



AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS
STAFF WELLBEING TOOLKIT

INTERIM IMPACT REPORT

September 2017

BACKGROUND

An overwhelming body of research, including by NESLI collaborator Professor Philip Riley, is highlighting the excessive stress and duress faced by Australian educators. Along with a growing number of school system stakeholders, we consider this a critical challenge that requires immediate attention at multiple levels.

As part of the need for a multi-tiered response, NESLI developed the Australian Schools Wellbeing Toolkit ('Wellbeing Toolkit'). The Wellbeing Toolkit supports Australian schools to create a forum for staff members to foster an ongoing dialogue around wellbeing, and provides research-supported materials to support the journey. The framework is designed to help schools to lay the foundations for a professional climate which is conducive to the health and wellbeing of all staff members.

The two key aims of the program are:

- to enable all staff to take a proactive approach to their own health and wellbeing and develop the mindsets and behaviours which will support them through challenging times,
- to provide professional communities with a framework to more effectively support each other's health and wellbeing and build social capital.

For more detailed information about the Wellbeing Toolkit, please visit nesli.org.

During 2017, NESLI has piloted the Wellbeing Toolkit across 5000 employees in 180 Australian schools across sectors and geography. Whilst most of these schools directly engaged NESLI for the program, system-level engagements include an Australian state department of education and an entire Catholic diocese.

Through a partnership with the New Zealand government-sponsored CORE Education, the program will also be rolled-out from 2018 to New Zealand schools, and the Wellbeing Toolkit has recently been adopted by schools in New York State.

This document provides an interim update on the impact of the Wellbeing Toolkit in Australia.



QUALITATIVE DATA

In addition to the quantitative survey results described in this Interim Impact Report, NESLI has gathered a considerable amount qualitative feedback from Wellbeing Toolkit participants. The comments, below, are a sample of this feedback.

'All participants reported that they found the program highly valuable and helpful, both professionally and personally. It was a very fruitful and highly enjoyable program for our staff. We have all benefited in many ways from having participated in the program.'

John Dunn, Director of Faith & Mission, De La Salle College

'We had many very positive and proactive discussions during the modules, and the feedback afterwards was that participants found the program to be a positive learning and reflection experience. We are looking forward to continued discussions and reflection on our wellbeing.'

Mark Vincent, Principal, Clare Primary School

'I am getting great feedback from my staff about the wellbeing course ... so glad we enrolled. This program has been extremely well received by all staff members. As a facilitator, I have found the online platform very easy to use. The modules are well paced and interesting. In evaluating this program as part of our Annual Improvement Plan we have had a very high satisfaction rating from all involved.'

Sharon Wittig, Principal, St Mary of the Angels School

'Just to let you know the staff at Star of the Sea completed Module 5 last week. We are actually going to meet next term because the participants enjoyed it so much. Thank you, it was a very good program and my staff gained a lot from it.'

Bernadette Turner, Deputy Principal, Star of the Sea College

'As I work through the Wellbeing Toolkit it gets more and more amazing ... I would love to spread the word to other schools about how great it is. The Toolkit has improved staff knowledge of wellbeing and provided them with tools to engage in robust conversations, that have led to improvements of social capital and wellbeing across the school.'

Rhett Watts, Assistant Principal, Marnebek School Cranbourne

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

NESLI employs a multi-dimensional approach to assessing the impact of the Wellbeing Toolkit. By assessing the program from a range of perspectives, we strive to achieve a deep understanding of how the program is contributing to wellbeing for Australian school employees. Importantly, the feedback also supports NESLI to continually improve the program. The various elements of the Wellbeing Toolkit evaluation framework are described below.

NESLI IMPACT SURVEYS

Wellbeing Toolkit Progress Surveys

Program participants complete feedback surveys at the completion of each of the five program modules. The progress survey measures wellbeing at the individual and community levels, as well as perceptions of the strength of social capital within the group.

Toolkit Leader Post-program Survey

Toolkit Leaders complete a post-program survey which explores various dimensions, including staff awareness, sense of long-term commitment to wellbeing, impact on staff collaboration, and interdepartmental relations.

THIRD-PARTY IMPACT SURVEYS

For a deeper impact assessment, the Wellbeing Toolkit uses two respected international instruments. These survey results are anonymous and used to provide individual schools with a broad measure of wellbeing and social capital before and after the Toolkit application.

Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale

The first measure is the WEMWBS, a well-established 14-item scale across five response categories covering feeling and functional aspects of wellbeing. WEMWBS is applied extensively in the United Kingdom and several other countries.

Short Measure of Workplace Social Capital Survey

The second measure is an eight-item survey developed and applied extensively in the Finnish public sector to measure workplace social capital, including designations for cognitive and structural social capital; vertical and horizontal social capital; and bonding ('to get by'), bridging ('to get ahead') and linking (trust across authority gradients) social capital. Applied to a base of 150,000 public sector employees in Finland over a period of 15 years, the tool is robust with longitudinal data and well-documented health end points, and is now broadly utilised.

The inclusion of robust and effective impact evaluation structures throughout the Wellbeing Toolkit ensures that participating schools have clear visibility of both wellbeing and social capital across their staff.

In addition to serving as a framework to evaluate the Wellbeing Toolkit, this data assists school leadership teams in the implementation of initiatives geared towards elevated staff engagement, and ultimately enhanced learning environments and outcomes for students.

SAMPLE SIZE

To date, 1,904 individuals have participated in the Nesli Impact Surveys (Wellbeing Toolkit Progress Surveys and Toolkit Leader Post-Program Survey) and 1,493 individuals have completed the Third Party Impact Surveys (Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale and Short Measure of Workplace Social Capital Survey).

WELLBEING TOOLKIT PROGRESS SURVEYS

Program participants complete feedback surveys at the completion of each of the five program modules. The progress survey measures wellbeing at the (1) individual and (2) community levels, as well as (3) perceptions of the strength of social capital within the group. In order to generate feedback for these three target areas, participants complete a brief survey responding to the following statements:

- 1 The module helped our group build a stronger sense of social capital.
- 2 The module gave me new insights into improving my personal wellbeing.
- 3 The module gave me new insights into improving our sense of team/group wellbeing.

Participants respond along a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree.

A 'positivity score' is generated from the data by deducting 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree' responses from 'agree' and 'strongly agree' responses. A positivity score below 60 percent indicates that a module or program element requires improvement. The results are outlined below.

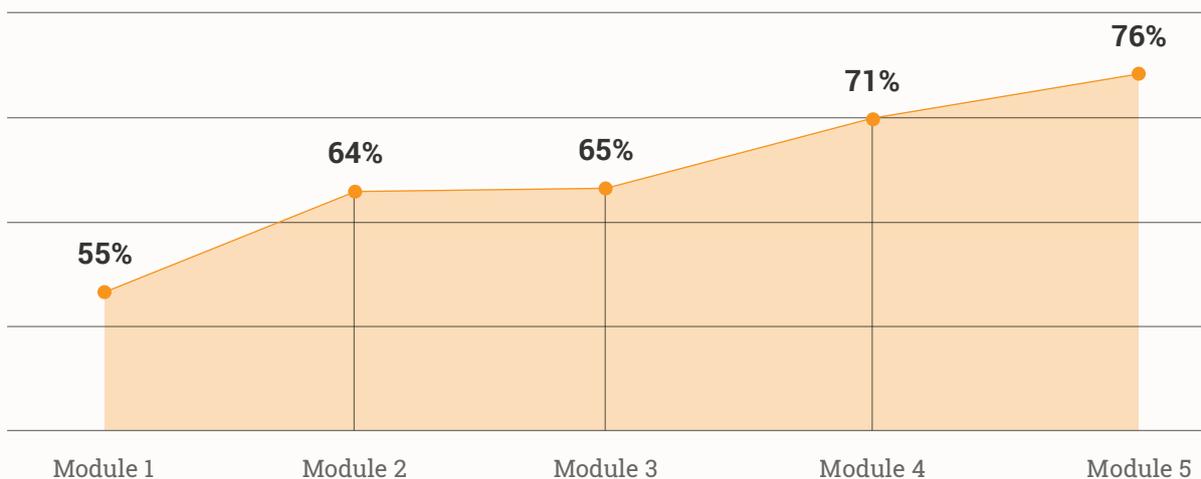
Building a stronger sense of social capital

An important aspect of the Wellbeing Toolkit concerns its objective to raise awareness around the importance of social capital within our schools. Social capital refers to the networks of relationships among people who live and work in a particular community, enabling that community to function effectively.

