated how prevalent these stressors were for their children.

Instead, parents thought their children's friendships were the second biggest cause of their anxieties (28%) but on par with the number of students who also said so. Mental health was the third biggest driver according to parents (21%), but less than half the number of students that said it caused them anxiety.

Interestingly, nearly 1 in 5 (19%) parents said their children did not have any personal concerns or worries, compared to only 1 in 25 (4%) students. Parents also over-estimate the impact of bullying (verbal, physical, cyber-bullying) as a cause of stress for their children (17%) than their children (9%).

Other areas however where parents largely underestimate the impact on their children's anxiety include future job prospects (30% students; 11% parents), pressures of getting into their chosen course at university, TAFE or other institution (29% students; 10% parents), family conflicts or breakdowns (24% students; 11% parents), their physical health (21% students; 9% parents) and family money worries or costs of living pressures (23% students; 12% parents). The tables on the following highlight some key differences across student cohorts.

Chart 10: Main Causes of Anxiety/Worries (Top 5)

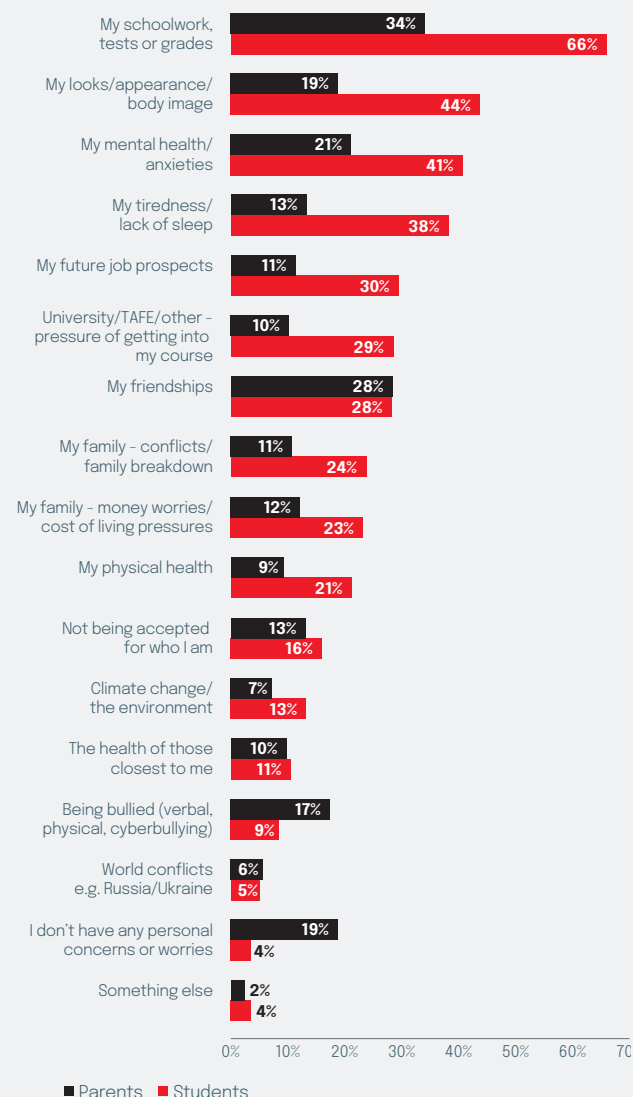


Table 1: Main Causes of Anxiety/Worries (Students)

| | All Students | Private Indep. school | Private Catholic School | Public/State School | Boys only school | Girls only school | Coeducational school | All boys | All girls | Years 7-9 | Year 10 | Year 11 | Year 12 |
|--|--------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|------------------|-------------------|----------------------|----------|-----------|-----------|---------|---------|---------|
| My schoolwork, tests or grades | 66% | 65% | 69% | 66% | 70% | 71% | 65% | 64% | 68% | 76% | 57% | 70% | 64% |
| My looks/appearance/body image | 44% | 39% | 57% | 43% | 35% | 42% | 45% | 36% | 52% | 49% | 42% | 48% | 39% |
| My mental health/anxieties | 41% | 39% | 43% | 41% | 35% | 50% | 39% | 34% | 47% | 32% | 38% | 47% | 42% |
| My tiredness/lack of sleep | 38% | 36% | 31% | 40% | 40% | 37% | 38% | 37% | 40% | 24% | 42% | 37% | 44% |
| My future job prospects | 30% | 31% | 20% | 31% | 20% | 29% | 30% | 29% | 29% | 22% | 30% | 26% | 36% |
| Pressure of getting into my chosen course | 29% | 25% | 33% | 29% | 40% | 27% | 28% | 26% | 31% | 17% | 23% | 24% | 42% |
| My friendships | 28% | 26% | 29% | 29% | 20% | 39% | 27% | 25% | 32% | 36% | 33% | 23% | 27% |
| My family: conflicts/family breakdown | 24% | 23% | 33% | 22% | 0% | 34% | 23% | 15% | 33% | 29% | 24% | 24% | 21% |
| My family: money /cost of living pressures | 23% | 14% | 22% | 26% | 25% | 27% | 22% | 21% | 24% | 27% | 20% | 23% | 23% |
| My physical health | 21% | 20% | 31% | 20% | 15% | 23% | 21% | 21% | 22% | 17% | 14% | 22% | 28% |
| Not being accepted for who I am | 16% | 15% | 18% | 16% | 5% | 15% | 17% | 16% | 15% | 14% | 22% | 15% | 14% |
| Climate change/the environment | 13% | 15% | 2% | 15% | 20% | 10% | 14% | 11% | 15% | 15% | 11% | 14% | 13% |
| The health of those closest to me | 11% | 14% | 6% | 10% | 15% | 11% | 10% | 10% | 11% | 15% | 11% | 8% | 11% |
| Being bullied | 9% | 6% | 8% | 9% | 20% | 6% | 8% | 11% | 5% | 10% | 6% | 11% | 7% |
| World conflicts e.g. Russia/Ukraine | 5% | 7% | 0% | 5% | 5% | 3% | 5% | 5% | 5% | 5% | 2% | 8% | 5% |
| Something else | 4% | 4% | 2% | 4% | 0% | 0% | 4% | 4% | 3% | 2% | 3% | 5% | 3% |
| I don't have personal concerns/worries | 4% | 6% | 0% | 3% | 0% | 0% | 4% | 6% | 1% | 2% | 9% | 3% | 1% |



