



Australian Schools and the Common Good

Summary Report of the
Cardus Education Survey Australia

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This summary report *Australian Schools and the Common Good* is based on the Cardus Education Survey Australia administered by ORIMA Research and produced by McCrindle Research.

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URL: carduseducationsurvey.com.au

ISBN: 978-1-896701-41-7

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The Cardus Education Survey Australia Project has been funded and coordinated by a consortium of Australian Christian school associations that included: Adventist Schools Australia (ASA), Associated Christian Schools (ACS), Australian Association of Christian Schools (AACCS), Christian Education National (CEN), Christian Schools Australia (CSA) and Swan Christian Education Association (SCEA).

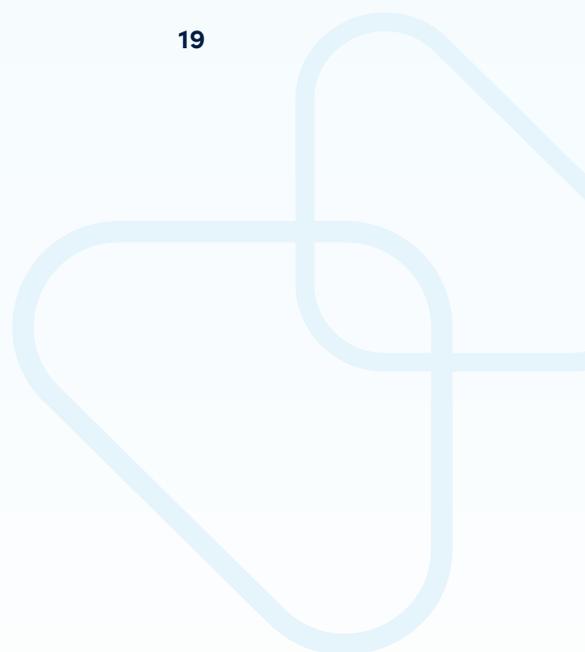
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Introduction

Research background

Cardus is a Canadian independent think tank dedicated to the renewal of social architecture that has, since 2011, been gathering and analysing data about the ways secondary school graduates in Canada and USA contribute to and engage with the common good in early adulthood. The Cardus Education Survey (CES) Australia was overseen and licensed through Cardus and their senior research fellows. The Australian implementation of the survey was funded and coordinated by a consortium project team consisting of six Australian Christian school associations: Adventist Schools Australia (ASA), Associated Christian Schools (ACS), Australian Association of Christian Schools (AACS), Christian Education National (CEN), Christian Schools Australia (CSA) and Swan Christian Education Association (SCEA).

Research objectives

This report seeks to identify and quantify how Australians ages 25 to 39 who graduated from secondary school between 1998 and 2011 – popularly named Millennials – contribute to the flourishing of Australian communities. It explores the extent to which these contributions are evident many years after they graduated. A snapshot of how schools cultivate and engage with a range of social, civic, cultural, academic and spiritual outcomes is also provided. By identifying differences across school sectors, this report endeavours to assist each sector to understand their own story within the wider story of Australian Millennials and to inspire leaders to reimagine what constitutes a good education in the pluralistic yet shared social architecture that is contemporary Australian society.

How education contributes to the common good in Australia

Education in Australia has historically focused on the responsibility of schools to instil values that go beyond self-interest and personal benefit. Schools as social institutions have played a significant role in helping to form engaged and responsible citizens. Since the 1980’s however, the focus of education has shifted to placing a greater emphasis on preparing students for their economic contribution to society. This means that education now prioritises preparing students for work and their individual economic advancement rather than the broader concept of their economic contribution in partnership with their civic, social and/or religious contribution.

Education for the common good is oriented towards the cultivation of character and commitment in the hearts and minds of students.

Through education, young people are prepared and shaped into the kinds of people who can enrich and benefit their neighbours and the community. All Australian schools, from all sectors share responsibility for the flourishing of Australian society. This task requires a commitment to not only focus on academic learning, but also on shaping citizens and their character development. Schools play a critical role in sustaining our shared way of life and wellbeing. This important task is not just the responsibility of school education alone but requires a partnership with the home and wider community to shape the lives of young people.