As the proverb goes, it takes a village to raise a child, but our global village is a vast and confusing place for many. Support from within our school communities is becoming ever more important, and we urgently need to turn our attention to increasing the social capital for the benefit of all. Social capital is built from the ground up, based on trust, mutual reciprocity and support across networks. It takes focused time and effort. It makes us consciously consider how we help each other through difficult times, and indeed, how we ask others for help when we need it. It is arguably the best, if not, the only way we are going to address the isolation and stress felt in our education workforce. As Professor Philip Riley puts it, 'When social capital increases within an organisation everyone improves together'.

CHART 1 POST-MODULE POSITIVITY SCORES

'The module helped our group build a stronger sense of social capital.'



Pleasingly, a significant volume of qualitative feedback speaks to participants' views that their colleagues have become more conscious of the importance of social capital as a result of the program. Quantitatively, to the survey item 'The module helped our group build a stronger sense of social capital' we see a steady increase in participant positivity scores during the course of the five modules, and a 21 percent increase overall.

Translating increased awareness to practical actions and outcomes

The Wellbeing Toolkit is based on a blend of direct instruction and broader social-constructivist theory, with a particular focus on dialogic learning and self-discovery. The learning outcomes in each module work through Biggs’ SOLO (Structure of Observed Learning Outcomes) model, from surface-level learning via identification, articulation, description and recognition, through to the deeper (relational and extended/abstract) learning associated with interpretation, relation, discussion, planning, application and evaluation.

In taking on the Wellbeing Toolkit, NESLI stresses the importance that schools understand the investment they are making in the long-term wellbeing of their professional community and the commitment it will require to achieve this. In order to fully realise the Toolkit’s benefits, participants are required to fully own the implementation of the various elements of the program and their staff’s commitment to undertaking and engaging in the process. In partnership with participating schools, NESLI commits to providing a highly effective, accessible and practical framework which, if undertaken with purpose, will have both short-term and long-term benefits for individuals and their professional communities.

Accordingly, it is important that we observe evidence that participating schools are using the program modules as a platform for wider conversations and initiatives to drive positive change. Whilst a full understanding of the impact of the Wellbeing Toolkit will require more time, the early responses of program participants is encouraging. Many schools are reporting that they have established wellbeing committees. Particular initiatives range from meditation and fitness programs through to organised peer support programs.

The data below shows positivity scores in relation to participants’ sense that they have developed new insights into how they might improve their personal wellbeing. As can be seen, responses across all modules are uniformly affirmative relative to our target impact threshold of 60 percent. The same can be said of participants’ sense of having developed insights to contribute to the wider wellbeing of the group.

CHART 2 POSITIVITY SCORE: PERSONAL INSIGHTS INTO IMPROVING OWN WELLBEING
‘The module gave me new insights into improving my personal wellbeing’

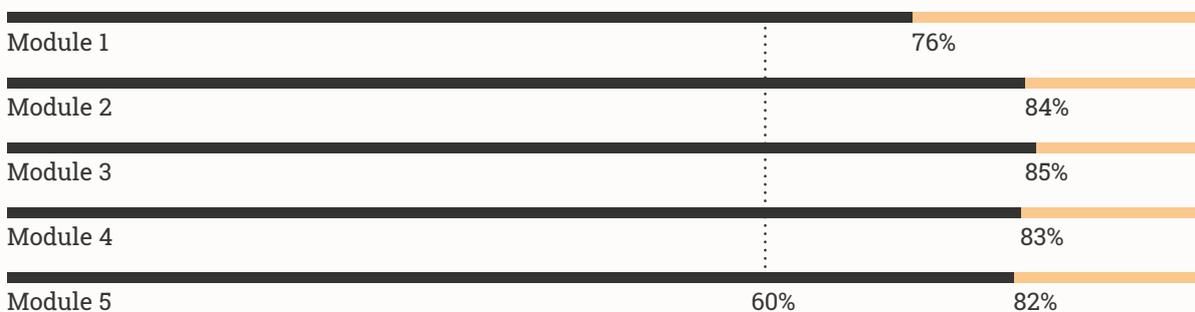
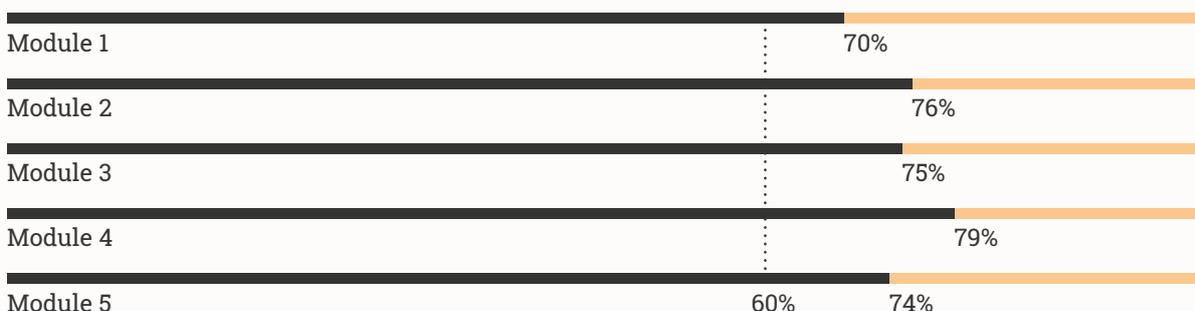