Table 2: Main Causes of Anxiety/Worries (Parents)

| | All Students | Private Indep. school | Private Catholic School | Public/State School | Boys only school | Girls only school | Coeducational school | All boys | All girls | Years 7-9 | Year 10 | Year 11 | Year 12 |
|---|--------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|------------------|-------------------|----------------------|----------|------------|------------|---------|------------|------------|
| Their schoolwork, tests or grades | 34% | 39% | 35% | 32% | 26% | 52% | 34% | 33% | 36% | 43% | 47% | 44% | 33% |
| Their friendships | 28% | 30% | 28% | 28% | 20% | 15% | 30% | 27% | 30% | 33% | 13% | 21% | 23% |
| Their mental health/anxieties | 21% | 19% | 17% | 23% | 18% | 18% | 22% | 18% | 24% | 22% | 19% | 23% | 13% |
| Their looks/appearance/body image | 19% | 15% | 27% | 18% | 14% | 15% | 20% | 17% | 20% | 27% | 19% | 14% | 15% |
| Don't have personal concerns/worries | 19% | 10% | 17% | 22% | 16% | 9% | 20% | 20% | 18% | 13% | 23% | 16% | 23% |
| Being bullied | 17% | 14% | 18% | 18% | 20% | 15% | 17% | 21% | 14% | 24% | 8% | 16% | 0% |
| Their tiredness/lack of sleep | 13% | 13% | 16% | 13% | 18% | 12% | 13% | 13% | 13% | 13% | 17% | 7% | 13% |
| Not being accepted for who they are | 13% | 14% | 14% | 13% | 8% | 9% | 14% | 12% | 14% | 19% | 9% | 7% | 8% |
| Family: money /cost of living pressures | 12% | 9% | 11% | 13% | 16% | 9% | 12% | 12% | 12% | 17% | 9% | 9% | 10% |
| Their future job prospects | 11% | 13% | 8% | 12% | 12% | 12% | 11% | 12% | 10% | 8% | 19% | 14% | 23% |
| Family: conflicts/family breakdown | 11% | 10% | 15% | 10% | 14% | 12% | 10% | 10% | 12% | 8% | 8% | 7% | 3% |
| Pressure of getting into chosen course | 10% | 20% | 10% | 7% | 26% | 18% | 8% | 9% | 11% | 7% | 17% | 26% | 30% |
| The health of those closest to them | 10% | 13% | 9% | 9% | 8% | 15% | 10% | 10% | 10% | 8% | 13% | 5% | 8% |
| Their physical health | 9% | 14% | 8% | 8% | 16% | 6% | 9% | 10% | 8% | 8% | 11% | 9% | 5% |
| Climate change/the environment | 7% | 8% | 7% | 7% | 6% | 21% | 6% | 5% | 9% | 8% | 4% | 9% | 13% |
| World conflicts (e.g. Russia/Ukraine) | 6% | 7% | 5% | 6% | 10% | 6% | 5% | 5% | 6% | 8% | 8% | 7% | 10% |
| Something else | 2% | 2% | 0% | 3% | 0% | 0% | 3% | 3% | 2% | 3% | 0% | 0% | 3% |



School help

Parents were also asked how well the school their children attended helped their child with anxieties or worries. On average, they believe they are helping ‘quite’ well, scoring 68.5 pts out of 100 (100 is ‘extremely’ well). However, this did range significantly across key groups. By school type, parents thought private independent (74.3 pts) and private Catholic (71.3 pts) schools helped more than public or state schools (65.5 pts). Girls (76.7 pts) and boys (76.1 pts) only schools were also doing better helping their children than coeducational schools (67.1 pts). Parents also thought schools were slightly better at helping boys with anxiety (69.1 pts) than girls (67.8 pts), as well helping students in year 12 (71.6 pts), compared to those in year 11 (63.1 pts).

