Taking the Pulse of Australian Students

November 2021

ARACY

Taking the Pulse of Australian Students: ei Pulse Results March 2020 to March 2021
ARACY

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Executive summary

Ei Pulse is a student wellbeing tool developed by Educator Impact (EI) and used to track and support student wellbeing in real time, providing a weekly check-in with students and enabling them to ask for help when they need it. As part of developing ei Pulse, EI approached ARACY to operationalise the Nest, Australia's wellbeing framework for children and young people.

Ei Pulse gathers data on the wellbeing of students based on the methodology from ARACY's Common Approach®. The Common Approach® is a method of speaking with children, young people and their families about wellbeing using the six domains of the Nest.

Ei Pulse was launched by EI in March 2020 in New South Wales (NSW). By October 2020, it was being administered in schools across all Australian jurisdictions, except the Northern Territory (NT). The earliest adopters of ei Pulse were independent and Catholic schools in the non-government sector, but the adoptees include a growing number of government schools.

Methodology

Ei Pulse is designed for young people aged 10 years and over. Once a week, the app asks students 'How are you feeling today?' and then collects their responses to five evidence-based wellbeing questions drawn from a bank of approximately 130 questions which cover topics across the six Nest domains. Students are asked different questions each time they check in and the average check-in time to complete the process is one minute.

The app supports students to reach out for help across any element of their wellbeing, in a low friction, low-risk way. When a student flags that they need help, ei Pulse connects them with a trusted staff member of their choice: a support officer, pastoral care teacher, or classroom teacher they nominate by name.

Data in the report

Data in this report are drawn from the initial 12-month period of ei Pulse results collected between March 2020 and March 2021. The number of 'users' (students) in this period increased from approximately 500 in March 2020 to more than 28,000 in March 2021, when the app was being used in approximately 70 schools in six jurisdictions.

Across the collection period, approximately 356,000 check-ins were recorded. This figure does not equate to respondents (students) themselves, rather, it refers to the number of responses received that month in each state or territory. For example, if five students used ei Pulse two times each, that would equate to 10 check-ins.

Given that not all Australian jurisdictions are currently involved, and the number of schools participating is limited, the data are not representative of all Australian students or schools.

Key Findings

The first year of the ei Pulse wellbeing check-in tool presents a picture of approximately 28,000 students across Australia, who checked in a total of 355,879 times, resulting in 2.1 million data

points. Across all check-ins, 1,353 (0.4%) resulted in a student reaching out for help, with those requests coming from 1,166 individual students (4%). In a school of 1,000 students this translates to about three students reaching out for help each week, and about 40 distinct students reaching out across the entire year.

On average, 7% of students reported feeling 'negative' each week, 27% felt 'in the middle' and 66% felt 'positive' or 'great.' Data from the targeted wellbeing questions illustrate that most young people felt positive about their access to necessities.

However, the findings also highlight areas for concern. Of course, some are not surprising given that students (and their families and communities) were experiencing a global pandemic and the associated lockdowns and periods of remote learning for the first time.

One issue emerging from ei Pulse is the incidence of students who reported being worried or nervous. Approximately:

- Two in five students said they worry a lot about mistakes that they make (42.1%)

- One in three students said they worry a lot about things at school (34.7%)

- Three in 10 (30.0%) students said they felt nervous often.

Furthermore, one in four students:

- Often feel everything is an effort (26.5%)

- Feel that they do things wrong a lot (25.0%)

- Indicated they would not have their life the same way if they could live their life over again (24.9%)

- Often feel disappointed after completing a task because they knew they could have done better (23.6%).

Finally, in its first year, ei Pulse results also indicated that approximately one in five students:

- Think doing their best will never be enough (22.1%)

- Are less likely to think about something worrying in a different way that helps them feel better (21.0%)

- Did not eat breakfast often (19.8%)

- Indicated they often do not like how they look (19.1%)

- Are not confident in their ability to achieve their study/work goals after school (18.8%).

Ei Pulse also tells us that approximately one in four students felt negative or neutral about areas such as friendship intimacy and connection with classmates.

Next steps

The first year of ei Pulse findings serve to remind us of the opportunities provided when schools check-in with their students on a regular basis, enabling students to build their wellbeing literacy while also allowing schools to monitor trends in data and adjust policies and strategies for continuous improvement. As the number of schools using ei Pulse increases, the findings from the data will grow more nuanced, and comparative analyses of the effects of COVID-19 may be explored, e.g., the impacts of lockdowns between large states, such as Victoria and NSW.

Looking ahead, enhancements to ei Pulse are occurring, such as refinements to the current questions, as well as the introduction of a version for younger children in 2022. ARACY supports the expansion of the ei Pulse app and the Common Approach® in the Australian school system as a means of supporting the wellbeing of children and young people.

1. Introduction

Educator Impact (EI) Pulse is a student wellbeing app used to track and support student wellbeing in real time, providing a weekly check-in with students and enabling them to ask for help when they need it.

EI is a New South Wales-based business established in 2014 to serve the education sector. During 2020, due to COVID-19, EI made the platform available to schools at no cost. Amazon Web Services waived their hosting costs for the period.

ARACY puts knowledge to work to enable better decision making for the wellbeing of children and young people. ARACY believes all children and young people in Australia should have every opportunity to thrive.

In developing Pulse, EI partnered with ARACY to operationalise the Nest (Goodhue, Dakin, & Noble, 2021), Australia's wellbeing framework for children and young people. The Nest was developed over a two-year process involving close to 4,000 children, young people and experts across Australia. The Nest defines six interlocking areas of wellbeing which must be considered and supported for a child to thrive. The six domains of the Nest are defined by children and young people as:

- being **Valued, Loved and Safe,**

- having their basic **Material Needs** met,

- being **Healthy** (physically, mentally and emotionally),

- being engaged and supported in their **Learning**,

- **Participating** in family, community and decision-making, and

- having a **Positive Sense of** their **Identity and Culture**.

