National Forum:
How schools and parents can work together to address bullying

Date: Tuesday 31 July 2012

Venue: Parliament House, Canberra Committee Room 1R1

Forum participants

Host

The Hon Peter Garrett AM MP (Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth)

Facilitator

Dr Lance Emerson (Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth)

Participants

Ms Anna Brazier (Safe and Supportive School Communities Working Group)
Dr Michael Carr-Gregg (Adolescent Psychologist)
Ms Danielle Cronin (National Catholic Education Commission Parent Committee)
Professor Donna Cross (Edith Cowan University)
Mr David Colley (Australian Education Union)
Mr Ian Dalton (Australian Parents Council)
Mr Matt Davies (Engagement and Wellbeing Group, Department of Education, Employment
        and Workplace Relations)
Mr Jihad Dib (Punchbowl Boys High)
Ms Dianne Giblin AM (Australian Council of State School Organisations)
Ms Stephanie Gotlib (Children with Disability Australia)
Mr Phillip Heath (Radford College, representing Independent Schools Council of
        Australia)
Ms Sarah Jackson (Inspire Foundation)
Ms Lauren Jew (Australian Youth Forum)
Mr Sjon Kraan (Australian Youth Forum)
Ms Dee Madigan (Madigan Communications)
Dr Helen McGrath (Deakin University)
Ms Heather Parkes (Principals Australia Institute)
Dr Ken Rigby (University of South Australia)
Professor Phillip Slee (Flinders University)
Ms Helen Thomas (Catholic Education Office Melbourne, representing the National
        Catholic Education Commission)
Ms Heather Watson (Education Services Australia)
Mr Chris Watt (Independent Education Union of Australia)

Introduction

On 31 July 2012 the Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth, Peter Garrett convened the *National Forum: How schools and parents can work together to address bullying* at Parliament House. The Forum brought together principals, parents groups, young people, as well as experts in education, child welfare, psychology and marketing to discuss the important role of the school – family partnership to address the complex societal issue of bullying. The focus of the day was on seeking positive and effective solutions to ensure the safety and wellbeing of Australian school students.

The participants explored the roles of teachers, students and parents with a focus on:

- the home: family behaviours and practices to prevent and/or address bullying
- the school: what schools, teachers and students can do to help families to prevent and/or address bullying, and
- direct partnerships: collaborative initiatives between families and schools to address bullying.

Before the Forum, participants completed a questionnaire to provide initial feedback and ideas on how schools and parents can work together to address bullying. The questionnaire sought views on:
- the National Safe Schools Framework[1]
- school – family partnerships and
- how to optimise parental engagement in Australian schools.

A summary of the questionnaire responses is at Attachment A.

Minister Garrett also invited the Australian public to share their views and ideas with him via Twitter, Face book, and email. A synopsis of this feedback is at Attachment B.

Background

Research tells us that students with parents who are engaged in their learning development, no matter what their income or background, are more likely to do better in school, stay in school longer, and enjoy school more. Parent partnership programs can increase student achievement, improve attendance and behaviour, and promote positive social skills. When partnership practices are aligned with school goals, policies, and programs; families become involved in ways that directly assist students' learning and success, as well as social and emotional development.

The effective school – family partnership

Effective school – family partnership models build a schools capacity to work with families to accomplish a common mission for children and young people's wellbeing and educational success. There is collaboration among parents, educators, and community members that occurs through the foundation of quality two-way communication, focusing on the parents' (and students') strengths, and solving problems together. The school is committed to

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[1] The National Safe Schools Framework aims to provide a safe and supportive learning environment where members of the school community both feel and are safe from bullying, including cyberbullying, harassment, and violence. The nine key elements of the Framework assist schools to develop sound safe school policy and approaches.

ongoing improvement in its parental partnerships and continues to explore new policies, practices, relationships, and attitudes that foster partnering for children's social relationships, development and academic success. The school also turns to parents for their input, expertise, and guidance with parents regularly engaging in decision making.