School sectors in Australia

Australian schools are usually grouped into three dominant sectors: Government, Catholic and Independent schools.

While Christian schools are included in the independent sector, for the purpose of this report, Christian schools have been analysed as their own distinct schooling group.

Government schools:	Catholic schools:	Independent schools:	Christian schools*:
2,594,830 students	765,735 students	584,262 students	145,000+ students
65.7% of enrolled student	19.5% of enrolled students	14.8% of enrolled students	
6,695 schools	1,756 schools	1,088 schools	320+ schools

*Schools explicitly seeking to be described as Christian and aligned with one of six Australian Christian school associations – Adventist Schools Australia (ASA), Associated Christian Schools (ACS), Australian Association of Christian Schools (AACS), Christian Education National (CEN), Christian Schools Australia (CSA) and Swan Christian Education Association (SCEA).



Overview of findings

The findings of the Cardus Education Survey (CES) Australia reveal that across all sectors within Australian education, Millennial graduates contribute to the common good by promoting flourishing and sustaining civic life in various ways. Millennial graduates are positioned by their schools to promote human flourishing through the various emphases schools hold towards educational goals. To different extents across the sectors, schools encourage academic excellence, invest in the development of relationships and teach a set of commitments and values. Different educational emphases appear to translate into different life paths in terms of further education, employment and income as differences are observed across the sectors.

While study and work are key areas that Millennial graduates contribute to the common good, they are also engaged citizens and find belonging in their communities through membership and volunteering with various groups. Schools play a role in cultivating membership in these groups, most commonly sporting, leisure or cultural groups. Millennial graduates are making a positive impact in the lives of others through their generosity, by donating their time and money. Millennial graduates are twice as likely, however, to donate money than to volunteer. These acts of generosity vary across the sectors.

Family and relationships, as well as Australian Millennials' understanding and engagement with faith and religion, position them within the social fabric of their communities. Schools take different approaches in fostering transcendence and religious values and this can be seen through the differences of graduates across the sectors with their views on God and engagement with religious expressions.

The insights within this report highlight the role schools and educational sectors play in preparing their students for contributing to the common good. The aim of students contributing to the common good is not just for self-interest but for active and meaningful engagement with and for society as a whole – civically, socially and religiously.

Formation

The influence of school and educational experiences.

Schools exist to positively shape students during their formative years.

The concept of formation refers to the way that schools shape the values and character of young people throughout their schooling experience. Formation occurs through formal curriculum choices as well as the relationships and norms of the school community. These formational and relational practices within a school can make a lasting impact on students and how they relate to others. It is important to note, however, that schools are not the only formative factor in children's lives. Schools are part of a larger moral ecosystem, including family and community, where shared commitments can be learned and practiced.

The study investigates how Millennial graduates have been shaped by formational practices in Australian schools through exploring their perceptions of their school's cultural emphases and distinctives, their level of satisfaction with their school and how well they feel their school prepared them for life within contemporary Australian society.

Formational practices contribute to the common good.

Schools prepare Millennial graduates for the lives they live, not just the impacts they make economically but also civically, socially and religiously — all of which are necessary to sustain the good we share in common. These perceptions and practices form students in lasting ways that impact their engagement with others in their communities.

Catholic, Independent and Christian schools have a similar emphasis on academic excellence, leadership and character development.

More than three in four Millennial graduates from Catholic (80%), Independent (79%) and Christian schools (75%) believe their school emphasised academic excellence. Three in five Government school graduates feel the same (61%). The Catholic, Independent and Christian school graduates also report a similar emphasis for both leadership and character development.

Three in five Government school graduates (60%) feel prepared by their school for academic success at university. Christian (75%), Independent (74%), and Catholic (73%) school graduates, however, are more likely to feel prepared for future academic success.

Christian school graduates believe their school prepared them to find a sense of meaning, purpose and direction in life.