Ei Pulse gathers data on the wellbeing of students based on the methodology from ARACY's Common Approach®. The Common Approach® uses the Nest framework and is best practice for having quality conversations with children, young people and their families about all aspects of wellbeing.

1.1   The Common Approach

The Wellbeing Wheel (overleaf) is one of the resources that supports people to use the Common Approach®. Each segment of the wheel represents one Nest domain and contains examples of wellbeing considerations including a separate focus on the different levels of child, family and community. The Common Approach® is a prevention-focused and flexible way of working to help everyone have quality conversations with young people and their families about all aspects of their wellbeing. Having a Common Approach® conversation means being child-centred, strengths-based, holistic and collaborative. It provides shared language and a capacity-building focus. The Common Approach® enables us to get to the heart of issues sooner, and to see the full picture

more quickly, so that we can work with the young person, their family and other practitioners to achieve better outcomes sooner.

Fig 1. The Common Approach® Detailed Child Wellbeing Wheel (ARACY)

The items used within ei Pulse were developed from the bank of Common Approach® questions across the six domains of the Nest. These questions have been created and refined by ARACY over a seven-year process involving hundreds of educators, practitioners and leaders. The Common Approach® questions have been adapted in structure to ensure functionality within an app context, while preserving the holistic nature of the questions.

Schools that adopt ei Pulse are also encouraged to receive Common Approach® training to help ensure students experience seamless wellbeing support from staff.

1.2 Launching Pulse

Ei Pulse was launched by Educator Impact in March 2020 in NSW. By October 2020, ei Pulse was being administered in schools across all Australian jurisdictions, except the Northern Territory (NT). The earliest adopters of ei Pulse were independent and Catholic schools in the non-government sector, and there is a growing number of government schools now adopting the tool.

2. Methodology

The ei Pulse app is designed for young people aged 10 years and over. Once a week, students are invited to "check in" using the tool. Students are firstly asked how they are feeling, followed by a further five targeted wellbeing questions. The check-in process usually takes around one minute.

Students are asked how they are feeling (left) and five questions about their experience (right)

2.1 Authority, privacy, and confidentiality

School leaders adopt ei Pulse to help them better understand their students and their school. They enter a commercial relationship with EI to gain access to the platform. The primary use of the collected data is for schools to improve the wellbeing of their students by taking actions based on that data. The EI privacy policy states that data collected using the platform will also be used for research purposes, after the data has been anonymised and aggregated. Data for this report were provided to ARACY under this privacy policy.

Each week, students are invited to check in using ei Pulse. Check-ins are voluntary, and students may check in at any time. Typically, engagement rates (i.e., a check-in) exceed 80% of the students enrolled in ei Pulse. At many schools that engagement rate exceeds 90%.

Ei Pulse is integrated with a school's IT infrastructure and requires a student name, email address and class identifier for the student. These data help to make the app easier to use, by sending students reminders and allowing them to reach out when they need help.

Ei Pulse also collects information from individual students about wellbeing. These data are used to help schools provide students with needed support.

Most of the data collected are provided to the school in an aggregated and anonymised format. Importantly, when students answer a question, the app states how that answer will be shared with the school. For example:

- *Your response will be shared with your teacher and principal* (shown above, left)

- *Your response will be shown to the school with your identity removed* (shown above, right).

The answer to the first question, 'How are you feeling today?' is identifiable by the school. The responses to the following, more specific wellbeing questions within each check-in, are only available to the school at a cohort level.

While ei Pulse is a measurement tool rather than a psychological or wellbeing intervention in and of itself, it is important to consider the impact such measurement can have on young people. There has been significant research in this area.

There is no evidence to suggest asking questions about difficult or emotionally challenging circumstances, or about personal feelings, is dangerous for young people. Indeed, Australian clinical recommendations make it clear that discussing feelings and behaviours regarding mental health states and suicide is the preferred approach (Ross, Kelly, & Jorm, 2014).

When students use ei Pulse to reach out for help, the individual student is identified to the person they are seeking help from, as well as the management chain ultimately responsible for ensuring each request is responded to.

Student voice and agency is emphasised through the use of ei Pulse. Student feedback has demonstrated the perceived value the app holds for young people. The following quote from a student is one such example:

> *"One thing that has been really important to me is the one minute… the time I get to really think about how I really feel."*

> *(Senior Student, South Australia, September 2020)*

2.2   Pulse questions

Ei Pulse questions are themed around the six domains of the Nest (Level 1) and then organised into clusters (Level 2) within each domain. Clusters then have corresponding questions. In total, there is a bank of n=134 questions (Level 3). Questions are based on the Common Approach® and modified for use within the app.

Each week, students are asked the 'big question' (How are you feeling today?), followed by a selection of five targeted wellbeing questions randomly selected from the question bank.

All responses to the questions are based on a five-point Likert scale, a universal scale used to measure attitudes and opinions. Respondents specify their level of agreement to a statement or question in five points, such as (1) Strongly disagree; (2) Disagree; (3) Neither agree nor disagree; (4) Agree; (5) Strongly agree. The response categories to the wellbeing questions in ei Pulse are always based on a five-point scale, but alter depending on the nature of the question, e.g., level of agreement or frequency of an event.

Regardless of the question, the basis remains the same – the higher the agreement or frequency, the higher the response category. For the purposes of this report, we have aggregated responses in the lower/lowest and higher/highest response categories, creating a three-point scale: Low; Medium; High.

