



Australian Council of State School Organisations Limited

SUBMISSION

TO THE

COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT

COVID-19 RESPONSE INQUIRY

Damien Ellwood
President
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The national voice for families, carers, and communities in government education

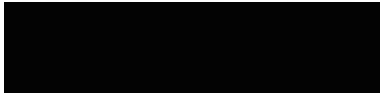


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Please indicate your name if an individual, or your organisation name if you are responding on behalf of an organisation.

Australian Council of State School Organisations



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The Australian Council of State School Organisations is a peak community organisation and

*The national voice for families, carers, and communities in government
education*

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Submission
to the
Commonwealth Government Covid-19 Response Inquiry

Executive Summary

The Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) submission to the Commonwealth Government COVID-19 Response Inquiry focuses on the pandemic's educational impact. Advocating for over 2.6 million students, ACSSO emphasises an inclusive, equitable education system. Our submission, informed by surveys and discussions with families and principals, aims to shape future crisis preparedness.

Key proposals in the submission include a coordinated emergency management approach, with federal and state/territorial governments strengthening partnerships for unified planning and clear communication. ACSSO underscores the importance of family engagement, training for school communities, equitable resource access, and robust evaluation mechanisms. The goal is to build a resilient education system adaptable to various crises and informed by international best practices.

ACSSO advocates for bridging the digital divide, suggesting laptops and internet access for all students, along with comprehensive digital literacy programs. We emphasise the need for mental health support, curriculum adjustments for flexible and relevant education, and robust family engagement strategies.

The submission highlights the importance of inclusive education, especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and students with disabilities, advocating for tailored learning environments and accessibility. ACSSO proposes a national procurement system for safety materials to ensure a reliable supply during crises and stresses the value of collecting student feedback to inform educational strategies.

Addressing educational inequities, ACSSO calls for equitable policies and support across all school sectors, focusing on bridging the digital divide and ensuring fair access to resources. We emphasise the need for parental involvement in decision-making, particularly in home learning arrangements, advocating for effective communication and support strategies.

ACSSO's comprehensive approach aims to foster strong home-school relationships, build a resilient and inclusive education system, and ensure equitable access and support for all students in the face of future challenges.

Strategic Recommendations

1. Learning from Experience

- Strengthened partnership between Federal and State/Territory governments for unified crisis management in education.
- Comprehensive crisis response plans incorporating COVID-19 lessons.
- Clear and consistent communication between governments, educational bodies, and families.
- Investing in training and preparedness of school communities.

2. Technology Access for Students

- Provision of laptops and effective internet access for all government school students.



- Comprehensive digital literacy programs for students, teachers, and parents.
 - Special attention to students with disabilities and equitable access to digital resources.
3. Wellbeing and Mental Health Support
- Holistic wellbeing programs in schools.
 - Training for teachers in identifying and supporting mental health issues.
 - Inclusion of social-emotional learning in the curriculum.
4. Curriculum Adjustments
- Streamlining curriculum content and focusing on skill development.
 - Integrating digital literacy and social-emotional learning into the curriculum.
5. Family Engagement in Education
- Enhancing communication channels between schools and families.
 - Encouraging parental engagement and providing resources for at-home learning support.
6. Inclusive Education
- Tailored approaches for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, students with disabilities, and non-English speaking background students.
7. National Procurement for Safety Materials
- Leveraging Federal Government procurement power for bulk buying essential safety materials.
8. Student Feedback Collection
- Gathering direct feedback from students to inform educational strategies.
9. Addressing Educational Inequities
- Policies for equitable support across government and non-government schools.
 - Bridging the digital divide and ensuring all students have access to quality education.
10. Clarification and Consistency in Messaging
- Development of standardised communication protocols during emergencies.
11. Parental Involvement in Decision-Making
- Inclusive approaches in decision-making processes and providing resources for effective home learning.