Christian school graduates are far more likely than Government school graduates to believe their school prepared them to find a sense of meaning, purpose and direction in life (74% cf. 51%) and prepared them to deal with personal relationships (67% cf. 53%). Catholic (87%) and Christian (80%) school graduates are more likely to believe their school emphasised religious or spiritual values than Independent (65%) or Government graduates (21%).



% of Millennial graduates who agree with the following

● Government School ● Catholic School ● Independent School ● Christian School

Academic excellence was emphasised at their school



Leadership development was emphasised at their school



Character development was emphasised at their school



Spiritual/religious values were emphasised at their school



% of Millennial graduates who feel somewhat or very prepared by their school for the following

● Government School ● Catholic School ● Independent School ● Christian School

Academic success at university



Finding a sense of meaning, purpose and direction in life



Dealing with personal relationships





Work

Employment, vocational pathways and income

Developing professional skills, having a stable income and employment are important for the flourishing of both individuals and the communities in which they live.

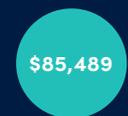
These work and education indicators provide an important snapshot of secondary school graduate outcomes. They do not however, paint the whole picture. The material outcomes of employment, educational attainment and income are contributors to the greater picture which highlights the multitude of ways, both tangible and intangible, Millennials are contributing to the common good.

Independent school graduates are most likely to complete further study, while Catholic school graduates have the highest household incomes.

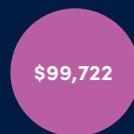
Looking to further education, Independent school graduates are the most likely to hold post-secondary qualifications. Almost half of these graduates (48%) hold a bachelor's degree, followed by two in five Catholic school graduates (41%). Millennial graduates from metro areas are much more likely to hold a bachelor's degree than graduates from non-metro areas.

A similar proportion of Millennial graduates from Christian (79%), Independent (78%) and Catholic schools (81%) are employed. While Christian schools have a higher rate of employment, Government school graduates hold a slightly higher annual income (\$83,238 cf. \$85,489). Catholic school graduates, however, have the highest annual household incomes at \$99,722.

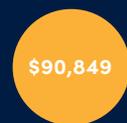
Average annual household income (AUD)