A breakdown by distribution of scores does however highlight some areas where parents don’t think their children are being helped as much. Overall, 13% of parents scored the help their children received from their school to help manage their anxiety ‘low; (i.e. scored less than 40 pts). But this climbed to 25% of parents with children in year 11, compared to just 3% for parents of students in year 12 and 6% for private independent schools. In addition, parents of children in year 10 (34%) and public or



state schools (38%) had the lowest number of parents who rated the help their children received ‘high’ (i.e. scored 80+ pts).

Schools play a critical role in helping students manage anxiety by creating environments where all students feel that they are cared for. But what do students and their parents believe their school could do to most help with their anxiety or worries?

Chart 11: How Well School Helps Children with Anxiety or Worries (Parents)

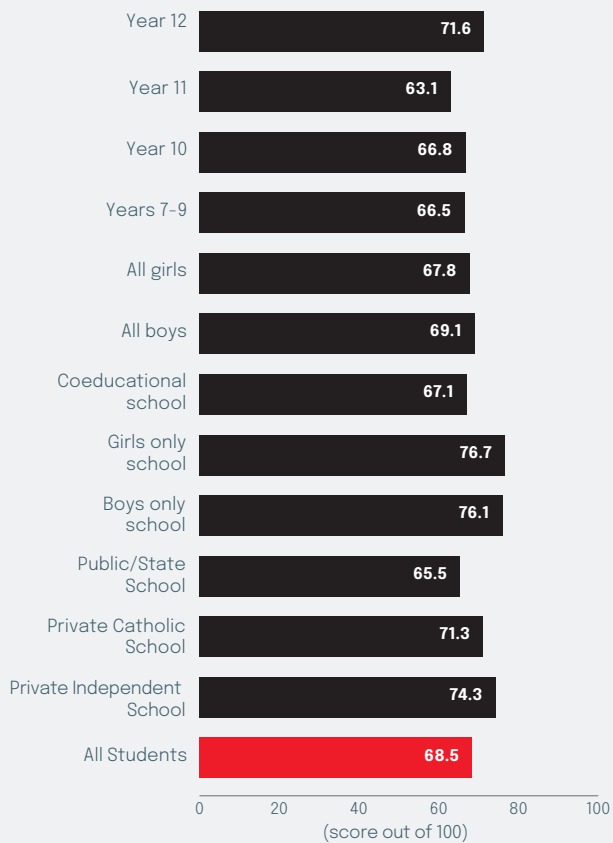
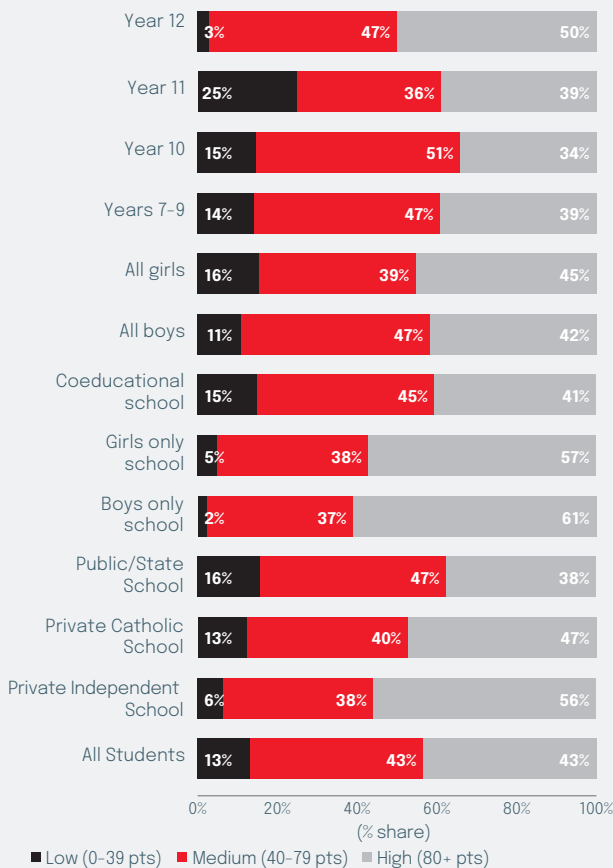


Chart 12: How Well School Helps Children with Anxiety or Worries (Parents)



According to students, the top 5 things they could do to help them is putting less emphasis on grades and scores (45%), have fewer tests and exams (41%), have teachers who are more calm, honest and caring (40%), be less strict policy on uniforms and appearance (33%) and less homework (33%) – see chart below.

Parents agreed that one of the top 5 things schools could do to help their children was having teachers who are more calm, honest and caring (32%). But in contrast to their children, parents also highlighted more professional counselling or wellbeing services (25%), more safe spaces and opportunities for check-ins with students (20%), more feedback on progress and academic performance (19%), and more focus on core subjects (19%).

Interestingly, a lot more parents (15%) than students (2%) said there was nothing the school could do to help. Noticeably more students however also thought different school times either earlier or later (30% students; 8% parents), more understanding of the individual person (25% students; 16% parents) and more remote learning (14% students; 5% parents) would help with their anxieties or worries. The tables on the following pages highlight some key differences across student cohorts.

