

South Australian Student Wellbeing Survey 2016

By David Knuckey

The online survey conducted by DECD was held over four weeks in Term 4.

43,000 SA students, from 500 schools completed the survey - About 10,000 students each from years 6 to 9.

- Public - 466 schools: 36,823 students.
- Catholic - 26 schools: 4,323 students.
- Independent - 8 schools: 1,947.

If you are looking to extrapolate these figures (considering that every SA child either was recently, or will be, in years 6-9) - according to the 2016 DECD annual report, there are more than 180,000 South Australian children in public primary and secondary schools and early childhood centres.

The survey has been going since 2013, but this is the first year the government has released the report, according to The Advertiser, at media urging.

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 DECD survey measures wellbeing across the following areas:

- Mental and physical health
- Experiences at school
- Engagement and beliefs about learning
- Gender difference in wellbeing
- Wellbeing and the implications for lifting educational achievement
- Breakfast and sleep.

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Background

Success, both at school and life depends on more than just intellectual ability - it also relies on factors such as motivation,

attitudes toward school, being connected, self-regulation and perseverance.

While it was once thought that such aspects of personality were fixed traits, it is now believed that perseverance, self-esteem, self-efficacy, attentiveness, resilience, openness, empathy and tolerance can be improved and shaped by experience.

Importantly, non-cognitive skills are more malleable at later ages than cognitive abilities.

This has significant policy implications for schooling.

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 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.

Mental and physical health

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.

Approximately 3 in 20 primary students and 4 in 20 secondary students report high levels of sadness. This equals around 7,000 of the 43,000 students surveyed.

Overall, just over one third (or over 14,000) of students feel 'low' optimism. This is compared with 27% who feel 'high' optimism.

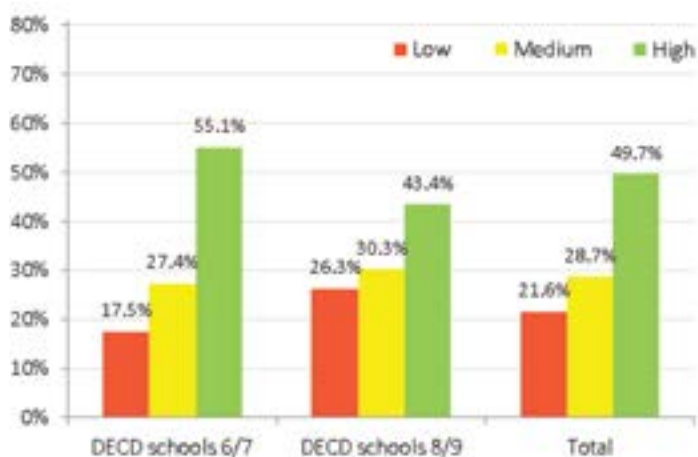
Over 80% of primary students report adequate sleep in a typical week and just over 70% of secondary students report the same. Conversely this means that 19% and 28% respectively are not getting a good night's sleep at least 4 nights a week.

Close to 17% of primary students and 28% of secondary students missed breakfast at least twice a week - that's around 9,000 of students surveyed. Extrapolated over the SA public school population, that number runs into the tens of thousands.

7% of young people reported negative views about their bodies - that's around 3,000 children.

25% of Year 8/9 students - or 5,000 - reported their health as 'low'.

Happiness



Nearly 90% of all students reported that they receive medium or high levels of social support from their peers. However, this still leaves several thousand students with low levels of peer support.

15% of primary and 18% of secondary students do not feel that they 'belong'.

24% of primary students and 20% of secondary students do homework every night. Equivalent numbers report they never do homework.

Around 43% of students watch TV every weeknight.

Around 25% of students play computer games every weeknight.

When asked what was stopping them from doing after school activities, students reported:

- Having to go home after school - 41%
- Being too busy - 26%
- Having too much homework - 22%.

Experiences at school

....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.

44% of primary students rated their school as having a 'high' climate. However, only 26% of secondary students gave the same rating. Overall, 27.7% of all students rated their school climate as 'low'.

57.8% of secondary and 43.7% of primary students said they had 'no' important adults at school.