ACSSO advocates for a comprehensive, equitable, and family-oriented approach to crisis management within education. The submission emphasises collaboration between Federal and State/Territory governments to address the highlighted issues effectively, ensuring preparedness for future challenges.

Introduction

On behalf of the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO), it is our privilege to contribute to the Commonwealth Government COVID-19 Response Inquiry. As a long-standing advocate for the families and communities of Australia's government school students, ACSSO has continuously championed the needs and rights of over 2.6 million students since its establishment in 1947.

Our organisation has a rich history of engaging with various state and territory parent organisations and families, creating a cohesive national voice on public education matters. ACSSO firmly believes in a government education system that is inclusive, equitable, and responsive to all students, regardless of their backgrounds or circumstances.



The primary focus of our submission revolves around the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the government education sector. We aim to show how the pandemic has affected students, families, and communities involved in government schools across Australia. Our insights are drawn from our extensive network and direct engagement with our diverse membership base.

However, we acknowledge our limitations in addressing all the terms of reference outlined in the Inquiry. While ACSSO is deeply committed to representing the interests of our constituents, our resources are finite, and our expertise in this response is primarily concentrated on the educational aspect to students, families, and their communities of the pandemic's impact. Therefore, our submission will focus on areas where our experience and knowledge are most pertinent, particularly in understanding and articulating the challenges faced by students and families in the government education sector during the pandemic.

We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this vital Inquiry and hope that our submission will provide valuable perspectives on the educational implications of the pandemic. ACSSO remains dedicated to ensuring that the voices of families and communities within the government school system are heard and considered in shaping Australia's preparedness for future challenges.

ACSSO made two submissions to the government that we believe highlight the issues and provided some crucial feedback:

- [ACSSO Submission to Review of the impact of COVID-19 on school students with disability.](#)
- [Response to Covid -19 June 2020](#)

Both these submissions were based on survey feedback (two nationwide surveys) and conversations with families and principals around the nation.

Learning from Experience

In times of crisis, it's essential to have a coordinated approach to managing emergencies. That's why ACSSO believes that a strengthened partnership between Federal and State/Territory governments promotes unified decision-making and strategic planning. By working together, we can tackle nationwide educational challenges more effectively.

The nation needs comprehensive crisis response plans to ensure preparedness for various types of emergencies. These plans should incorporate scenarios and strategies derived from the COVID-19 experience. Additionally, clear and consistent communication channels between governments, educational bodies, and families are crucial. Regular updates, easy-to-understand guidelines, and open feedback mechanisms ensure that parents and communities are well-informed and can adapt to changing situations.

Engaging parents and communities in developing and refining crisis response strategies is also vital. This inclusion ensures that strategies are grounded in families' real experiences and needs, leading to more practical solutions. Data and insights gathered from the pandemic experience can also inform future policies and actions. This approach we believe, ensures that decisions are evidence-based and tailored to address specific challenges identified during past crises. A time of crisis is NOT the time for schools to start a family engagement strategy – schools should have an integrated family engagement.



Investing in the training and preparedness of school communities to handle crisis situations is essential. This includes equipping them with the skills and tools needed for remote teaching, adapting curriculums to changing circumstances, and providing support for student wellbeing in times of crisis. Ensuring equitable access to resources, such as technology and internet connectivity, is also crucial. Future strategies should consider the diverse socio-economic backgrounds of students to ensure that all have equal opportunities to continue their education during crises.

Establishing robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of crisis response strategies is important. These mechanisms can help identify areas for improvement and make timely adjustments to strategies as situations evolve. The ultimate goal should be to build a resilient educational system capable of withstanding future crises. This involves long-term planning, including developing flexible learning models and infrastructure that can adapt to various emergency scenarios. Learning from both national and international best practices in crisis management within the educational sector can also offer valuable insights. Sharing experiences and strategies with other countries can help develop more robust and comprehensive approaches.

