

Friday, 7 August 2020

SUPPORTING STUDENTS THROUGH THE PANDEMIC

For Victorian students in their final years of school, as well as their parents, carers, families and teachers – this has been a year like no other.

That's why the Victorian Government is today announcing more support for VCE students and further mental health resources for young people struggling with this pandemic.

Every Victorian student will be individually assessed, and any adverse impacts of coronavirus will be reflected in ATAR rankings as part of a wide-ranging process to ensure fair and accurate results in this unprecedented year of school – taking a huge mental load off students and their families as we head towards exams.

The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) will introduce a wide-ranging "Consideration of Educational Disadvantage" process to calculate VCE scores, taking into account disruptions to learning caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

This new process will mean the only thing impacted students need to focus on is their exams – and doing their best.

In a normal year, individual students are assessed for special consideration on a case by case basis. This year, schools will provide the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) with information on every single one of their students.

These reforms will reach every Year 12 VCE student in the state, ensuring the experiences of the class of 2020 are factored into their results.

The VCAA will consider a range of data alongside exam results, including a student's expected achievement levels before the impact of coronavirus, school assessments completed prior to remote and flexible learning, the General Achievement Test (GAT) and a range of statistical analyses to calculate final results.

This may include assessing the individual impact of coronavirus on each student, including school closures, direct impacts on the health of a student, students dealing with substantial extra family responsibilities, ongoing issues with remote learning and mental health challenges.

This will then be used to calculate a student's final VCE results and ATAR rank, ensuring that our kids' final results take into account not only their performance in an exam – but their courage and commitment in the face of huge adversity.

This adds to the steps already taken by the VCAA, such as reducing course content for Unit 4, rescheduling the General Achievement Test (GAT) and extending Term 4 for VCE students with exams to be held later in the year. The ATARs received by Victorian students will be equivalent to those received by students in other states.

To help students struggling with their mental health, the Government will also provide \$28.5 million to ensure students can receive more support. More than 1,500 school staff will undergo additional mental health training in partnership with headspace, to help identify at-risk students as remote learning continues.

All specialist schools with secondary aged students will also receive funding to recruit a school-based mental health practitioner, who will build provide wrap-around support to students and families.

The Mental Health in Primary Schools pilot will continue and expand to include an additional 15 new schools. Participating schools employ a Mental Health and Wellbeing Coordinator with teaching qualifications, to build the capability of school staff to better identify and support students with mental health concerns.

The successful Navigator program, which supports young people to re-engage with school will also be expanded to reach more students and ensure even during coronavirus, they remain connected to their education.

The LOOKOUT program will also be expanded to tackle disengagement from education of highly vulnerable students in out-of-home care, and other young Victorians who are at risk.

This is in addition to Victorian Government's support for Orygen's new digital mental health platform for young people – MOST – an online tool which allows young people to access tailored online therapy and peer support, when and where they need it.

The Government has invested over \$87 million into supporting the mental health of all Victorians to get through the pandemic – and continues to work with service providers to consider additional support as our state faces Stage 3 and 4 restrictions.

Quotes attributable to the Premier Daniel Andrews

"The bottom line is that every student has been impacted in some way by this pandemic – the challenge is to make sure that it doesn't decide their future."

"My message to VCE students is clear: you concentrate on doing your best, and we'll take care of everything else."

Quotes attributable to Minister for Education James Merlino

"I know the very real stress and anxiety that many students and their parents are feeling. Today's announcement will mean one less thing to worry about."

"With this additional support, we'll make sure every student at every age has the support to be their best."