

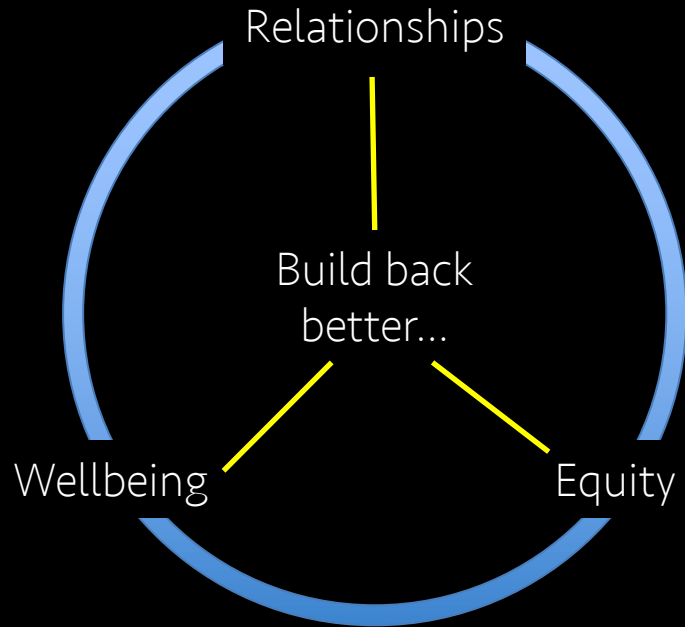
# Australian Schools in International Light: Lessons for Teachers and Parents

Positive Schools Mental Health & Wellbeing Conference  
3<sup>rd</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> November 2021



1. Post-pandemic trends
2. Digital wellness for all
3. Lessons for teachers and parents

# 1. Post-pandemic trends



## Other issues to worry less about...

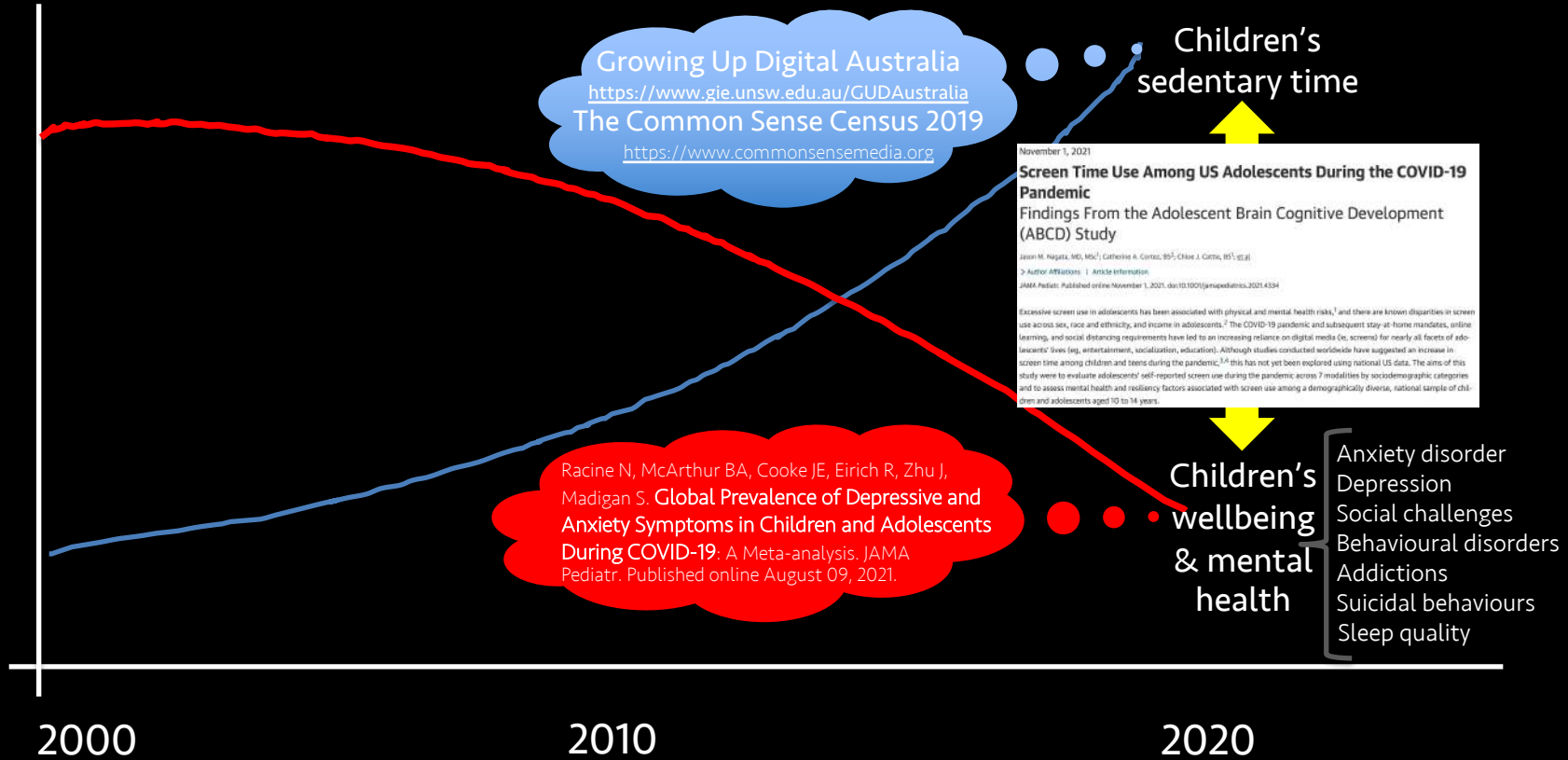
Homework: Little value, often linked to increased anxiety