2.3   Reaching out for help

Through their use of ei Pulse, it is intended that students will become actively engaged in improving their wellbeing. The app supports students to reach out for help across any element of their wellbeing, in a low friction, low-risk way. When a student flags they need help, ei Pulse connects them with a trusted staff member of their choice: a support officer, pastoral care teacher, or classroom teacher they nominate by name.

2.4   Data in this report

Data in this report are drawn from the initial 12-month period of ei Pulse results collected between March 2020 and March 2021. The number of 'users' (students) in this period increased from approximately 500 in March 2020 to more than 28,000 in March 2021, when the app was being used in approximately 70 schools in all Australian jurisdictions, except the NT.

The number of schools adopting ei Pulse across Australia continues to grow. By March 2021, the number of schools using the app ranged from around five schools each in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), South Australia (SA), Tasmania, and Western Australia (WA). In the remaining jurisdictions, ei Pulse was in 11 schools in Queensland, 21 schools in Victoria, and 29 schools in NSW.

Ei Pulse is currently only used with students enrolled in upper primary and high school – Years 5 to 12 – therefore, respondents are aged between 9 and 18 years, with the majority aged over 12 years. Due to limited sample sizes in different jurisdictions, this report does not provide data analysis by age or year level. However, as the number of schools using ei Pulse increases, analysis by year level will be considered.

Table 1: Student check-ins per month by jurisdiction (Mar 2020 – Mar 2021)

Date	ACT	NSW	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA	Total Students*
Mar 2020	N/A	434	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	**434**
Apr 2020	541	601	N/A	N/A	1209	228	N/A	**2,579**
May 2020	3786	2548	1951	N/A	7373	3982	N/A	**19,641**
Jun 2020	3783	3342	6447	3480	6300	4850	N/A	**28,202**
Jul 2020	1625	2025	4841	2162	2006	3302	N/A	**15,961**
Aug 2020	3999	6967	12058	5188	4343	15092	N/A	**47,647**
Sep 2020	1517	4015	3784	1946	1543	7795	N/A	**20,600**
Oct 2020	2297	15078	6789	3164	1378	14644	692	**44,042**
Nov 2020	3567	25164	7495	4240	2823	21468	1061	**65,818**
Jan 2021	Over the summer school holiday break, data collection was paused.							
Feb 2021	1711	14602	7037	4201	334	16588	42	**44,515**
Mar 2021	2751	22957	9585	5043	1843	23750	945	**66,874**
Total	**25,577**	**97,299**	**59,987**	**29,425**	**29,152**	**111,699**	**2,740**	**355,879**

* Figures above represent total check-ins.

Table 1 (above) shows the number of student check-ins per month by jurisdiction in the collection period. This figure does not equate to respondents (students) themselves, rather, it refers to the number of responses received that month in each state or territory. Responding to ei Pulse is voluntary, so although students will have the opportunity to check in with the app every week, they may choose not to complete it. The median monthly engagement (response rate) during the reporting period was approximately 85%.

At its peak, approximately 66,000 check-ins were recorded, in November 2020 and March 2021 respectively, followed by February 2021 and October 2020, with approximately 44,000 respectively. NSW and Victoria recorded the highest total number of check-ins, given the higher number of schools using ei Pulse in those states, however on a month-to-month basis, some other jurisdictions had higher check-ins. Again, this is likely due to the voluntary nature of the app (see note above), as well as the timing of school holidays differing between jurisdictions.

Final notes on the data used in this report

- Given the emerging nature of ei Pulse in Australia, the data are not representative of the student populations in different jurisdictions.

- A key limitation of the data is in making comparisons between jurisdictions. This is particularly the case with WA, where a small number of schools joined ei Pulse in September 2020.

- Where comparisons are made, we have applied statistical significance tests to 95% confidence levels and limited reporting on individual items to those with more than 250 data points.

3. The first year of Pulse results

What do ei Pulse results tell us about the national picture of student wellbeing throughout 2020, and into early 2021?

Overall, the data presents a picture of approximately 28,000 students across Australia, who checked in a total of 355,879 times, resulting in 2.1 million data points. Across all check-ins, 1,353 (0.4%) resulted in a student reaching out for help, those requests coming from 1,166 individual students (4.2%). In a school of 1,000 students this translates to about three students reaching out for help each week, and about 40 distinct students reaching out across the entire year.

While the overall trend from check-ins illustrates two-thirds of students feeling positive in any given week, the data from the targeted wellbeing questions highlights several areas for concern.

3.1   The Big Question – how are you feeling today?

The first question asked of students responding to ei Pulse is "How are you feeling today?". The response categories are: I'm feeling great; I'm feeling positive; I'm feeling in the middle; I'm feeling negative; I need some help. Students reaching out for help can opt for support from their preferred educator.

> *"We know that students will reach out when they feel sad enough and safe enough at the same time – and that time can be fleeting. Pulse lets students reach out for help to a specific, trusted teacher, at the time they are ready."* (Educator Impact website)

On reaching out for help, the app responds with a message, confirming an educator will contact the student: "Hey [name], sorry to hear you're not feeling great, but that's why we're here. We'll let [educator name] know you're asking for help." This allows the student to confirm that a message will be sent to a specific educator ('send message'), or they would prefer to reach out to a different educator ('change teacher'). The student can then choose from a list of other educators to have a message sent to. Once the message is sent, the app informs the student they will receive a notification when the teacher sees the message.

In aggregate, the remaining students (i.e., those not reaching out), checked-in as follows:

- Negative ("I'm feeling negative") 24,682 times (6.9%)

- Neutral ("I'm feeling in the middle") 96,125 times (27.0%)

- Positive ("I'm feeling positive"/ "I'm feeling great") 233,718 times (65.7%).

Interestingly, the data highlighted significant variation from week to week, with more than 40% of students in any given week choosing a different answer to their previous week's check in.