Chart 13: What Schools Could Do to Most Help with Student's Anxiety or Worries (Top 5)

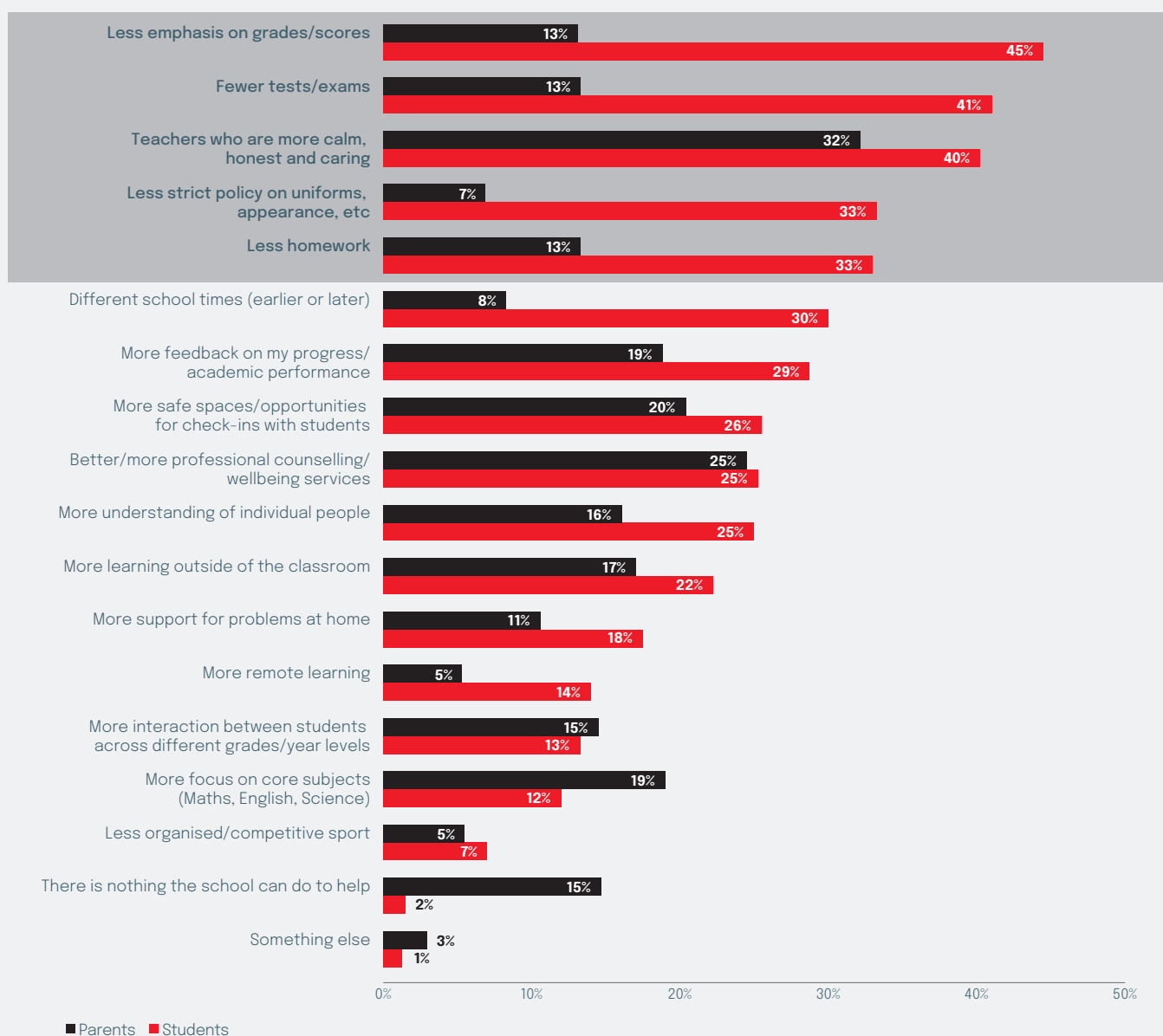


Table 3: What Schools Could Do to Most Help Students with Anxiety/Worries (Students)

