Inquiry Name: Inquiry into Sexting

Nicholas Lynch
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35 Grossmans Road
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SUBMISSION CONTENT:

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The Executive Officer
Dear Sir,

Context
The school council of Surf Coast Secondary College has endorsed a submission to this inquiry. The College sees itself as fulfilling one of a number of its broader community obligations by becoming a reference point for the informed discussion of issues of meaning to the lives of adolescents in our community.

The College issued an open invitation to the community to attend a forum and the matter was reported in the local press. (See attachment). And, the forum was further endorsed by our local Member of Parliament, Mr Andrew Katos. (See attachment).

A number of student-led interviews were conducted to gather opinions as well.

The College initiated this as a matter of community obligation and not, in any sense, as a response to perceived or actual behaviour by students within the College community.

The community forum was facilitated by Leigh Bartlett.

Response to the terms of reference:
1. the incidence, prevalence and nature of sexting in Victoria;
Based on the responses of mid aged adolescents (that is, in years 9 and 10) it is our view that the incidence and prevalence of sexting within this community is negligible. It is clear, also, that the
nature of sexting was not understood at all, or misunderstood, by members of this group indicative of this was the representative perception that the behaviour was between ‘couples’. There is a clear and seemingly unbridgeable disconnect between adults who view sexting differently than adolescents, who seem to see sexting as merely inappropriate social behaviour.

2. the extent and effectiveness of existing awareness and education about the social and legal effect and ramifications of sexting;

It is clear that there is negligible awareness of the legal ramifications of sexting in this age group at this College. Many students represented their responses regarding sanctions in terms of those guilty having their phones confiscated by their parents; thereby representing the behaviour as a family based matter rather than a matter for the justice system.

3. the appropriateness and adequacy of existing laws, especially criminal offences and the application of the sex offenders register, that may apply to the practice of sexting, etc, etc.

Given the level of understanding of this issue by our focus groups no response is made. However, as a matter of general comment, it is of some urgency that an appropriate educative program be established to provide adolescents with an informed understanding of sexting lest their misunderstandings result in significant sanctions.

In the words of facilitator, Leigh Bartlett, we have put the technology (via mobile phones, etc) in their hands without also giving them an understanding of the socio-legal implications of the use of this technology.

As a sidebar to this issue, the subject of sexualized images of adolescents was also discussed and the possible prospect of the acceptance, in a variety of contexts, of those images as leading to a normative acceptance of sexted imagery.

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File1: 4fdae748238b1-Step forward for social media safety.docx

File2: 4fdae74824081-Mr Andrew Katos.docx

File3:
Step forward for social media safety

Ali Deane

May 31 2012

Surf Coast Secondary College (SCSC) is preparing to host an open community forum that will provide important information to the Parliament of Victoria enquiry into future policy and law making regarding social media.

The forum – to be held next Monday night – is open to anyone, and will focus on creating awareness around “sexting”, its prevalence in our community and the implications this form of communication can have, especially for young people.

Forum facilitator Leigh Bartlett from Barwon Adolescent Task Force (Batforce) said confusion exists over what “sexting” actually is and means.

“Whilst we have a broadly shared community understanding of what “sexting” is, we haven’t really created a way of testing for young people’s understanding of the issue.

“When it comes to the legal implications we are asking young people to be treated like fully informed adults in respect to this issue.

“We need to be asking young people for their opinions and taking them into consideration when we create legislation that will impact on them. To do this we need to ensure they are educated and making a fully informed decision in relation to the issue.”

“Sexting” refers to the creation, possession and transmission of sexually suggestive or explicit messages and images, with or without knowledge of people concerned, for private or broad use.

The forum will be interactive and educational, and responses will be compiled and presented to parliament via a submission on behalf of the Surf Coast community.
Assistant principal Nick Lynch said although “sexting” was not a problem at SCSC, he wanted to get the discussion happening.

“We feel it’s absolutely part of our responsibility as a secondary school, to be proactive about issues like this.”

Ms Bartlett congratulated SCSC on the brave move to host a forum.

“This is about the broader community having a chance to participate. Surf Coast Secondary College very much sees itself as an important stakeholder in the lives of young people.

“I look forward to supporting them to ensure that young people from their school and surrounding schools – and the broader community – have an opportunity to feed into a submission which may impact on the lives of their students in the future.”

The forum will take place at SCSC Monday June 4, from 7–8.30pm, for more information email lynch.nicholas.p@edumail.vic.gov.au.
Mr Andrew Katos

Press release

Mr Andrew Katos MP has written," Due to the popularity of social media in today’s society it is important for parents and guardians to keep up to date on how this affects our children.

I encourage interested parties to attend the Surf Coast Secondary College Forum to contribute to the discussion about this emerging social issue.

I commend the Surf Coast Secondary College for being proactive on this subject that has become an important issue in our local schools.

I encourage the School to make a submission to the Parliamentary Enquiry."