We know for a fact that many students did not engage in school at all during the lockdowns. *Learning from Experience* calls for a proactive, collaborative, and well-resourced approach to future crisis management in education. By integrating the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, Australian Federal and State/Territory governments can better prepare and support schools, teachers, students, and families in navigating and overcoming future challenges.

Technology Access for Students

Our research clearly shows that many students did not have access to online learning. Schools should be commended for using their already limited resources to support young people with internet connection; devices so they no longer needed to share or in areas where the internet was challenging, or students were unfamiliar with the workings of online.

ACSSO advocates for providing all government school students with laptops and effective internet access. This comprehensive and multifaceted approach addresses numerous crucial aspects of modern education.

In today's world, access to technology is crucial for students' success. It's imperative that every student in government schools has access to a laptop or a similar device to bridge the digital divide. This initiative goes beyond just providing hardware; it also ensures that these devices come with the necessary software and are tailored to meet the unique educational needs of each student. By providing access to technology, we enable students to learn, explore, and grow in ways that were previously impossible, ultimately setting them up for success in today's digital age.

Ensuring high-speed and dependable internet access for all students, regardless of location, is paramount. ACSSO suggests an all-encompassing digital literacy program that caters to students, teachers, and parents. This program should offer training in using digital tools, understanding digital safety, and promoting responsible online behaviour.

Students with disabilities require special attention to ensure that they have access to technology that caters to their individualised learning needs, including adaptive hardware and software. The provision of technology must also come with a robust support system, including maintenance and technical support, to ensure the smooth functioning of these tools.



In addition to laptops and internet access, equitable access to digital educational resources such as online textbooks, educational software, and subscription-based educational platforms is crucial. Strategic partnerships with technology companies can provide cost-effective solutions, including discounted devices, free software licenses for educational tools, and high-speed internet services.

Upgrading the digital infrastructure in schools is essential to support technology usage, including high-speed internet, digital whiteboards, and other interactive learning tools. This ensures seamless learning and prepares education systems for sudden shifts to remote learning, as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The effectiveness of technology usage in education should be monitored and evaluated through an assessment system. This system would evaluate students' adaptation to digital learning and identify areas that require additional support.

Parental involvement and support are vital in their children's digital learning. It is crucial to provide resources and training to assist parents in supporting their children's use of technology for educational purposes.

With the increased use of digital technology, securing students' devices and networks is crucial. Educating students about online safety is also essential.

Our recommendation for technology access for students goes beyond hardware provision. It adopts a holistic approach to digital education, aiming to ensure that all students, irrespective of their background or location, can equally participate in and benefit from the digital revolution in education.

Wellbeing and Mental Health Support

Prioritising student wellbeing and mental health is a critical component of a comprehensive response plan as students transition back to full-time school attendance. Various dimensions of student wellbeing and mental health support should be addressed to ensure a more detailed and comprehensive strategy.

Schools can implement holistic wellbeing programs that cater to students' physical, emotional, social, and mental health. These programs should include activities and resources that promote mindfulness, stress management, healthy lifestyle habits, and social skills development. Additionally, access to counselling and psychological services within schools should be enhanced by employing trained mental health professionals such as school psychologists, counsellors, and social workers. This will provide individual and group support to students who need it the most.

Teachers and school staff should receive training to identify signs of students' mental health issues and provide initial support and guidance. This training should include strategies to create a supportive classroom environment that is sensitive to students' mental health needs. Peer support programs can also be established where older students are trained to offer guidance and support to their younger peers, fostering a sense of community and belonging, which is vital for mental well-being.

Engaging parents in the mental health and well-being conversation is essential. Workshops and resources can be provided for parents to understand mental health issues, recognise signs in their children, and learn how to provide support at home. Integrating resilience-building activities into the



curriculum can also help students develop coping skills to manage stress and bounce back from challenges.

Creating a safe and inclusive school environment, where diversity is celebrated, and bullying is actively addressed, is important for student wellbeing. Implementing regular mental health assessments can help identify students who may be struggling early, allowing for timely intervention. Schools should also collaborate with external mental health organisations and experts to access additional resources and expertise.