Table 2 shows the results for the Big Question (how are you feeling today?) by jurisdiction.

Table 2: The Big Question (how students were feeling) by jurisdiction (Apr 2020-Mar 2021)

Jurisdiction	Reached Out		Negative		In the middle		Great or Positive		Total
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
ACT	172	*0.67*	2,676	*10.46*	8,275	*32.35*	14,454	*56.51*	**25,577**
NSW	413	*0.42*	6,573	*6.76*	24,875	*25.57*	65,420	*67.24*	**97,299**
Qld	266	*0.44*	4,171	*6.95*	16,087	*26.82*	39,471	*65.80*	**59,987**
SA	74	*0.25*	1,993	*6.77*	8,007	*27.21*	19,347	*65.75*	**29,425**
Tas	115	*0.39*	1,715	*5.88*	7,543	*25.87*	19,780	*67.85*	**29,152**
Vic	265	*0.24*	7,289	*6.53*	30,726	*27.51*	73,431	*65.74*	**111,699**
WA*	48	*1.75*	266	*9.71*	612	*22.35*	1,814	*66.20*	**2,740**
Total	**1,353**	*0.38*	**24,682**	*6.94*	**96,125**	*27.01*	**233,718**	*65.67*	**355,879**

*WA figures were collected from Term 4, 2020 onwards.

Of particular interest are the proportions of students who reported feeling negative or who reached out for help. Overall, one in 14 (6.9%) students reported 'feeling negative' when they checked-in, and a further one in 260 students (0.4%) reached out for help.
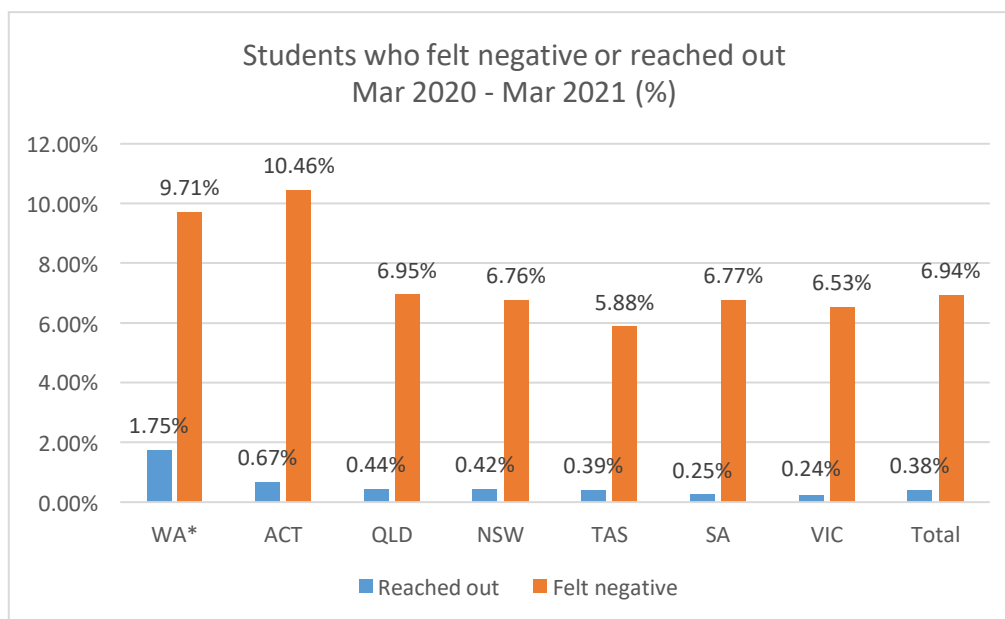
In its first year, ei Pulse enabled 1,166 individual students to connect with help. The difference between this figure and the overall figure (n=1,353) indicates students reached out for help more than once in the year to March 2021.

Although the ACT and WA had higher proportions of students reporting feeling negative or needing some help, the smaller number of data points collected in these jurisdictions means we cannot verify whether these differences are of statistical significance.

Figure 2 shows that in the ACT almost one in 10 students (10.5%) reported feeling negative, and approximately three in 500 (0.7%) reached out for help. In WA, approximately one in 10 (9.7%) reported feeling negative, and approximately seven in 500 (1.4%) reached out for help. It should be noted that a small cohort of schools in WA did not begin collecting ei Pulse data until Term 3, 2020, therefore fewer student responses were collected compared with other jurisdictions.

By comparison, students in Victoria – despite facing more instances of lockdowns and periods of remote learning during 2020 than other jurisdictions – reported more positively than students elsewhere, with one in 15 students feeling negative (6.5%), and approximately one in 417 students (0.2%) reaching out for help.

Fig 2: Proportion of students who reached out for help by jurisdiction

Students who felt negative or reached out
Mar 2020 - Mar 2021 (%)

Jurisdiction	Reached out	Felt negative
WA*	1.75%	9.71%
ACT	0.67%	10.46%
QLD	0.44%	6.95%
NSW	0.42%	6.76%
TAS	0.39%	5.88%
SA	0.25%	6.77%
VIC	0.24%	6.53%
Total	0.38%	6.94%

WA figures were collected from Term 4, 2020 onwards.

During 2020 EI regularly debriefed with schools about their experience with students who reached out for help. At almost every school, during the first month using ei Pulse at least one student who was a "surprise" to the school reached out for assistance through the app. That is, the school had not been formally involved in the student's wellbeing, nor had the student previously triggered any red flags. Schools have identified three properties of ei Pulse that may make students more likely to use the app to initiate a wellbeing conversation, where they otherwise might not:

- Ei Pulse is very different to existing pathways for obtaining support and is seen as a lower stakes option (e.g., approaching the school counsellor is highly visible and crisis helplines are anonymous but an unknown quantity; both have a certain stigma attached).
- It is possible to flag the need for a wellbeing conversation without having to have that conversation immediately (i.e., the time-lag is seen as valuable to some students).
- Feeling both "sad enough and safe enough" to initiate a wellbeing conversation does not always coincide with access to the pathways or people the student wishes to proceed with (e.g., students might wait until their trusted teacher is on playground duty), whereas an app is more universally accessible.

