



PESA

Positive Education Schools Association

Community of Practice

Are you a member of your state or territory's discussion group yet? Each week we will post a 'conversation starter' question to encourage the sharing of ideas and strategies.



In June, our five topics were:

- Staff wellbeing
- Student wellbeing
- Resilience
- Gratitude
- Empathy

Below is a collation of responses from our discussion groups across Australia.

Congratulations to Lynda Humphries (NSW) and Mel Smith (ACT) for leading the way with a number of fantastic contributions on multiple topics! Special acknowledgement also to the QLD State Chapter for the most number of posts as a collective this month!

Week 1 - What is one key strategy you've employed to support staff wellbeing during the pandemic?

- At the start and end of term we have a Travel Day for boarders and staff have PD as well as either Parent Teacher Interviews or planning time, depending on the term. We hold Whole Staff (not just teaching staff) morning teas at this time and alternate venues between the six boarding houses to enable all staff to visit boarding facilities and see where our students live. The staff all belong to one of the six Houses at the school and take it in turns to supply morning tea - often with plenty of home-baked goodies. This year, at the end of Term 1, the staff were also treated to a live music performance from our in-house music staff band (Wendy Fleming – QLD)
- On the first Monday with students back full time, the deputies came around with lolly bags and party hats for all staff. Over Teams, we had a remote party to celebrate doing a great job with online learning (Lynda Humphries – NSW)



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Week 1 – What is one key strategy you've employed to support staff wellbeing during the pandemic?

- Our biggest focus has been about maintaining connection with each other in a social way given despite being back at work our staff offices, staff rooms and shared spaces are not being used. We have established days of the week challenges (Monday memories, Tuesday tongue twisters, Wednesday workouts, Thursday tunes and Friday faith formation) which staff can elect to engage in. Smaller groups have virtual lunch and Friday night drinks via Zoom/Microsoft teams (Deirdre Marie – SA)
- We started a 'Gratitude' WhatsApp group and people are posting small moments of joy and thankfulness. Even if you don't post, you still get to share in other small moments that have made a difference to colleagues and it has created a lovely connection and conversation starter when we are all under stress. Someone else's sunrise can brighten many other people's moment, and others are thanking colleagues for small things that make a difference. Bright spots to share with minimal effort and surprising impact (Judy Hilton – SA)
- Staff Recognition Awards: our staff, both teaching and non-teaching are recognized for their contribution to our school values. At any time our staff can anonymously nominate another staff member for their contribution to one of our four values. All nominees are acknowledged at whole school staff meetings each term (Matt Smith – QLD)
- Coffee! Early in the term when we had less students (and more time) I invited a different staff member to join me for coffee each time I visited our local cafe (takeaway of course). The walk was good for our physical wellbeing, the social connection (1.5m physically distanced) was great for our social/emotional wellbeing and it felt satisfying to be kind by shouting a colleague a coffee! I call it a win-win scenario for staff wellbeing! (Matt Smith – QLD)



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Week 2 – Can you share one strategy your school has employed to support student wellbeing during distance learning or the return to school?

- We have just commenced a student pulse check to try and track aspects of wellbeing and self-regulation (Carolyn Speers– QLD)
- Not the school I work in but my own child's school did some great things. They had a weekly family movie nights and encouraged families to watch the chosen movie at a certain time and send in photos of themselves participating. Such an easy, fun thing to do for junior school students. My daughter is in Year 12 and the executive staff also rang the parents of every Year 12 student to check how they were going in lockdown. So impressed with the level of wellbeing that has been provided by Ravenswood through this time! (Lynda Humphries – NSW)
- We are a smaller school but when the bulk of our students were remote learning (a mix of online zoom classes and home learning packets depending on internet and device access) we instituted learning coaches. Each teacher was responsible for touching base with their students each week by phone, text, messenger etc and using a coaching approach to see how they were going with school work. We also had youth worker online sessions every day where students could join in and hang out just to say hey and participate in some resilience building activities (Mel Smith – ACT)
- At break times, our senior students under the guidance of the School Chaplain play song requests through their impressive sound system. The music creates a nice ambience in the school yard and any student (or staff member) can nominate for their favourite song to be played (Matt Smith – QLD)



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Week 3 – Being resilient is the ability to not only ‘bounce back’, but ‘bounce forward’. How have you – or how has your school – ‘bounced forward’ since COVID-19?

- I’ve tried to bounce forward by looking at the positives in this, particularly in how it will shape our options around online delivery in the future as previously we did not have a model that supported that. It’s also been a great upskilling for all staff in ICT! (Mel Smith – ACT)
- I have tried to ‘bounce forward’ by playing to my top strength of ‘Curiosity’. Every time I leave my office, there is always something new to see or someone different to talk with - I just need to be curious enough to recognize these opportunities! This in turn helps me to be more mindful and experience more gratitude (Matt Smith – QLD)

Week 4 – Showing gratitude boosts wellbeing and strengthens relationships. How have you encouraged your students or peers to develop a ‘habit of gratitude’?

- During a Connect (Student Wellbeing) lesson, our students participated in a ‘mindful walking’ exercise around the school grounds. Their purpose was to notice things about the school that had never seen before and collect a ‘token’ from nature and bring it back to class. Students learned to show gratitude for the little things at school that often go unnoticed. We will continue to re-visit this activity to slowly help students to develop a ‘habit of gratitude’ (Matt Smith – QLD)



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Week 5 – Chris Peterson once said ‘other people matter’. Showing empathy for others is one way of telling them that they matter. What strategies can you suggest for encouraging your students to show empathy?

- I find that explicitly teaching students about empathy and role playing scenarios helps. It's a really tricky concept, especially for younger students (Lynda Humphries – NSW)
- I work with students who are disengaged from mainstream school and many have experienced childhood trauma. So empathy is a huge thing for us to teach but sometimes our students are just in survival mode and it's the last thing on their mind. In my teaching I try to support exposure to other people's circumstances, engaging in community work or charity work where possible (although this needs to be done appropriately when working with already disadvantaged students), examining personal biases and challenging them and modelling this to students while doing it with them, encouraging curiosity towards others and towards our own thoughts and responses. The list goes on! Modelling is a huge focus with our particular cohort so we model a lot how to value feelings and how to connect with others in different ways. We also model a lot of forgiveness between staff, between staff and students and help students to demonstrate forgiveness towards each other (Mel Smith – ACT)
- At Peer Power we are training ourselves to listen to the emotion behind the answers students give. Then in response, often asking for clarity from the student if “X?” Is the emotion they are expressing or not. We've noticed an increase in how much students respond appreciatively to the empathy being activated towards them (Michael Knight – QLD)



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- When our school acknowledged National Sorry Day and Reconciliation Week, we frontloaded lessons and activities by teaching the concept of 'compassionate empathy'. This enabled our students to better understand and appreciate indigenous perspectives. Teaching empathy to adolescents is difficult so the strategy of linking empathy to a 'real' issue or event can make it more tangible and meaningful (Matt Smith – QLD).
- We have spent time planting gardens and teaching students around how if a plant isn't flourishing it's our responsibility to get it more sun, more water, more nutrients. Just like with people we need to care (Deirdre Marie – SA)

Join the conversation!

To connect with your state or territory discussion group, please go to
www.pesa.edu.au/dashboard/discussion-groups/

For more resources on each of these topics, please visit the
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