Links to further research/information on the school – family partnership and bullying are at Attachment C.

Minister Garrett's opening address

Minister Garrett opened the Forum by expressing his personal commitment to address bullying in schools. He noted that all governments are developing and implementing policies and programs to ensure the wellbeing and resilience of school-aged students but acknowledged much more could be done. He emphasised that all Australian children had the right to learn and play in a safe setting that extends beyond the school gate.

The Minister discussed the importance of every school having a 'Safe School Plan' so the entire school community has access to clear, practical guidelines on how to manage bullying behaviour and provide assistance for students experiencing bullying. He noted the strength and rigour of the National Safe Schools Framework, which has been endorsed by all governments, and provides clear guidance to schools on developing safe school policies. Minister Garrett said his vision was for every Australian school to develop and implement its own approach based on the Framework.

Minister Garrett also highlighted the important role of the school community in developing a whole-of-school approach to address bullying, saying that the Forum was a welcome opportunity to:
- continue the conversation on how parents and schools can work more effectively together to improve student social and emotional development in addition to resilience
- harness advice on how the Australian Government can communicate effectively about the existing initiatives and resources available for schools, families and students, and
- the value and importance of effective school – family partnerships.

The Minister announced the Australian Government investment of almost $4 million to develop a new online safe schools toolkit, which will support the whole school community to implement the National Safe Schools Framework. The toolkit, which is being developed by Education Services Australia (ESA), will include practical information, support and guidance for parents, students, teachers, and student support staff (including chaplains and student welfare officers). ESA will also produce training and professional development modules for those training to be teachers, teachers and school principals, which will align with the suite of resources the whole school community can use.

Minister Garrett noted the resources that will be available for those training to be teachers would be a key mechanism for embedding safe school practices early.

Presentation on the National Safe Schools Framework

Forum participants were given an overview of the revised National Safe Schools Framework by Dr Helen McGrath, Senior Lecturer in Psychology at Deakin University, member of the National Coalition Against Bullying and co-author of the revised National Safe Schools Framework.

As part of a national approach to support schools in building safe school communities, the Australian Government worked with all state and territory governments to revise the National Safe Schools Framework.

The Framework provides Australian schools with a vision and a set of guiding principles that assist school communities to take a proactive whole-school approach in developing effective student safety and wellbeing policies. This vision includes creating learning environments which are free from bullying, harassment, aggression and violence.

The Framework places an emphasis on student wellbeing and child protection and includes relevant national and jurisdictional legislation in addition to government policy. The Framework also highlights and responds to the emergence of technologies that have enabled new forms of bullying to develop.

The Framework was endorsed by all ministers for education through the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) in December 2010.

Dr McGrath noted that 'no other country has a safe schools framework and many are in awe of the Australian framework'. She also highlighted the importance of students both being safe and feeling safe in the school environment.

During the presentation participants from the peak parent organisations highlighted the importance of schools viewing parents as equal partners in education and working with parents and families collaboratively.

There was a strong consensus that awareness of the National Safe Schools Framework needs to extend beyond the school leadership team for it to have an effective impact. Dr McGrath suggested it would be valuable for the framework to be a compulsory part of pre-service teacher training.

Dr McGrath's presentation is at Attachment D.

What's working to promote school – family partnerships that address bullying?

During the second session, Forum participants generated ideas on what works and what should be introduced at the family, school and partnership levels. They also noted what they know doesn't work.

A table listing the ideas generated is at Attachment E.

Getting into action

During the third and final session the participants formed small groups to consider practical ideas for integrating successful parental engagement strategies with existing school frameworks at the three levels, family, school and partnership. The groups were then asked to share their most effective and efficient strategies with the wider group.

The following ideas were pitched:

Families

Idea one - The 'Inclusive School Action Plan', similar to the 'Reconciliation Action Plans' that were introduced to create meaningful relationships and sustainable opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Schools could then include details of their 'Inclusive School Action Plans' on the *My School* website.