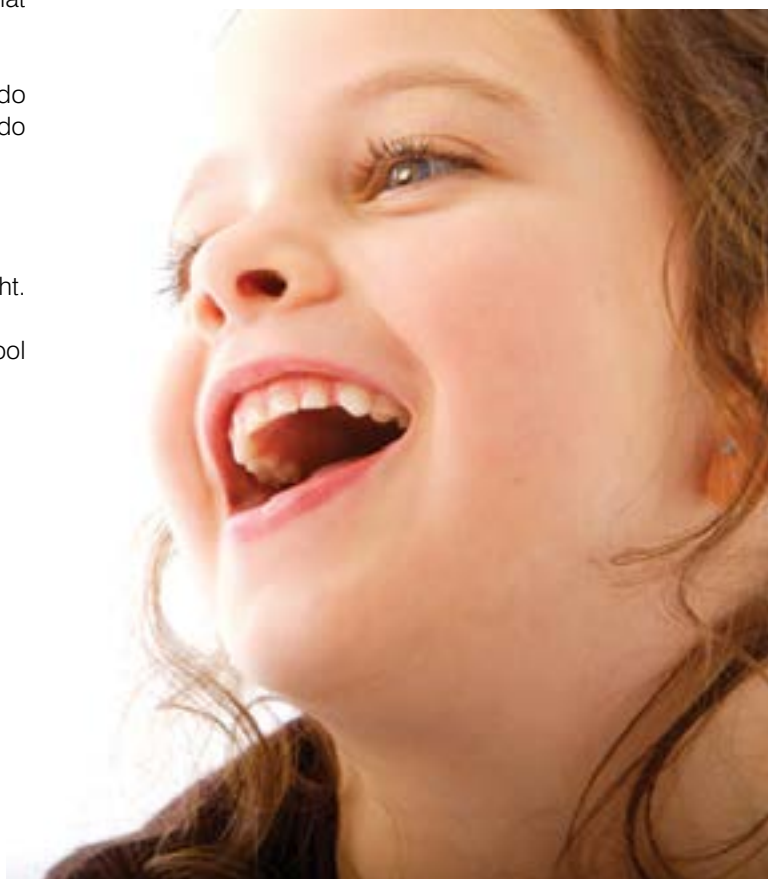
In terms of school belonging, overall:

- 26.1% of students felt 'low' belonging at school
- 30.8% felt medium belonging at school
- 41.1% felt 'high' belonging at school.

“25% of Year 8/9 students reported their health as 'low'.”

The sense of belonging decreased for older students.

Overall, 64.1% of students felt 'high' emotional engagement with teachers. 30.7% reported 'medium' engagement with teachers and 5.1% experienced 'low' emotional engagement with teachers. Primary students feel significantly more engaged with teachers than secondary.



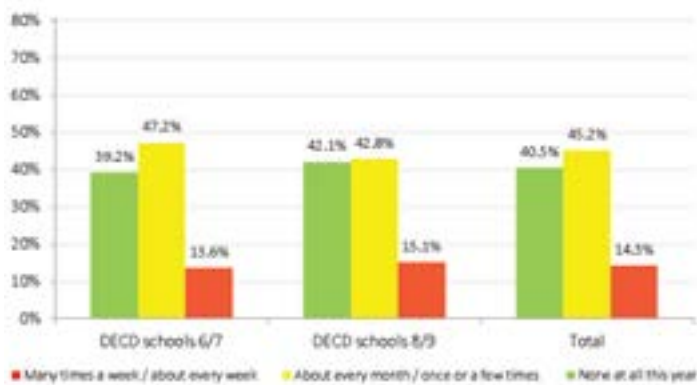
South Australian Student Wellbeing Survey 2016 *continued*

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Over 70% of South Australian students report being bullied.

- About 15% of students are verbally bullied every week.
- 41% are socially bullied every month.
- 33.6% are physically bullied every month - once or a few times.
- Cyber bullying was rated as least severe, with 22.1% saying it happens every month.

Bullying - Verbal



Engagement and learning

Academic self-concepts refers to the students' beliefs about their likelihood of success in learning and school work if they put in the effort.

40% of primary students and half of secondary students reported low levels of engagement in activities.