| | All Students | Private Indep. school | Private Catholic School | Public/State School | Boys only school | Girls only school | Coeducational school | All boys | All girls | Years 7-9 | Year 10 | Year 11 | Year 12 |
|--|--------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|------------------|-------------------|----------------------|------------|-----------|-----------|------------|---------|------------|
| Less emphasis on grades/scores | 45% | 43% | 45% | 45% | 30% | 55% | 43% | 42% | 46% | 56% | 42% | 39% | 46% |
| Fewer tests/exams | 41% | 40% | 35% | 42% | 40% | 44% | 41% | 40% | 42% | 51% | 33% | 44% | 39% |
| Teachers more calm, honest & caring | 40% | 32% | 35% | 44% | 30% | 29% | 43% | 39% | 41% | 46% | 47% | 40% | 34% |
| Less strict policy on uniforms, appearance | 33% | 38% | 45% | 30% | 25% | 35% | 33% | 29% | 38% | 42% | 31% | 39% | 26% |
| Less homework | 33% | 27% | 29% | 36% | 35% | 31% | 33% | 38% | 29% | 42% | 30% | 37% | 28% |
| Different school times (earlier or later) | 30% | 25% | 35% | 31% | 50% | 26% | 30% | 24% | 34% | 27% | 34% | 33% | 27% |
| More feedback on progress/ performance | 29% | 30% | 29% | 28% | 45% | 29% | 28% | 30% | 28% | 19% | 22% | 31% | 36% |
| More safe spaces/opps for check-ins | 26% | 25% | 37% | 24% | 5% | 23% | 27% | 20% | 31% | 17% | 24% | 28% | 29% |
| More prof. counselling/wellbeing services | 25% | 30% | 24% | 24% | 5% | 29% | 26% | 21% | 28% | 8% | 22% | 28% | 33% |
| More understanding of individual people | 25% | 24% | 33% | 24% | 15% | 26% | 25% | 25% | 26% | 24% | 26% | 28% | 23% |
| More learning outside of the classroom | 22% | 23% | 27% | 21% | 35% | 32% | 19% | 20% | 24% | 20% | 25% | 21% | 23% |
| More support for problems at home | 18% | 15% | 14% | 19% | 10% | 18% | 18% | 17% | 19% | 25% | 20% | 11% | 18% |
| More remote learning | 14% | 23% | 10% | 12% | 25% | 8% | 14% | 14% | 14% | 14% | 16% | 14% | 13% |
| More interaction across grades/year levels | 13% | 19% | 6% | 13% | 10% | 21% | 12% | 13% | 13% | 12% | 15% | 17% | 10% |
| More focus on core subjects | 12% | 8% | 8% | 14% | 15% | 13% | 12% | 15% | 10% | 10% | 14% | 9% | 14% |
| Less organised/competitive sport | 7% | 13% | 2% | 6% | 10% | 5% | 7% | 7% | 7% | 7% | 9% | 7% | 6% |
| Something else | 1% | 1% | 0% | 1% | 0% | 0% | 2% | 1% | 1% | 2% | 1% | 1% | 2% |
| There is nothing the school can do to help | 2% | 1% | 0% | 2% | 0% | 2% | 2% | 2% | 1% | 2% | 2% | 3% | 0% |

Table 4: What Schools Could Do to Most Help Students with Anxiety/Worries (Parents)

| | All Students | Private Indep. school | Private Catholic School | Public/State School | Boys only school | Girls only school | Coeducational school | All boys | All girls | Years 7-9 | Year 10 | Year 11 | Year 12 |
|--|--------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|------------------|-------------------|----------------------|----------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|
| Teachers more calm, honest, and caring | 32% | 36% | 33% | 31% | 20% | 33% | 33% | 32% | 32% | 38% | 26% | 26% | 33% |
| More prof. counselling/wellbeing services | 25% | 19% | 19% | 28% | 18% | 21% | 26% | 25% | 24% | 20% | 25% | 23% | 18% |
| More safe spaces/opps for check-ins | 20% | 30% | 16% | 19% | 24% | 27% | 19% | 20% | 21% | 24% | 13% | 26% | 18% |
| More focus on core subjects | 19% | 20% | 17% | 19% | 22% | 21% | 19% | 17% | 22% | 19% | 19% | 21% | 23% |
| More feedback on progress/performance | 19% | 22% | 25% | 16% | 14% | 27% | 19% | 19% | 19% | 17% | 13% | 14% | 25% |
| More learning outside of the classroom | 17% | 15% | 9% | 20% | 12% | 9% | 18% | 19% | 15% | 19% | 11% | 14% | 5% |
| More understanding of me as a person | 16% | 15% | 20% | 15% | 6% | 18% | 17% | 15% | 17% | 19% | 9% | 14% | 5% |
| More interaction across grades/year levels | 15% | 9% | 20% | 15% | 10% | 6% | 16% | 12% | 17% | 15% | 13% | 9% | 8% |
| Fewer tests/exams | 13% | 12% | 15% | 13% | 16% | 15% | 13% | 12% | 15% | 16% | 15% | 16% | 8% |
| Less homework | 13% | 11% | 17% | 13% | 12% | 12% | 14% | 16% | 10% | 15% | 21% | 9% | 10% |
| Less emphasis on grades/scores | 13% | 16% | 6% | 14% | 4% | 15% | 14% | 12% | 14% | 15% | 9% | 33% | 8% |
| More support for problems at home | 11% | 8% | 10% | 12% | 12% | 15% | 10% | 10% | 11% | 10% | 11% | 5% | 5% |
| Different school times (earlier or later) | 8% | 11% | 9% | 7% | 12% | 12% | 7% | 8% | 8% | 3% | 6% | 12% | 13% |
| Less strict policy on uniforms, appearance | 7% | 8% | 1% | 8% | 8% | 0% | 7% | 7% | 7% | 9% | 6% | 7% | 10% |
| Less organised/competitive sport | 5% | 8% | 1% | 6% | 14% | 9% | 4% | 6% | 5% | 6% | 6% | 0% | 8% |
| More remote learning | 5% | 7% | 5% | 5% | 12% | 6% | 4% | 5% | 5% | 3% | 6% | 7% | 8% |
| Something else | 3% | 1% | 7% | 2% | 4% | 3% | 3% | 3% | 3% | 3% | 0% | 7% | 3% |
| There is nothing the school can do to help | 15% | 9% | 16% | 16% | 8% | 15% | 15% | 13% | 16% | 14% | 15% | 16% | 28% |