Tailored support for students who may be more vulnerable to mental health issues, such as those with prior mental health conditions, learning disabilities, or those experiencing socio-economic hardships, should be provided. Offering flexible learning options for students who might find the transition back to full-time attendance challenging, such as phased transitions, blended learning models, or adjusted schedules, can also help.

Recognising that the aftermath of a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic can have long-term effects, schools should prepare to provide ongoing mental health support to address issues such as anxiety, grief, and trauma. Ongoing professional development opportunities in the field of student mental health and wellbeing for educators and school mental health professionals are also essential. Finally, forming partnerships with local community groups and healthcare providers can enhance the support network available to students and their families.

A focus on wellbeing and mental health support calls for a multi-dimensional approach that encompasses a range of strategies, from direct mental health services to creating supportive and inclusive school environments. This approach aims to ensure that all students receive the support they need to transition back to full-time school attendance successfully and to thrive in their educational journey.

Curriculum Adjustments

We recommend curriculum adjustments, focusing on reviewing curriculum requirements to emphasise key elements essential for student engagement and learning continuity, which is a vital strategy in the evolving education landscape.

Streamlining curriculum content is a crucial step. This involves eliminating redundancy and condensing topics to create a more cohesive and engaging learning experience.

A flexible curriculum design is essential to meet the various learning needs of students, whether in the classroom, online, or in a hybrid setting. Given the increasing role of technology in education, integrating digital literacy skills into the curriculum is a must. This includes teaching students how to use technology for learning and communication effectively and responsibly.

Focusing on skill development, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, and collaboration, empowers students to navigate the challenges of the 21st century. Personalised learning paths that cater to the diverse learning styles and paces of students are also essential.

Incorporating social-emotional learning (SEL) into the curriculum supports students' emotional wellbeing and helps them develop interpersonal skills, empathy, and emotional intelligence. Encouraging the application of knowledge through project-based learning and real-world problem-



solving activities helps students see the relevance of their education and apply their learning in practical contexts.

Regular curriculum reviews and updates are necessary to ensure that educational content remains current, relevant, and aligned with the latest educational research and societal needs. Stakeholder involvement in curriculum development and review processes, including educators, students, parents, and industry experts, ensures that multiple perspectives are considered, and the curriculum is responsive to the needs of the community.

Providing ongoing professional development for educators supports them in adapting to curriculum changes and employing effective teaching strategies that align with the revised curriculum. Aligning assessments with the adjusted curriculum is essential to accurately measure student understanding and progress in the key areas of focus.

This recommendation for curriculum adjustments is about creating a dynamic, relevant, and student-centred curriculum that not only focuses on essential academic competencies but also prepares students for the challenges and opportunities of the future. This approach requires collaboration, innovation, and a commitment to continuous improvement in educational practices.

Family Engagement in Education

ACSSO strongly believes in prioritising family engagement as a fundamental aspect of its mission. To establish a robust and meaningful home-school relationship, adopting an all-encompassing and seamless approach is essential. The school must maintain regular and open channels of communication with families. This can be achieved through various means such as disseminating newsletters and emails, organising parent-teacher meetings, and providing digital platforms for parents to monitor their child's progress and school activities.

Encouraging parental involvement in school events is another effective approach to building a stronger connection between families and the school. Organising educational workshops for parents is critical to support their children's learning at home. These workshops can cover topics such as understanding the curriculum, strategies for homework assistance, and guidance on managing digital learning platforms.

Creating opportunities for feedback and collaboration is another critical aspect of family engagement. Parents can offer feedback and collaborate with teachers and school administrators through surveys, focus groups, or parent advisory councils, ensuring that parental perspectives are considered in school decision-making.

Fostering strong parent-teacher partnerships is also essential. Encouraging regular and meaningful communication about students' progress, challenges, and achievements can be achieved through parent-teacher conferences, personalised progress reports, and collaborative goal setting for students.

