

Education Victoria

Victorian students' wellbeing takes grim dive

Feelings of positivity among Victorian students have plunged in recent months, but there is a way to help kids before the year is out.

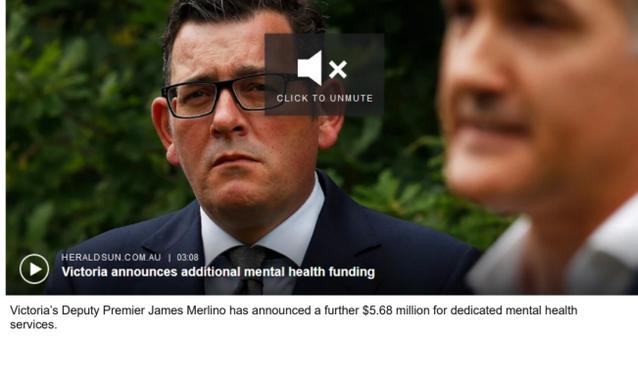
Claire Heaney Education reporter

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Education

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Victoria's Deputy Premier James Merlino has announced a further \$5.68 million for dedicated mental health services.

Feelings of positivity among Victorian students have been an average 18 per cent lower than Queensland where students were the happiest in Australia.

Only New South Wales came close to Victoria when that state was plunged into remote learning in July and August. Levels of positivity among NSW students dropped by 15 per cent as they went into lockdown.

Students in Western Australia, which continued face-to-face schooling while having strict border rules, were a close second in positivity to Queensland.

The data was collected by Skodel school wellbeing platform in which up to 30,000 students checked in at least once. There were 200,000 interactions in 150 schools.

The Skodel platform asked students how they were feeling and they responded to emojis as to whether they were happy, motivated, angry, negative, worried or sad,

Clinical psychologist Andrew Fuller said schools should use the final few weeks to claw back some wellbeing benefits.



Many young people are still on edge. Picture: istock

He suggested axing or playing down formal assessments to take the stress away.

"Kids need to fall in love with learning again as motivation levels are at an all time low and formal assessments are not the way to do this."

He urged parents to go easy on tired teachers, lowering their expectations on reporting duties and academic outcomes this year.

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He said group activities and school rituals that drove connection were important.

St Margaret's Berwick Grammar principal Annette Rome said wellbeing was prioritised at the school, based on the belief that academic results flowed from students being happy and well.

"Now that students have returned on-site, we have emphasised activities that encourage relationship building such as camps and house activities," she said.

Ms Rome said while screen time gets bad publicity they were conscious of distinguishing between negative and positive use of screens.

"In truth, academic results do not appear to have been adversely affected on external measures such as NAPLAN (2021) and VCE results (2020), which have remained very strong," she said.

Skodel director Ian Fagan said the check ins were used to measure positivity.

"On the whole, the kids preferred face-to-face learning and this demonstrates the important role that students can play in supporting student wellbeing."

He said when students checked in they had access to supports.

He said they were seeing that people were still on edge and next year might see a re-energised community.

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