Wellbeing

Parents lack awareness of wellbeing programs offered by schools. Whereas 2 in 3 (66%) students said their school had a wellbeing program, only 4 in 10 (40%) parents thought they did. Around 1 in 5 (19%) students said they did not, compared to 1 in 3 (34%) parents, with 15% of students and 26% of parents unsure.

Around 7 in 10 (69%) students at public or state schools said their schools had a wellbeing program, compared to 6 in 10 at private independent (61%) and Catholic (59%) schools. Particularly interesting was the fact the lowest number of parents who said their children’s school had a wellbeing program (35%) also had children at public or state schools.

Significantly more students at girls only schools (73%) said they had a wellbeing program than did students at boys only schools (60%) or coeducational schools (65%). Awareness of these programs was also highest for parents of students at girls only schools (52%), but lowest for coeducational schools (38%).

Most students in year 7-9 (71%) said their school had a wellbeing program, compared to 63% of students in year 11. However, most parents of students in both these year



levels also said their children’s school had a wellbeing program (44%). Only 28% of parents of year 12 students said their school had a wellbeing program.

Around 1 in 5 (19%) students overall said their school did not have a wellbeing program, but this climbed to 30% in boys only schools. Awareness was also lowest for boys in general, with 1 in 5 (20%) unsure whether their school had a wellbeing program – or twice as many girls who were unsure (10%). Uncertainty was also relatively high in coeducational schools (17%) and in years 11 (16%) and 12 (17%).

Chart 14: Does School Have a Wellbeing Program (Students)

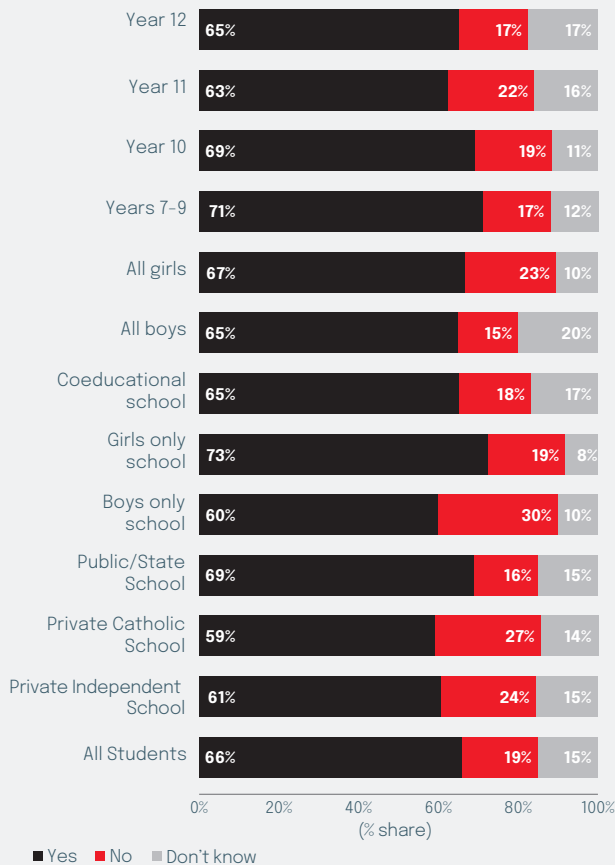
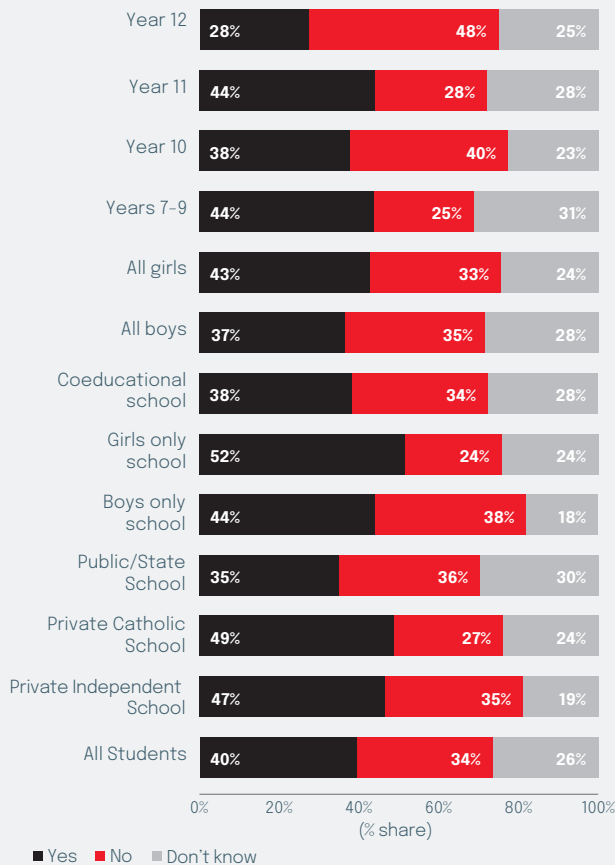