Put simply, schools feel that ei Pulse provides students with a low-stakes and convenient way to initiate a wellbeing conversation with a trusted adult.

3.2 Findings by the Nest domains

The charts in the following section illustrate the trends across ei Pulse, at a national level and by the six Nest domains.

At a national level, questions clustered under the *Healthy* domain received the most negative responses, that is, the average of the aggregated lower and lowest responses for these questions was 14.4% negative (approximately one in six), and 59.9% positive (the average of the aggregated higher and highest responses for these questions).

This contrasts with *Material Basics* which received the most positive responses – 87.7% positive and fewest 4.4% (one in 25) negative responses.

Fig 3: Comparison of positive responses across the Nest domains
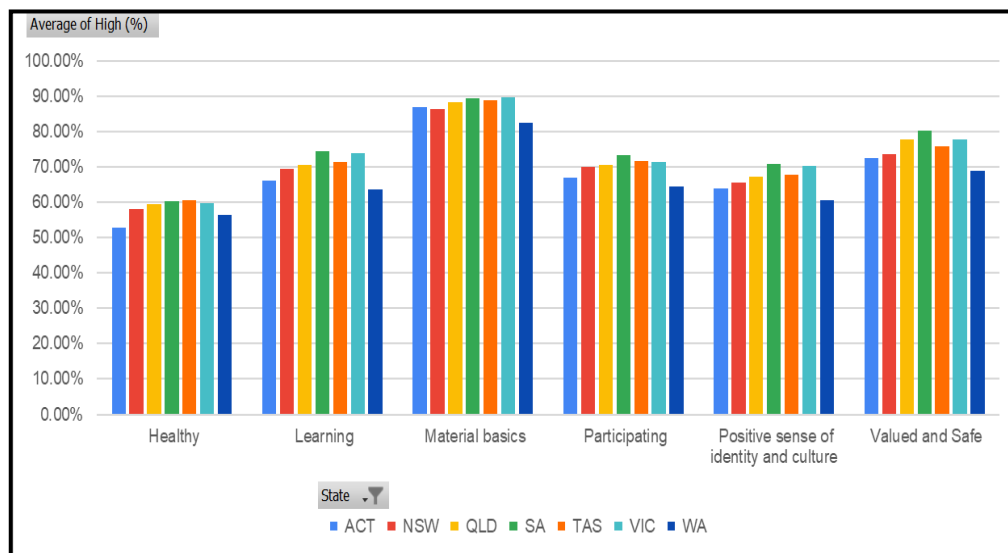
Across the 12-month data collection period, the positive response to *Material Basics* decreased from 90.7% for the first 6 weeks to 86.9% for the last 6 weeks. Conversely, the positive response to *Participating* increased during this time, from 69.5% for the first 6 weeks and 72.9% for the last 6 weeks.

Again, despite the *Healthy* domain attracting the highest overall average of negative responses (14.4%) across the 12-month data collection period, the pattern for this domain improved across the collection period, meaning there were more positive responses and fewer negative responses observed over the year (positive: from 56.1% to 62.1%, negative: from 16.0% to 13.2%). Similar patterns were observed in the *Positive Sense of Identity and Culture* domain (from 66.1% positive to 70.5%).

There were no significant changes over time in the *Valued, Loved, and Safe* domain.

Fig 4: The Nest domains by 'Low' responses (%)