Idea two - The introduction of family engagement facilitators in schools to facilitate family networking.

Idea three - Mentoring for families or peer networks, where parents buddy with peers and discuss and share evidence based resources and information. This initiative could receive holistic support through the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI). Participants suggested this would also be a useful prior school initiative.

Schools

Idea one - Work with the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) to build the capacity of school leadership teams, which is particularly important for new principals/school leaders. Support could be provided through mentoring programs with ex-school principals and online communication channels.

Idea two - The ongoing provision of support and services for teachers and schools, including the establishment of criteria to evaluate evidence-based programs. The Australian Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs Senior Officials Committee (AEEYSOC) Safe and Supportive School Communities Working Group is currently undertaking a project to evaluate anti-bullying programs and initiatives in schools.

Idea three - Empower students to develop and implement ideas to address bullying in their schools. This initiative would value the students' ability to create resources that will connect with their peers. The students' ability to broker school – family partnerships could also be explored.

Partnerships

Idea one - Engaging parents and families in the partnership with a positive message, such as 'safe schools are smart schools'. This initiative could include a social marketing strategy to raise awareness of the evidence that students with well developed social and emotional skills that display pro-social behaviour have higher levels of academic success (Australian Catholic University and Erebus International, 2008).

It was also suggested that the Australian Government could initiate awareness raising activities to promote the value of parents in the education of school aged children. The use of celebrity role models could assist to model safe and supportive behaviour.

Idea two - The development of a centralised online information hub to allow parents, teachers and students to share evidence based resources and information.

Idea three - Embedding student resilience and wellbeing into the Australian Curriculum and sharing the learning's with parents. The group suggested this could be done through drama classes, where the students write and perform a play that explores safe and supportive behaviours with an anti-bullying theme.

Forum outcomes

Forum participants all agreed that a 'safe school is a smart school'. 'Smart schools' are inclusive, value diversity, work with parents, families and their community to build a safe school culture.

Parent and family engagement are vital to building 'smart schools' and to achieving successful education outcomes. Research demonstrates, students who feel safe and supported in school do better in their learning as well as social and emotional wellbeing (Australian Catholic University and Erebus International, 2008).

Parents and families need good information and resources to make the most of the partnership, whether their child is being bullied, is doing the bullying or is a bystander. Schools also need to understand the value of collaborating with parents and families so that practical strategies can be embedded in every school.

School systems as well as school communities can take practical steps to include and engage parents and families in discussions on key issues by:

- inviting them to the school, or to venues outside of the school, for community events where they are informed about key issues and strategies to help address the issue of bullying
- creating virtual hubs for schools so parents can access online information about all aspects of their child's schooling
- exploring the concept of establishing family engagement officers in schools to engage with families in informal settings, and
- exploring the requirement that all schools have parental engagement plans in place.

Participants agreed the messages sent to kids about bullying are extremely important, whether it's over the dinner table, on television, the internet, social media or in classrooms. Parents are their children's first and most important teachers. They need to know all the options available for them to improve their child's wellbeing and prevent bullying.

The Australian Government, in collaboration with the state and territory governments, is well placed to develop a strategy to help parents understand their important role in their child's education and communicate the options available to them to optimise their

partnership with schools. To this end, Minister Garrett announced the Australian Government would explore options for developing an Australia-wide social media campaign in addition to a national hub of resources and information for parents, teachers, and students. These initiatives will align with the suite of resources being developed by ESA, which include:

- **A safe and supportive schools toolkit**, which will assist school communities to identify gaps in their safe schools policies, provide guidance on evidence-based programs and practice, and provide a suite of support resources.
- **Online parent and family resources** to build capacity in understanding and managing bullying behaviour, and foster resilience and wellbeing in children. These resources will include parental engagement strategies for schools and parents.
- **Online professional learning modules for teachers and principals** to assist in the development and implementation of the National Safe Schools Framework.
- **A training module for those training to be teachers** to build awareness and understanding of the National Safe Schools Framework, so that graduate teachers have the skills necessary to deal with bullying when they first enter the classroom.
- **Resources for student support staff**, such as school counsellors, school chaplains and student welfare officers to help them provide support and advice to students.