CHART 3 POSITIVITY SCORE: PERSONAL INSIGHTS INTO IMPROVING TEAM WELLBEING
‘The module gave me new insights into improving our sense of team/group wellbeing’



TOOLKIT LEADER POST-PROGRAM SURVEY

Participating schools nominate one or more Toolkit Leader(s) to facilitate peer learning sessions and provide a project management role throughout the program's implementation. Accordingly, Toolkit Leaders occupy a unique vantage point from which to assess the impact of the program.

In order to obtain meaningful feedback from Toolkit Leaders, NESLI employs a simple four-item survey. Toolkit Leaders respond to four statements along a five-point Likert scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree.

The five statements and average scores are as follows.

CHART 5 POST PROGRAM SURVEY

1 *The program has increased our understanding of the critical importance of staff wellbeing.*

4.64 = 92.7%

2 *The program is the start of an ongoing conversation about staff wellbeing at our school.*

4.75 = 95.0%

3 *The program has resulted in improved collaboration among staff members.*

4.20 = 84.0%

4 *The program has helped to enhance the quality of interactions between teaching and administrative staff.*

4.33 = 86.7%

These results are consistent with feedback from other evaluation streams and affirm a number of key objectives of the Wellbeing Toolkit which are described below.

Increased awareness of the importance of staff wellbeing

The most fundamental objective of the Wellbeing Toolkit is to increase awareness around the critical importance of staff wellbeing. A strong body of contemporary research, most notably the work of Dr Phillip Riley, highlights the suboptimal wellbeing across Australian schools. Further, the research underscores the link between staff wellbeing and school performance.

Toolkit Leaders are overwhelmingly of the view that the Wellbeing Toolkit has achieved this objective with an average response of 4.64/5.0 (92.7 percent) to the survey item 'The program has increased our understanding of the critical importance of staff wellbeing'.

In addition to the survey results, a significant volume of qualitative feedback has emphasised the effectiveness of the Wellbeing Toolkit in bringing wellbeing conversations to the surface. It is hoped that over time this will normalise and destigmatise wellbeing to enable more supportive working environments.

Deeper commitment to staff wellbeing

Another fundamental objective of the Wellbeing Toolkit is to support schools to take a long-term approach to supporting staff wellbeing. Whilst the Wellbeing Toolkit sets out to support short-term positive change, it is important that schools adopt an ongoing and mindful approach to fostering environments which are conducive to wellbeing.

Toolkit Leaders expressed a strong sense that their colleagues were intending to continue the wellbeing conversation. This was supported by an average response of 4.75/5.0 (95.0 percent) to the survey item 'The program is the start of an ongoing conversation about staff wellbeing at our school'.

Building more supportive peer dynamics

Healthy staff interactions and high levels of professional collaboration are considered hallmarks of good social capital and harmonious working environments. Qualitative feedback from program participants indicates that the Wellbeing Toolkit provides a "community-building" experience for staff members. Interestingly, many participants highlight the fun and enjoyment they had during the group sessions, as well as feeling more 'connected' to colleagues.

Qualitative feedback from participants is supported by Toolkit Leaders' strong support of the statement 'The program has resulted in improved collaboration among staff members'. An average response of 4.2/5.0 (84.0 percent) was submitted.

Bridging the hierarchy

Like all complex organisations, schools comprise of numerous distinct and interacting sub-groups. A school's culture is the product of various sub-cultures. Healthy organisations allow for the harmonious existence of these sub-cultures, and a critical dimension to schools with high social capital is the sense that the management, teaching and support staff respect and support each other with their shared goals for the school community.