The Nest domains by 'Low' responses
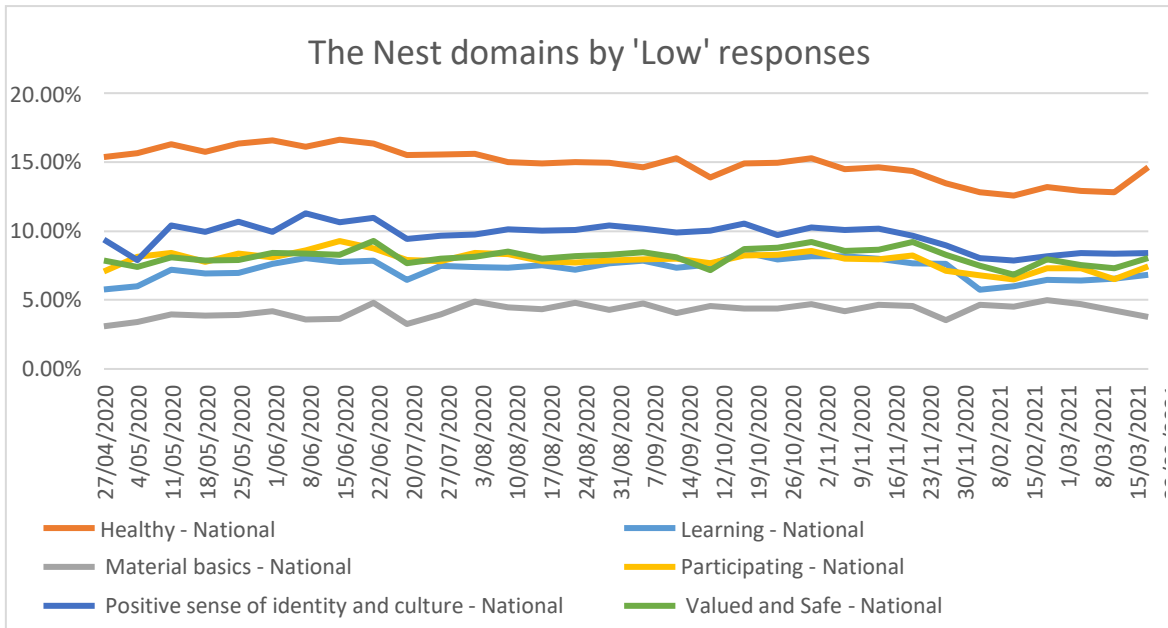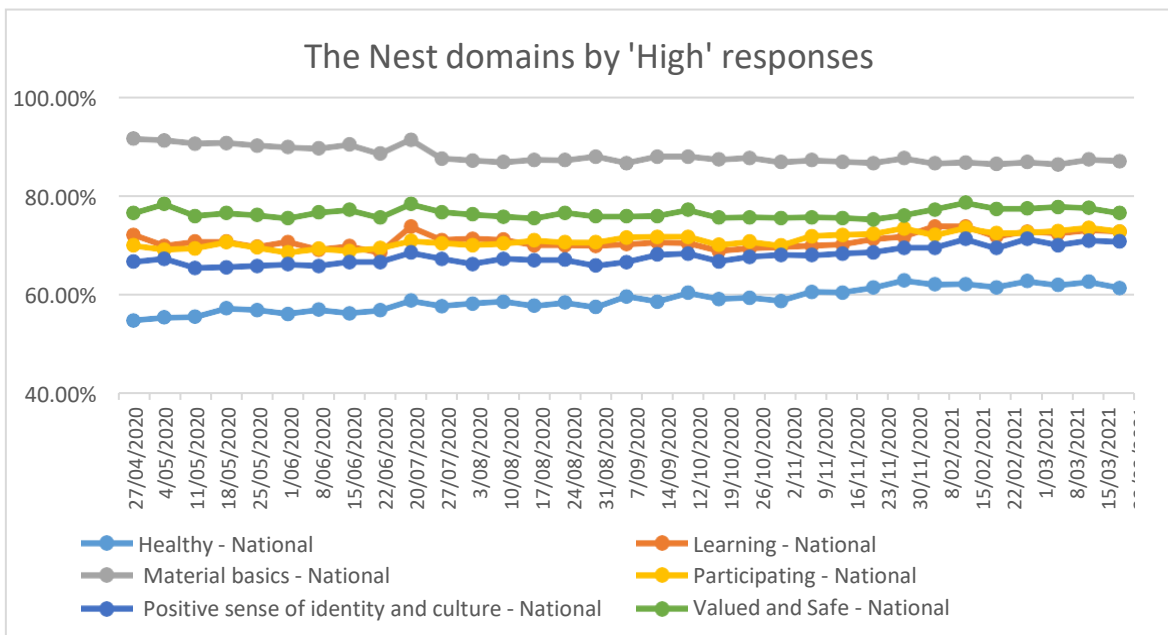
Fig 5: The Nest domains by 'High' responses (%)

The Nest domains by 'High' responses

Across jurisdictions, the data show the ACT and WA had higher rates of students responding negatively over the six domains. Most positive responses were from students in Victoria and SA. This aligns with the findings from the Big Question (previous section).

3.3   What are students feeling most concerned about?

Exploring the areas that attracted highest levels of negativity in the ei Pulse data allows us to understand the specific areas of concern for students. Overall, the clusters of questions which attracted the highest levels of negativity for students are listed in Table 3.

Table 3: Areas of most concern for students (%)

Question cluster (level 2)	Nest domain (level 1)	Av. Low (%)	Av. High (%)	Total responses (n)
Challenging Emotions	Healthy	**22.82**	47.89	149,207
Eats Breakfast	Material Basics	**20.46**	67.77	14,514
Organised Activities	Participating	**18.44**	62.72	14,306
Meeting Expectations	Positive Sense of Identity & Culture	**18.12**	50.87	53,655
Feelings about After School Study/ Work	Participating	**17.43**	50.34	12,612
Emotion Regulation	Healthy	**16.16**	53.02	24,971
Connectedness to Adults at School	Valued and Safe	**14.05**	63.04	39,568
Engagement (Flow)	Learning	**11.91**	52.30	52,511
School Belonging	Positive Sense of Identity & Culture	**11.80**	64.64	27,086
Resilience	Participating	**11.45**	57.68	38,128
Self-Image	Healthy	**11.11**	64.63	57,478

In the following sections we discuss some of these areas of concern.

Challenging Emotions

The 'challenging emotions' cluster includes questions related to self-worth, areas of worry, and frequency of emotions such as hopelessness and nervousness. These are rated to be among the most important for students.

Fig 6 illustrates these emotions by proportion of students. The most challenging emotion reported was "I worry a lot about mistakes that I make", with approximately two in five+ students (42.1%) reporting this, and less than one in three reporting this was not a concern (30.9%).

By jurisdiction the results show that in the ACT over one-half of students (55.2%) said they worry a lot about mistakes they make. This was significantly higher than other states, which ranged from 34.4% (Tasmania) to 42.0% (SA).