'Learning loss': Little evidence of long-term harm

Test scores: Poor predictor of future success in life

## 2. Digital wellness for all

# Changing children, changing times



# Kids are not alright

Australian teachers say:

**Australian classrooms are becoming more complex places to teach and learn.**

In the last 3-5 years, students with:



**Emotional challenges**  
have increased  
**94%**



**Social challenges**  
have increased  
**93%**



**Behaviour problems**  
have increased  
**93%**

**Cognitive challenges**  
have increased  
**84%**

Australian parents say:

**Parenting is harder than it used to be.**



**3 of 4 parents**

think it is harder to control their child's digital habits since they have got their own screen-based device.

# Workout for better digital wellness

1. Understand the benefits and risks of our digital lifestyles.
2. Learn how to self-regulate your digital behaviour.
3. Role-model safe, healthy and responsible digital habits!



### 3. Lessons for teachers and parents

# How do we compare with the Nordics?

Nordic countries



Australia



# How do we compare with the Nordics?

## Nordic countries

*Short schooldays that include 20% unstructured time for all students*

*Low-stakes assessments and very little homework pressure*

*Close collaboration between schools and youth organisations for the benefit of all students*

*Holistic and coherent public policies that link health and social policy sectors to education*

*Students are trusted to have agency and active role in education policy and school life*

## Australia

*Long schooldays with little unstructured time for students*

*High-stakes assessments and strong focus on homework and after-school tuition*

*Schools operate separately from youth and leisure organisations that are often privately funded*

*Education and health are provided separately in different locations*

*Students have a limited role in education policy and only a weak influence in their life at school*

# How do we compare with the Nordics?

## Nordic countries

**Flexibility through local governance**

**Trust-based responsibility**

**Creativity and responsiveness**

**Equity as a driver**

## Australia

**Bureaucracy through central governance**

**Test-based accountability**

**Standardisation and compliance**

**Excellence as a driver**

Three steps

## Step 1: Remove the barriers

Reduce or remove policies and practices that are harmful to children and their wellbeing:

- Unhealthy competition in school
- Pressure to conform and perform
- Inequalities in school and community

## Step 2: Seize the opportunity

Strengthen whole-child approach by focusing on equity, healthy relationships, and play as post-pandemic priorities:

- Balanced focus on excellence and equity in education
- Rebuild positive relationships within school and with community
- Bring play back to school as a student-led activity

## Step 3: Link health and education closer together

Rethink wellbeing and health by bringing them closer to learning and teaching in school:

- Provide all students with healthy lunch at school
- Include digital wellness as a goal in every school
- Elevate health as an essential 21<sup>st</sup> century skill



# A DARK SIDE OF HAPPINESS?

**Happiness can make us slower:** When a person is confronted with serious threat that requires fast responses, a delayed detection can be catastrophic.

**Happiness can make us more gullible:** Those who believe everything they hear can be in danger when in a hostile environment.

**Without sense of fear or anger we may be in trouble:** When facing a threat our bodies are better prepared for external challenges and resistance.

Source: Gruber, J., Mauss, I., & Tamir, M. (2011). A dark side to happiness? How, when, and why happiness is not always good. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 6(3), 222–233.

See also: Hargreaves, A. & Shirley, D. (2022). *Wellbeing in Schools*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

THANK YOU!



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