Parliamentary inquiry into the potential for developing opportunities for schools to become a focus for promoting healthy community living

Submission – Principals Australia – MindMatters

On the potential for developing opportunities for schools to become a focus for promoting healthy community living, in particular:

a) Existing activities carried out by schools to promote holistic healthy living within their school communities involving healthy eating, active lifestyles, sun smart awareness, and appreciation of the effects of harmful substances.

MindMatters is a mental health promotion program funded by the Federal Department of Health and Aging since 2000 and administered and managed by Principals Australia. In 2000 all schools with secondary enrollments across Australia were sent a copy of the MindMatters Kit which contains information for teachers on: a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing, community matters, curriculum books on bullying and harassment, grief and loss, resilience and understanding mental illness.

Since 2000 MindMatters has provided free professional development for over 120,000 teachers in mental health promotion across Australia. We have also been invited overseas to discuss the MindMatters initiative as it is seen as one of the most effective mental health promotion programs worldwide.

MindMatters has recently rewritten and developed new teacher professional development including a one day PD on “Communities do Matter” to encourage schools to take a
greater interest and to be a part of their community. Our resource book Community Matters has been available since 2001 and is currently being rewritten.

Much of the work already undertaken in Communities do Matter has taken place with indigenous communities across Australia. In addition to the Communities Do Matter workshop, MindMatters also works with and promotes community development by providing: leaders seminars, community yarning, MindMatters Family, Parent and Caregivers seminars, community agency PD, Indigenous education workers PD and a specific program for indigenous young people called “Feeling Deadly not Shame”

Link to information on the Communities do Matter professional development for teachers

Link to the Community Matters book

Description of the Communities do Matter module

Culture, community identity and family contribute to the development of personal identity, mental health and wellbeing, self worth and social connectedness. This module explores both the diversity of communities, and diversity within, and examines how schools can work in respectful partnerships to support positive community mental health and wellbeing. This workshop is the introduction to a series of seminars and workshops for community leaders, health agencies, Indigenous Education workers, young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and other people interested in community development.

b) Successful programs which have been instituted in schools in other states or internationally

MindMatters has had significant success over the past 10 years.

Achievements

- Staff from 82% of all schools with secondary student enrolments in Australia have attended MindMatters professional development.
- Over 120,000 Australian and international participants have undertaken professional development.
71% of Australian secondary schools have used MindMatters.

52% of the Australian secondary schools surveyed continue to use MindMatters as a curriculum resource.

18% of Australian secondary schools use MindMatters as their key organiser for mental health promotion.

The Federal Department of Health and Aging has funded 5 evaluations. The information below is from our web site where more detailed information is available.

The evaluation of MindMatters was managed by the MindMatters Evaluation Committee 2001-2005. The diagram below shows the key components of the MindMatters evaluation. The evaluation summaries and reports are available on line. Please see link below


Evaluation reports

The reports are provided in two forms: a summary that was written by the MindMatters Evaluation Committee and the full report written by the researchers.


2. 'Professional Development Program and School-level Implementation.' Hunter Institute of Mental Health

3. 'An Investigation of the Implementation of a MindMatters Teaching Module in Secondary School Classrooms.' Flinders University

4. 'MindMatters Plus.' LaTrobe University

5. 'MindMatters Plus General Practice.' LaTrobe University
c) Identify whether it is appropriate for the state to encourage schools to extend health programs to be directed to the broader community and, if so, what the most effective and efficient approaches are?

The World Bank website argues that:

'Family, community and state involvement (in education) helps to increase the relevance and quality of education by improving ownership, building consensus, reaching remote and disadvantaged groups, mobilising additional resources and strengthening institutional capacity.'

The judgement about whether local school management meets this 'vision for the new millennium' rests in part with governments but also with the commitment of school leaders and others involved in local school management to such goals.”

From Associate Professor Pat Thompson: Presentation for Principals Australia conference on Neighborhood networking: Local School Management and Social Capital

Schools are not separate from their community they are a part of their community. Schools have a role to play in the health and wellbeing of the community. How this collaboration is modeled and achieved requires: authentic and meaningful links with community partners, collaborative partnerships that are respectful, genuine and have a willingness to share resources such as time, staffing, and buildings.

Given the demands on schools at present the capacity of schools to authentically link to community is often difficult, and although some schools are sincere and make a considerable effort it can be difficult to create the opportunities to achieve these links. Without resourcing that is specific to school and community collaboration and the capacity
to be flexible with staffing there would be very little capacity to achieve the integration between school and their community.

Without a big picture and a sense of what could be achieved by working with local communities the uptake of community links would be limited and struggle to get a foothold in an already overloaded system.

The professional development of the department staff, executive leadership in schools and school teaching staff regarding the benefits of working with community is necessary before other initiatives are put in place.

d) Opportunities for linking with community leaders and forming partnerships with business and community organizations

The opportunity to link with community leaders and form partnership with business and community organizations already happens in most schools. It is an aim of MindMatters to increase the connections between schools and the community.