Additional key messages:
- Governments, education systems and schools can work together to embed learning and an understanding of key issues, such as bullying, into the school curriculum.
- The Australian Government should continue to work with the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) on school leadership models that support school leaders to address bullying. This includes sharing of what works and support for new school leaders through online channels, including social media.
- Criteria could be developed and established so that schools know what the best evidence-based approaches are.
- The whole community needs to value the voice of the student and empower them to develop and implement ideas to address bullying in their schools. Also to acknowledge the contribution students can make in brokering school – family partnerships.
- Schools, families and students, as well as the wider community, need to know and understand what constitutes bullying behaviour and how to read the signs. A suggested method of communicating this message could involve a social media campaign.
- Mentoring for families on evidence-based approaches from the early years.

Additional material:
- Minister Garrett's post-event media release.
- The *National Forum: How schools and parents can work together to address bullying* communiqué.

Summary of questionnaire responses

A total of 11 completed questionnaires were received from the 22 participants who attended the Forum. The questionnaire included 10 questions of which nine were free text responses. Every respondent noted they were aware of the National Safe Schools Framework.

The free text responses were collated into three themes:
- the need for increased awareness and take up of the National Safe Schools Framework in schools
- the key components of an effective school – family partnership, and
- priorities for action.

Some of the key ideas and comments under these themes have been summarised below.

Theme 1: The need for increased awareness and take up of the National Safe Schools Framework in schools:

- A national campaign reaching out to parents is required, the campaign should incorporate a comprehensive use of social media
- Provide clear incentives and information on [the] benefits of schools implementing safe school policies
- Appointment of youth advocates to promote the Framework
- Provide Framework-based professional learning modules for teachers, both offline and online
- Partnerships with relevant peak bodies to promote and inform Framework implementation
- It is important for governments to understand the reasons why schools find it difficult to take up the Framework
- Important not to create a feeling of inadequacy in school staff [or parents] without providing support and resources to address it
- Need to be clear to parents why they should be engaged in their children's schools, the benefits should be communicated
- Acknowledge the specific issues for children with disability, which is required to change entrenched culture and attitudes regarding disability
- One respondent felt that 'governments spend a great deal of time developing excellent policies and initiatives but sadly, the 'selling' of the product is not an area of strength'

Theme 2: The key components of an effective school – family partnership

At the school level:
- Acknowledgment that each school is at a different point in their engagement. Therefore engagement opportunities need to be tailored to circumstances of school population
- *The Harvard Family Research Project* (2010) identifies teacher capacity as a crucial link in embedding and sustaining effective school-family partnerships

- The significance of school – family partnerships as part of the 'core' business of schools
- School leadership plays a crucial role. Parental engagement must be seen as a positive by the school
- [Ensuring] meaningful professional development of teachers and school leaders in the area of parental engagement
- School-family partnerships should be given equal prominence in the 'School Improvement Process', together with teacher quality, leadership, literacy and numeracy.

At the partnership level:
- Respect for parents' role as the first teachers of their children
- Recognising and valuing the contributions parents have to make
- Focus on strengths not weaknesses
- Parents being genuinely included and brought into schools via non-stigmatising policies and interventions
- Identify areas of common concern and agree to work on a real partnership to address the issues
- Understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities
- Provide opportunities to jointly create goals, strategies and shared decision making
- Parents and schools viewed as equal partners based on mutual respect. Parents are a resource not a problem; doing with, not doing to; and led by parents supported by school
- Development of a shared understanding of what is and what isn't bullying
- Values are articulated and shared with a common language
- Using a combination of information, collaboration and implementation.

