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Social workers | Herald Sun



A report by Maroondah-based health service EACH said that the State Government is failing high-risk children.
Source: News Limited

THE State Government's student welfare program is "failing" high-risk children, according to a Maroondah welfare agency report.

The report, by Eastern Access Community Health (EACH) senior health promotion officer Elizabeth Senior, said the State Government should "act now" to ensure high-risk families received proper care.

"The current on-call model provided by (the department) is failing teachers, students and their families," Ms Senior wrote.

"Teachers need the on-site presence of a welfare professional who has the training, experience and time to deal with crisis situations as they arise at a school."

The Department of Education and Training employs support services officers who work on a referral basis once welfare issues have arisen.

Ms Senior's report evaluated a 2012-13 trial of assigning a family support worker to work at Bayswater North Primary School.

The experienced support worker, who was seconded from Anglicare, was able to help in immediate crises and also offer support to families beyond the school grounds.

Released on Thursday, Ms Senior's report concluded that having a family support worker at primary schools provided savings in teacher time and cost to the school and community.

"As she was able to do home visits, (the family support worker) was able to intervene in the lives of troubled school families before a crisis," she wrote.

Bayswater North principal Berna Buzaglo said the key to the program's success was parents felt comfortable with the worker who was independent of school staff.

"As she was able to do home visits, (the family support worker) was able to intervene in the lives of troubled school families before a crisis," — Elizabeth Senior's report

"With the help of a social worker supporting these families, it makes a huge difference to the morale of the whole community," Ms Buzaglo said.

She said the issues facing young children were often "deep-seated" but early intervention could prevent problems from escalating.

"Our data shows that the program had a higher success rate for the families and it was also cost effective," she said. "We would love to see the role funded, not only in our school but also a number of schools."

Education Minister James Merlino's spokeswoman Georgia Brumby said schools had a range of wellbeing services available.

"Schools receive funding for wellbeing programs, and many schools choose to use that funding to work with community agencies — such as Anglicare — to provide access to high-quality services within their local communities," Ms Brumby said.

Mr Merlino's office did not say whether the State Government would consider funding a new dedicated family support worker.



Family support worker Angela Morris was assigned to Bayswater North Primary School. Picture: Hamish Blair
Source: News Corp Australia

INTERVIEWS were conducted with parents who had accessed the family support worker at Bayswater North Primary School. A selection of their views was recorded in the report:

"I was going into depression, hitting my children, couldn't manage them and couldn't cope. I read about [the worker] in the school newsletter. I was at my wit's end and thought: 'Well I may as well give it a go.' "

"I hit a brick wall. I didn't know where to turn. I'd tried so many places. Some say you're not eligible, others have long waiting lists. Some say they'll get back to you, but they don't."

"[Without the worker] I would have sunk lower, had more grief with the Department of Human Services — my daughter might have been removed. It was going that way. [The worker's] involvement means that my daughter has stayed at home."