

MEDIA BACKGROUND

Extracurricular Activity Access & Disadvantage

The Longitudinal Effects of Adolescent Extracurricular Activity Participation on School Belonging and Peer Relations: The Moderating Role of Socioeconomic Status

For Presentation at [Australian Social Policy Conference](#), Wed 22 October, 2pm by Professor Gerry Redmond and Dr Alex O'Donnell.

The study examined 3,850 adolescents from the [Longitudinal Study of Australian Children](#) who participated in extracurricular activities at age 12/13 and their levels of school belonging four years later at ages 16/17.

Extracurricular activity was defined as participation in the past week outside of school hours (even if organised by school) – including sport (team and individual), artistic pursuits and religious groups.

Decades of research confirms that adolescents who participate in extracurricular activities report better school-based outcomes than non-participants.

School belonging was defined as the extent to which participants feel accepted by teachers (e.g., *Teachers are interested in me*) and more generally within their schooling community (e.g., *I can be myself at school*). Previous studies have shown a subjective sense of school belonging is important, having been linked with lower psychological disturbances, higher academic performance, and perceived usefulness of school. School belonging is a key mechanism for improved school engagement and academic performance.

Peer connectedness was defined as the extent to which they felt understood, connected, and respected by their peers (e.g., *"I feel my friends are good friends"*). Social connection is a building block of well-being, health, and psychological growth across all aspects of life

Socioeconomic status: Index of Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD) ABS census 2016 score SEIFA.

The study found considerably lower levels of participation in low socioeconomic status communities (66.44%) compared to moderate (78.13%) and high (86.89%) socioeconomic status communities.

It further revealed important differences in the benefits of extracurricular activities for adolescents depending on where they lived. The relationship between extracurricular activities and peer connectedness was only statistically significant when participants resided in low socioeconomic status communities.

Participants from socioeconomically disadvantaged communities who engaged in extracurricular activities reported significantly higher levels of school belonging four years later through the development of stronger interpersonal ties with their peers (summarised as peer connectedness).

What are State and Territory Governments doing to support access to extracurricular activities?

Across Australia, all States and Northern Territory provide financial support for young people to subsidise some of the costs of participation in extra-curricular activities.

NSW: The [Creative Kids Program](#) offers one \$100 voucher per year for all children attending school for participation in organised creative and arts activities. The [Active Kids Program](#) offers two \$100 vouchers per year for all children attending school for participation in organised active recreation (including scouts, dance and martial arts as well as individual and team sports).

Victoria: The [Get Active Kids Voucher](#) is available for children aged 0-18 years living in families holding a Health Care Card or Pensioner Concession Card. Eligibility is limited, for example, 100,000 vouchers valued at up to \$200 each are available from 1/3/21 to 15/4/22. Each child is eligible to apply for up to four vouchers.

Queensland: Children aged 5 to 17 years whose parents hold a holding a Health Care Card or Pensioner Concession Card can access one [FairPlay Voucher](#) per year (worth \$150), to cover active sport and recreation membership, registration or participation fees.

Western Australia: [KidSport](#) is open to children aged 5 to 18 with a Health Care Card or Pensioner Concession Card. Eligible children can receive two \$150 vouchers per year to cover costs of joining an approved active recreational activity.

South Australia: all children attending school up to Year 7 can access [Sports Vouchers](#), valued at \$100 per year, to cover sports or dance membership/registration fees. Eligibility is being expanded to school years 8 and 9 in 2022.

Tasmania: Children aged 5-18 years who are listed on a Health Care or Pensioner Concession Card or in Out of Home Care are entitled to up to two \$100 vouchers per year under the [Ticket to Play](#) scheme to cover registration costs for approved active sports and recreation.

ACT: No formal schemes comparable with those in other jurisdictions.

Northern Territory: The [Urban Sport Voucher](#) scheme provides \$100 twice a year for each school-enrolled child aged up to 18 years to participate in sport, recreational or cultural activities. NT also runs a [Remote Sport Voucher](#) scheme, where up to \$200 per year for every children enrolled in school can be provided to a remote community to organise an activity.

Do governments provide enough support?

- Costs of participation in activities vary greatly by activity, location and age of child. However, costs of participation are in most cases considerably higher than amounts of available government support.
- There are costs that are not covered by these grants, including transportation and lost income when time off work is required.
- In most states, government support is focused on 'active recreation' – for example sport and dance (but also eight-ball and motorsport). Only NSW and NT explicitly offer support for participation in arts and cultural activities.