Fig 6: Challenging Emotions by Low/High responses (%)
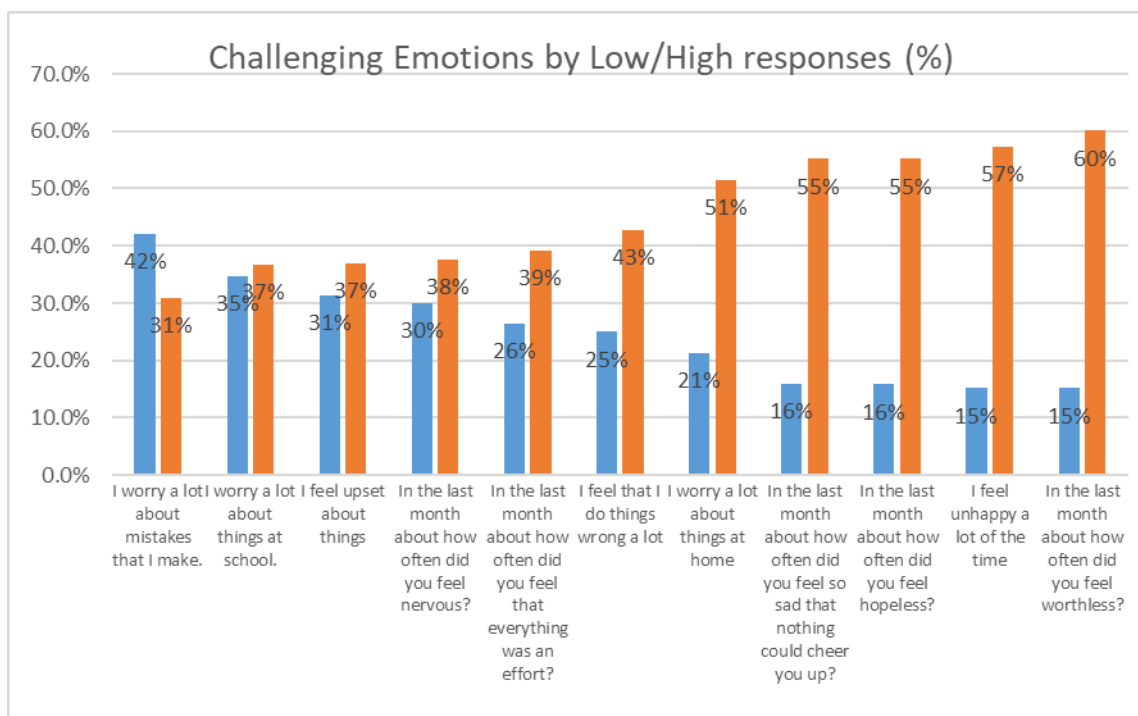
The next most challenging area reported was "I worry a lot about things at school", with over one in three students (34.7%) reporting this, however slightly more students (36.7%) also reported this was less of a concern for them.

Again, by jurisdiction the results show that in the ACT the proportion of students who reported worrying a lot about things at school was higher than the average (approximately two in five, 43.4%), compared with students in Victoria and Queensland who had the lowest proportions reporting this as a concern (one-third, 33.0% and 33.3%, respectively).

Nearly one in three students (31.3%) said they often or always "feel upset about things", and a similar proportion (30.0%) said they always or often felt nervous. Again in the ACT, the proportion of students reporting these issues were higher than elsewhere, at approximately four in 10 (39.1% and 39.3%, respectively). By comparison, students in Tasmania and NSW had the lowest proportion of students reporting feeling upset about things always or often (27.4% and 28.3%, respectively).

When asked "in the last month about how often did you feel that everything was an effort?", over one in four students answered often (26.5%). Overall, nearly one in four (25.0%) students felt that they "do things wrong a lot".

Eating Breakfast

There is one question in ei Pulse about frequency of eating breakfast. Answers are given on a scale of *Never, One or two days per week, Three or four days per week, Five or six days per week,* and *Every day*. Nearly one in five students (19.8%) ate breakfast fewer than three days per week.

The proportion reporting they 'never' eat breakfast was highest for students in the ACT, with over one in four reporting this frequency (27.4%), and lowest for students in Queensland (17.1%).

Meeting expectations

The 'meeting expectations' cluster of questions refers to the perceptions of measuring up to personal standards and efforts.

Approximately one in four (23.6%) students reported feeling "disappointed after completing a task because I know I could have done better". In the ACT, this figure was slightly higher (28.7%).

Almost one in four (22.1%) students reported "doing my best never seems to be enough".

Emotion regulation

The question attracting highest responses within the 'emotion regulation' cluster pertains to the ability to reframe thinking. Approximately one in five students (21.0%) reported when feeling worried they were not able to "make myself think about it in a different way that helps me feel better". Again, in the ACT, this figure was slightly higher (26.1%).

Self-image

In response to "how often do you like the way you look?", nearly one in five students (19.1%) reported never or rarely.

Feelings about after school/study/work

Nearly one in five students (18.8%) said they were not confident in their ability to achieve their study/work goals after school.

Connectedness to adults – at school, at home

Students were more likely to feel connected to adults at home than at school, with an average of one in seven (14.6%) reporting not feeling connected to any adults at school, compared to one in 25 not feeling connected to an adult at home (4.0%).

3.4 What are students feeling most positive about?

The areas attracting higher levels of positivity in responses allows us to understand the areas of least concern for students. Overall, the clusters of questions which attracted the highest levels of positivity for students are listed in Table 4.

Table 4: Areas of least concern for students (%)

Question cluster (level 2)	Nest domain (level 1)	Av. Low (%)	Av. High (%)	Total responses (n)
Access to Necessities	Material basics	1.32	**93.96**	71,928
Access to Online Resources	Learning	1.30	**92.62**	1,683
Home Environment	Material basics	3.93	**87.17**	43,063
Connectedness to Adults at Home	Participating	4.04	**86.35**	52,407
Home Climate	Valued and Safe	4.24	**85.05**	43,360
Health Problems	Healthy	5.43	**80.54**	15,959
Friendship Intimacy	Participating	7.73	**78.78**	39,771
Emotional Engagement with Teachers	Learning	6.06	**77.15**	68,752
Connection with Classmates	Learning	7.14	**77.03**	1,711
Academic Self Concept	Learning	5.34	**76.55**	39,623

It is encouraging to see that the areas of least concern for students include access to necessities and to online resources for learning, although we know that these findings are not representative of Australian students or schools, and that caution should be practiced when interpreting these data.