Chart 15: Does School Have a Wellbeing Program (Parents)





The number of parents who said their school did not have a program was lowest for girls only schools (24%) and years 7-9 (25%), and highest among parents of year 12 students (48%). Uncertainty around whether the children's school had a wellbeing program was however highest among parents of year 7-9 students (31%), students at public or state schools (30%), coeducational schools (28%) and had children in year 11 (28%). It was lowest for parents with children at boys only schools (18%) and private independent schools (19%).

Many parents understand that wellbeing is a fundamental component of the school experience and just as important as academic achievement. But wellbeing initiatives provided by schools (such as coaching, meditation, fitness, counselling, etc.) do not seem to be helping students anywhere near as much as parents may think. Indeed, when asked to rate the extent they were helping, students on average scored a very 'moderate' 46.0 pts out of 100 (where 100 signals they are helping completely). When parents were asked how wellbeing initiatives were helping their children, they scored a more robust 74.5 pts, believing they are of significant benefit.

Chart 16: Extent Wellbeing Initiatives Helping to Improve Wellbeing

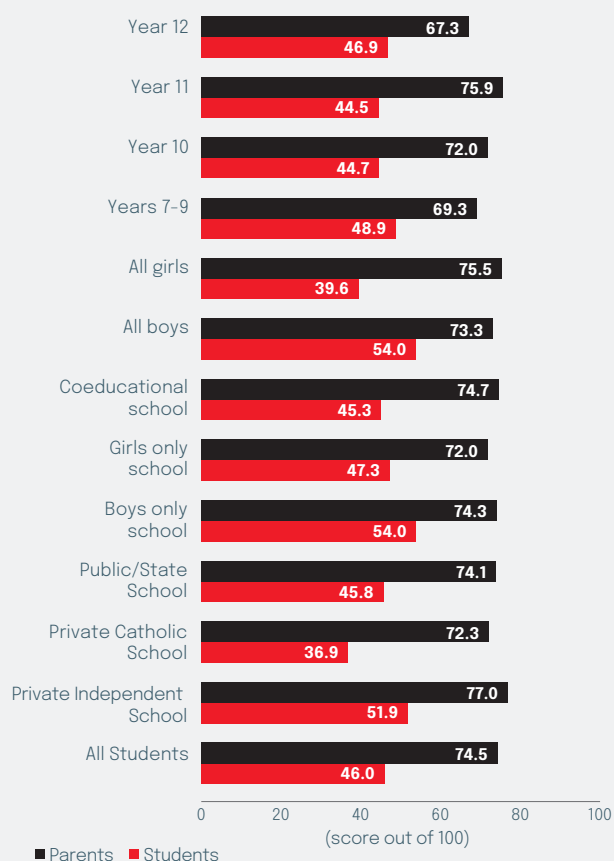
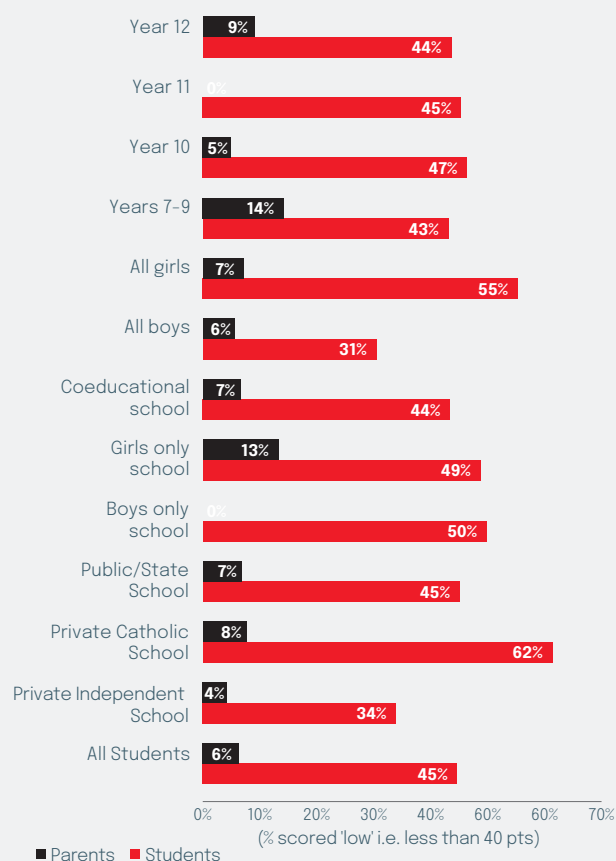


Chart 17: Extent Wellbeing Initiatives Helping to Improve Wellbeing



The impact of school wellbeing initiatives was rated low by students in all groups. By school type, students at private independent schools said they helped most (51.9 pts), and private Catholic schools least by a big margin (36.9 pts). Students at boys only schools (54.0 pts) said they were somewhat more helpful than those at coeducational (45.3 pts) and girls only (47.3 pts) schools. The impact was broadly consistent in all year levels.