Hosting family-centred school events can help families feel more connected to the school community. These events may include family learning nights, cultural festivals, and parent-child workshops.



Recognising and supporting the diversity of family structures and backgrounds is critical. This includes providing multilingual communication for non-English speaking families and understanding the unique needs of families from various cultural, socio-economic, and educational backgrounds.

Integrating family perspectives and experiences into the curriculum where possible is also highly beneficial. Projects that include family histories or cultural practices can help bridge the gap between home and school.

Leveraging technology to enhance family engagement is another effective approach. Online platforms for tracking student progress, virtual parent-teacher meetings, and online resources that families can use to support learning at home can all be helpful.

Developing early involvement and orientation programs for families, especially those transitioning into the school system for the first time, can help establish a foundation for strong relationships from the beginning.

Having specific communication plans in place for crises is also essential. This will ensure that families are kept informed and supported during challenging times, with clear, empathetic, and frequent communication.

Finally, it is very important to empower parents to be active partners in their child's education by providing them with the necessary resources and support. This can include guidance on creating conducive learning environments at home and motivating and engaging their children in learning activities.

In summary, ACSSO's focus on family engagement in education involves a comprehensive approach that fosters strong and proactive home-school relationships. By establishing these connections early and maintaining them through various strategies, schools can create a supportive and collaborative educational environment that benefits students, families, and educators alike.

Inclusive Education

ACSSO believes that the COVID-19 pandemic has created new challenges and opportunities for Inclusive Education. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, the pandemic has highlighted the importance of flexible and accessible educational resources. This means providing culturally appropriate digital learning tools and resources that can be accessed from remote areas. Community engagement and support have also become more important than ever, ensuring that families are involved in the educational process and have the necessary resources to support their children's learning from home.

Students with disabilities have faced unique challenges during the pandemic, emphasizing the need for adaptable and personalized learning environments. Innovative approaches, such as enhancing online learning platforms with accessibility features, providing specialized support and resources for at-home learning, and maintaining regular communication between teachers, students, and caregivers are necessary to ensure the continuity of education for these students.

Non-English speaking background students have also faced distinct challenges during the pandemic, including language barriers to accessing online education and a lack of in-person support. ACSSO advocates for multilingual support in digital learning platforms, such as translation services and bilingual educators. Additionally, cultural elements should be included in online curricula and virtual



peer support networks should be fostered to maintain a sense of community and cultural connection during periods of remote learning.

The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced the need for an inclusive education system that is adaptable, resilient, and responsive to the diverse needs of all students. By integrating these pandemic-era insights, we can build a more inclusive educational landscape that can withstand future challenges and provide equitable opportunities for all learners.

National Procurement for Safety Materials

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the critical importance of having a robust and responsive national procurement system for safety materials. The Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) puts forward a suggestion that the Federal Government leverage its procurement power to bulk buy safety materials for national use, especially in preparation for future crises. This approach, informed by the challenges faced during the pandemic, would aim to ensure a steady and reliable supply of essential safety items such as personal protective equipment (PPE), sanitisers, and medical supplies. By centralising the procurement process, the government can negotiate better prices, maintain higher standards of quality, and ensure equitable distribution across all states and territories, including remote and underserved areas.

Furthermore, the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for a strategic stockpile of safety materials, which can be rapidly deployed in response to any public health emergency. ACSSO's proposal includes the establishment of a national reserve of critical safety supplies, managed and monitored by the Federal Government. This reserve would act as a buffer against supply chain disruptions, ensuring that schools, hospitals, and other essential services have immediate access to necessary safety materials during a crisis. The stockpile would need to be regularly reviewed and replenished, considering the shelf life of different items and the evolving nature of potential threats, thus maintaining its relevance and effectiveness over time.