While not a panacea, the Wellbeing Toolkit provides a platform and structure for meaningful dialogue between these groups. This is supported by an average response of 4.33/5.0 (86.7 percent) to the statement 'The program has helped enhance the quality of interaction between teaching and administrative staff'.

THIRD-PARTY IMPACT SURVEYS

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) and the Short Measure of Workplace Social Capital Survey (SMWSCS) are employed by NESLI to generate longitudinal data which serves a number of purposes, including to:

- establish individual school measures of staff wellbeing and social capital
- establish overall, system, diocesan (and other sub-group) data for benchmarking purposes
- track changes in individual school scores, over time, to assess change occurring alongside the Wellbeing Toolkit and other targeted interventions,
- inform policy and decision on all levels, from schools through to systems.

Over the coming months, as post-program surveys are generated, NESLI will publish emerging trends across these schools. For now, the following commentary provides a snapshot of survey data generated at schools prior to the implementation of the Wellbeing Toolkit.

The average WEMWBS wellbeing score is 49, slightly higher than the average score for the Australian adult population, which is 47.8 (2011–2015). Tellingly, we found that 28 percent of schools' wellbeing scores are below the national mean for adult Australians. This lower quartile will be the subject of deeper analysis in future reports.

The average social capital score is 29.4. Scores are widely distributed from 22.5 (lowest) to 35 (highest) highlighting the wide discrepancy between schools, and the need for targeted solutions.

Again, over the coming months we will gather considerable post-program data. We expect to report on emerging longitudinal trends in the next impact report in early-2018.



WELLBEING WHEEL

WEMWBS Score:
49.0 /70
* 1.2



SOCIAL CAPITAL WHEEL

Social Capital Score:
29.4 /40

All of the time / Strongly Agree Often / Agree Sometimes / Undecided Rarely / Disagree Never / Strongly Disagree

* Difference (positive/negative) compared to mean WEMWBS score (47.8) of adult Australians across 2011–2015 Australian Psychological Society Stress and Wellbeing in Australia Survey 2015

CONCLUSION

In consideration of the critical importance of employee wellbeing across our schools, NESLI has committed \$750,000 over three years to ensure that the Wellbeing Toolkit is fully resourced and able to be sustained for the benefit of Australian schools well into the future. This commitment includes a focus on careful efficacy and impact reviews of the program to ensure optimal results.

In effect, 2017 has been the 'pilot year' for the Wellbeing Toolkit. As such, we are delighted at the way the program has been embraced by all school sectors. Moreover, we are pleased that the Wellbeing Toolkit is achieving positive feedback from participating schools. As the report articulates, we are seeing positive 'lead indicator' scores across many dimensions which relate to employee wellbeing, including:

- employee sense of social capital
- personal insights around managing one's own wellbeing
- personal insights around contributing to team wellbeing
- commitment, at the school level, to further proactive measures to support employee wellbeing
- improved collaboration across teams,
- improved relations between teaching and non-teaching employees.

In addition, NESLI is developing a significant national and international database of school-level scores across wellbeing and social capital. This data already enables schools to assess how they are placed in relation to their peers, and we hope it will, over time, provide valuable data to inform-system level policy and decision-making.

Whilst we are conscious of the need to continue to evaluate the Wellbeing Toolkit over an extended period, results to date are positive and should give confidence to Australian schools that the Wellbeing Toolkit is a cost-effective and impactful program.

APPENDIX 1 – SAMPLE WELLBEING AND SOCIAL CAPITAL REPORT FOR A TOOLKIT SCHOOL

This page is an example of a simple Wellbeing and Social Capital Report provided to a participating school. The data offers schools unique and powerful data to inform how effectively it is functioning over a number of important dimensions.



Deeper commitment to staff wellbeing

Generally speaking, the surveyed staff have an above-average level sense of general wellbeing, and there is good correlation to the general score for social capital. However, a closer look at the sub-dimensions for social capital shows something of an over-reliance on vertical/linking social capital (trust through the management hierarchy) at the expense of bonding/horizontal and, to some degree, cognitive social capital. The close to 25 percent somewhat negative response for bonding and cognitive social capital represent areas for attention, leveraging the already good rating for vertical/linking for more leadership around shared values, beliefs and norms, more teamwork and more collaboration and support, in particular, at department or smaller team level. Once this has some momentum, more collaboration and relationship-building across departments is recommended to build the bridging and structural social capital dimensions. With the already healthy levels of wellbeing reported here, there are significant opportunities to improve social capital for an even stronger sense of overall wellbeing across the group.



ENQUIRIES

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