Theme 3: priorities for action

How to encourage the take up of the NSSF:
- Mandatory implementation and reporting requirements - raise awareness of compliance and responsibilities. Enable schools to audit current practice, chart progress and identify future work
- Recognition/reward programs, youth ambassadors, champions and/or advisory panels/committees
- Embed the Framework within a student wellbeing framework and stress the positive approach
- The Framework should remain flexible, accessible, and be open to changes
- Provide incentives for clusters of schools to work together. Communication materials for principals to use within their communities and recognition of those schools who have taken it up

Share knowledge:
- Showcasing 'best practice' schools as case studies through online digital videos/podcasts
- Enrich learning opportunities between schools, and with governments, universities, community groups and agencies, business and other organisations
- Strategically improve the knowledge and understanding of parents so that they can contribute more effectively to the agenda and support the endeavours of schools

- Promote collaborative efforts between schools and across jurisdictions

Other strategies:
- Conduct a quality longitudinal research study similar to the *Australian Covert Bullying Study* (Cross et al, 2009) cross sectional to monitor changes in student bullying behaviour especially cyber to help schools to target and prevent / respond more effectively and assess the impact of current intervention initiatives
- The focus should shift from 'impact' to 'intervention'
- Engagement with national peak parent bodies

Synopsis of Twitter and Facebook feedback by topic

The comments and ideas below have been collated from feedback received from the public via Minister Garrett's Twitter and Facebook accounts. The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations does not make any representation or warranty about the accuracy, reliability, currency or completeness of the statements.

Counsellor in schools:
- The School Service Officer program in NSW high schools helps with social issues
- More social workers/pastoral carers in the school
- Greater parental responsibilities and role modelling
- Bullying behaviour stems from home life and modelled behaviours
- Parents to become more accountable for their child's behaviour
- Start young - make mandatory documented policies in all pre-school/daycare environments and make the parents acutely aware of their responsibilities
- Teachers should be able to ask for the parents of bullies to attend school and manage their student's behaviour
- Parents need to be made more aware and be held accountable for their children's actions
- All parents involved should immediately be called to report to the school
- Accountability and penalties
- Schools need to follow through on the anti bullying stances and start responding to complaints and reports of bullying
- There should be some kind of deterrent, like compulsory counselling for the bully and if they do not attend
- Perhaps the police need more power where school intervention doesn't work
- Bullies should be punished for their behaviour. Restorative Practices should then be used to move forward with all parties to build relationships but only after actual punishment for the initial bullying

Child wellbeing and development:
- We need to instil belonging, self belief, and an attitude of kindness among kids
- Teach kids to look for what they have in common first! Then talk about differences!
- Teaching students the skills to empower themselves and believe in themselves
- Celebrating and discussing diversity. Much of bullying.... comes from people being confronted with the unfamiliar

Whole community approaches:
- A community problem. Parents involved and school policies actioned. Employers say no! Kids will get the message
- Students (should be) required to be part of a 'community project' that contributed towards them participating in something good and worthwhile ... working towards a better societal environment
- Community people such as police or sports players who have suffered bullying to visit schools and talk to kids about their personal experiences

Anti-bullying strategies and guidelines in schools

- Dedicated time given to discussing bullying in schools. It is simply not enough to read out an anti-bullying policy.
- Schools need to have up to date anti-bullying policies and practical ways of dealing with it.
- "Do the Five" which has had some excellent progress ... students with a history of bullying do not like it as they then realise the student (victim) will follow through with the steps -do the five (Stop it, I don't like it, It makes me feel.., wait for a response, don't do it again), see a teacher, see principal.
- I feel that if the schools had an anti bullying class once a week and do role playing etc it will be fresh in their minds.
- Reduce class sizes. This reduction in student teacher ratios has allowed teachers to more effectively deliver curriculum and give more individual time to students.
- More teachers need to be supervising playground play.
- "Beyond Bullying" program - designed to empower teachers, students, and parents to address traditional bullying in schools - three simple strategies... Stop, Help, and Tell.
- There is a unique program in Canada - it allows ANY student at ANY school in Canada to safely report bullying to school officials without risk of becoming a target themselves StopABully.ca.