In regional areas this is more easily achieved as the local people and organizations are often known and relationships are already developed with other community players. The regional boundaries are clear and generally the services are known, there is less movement of staff and generally some community stability. There may not always be enough services but generally the services based in these regions are very well known.

In large Metropolitan regions the variety of services, charities, businesses, clubs, and government services can be very large and the confusion of service provision can make it difficult for schools to know who is reputable and appropriate for them to work with. To develop the appropriate connections takes time and short term contacts in the community and education sectors can make it difficult to maintain the connections schools develop. The rotating door phenomena in many community agencies means schools can develop great relationships one year and loose all contact the next. However, some city schools maintain connections with their community and persevere with the changing organizational and staff landscape. These schools often have student with high needs and the schools are very effective in finding the correct services for their families and students. Some schools have community services based at the school and share resources. Unfortunately this is
still the exception not the rule. With the building of new schools and community precincts close together it is hoped that there will be more integrated service provision ensuring families, adolescents and children are provided with the services they require. These joint sites are well placed to provide joint school and community initiatives.

In Victoria the School Focused Youth Services (SFYS) has played a key role in the developing links between community organizations, business and schools. This initiative of the Victorian State Government has been instrumental in getting many excellent joint initiatives between schools and the community up and running. MindMatters has worked closely with the SFYS over the past 9 years informing schools of the SFYS service and providing professional development across Victoria.

e) Existing broader health promotion policies and activities

As stated earlier MindMatters is a mental health promotion project aimed at increasing schools understanding of a whole school approach to health and wellbeing. A whole school approach encourages schools to authentically link with their wider community and services.

Our introductory training provides teachers with an overview of the Health Promoting Schools (HPS) framework, developed by the World Health Organisation. (see below)
The Health promoting schools framework provides a framework for schools to look at a whole school approach to wellbeing. When schools address all 3 parts of the diagram then they are more likely to be successful in the implementation for programs such as bulling or encouraging connectedness to school and community.

The MindMatters Implementation Model (below) is an extension of the HPS framework and is used in our Level 2 PD to encourage schools to strategically plan their implementation of initiatives that are most important to the school. The Implementation plan has been developed from our own evaluations and research. A core aspect of the plan is the links to community and agencies in the community.
In our level 2 training we get the school teams to examine how well they are doing in all aspects of the above diagram. Discussion on the “Internal and External partnerships and services” is a part of this examination.

f) How school based activities could relate and coordinate with these (broader health promotion polices and activities) to maximize impact and efficiency.
MindMatters role as a key provider of mental health professional development to teachers and community members working with schools gives us a unique opportunity to work across the health and education sectors. We are very familiar and knowledgeable about the requirements of schools and the student requirements in schools. We are also very well linked and funded by the Federal Department of Health and Aging and the Mental Health Sector. Our Professional Development has many cross over points for schools and the community sector that enables schools and the community to reflect on and take action in regards to their own health promotion in the school. Each school is different and the requirements of each school mean that they will work differently. However, giving a school the opportunity to reflect, to plan and to take action on the most important aspect for their schools mental health promotion is respectful to the capacity of schools.

MindMatters PD gives schools the opportunity to find out more about key aspects of mental health promotion and to explore best practice in this field. The PD is free and open to school personal and also members of the school community, parents and carers and to community agencies workers keen to work with schools and understand how schools approach mental health promotion.

Schools and teachers are less likely to embrace a connection with their community and work effectively with the community sector unless they understand the benefits for their students and the community they work in. Professional learning is about shifting beliefs and opening up the opportunity to perceive a better future and a more holistic “wrap around” support for the child the adolescent and the family. Making the school and community seamless would go a long way to improving the mental health of our communities and creating a sense of belonging. This is community capacity building.

The document below is a diagram of the free professional development available to teachers and the community sector working in schools.
About MindMatters

MindMatters is a national mental health initiative for secondary schools funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing and implemented by Principals Australia (formerly APAPDC).

MindMatters uses a whole school approach to mental health promotion based on the principles of the World Health Organization’s Global School Health Initiative and the Australian National Health Promoting Schools Framework (pdf, 207kb).

MindMatters aims to:

- embed promotion, prevention and early intervention activities for mental health and wellbeing in Australian secondary schools
- enhance the development of school environments where young people feel safe, valued, engaged and purposeful
- develop the social and emotional skills required to meet life’s challenges
- help school communities create a climate of positive mental health and wellbeing
- develop strategies to enable a continuum of support for students with additional needs in relation to mental health and wellbeing
- enable schools to better collaborate with families and the health sector.

MindMatters resource suite

The MindMatters resource suite supports Australian secondary schools to promote and protect the mental health and wellbeing of school community members. It includes:

- a resource kit for secondary schools
- a Professional Development Calendar
- a website
- evaluation reports.
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