Lastly, ACSSO emphasises the importance of a coordinated approach to distributing and utilising these safety materials. The lessons from the pandemic have shown that clear communication and collaboration between federal, state/territory, and local entities are paramount in managing a crisis efficiently. The proposed national procurement strategy must be accompanied by a framework outlining how resources are allocated and distributed in various scenarios, ensuring transparency and fairness in the process. This would also involve training and guidelines for institutions and communities on properly using and managing the safety materials, thereby maximising their effectiveness in safeguarding public health. Overall, ACSSO's recommendation for a government-led national procurement of safety materials we believe is a forward-thinking approach, aiming to build a more resilient and prepared nation in the face of future emergencies.

Student Feedback Collection

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed unprecedented challenges to the education sector, significantly affecting students' learning experiences. In response, there is a growing recognition of the importance of directly gathering feedback from students with diverse backgrounds to gain insights into their educational experiences during this period. This feedback is critical for understanding the varying impacts of remote learning, school closures, and other pandemic-related educational disruptions on different student groups. By engaging students in a dialogue, policymakers can uncover various demographics' specific challenges and needs, including those from marginalised or



disadvantaged communities. This ensures that their voices are directly heard and addressed in future educational strategies.

Collecting student feedback also provides an opportunity to understand the effectiveness of the various pedagogical approaches adopted during the pandemic. Students' perspectives can offer valuable insights into what worked and what didn't in terms of online learning, hybrid models, and other instructional adaptations made during school closures. This feedback is particularly crucial for tailoring educational practices to better suit the needs of students with disabilities, those facing digital divide issues, and non-native English speakers. By analysing students' experiences and suggestions, schools can refine their teaching methodologies, resource allocation, and support services to enhance all students' learning experiences and academic outcomes.

Involving students in feedback empowers them and fosters a sense of ownership in their educational journey. It's important to create multiple and accessible channels for students to express their views, such as surveys, focus groups, and digital platforms, to ensure inclusivity and ease of participation. This inclusive approach not only helps in gathering comprehensive feedback but also in building a more resilient and responsive education system. By understanding and addressing the unique challenges faced by students during the COVID-19 pandemic, educators can develop more effective and equitable educational strategies, paving the way for a more adaptive and inclusive education system in the post-pandemic world.

Addressing Educational Inequities

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted significant educational inequities, particularly in the treatment disparities between government and non-government educational sectors. ACSSO notes that students from the two sectors often received different levels of support and resources during the crisis, leading to a widening gap in educational quality and access. Government schools, especially in underprivileged areas, faced severe challenges regarding resources and support, whereas non-government schools often had better access to digital learning tools and infrastructure. This disparity not only affected the immediate learning experiences of students during the pandemic but also had long-term implications for educational equity and social mobility.

To address these inequities, ACSSO advocates for more equitable policies that ensure all schools receive adequate support regardless of their government or non-government status. This includes equitable funding, access to quality teaching resources, and robust infrastructural support to handle crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. Ensuring that all students, irrespective of their socio-economic background, have access to high-quality education is crucial. The pandemic has highlighted the need for a resilient education system that can adapt to unforeseen challenges while maintaining a focus on equity and inclusivity.

Additionally, ACSSO emphasises the importance of bridging the digital divide that became glaringly apparent during the pandemic. Many students in government schools lacked access to reliable internet and digital devices, hindering their ability to participate in online learning. Addressing this digital divide is essential for creating a level playing field where all students have the opportunity to engage with digital learning platforms and resources. Policies aimed at providing digital devices, improving internet connectivity, and training teachers and students in digital literacy are vital steps towards mitigating this divide.



Finally, ACSSO calls for a long-term strategy that includes monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure that policies addressing educational inequities are effectively implemented and make a real difference in students' lives. This includes gathering data on student performance, access to educational resources, and overall well-being to assess the impact of these policies. By continuously evaluating the effectiveness of educational strategies and making necessary adjustments, ACSSO believes it is possible to build an education system that is not only resilient in the face of crises like the COVID-19 pandemic but also fundamentally fair and inclusive, offering every student the chance to succeed.