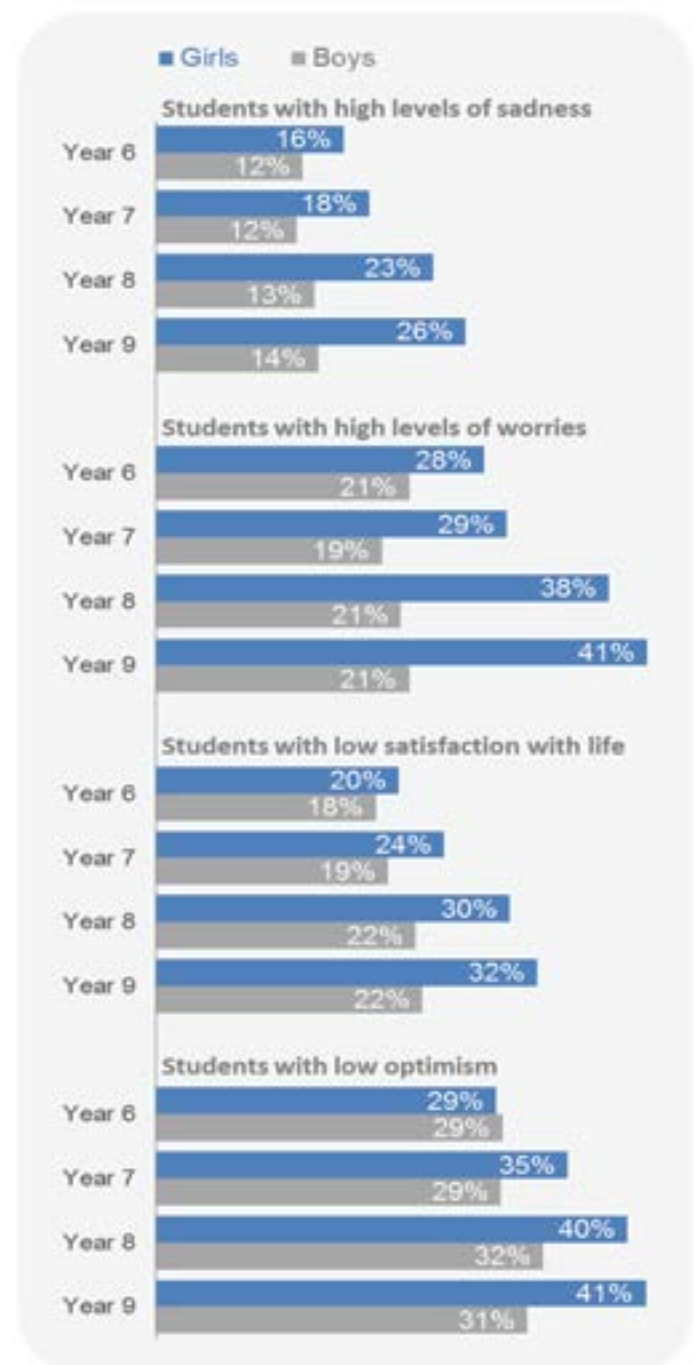
“Overall, 64.1% of students felt ‘high’ emotional engagement with teachers”

25% of primary students and one third of secondary students reported low levels of perseverance.

Overall, 61.1% of students reported ‘high’ levels of academic self-concept. The lack of self-belief increases as students move to secondary school - with 10% of primary and nearly 15% of secondary students reporting ‘low’ self-concept - several thousand South Australian students.

Gender differences in wellbeing

The wellbeing of many young people drops in adolescence. Because schools play an important part 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.



Girls report lower emotional wellbeing, particularly in secondary school. In Year 9:

- One in every four girls reports high levels of sadness
- 41% of girls report high levels of worries
- 32% of girls report low satisfaction with life
- 41% of girls report low optimism.

Perhaps just as shocking, in Year 6 of primary school:

- 16% of girls report high levels of sadness
- 28% of girls report high levels of worries
- 20% report low satisfaction with life
- 29% report low optimism.

Educational achievement and well-being

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.

A study of NAPLAN results show academic self-concept, perseverance and breakfast habits are linked to reading skills and academic progression. For year 7 reading tests:

- Students with high academic self-concept scored 18 points higher than children with low / medium self-concept.
- Regularly eating breakfast 5 or more times a week saw a 16 point increase for boys, but only a 5 point increase for girls. On average, students who ate breakfast five or more times a week scored 11 points higher than those who did not.

These results have dramatic implications with 40% of South Australia's students having low to medium self-concepts, which decrease as they mature.

Breakfast and sleep

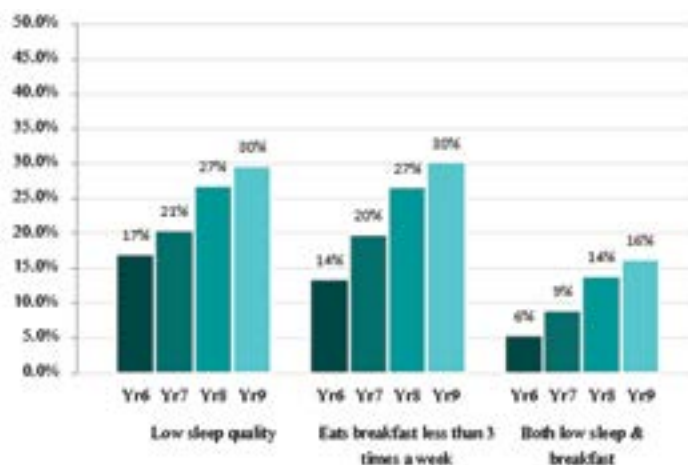
Sleep and nutrition are important for general health and development and also for learning in the classroom.

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

Sleeplessness and skipping breakfast increases as students enter secondary school.

Female students have higher rates of sleeplessness and skipping breakfast.

Proportion of young people who did not sleep well or eat breakfast before going to school



“Over 70% of South Australian students report being bullied.”

30% of year 9 students do not get enough sleep and eat breakfast less than 3 times a week.

Aboriginal students skip breakfast and sleep poorly more than non-Aboriginal students.

Source: Results from the 2016 wellbeing and engagement survey.