Parents however rated the extent school wellbeing initiatives helped their children highly in all groups – ranging from 77.0 pts for parents with children at private independent schools to 67.3 pts for those with year 12 students.

The disconnect between students and parents over the extent school wellbeing initiatives help was even more pronounced when looking at the numbers who said they helped little (i.e. scored less than 40 pts). Overall, almost 1 in 2 (45%) students said they did not help much, whereas just 6% of parents thought offered little help for their children.

The number of students who said they provided little help was much higher at private Catholic schools (62%) and among girls in general (55%), but substantially lower for students at private independent schools (34%) and boys in general (31%). There was no discernible difference across year levels, but was somewhat lower in coeducational schools (44%) than in boys (50%) and girls (49%) only schools.

Parents however severely under-estimate how many children did not derive much help from school wellbeing initiatives, with the number of parents who thought they were of little help ranging from 0% at boys only schools and in year 11, to 14% for students in years 7-9 and 13% in girls only schools.



What students think will help them most in school wellbeing programs...

"It may be beneficial for the wellbeing program to be more interactive for students and held outside the classroom so students can actively participate in activities to grasp the concepts taught for better wellbeing."

"The ability to have an anonymous messaging platform to the wellbeing team."

"Maybe coaching. Someone I could talk to about my grades and ways to improve them, not just telling me to go home and do homework."

"Having free periods when students can choose to meditate/relax or study. Not pressuring students into participating in pointless 'wellbeing' exercises that just make the school feel like they're helping students cope with stress."

"More support with students and the impact of other students. More support for students against teachers who do the wrong things, and someone to talk to when that happens."

"Just someone to talk to. Not in a psychologist or a teacher way, just someone to talk to and vent to."

"I don't even know if we have a wellbeing program. It just feels awkward to reach out to a teacher. Teachers are the reason for a solid chunk of my stress, not their fault, but what should I say? Stop assigning assignments? That's literally their job. I understand that but I just don't feel comfortable venting at school, especially as they might contact my parents about it."

"My school offers PEP classes, which teaches various things such as positive thinking, etc. I personally think this is a waste of time as I have so much homework and study to do that, I would prefer to have the 70 minutes for quiet individual study instead of learning about new (and unhelpful) concepts." It would also be helpful to have support on subjects I am weak at."

"Solo cubicle spaces so that we can cool down and no one bothers us because sometimes we just need alone time and not being constantly asked if we are okay."

"Just want an excursion to a fun place every year and class parties after exams."



"Stop making counselling sessions about colouring in. We're not in kindergarten. We have real life problems that require real solutions. Not a nice, surface 'let's mask the problem by doing some nice drawings' solution. I want to see psychologists in schools. Or counsellors who are actually qualified."

"The counsellor tells everything to the parents which is a school policy. I feel this should not be done as students might not want to talk about their issues with their parents."

"Anonymous help and useful apps and websites to visit to cope with stress."

"Maybe once a year there could be a private session with counsellors just between the student and counsellor. No parents involved so you can honestly tell the school what's bothering you. As well as a higher focus on VCE students because we feel the most stress out of all other year levels."

"Would firstly choose the counsellors and their therapy dogs. Having this really helps even as just a quick relaxation period before class or anything. Next, I'd choose mindfulness clubs! Just student led clubs where you can go with friends or even alone and just colour, talk, cry, anything!"

What parents think will help their children most in school wellbeing programs...

"Easy to follow five-minute activities to enhance wellbeing and relationships in students. Whole class and individual activities. Flexible resources to get your students thinking."

"One-on-one check ins with students even, with those not seeking help."

"Casual music classes where they can explore music and instruments."

"Practice more mindfulness and how to let go of worries."

"Mentors, rewards for attendance and good behaviour."

"I'd love to see info about how our brains work and react (fight or flight, holding trauma in the body etc). Explore alternate techniques such as EFT Tapping."

"Teach them to become calm and just enjoy learning."

"Checking in on their home situation."

"If teachers talk to students more like their friends."

"Meditation program and teaching them about overall health. Focus on how to eat healthy, how to cook for themselves."

"After several bullying incidents at the school. We have been forced to look into new schools for my step children

as the school has no idea how to handle bullying. The school does not call concerned parents back when they say they are going to, or when parents have left messages for teachers etc. to have the matter resolved. Really disappointed at the way the school has handled these incidents."

"Maybe more learning out in the open instead of in the class."

"Awareness using social media, online cyber, children online bullying and to reduce screen time."

"Better ways to cope with tests, and better ways to cope with cyber bullying."

"Teaching them to be resilient in trying circumstances and remain flexible when things don't work out as planned."

"A mentor who they can relate to, preferably a senior student rather than an adult, so they feel more comfortable talking."

"More counselling and discussions, longer lunchtimes with friends."

"Extracurricular physical subjects like gym club. Keep the kids active."



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