

# 2021 Australian Early Development Census National Conference

## Standard Presentation

### Education (ECEC and schools) STREAM

#### Associations between child development at school entry and student wellbeing in the middle years

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Previous research has established that school readiness across multiple developmental domains predicts children's success at school, with academic achievement used as the primary outcome measure in most studies. However, success at school is much broader than just academic success, and student wellbeing is increasingly being recognised as a central objective of schooling systems across the world. The present study focused on children's development when they start school and how strongly it predicted both positive (optimism, life satisfaction, prosocial skills, and peer relationships) and negative (sadness and worries) aspects of student wellbeing in Year 6. This data linkage study utilised two population data sets – the 2009 Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) and the 2015 South Australian Wellbeing and Engagement Collection (WEC) – that were linked for about 4,000 school children. Linear regression analyses showed that children who were “vulnerable” or “at risk” in Social Competence and/or Emotional Maturity at school entry had significantly lower levels of optimism, life satisfaction, peer belonging, and higher levels of sadness and worries in Year 6 than children who were “on track” after adjusting for a range of individual and family level covariates. Children who were “vulnerable” in Physical Health and Wellbeing, Language and Cognitive Skills, or Communication and General Knowledge had higher levels of sadness and worries in Year 6 than children who were “on track” but the links to positive aspects of wellbeing were weaker and less consistent. Implications for schools and governments for supporting student's wellbeing and mental health will be discussed.

**PRESENTER BIO:** Dr Tess Gregory is a Senior Research Fellow in the Fraser Mustard Centre, a partnership between the Telethon Kids Institute and the South Australian Department for Education and Child Development aimed to improve research translation. Dr Gregory holds a Bachelor of Mathematics and Computer Sciences and a PhD in Psychology from the University of Adelaide. Dr Gregory's current research focuses on using population level data on children's health and wellbeing, including the Australian Early Development Census and the South Australian Wellbeing and Engagement Collection (WEC), to inform policy and practice.