



This week's stories from the media

- We absolutely need you - girls interested in STEM
- New SA campaign to give children best start in life
- Maths homework causing more harm than good
- Child suicide risks at record high
- NAPLAN
- Backpacks

New SA Campaign

SA's largest campaign to nurture baby and toddler development.

The state government will support the development of the next generation of young South Australians with more than \$4 million to expand early literacy programs.

The Words Grow Minds campaign was an initiative of the Department for Education's Early Learning Strategy and provides messaging to parents of young children about how best to support their child's development in the first 1000 days.

Words Grow Minds will be rolled out across the state for parents, carers and service providers of children aged 0-3, after successful and independently evaluated trials in Mount Gambier and Whyalla.

Words Grow Minds is backed by the latest research on early childhood development, with input from practitioners, literacy experts, researchers and service providers who collaborated to create the campaign.

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We Absolutely Need You - Biologist To Girls Interested In STEM

Huge gender disparities in STEM careers are the focus of many International Women's Day celebrations.

Only 15% of STEM jobs are held by women, and just 23% of senior management, and 8% of CEOs in STEM-qualified industries are women, according to 2023 data.

This has resulted in a 17%, or \$27,012, gender pay gap in STEM industries.

Bias, stereotyping, and negative social experiences in STEM "begin early in life and have a significant impact on girls and women's development of confidence and interest in STEM," according to the Advancing Women in STEM strategy from the Department of Industry, Science and Resources.

Low confidence in STEM starts in primary school, and will lower with age, and accelerate a lack of interest in science and maths in young girls.

Girls make up a quarter of enrolments in year 12 IT, physics and engineering classes, women make up 37% of enrolments in university STEM courses, and 17% of VET STEM courses.

Seeing other girls participate in STEM and directing science and maths activities towards girls can help close the gap, Dr James Curran, chief of ed-tech charity Grok Academy, said.

"If a student has a great experience of digital technologies at school, and in the role models around them, in my observation there is no difference in the level of interest in boys or girls," he explained.

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“...This has resulted in a 17%, or \$27,012, gender pay gap in STEM industries....”

Maths Homework Causing More Harm Than Good

Researchers from UniSA recently set out to study how maths homework policies and practices affect families.

The research found that while parents are often the first people children turn to, many parents are unsure of the current mathematics strategies and approaches that their children are learning as these have changed markedly since they were at school.

“When parents realise that their tried-and-true methods are different to those which their children are learning, it can be hard to adapt, and this can add undue pressure,” Associate Professor O’Keeffe said.

The study found mothers being overwhelmingly responsible for managing children’s homework.

“When mothers find maths hard, there is concern that this may demonstrate to their children, especially their girls, that this is not an area in which they would naturally excel. The last thing teachers want to do is disadvantage girls in developing potentially strong mathematical identities.”

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Child Suicide Risks At Record High

Kids Helpline responded to calls from a record 122,356 distressed children last year - 71% from girls.

The hotline fielded nearly 12,000 calls from children discussing suicide.

The 10-14 year age group had the highest rate for reporting self-injury.

Kids helpline undertook 3893 crisis interventions seeking ambulance, police or child protection services.

Of these, 44% were related to suicide attempts or where the child was at high risk of taking their own life.

“The number of interventions ... in relation to suicide attempts by children and young people have more than doubled over five years....”

“More and more young people, particularly boys, are reaching out to Kids Helpline after experiencing extortion relating to sexually explicit images.”

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NAPLAN

NAPLAN begins this week.

Students across the country will take their NAPLAN tests between Wednesday 13 March and Monday 25 March.

It is a nationwide measure through which parents/carers, teachers, schools, education authorities, governments and the broader community can determine whether or not students are developing key literacy and numeracy skills.

Students are not expected to study for NAPLAN.

You can support your child by reassuring them that NAPLAN is a part of their school program and reminding them to simply do their best.

[Full Story](#)

National Ride To School Day

Friday March 22



Backpacks

While children can have firm ideas about how their school bags look – and schools have practical requirements about what students need to carry – it is vitally important bags are also safe and healthy.

Students are often not just carrying books to and from school, but technology, sports and musical equipment as well.

Studies have noted problems occur when students carry bags that weigh more than 20% of their body weight.

This excessive weight can cause students to adopt a forward-leaning posture to compensate, leading to chronic back pain and other postural deformities.

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