The cluster of questions in Access to Necessities, and their corresponding average of 'high' responses, in the order of most positive, were as follows:

- My family uses safe and reliable transport (95.8%)

- Do you have the things you need for a healthy life (healthy food, hot and cold-water, heating/cooling, appropriate clothing)? (95.1%)

- I have the things I need for school (uniforms equipment etc) (93.9%)

- Do you have access to services that you need (medical treatment, doctor, dentist, shops)? (93.0%)

- My family has the money to buy the things we need (92.1%).

As we go down the list in Table 4, we can see students reported less positively about intangible items, such as human connection and relationships: Connectedness to Adults at Home (86.4%), Friendship Intimacy (78.8%), Emotional Engagement with Teachers (77.2%) and Connection with Classmates (77.0%).

While still positive overall, these findings show approximately one in four (or five) students felt negative or neutral about these areas, e.g., friendship intimacy and connection with classmates, which is cause for concern. As communities grapple with COVID-19 over time, trends in these data will provide valuable insights into student wellbeing.

3.5   Bullying – an area of focus

The good news is that for most students responding to ei Pulse questions about bullying, the overwhelming majority reported it as rarely or never happening (87.0%). However, the findings also show on average nearly one in 25 students reported being bullied always or often (3.8%).

The cluster of bullying questions and their corresponding average of 'high' and 'low' responses, in the order of most positive, were as follows:

- At school are you **physically** bullied (for example, someone hit, shoved or kicked you, spat at you, beat you up, or damaged or took your things without permission)?
    - Rarely or never (92.2%)
    - Always or often (2.6%)

- Are you bullied **online** (for example, someone used the computer or text messages to exclude, threaten, embarrass you, or to hurt your feelings)?
    - Rarely or never (90.4%)
    - Always or often (2.7%)

- At school are you **verbally** bullied (for example, someone called you names, teased, embarrassed, threatened you, or made you do things you didn't want to do)?
    - Rarely or never (85.2%)
    - Always or often (4.3%)

- At school are you **socially** bullied (for example, someone left you out, excluded you, gossiped and spread rumours about you, or made you look foolish)?
    - Rarely or never (80.3%)
    - Always or often (5.6%).

This tells us that social bullying is more common than other forms of bullying, with more than one in 20 students (5.6%) reporting this happened always or often. Regardless of which form it takes, however, we know the impact of bullying on a student can be devastating. These data emphasise the importance of ei Pulse as a tool which can enable schools to monitor trends in data and adjust policies and strategies for continuous improvement, as required.

4.   Data limitations

ARACY and EI acknowledge the limitations of the data contained in this report and advise caution when interpreting the findings. Given the emerging nature of ei Pulse, the data are not representative of student populations in Australian states and territories. Additionally, as not all jurisdictions are currently involved, and the number of schools participating is currently limited, the data are not representative of all Australian students or schools.

As the number of schools using ei Pulse increases, the findings from the data will grow more nuanced, and comparative analyses may be explored.

5.   Conclusion

It is ARACY's aspiration that all children and young people are loved and thriving (ARACY, 2021). To thrive, children and young people need to be **valued, loved and safe**, they need their basic **material needs** met, they need to be **healthy, learning,** and **participating** in family, community and decision-making, and have a **positive sense of their identity and culture**. These six interconnected domains form the Nest, a wellbeing framework that provides a way of thinking about the whole child in the context of their daily lives, viewing wellbeing in a way that brings together the different elements a child or young person needs in order to thrive (Goodhue et al., 2021).

The first year of the ei Pulse wellbeing check-in tool operation highlights the powerful nature of supporting young people to reflect on their wellbeing by engaging them in questions which use principles of the Nest and ARACY's Common Approach®. It is intended that through their ongoing use of ei Pulse, students will become actively engaged in improving their wellbeing.

The findings show approximately two-thirds of students felt 'positive' or 'great' in any given week of the collection period, but also highlighted significant variation from week to week, with more than 40% of students in any given week choosing a different answer to their previous week's check-in.

For students not going well, ei Pulse enabled 1,166 individuals to connect with help over the year. At almost every school during the first month using ei Pulse, at least one student who was unexpected and had no wellbeing concerns identified by the school previously, used the tool to reach out for assistance. Schools have expressed that ei Pulse provides students with a low-stakes and convenient way to initiate a wellbeing conversation with a trusted adult.

The findings in this report illustrate most young people felt positive about their access to necessities (material basics), but one in three students experienced high anxiety. The data also indicate one in four (or five) students felt negative or neutral about areas such as friendship intimacy and connection with classmates.

It is intended that ei Pulse enables students to build their wellbeing literacy, while also allowing schools to monitor trends in data and adjust policies and strategies for continuous improvement.

ARACY supports the expansion of the ei Pulse app and the Common Approach® in the Australian school system as a means of supporting the wellbeing of children and young people.

6.   Future Work

This report provides a snapshot of wellbeing nationally. It is anticipated upcoming work include an addendum to this report that presents the same data for the period from March 2021 to the end of the Term 3, 2021. Further national updates could be developed for each school term. As the number of schools using ei Pulse increases, the conclusion from the reports will grow more nuanced.

A comparative analysis of the impacts over time could be completed exploring the 2020 COVID-19 lockdowns vs their counterpart 2021 lockdowns. Possible research questions include a) to what extent were students affected by lockdowns? and b) did mitigation strategies improve their outcomes?

Furthermore, comparative analysis of the impacts of the 2021 lockdowns between Victoria and NSW could occur. Victoria has undergone more lockdowns, and NSW has more recently locked down, but they overlap in time. One potential investigation could explore the experiences of students in NSW and Victoria; how these differed, and what might be the causes.

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