Clarification and Consistency in Messaging

During the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the key issues identified in our surveys was the lack of clarity and consistency in messaging from various authorities. Public health information, safety protocols, and guidelines were often communicated in ways that led to confusion among the public, including families and students. This ambiguity was particularly problematic in the context of education, where students, parents, and educators struggled to adapt to rapidly changing situations. ACSSO advocates for clearer and more consistent communication strategies. There is a need for straightforward, easily understandable messaging to effectively guide the public during such crises.

ACSSO's advocacy is grounded in the understanding that clear communication is essential for effective crisis management, especially in the educational sector. We suggest the development of standardised communication protocols to be used during emergencies, ensuring that all stakeholders receive accurate and timely information. This involves coordinating with health authorities, government agencies, and educational institutions to streamline the flow of information. Such coordination would prevent the dissemination of conflicting messages and ensure that the community receives unified guidance on important matters such as school closures, online learning protocols, and health and safety measures in educational settings.

Moreover, there is a need for tailored communication strategies to address the diverse needs of different communities. During the pandemic, it became evident that one-size-fits-all messaging was ineffective for everyone. Different regions, cultural groups, and socio-economic sectors have varying needs and challenges, which must be considered when disseminating information. For instance, communities with limited access to digital technology require different communication methods than those in urban settings. Similarly, non-English speaking communities need information in their native languages to ensure proper understanding and compliance with guidelines.

Finally, ACSSO advocates for the involvement of educational stakeholders in developing these communication strategies. Parents/Carers, teachers, school administrators, and even students can provide valuable insights into what works best in the context of educational settings. Their involvement would ensure that the strategies are practical and relevant and help build trust within the educational community. By fostering a collaborative approach to communication, the aim would be to establish a more effective and responsive framework for managing future crises, ensuring that all educational community members are well-informed and prepared to navigate challenges effectively.

Parental Involvement in Decision-Making

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the critical role of parental involvement in the educational decision-making process, particularly regarding "learning at home" arrangements. ACSSO has



previously highlighted the significant gap that existed in many areas where parents were not adequately involved in decisions impacting their children's education during the shift to remote learning. This lack of involvement often led to challenges in implementing home learning strategies effectively, as many parents felt unprepared and uninformed about how to best support their children's education under these new and rapidly changing circumstances.

Recognising this, ACSSO suggests that daily updates and more effective communication strategies between schools and families are necessary. We advocate for a more inclusive approach where parents are not just recipients of information but active participants in decision-making. This could involve regular virtual meetings, detailed newsletters, and accessible platforms for feedback where parents can voice their concerns and suggestions. Such an approach ensures that parents are kept in the loop about their children's learning progress, changes in educational policies, and the rationale behind decisions made by educational authorities. By fostering this level of transparency and collaboration, schools can create a more supportive and responsive educational environment that considers the realities of home learning.

Moreover, our recommendations extend to providing parents with the resources and guidance they need to effectively facilitate their children's learning. This includes offering workshops or online resources on how to support children's learning at home, understanding digital platforms used for remote learning, and strategies to manage the emotional and psychological well-being of both parents and children during such disruptive times. Ensuring that parents are equipped with the knowledge and tools they need enhances the effectiveness of home learning and alleviates some of the stress and uncertainty associated with it. In essence, ACSSO's focus on strengthening parental involvement in decision-making and providing adequate support mirrors a broader shift towards recognising the integral role of families in the educational ecosystem, especially highlighted during the challenges posed by the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

Our response in this submission we believe highlights the importance of adopting a comprehensive, fair, and family-oriented crisis management strategy in education. Our recommendations are based on a thorough understanding of the diverse needs of students and families throughout Australia, and we urge Federal and State/Territory governments to work together in a collaborative and well-resourced manner to address these issues effectively.