Education and national campaigns:

- Education and a national campaign would help everyone to understand bullying must not be tolerated
- I think bullying awareness seminars should take place in schools. With information provided on where and how school students can access counselling and psychological services

References and further research and information on the school – family partnership and bullying

- **National Day of Action Against Bullying and Violence** is held in March every year, and aims to encourage school communities to take a stand together and recognise the important role everyone plays in preventing bullying and violence. For more information visit: www.bullyingnoway.gov.au

- **Bullying.No Way!** website provides a wide range of information and resources for parents and school communities on managing bullying. For more information visit: www.bullyingnoway.gov.au and go to the parents' portal

- **Cybersafety Help Button** is a free desktop application that provides cybersafety advice and information to internet users, particularly children and young people. It offers counselling, reporting and education resources to assist young people to deal with online risks, including cyberbullying, unwanted contact, scams and fraud, and inappropriate material. For more information visit: www.dbcde.gov.au/helpbutton

- **Easy Guide to Socialising Online** provides cybersafety information for a number of social networking sites, search engines and online games. The Guide gives instructions on how to report cyberbullying and inappropriate content and how to adjust privacy settings for young people to protect their personal information. For more information visit: www.dbcde.gov.au/easyguide

- **Cybersmart** program is a national cybersafety and cybersecurity education program developed by the Australian Communications and Media Authority. The Cybersmart website has a lot of useful up to date and information for parents. For more information visit: www.cybersmart.gov.au/Parents.aspx

- **ThinkUKnow Australia** is a partnership between the Australian Federal Police (AFP), Microsoft Australia and ninemsn and aims to raise awareness among parents, carers and teachers of how young people are using technology, and how to help keep them safe online. ThinkUKnow sessions are hosted at a school, like a parent information night. For more information visit: www.thinkuknow.org.au

- **The Line** campaign aims to increase the knowledge of young people about the components of a respectful relationship including communication, trust and consideration for others in developing and maintaining healthy relationships. For more information visit: www.theline.gov.au

- Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study conducted by Edith Cowan University (2009) and an evaluation of the Method of Shared Concern approach, Adjunct Professor Ken Rigby, University of South Australia (2007). For more information visit:
http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/NationalSafeSchools/Pages/research.aspx.

- Family-School & Community Partnerships Bureau. For more information visit:
http://www.familyschool.org.au/

- Deslandes, R. (2001). *A Vision of Home-School Partnership: Three complementary conceptual frameworks.* Jack foundation, Berkeley, CA. For more information visit: http://www.familyschool.org.au/pdf/visionhomeschool.pdf
- Keys to Successful Partnerships. For more information visit: http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/nnps_model/school/sixtypes/6types.htm
- University of Minnesota Parent Education - *Partnering for Success.* For more information visit: http://www.extension.umn.edu/ParentEducation/schoolsuccess.html
- Aboriginal bullying research project, *Solid Kids Solid Schools.* For more information visit: www.solidkids.net.au
- Cross, D., et al. 2009. Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study (ACBPS). Western Australia: Report prepared for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR)
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- Cross, D., et al. 2012. *The Friendly Schools Friendly Families Program: Three-year bullying behavior outcomes in primary school children,* International Journal of Educational Research 53:394-406
- Rigby, R., 2008. *Children & Bullying: How Parents and Educators can Reduce Bullying at School,* Blackwell Publishing
- Australian Catholic University and Erebus International, 2008. *Scoping study into approaches to student wellbeing.* For more information visit: http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/wellbeing/Documents/ScopingStudy.pdf

Where else can parents go for help and advice
- Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800 www.kidshelp.com.au
- Lifeline: 131 114 www.lifeline.org.au
- Youth Beyondblue: www.youthbeyondblue.com
- Reach Out!: www.reachout.com
- Inspire Foundation: www.inspire.org.au
- Headspace: www.headspace.org.au
- Raising Children Network: www.raisingchildren.net.au
- Alannah and Madeline Foundation: www.amf.org.au