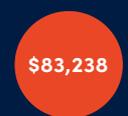
Government School



Catholic School



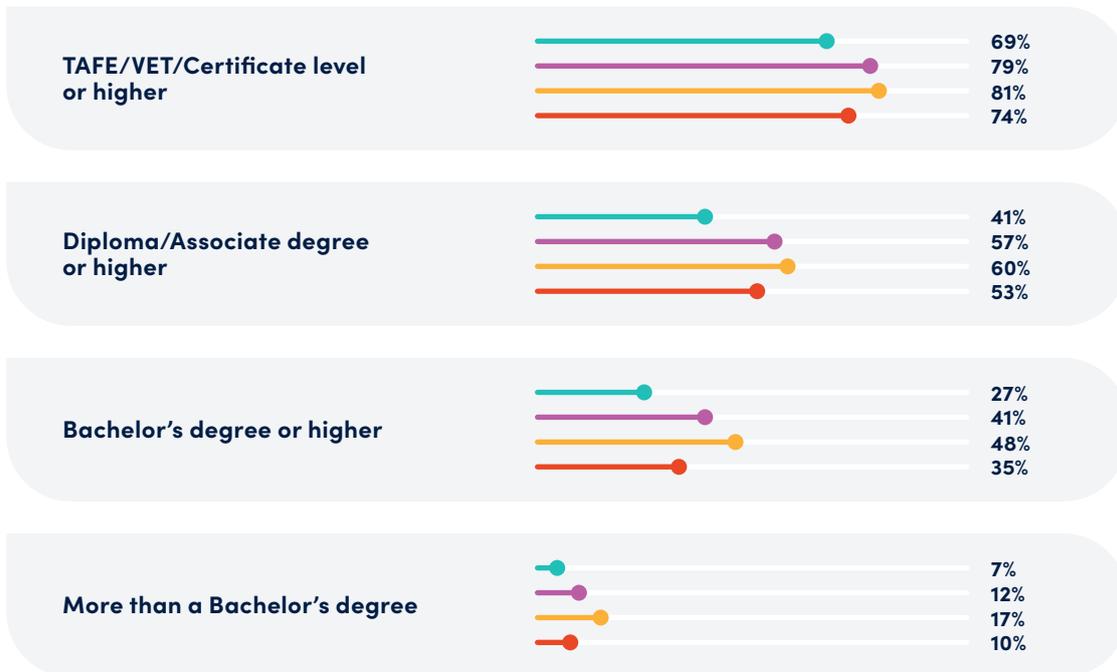
Independent School



Christian School

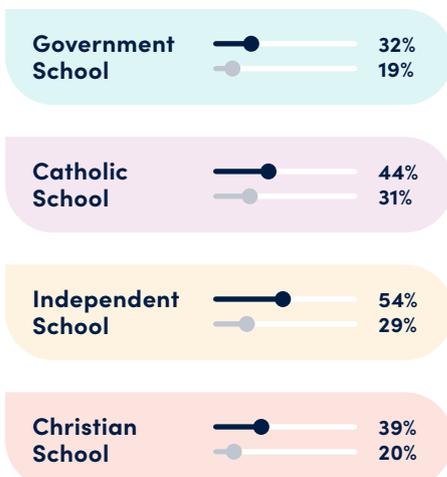
% of Millennial graduates who have completed at least the following qualifications

● Government School ● Catholic School ● Independent School ● Christian School

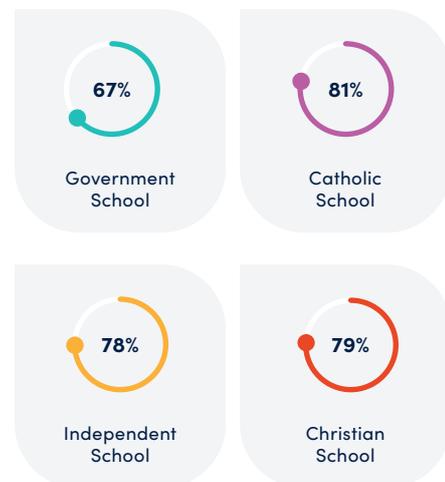


% of metro and non-metro Millennial graduates who have completed a bachelor's degree

● Metro ● Non-metro



% of employed Millennial graduates currently employed





Belonging

Involvement in associations, groups and causes.

In 2019, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare found one in ten Australians (10%) aged 24-39 were experiencing social isolation and approximately 16% were experiencing lonelinessⁱⁱ. Research conducted since COVID-19 pandemic has shown that Australians have been most negatively impacted socially (42%), more than the proportion who have been most impacted financially (28%), in their mental health (17%) or physically (13%)ⁱⁱⁱ. With loneliness being a growing concern in Australian society, it is important that individuals feel a sense of belonging in their communities. These experiences are good, not just for economic or psychological reasons, but they are fundamental to our good as humans.

Schools have a role to play in fostering a sense of belonging in students. Schools create a sense of place and a meaning-filled space for families to cross paths. They also convey values and norms that shape how students make sense of the world around them, which impacts students when they become adults as they build connections, relate to others and engage in their communities.

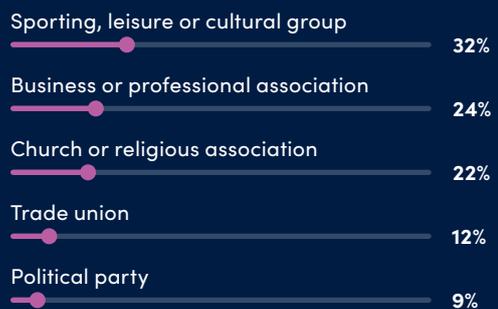
With loneliness being a growing concern in Australian society, it is important that individuals feel a sense of belonging in their communities.

Millennial graduates' engagement in groups and associations.

The results suggest schools play some role in enriching the social fabric and cultivating membership or participation in a variety of civic associations. If social connectedness is a good that we all share, then all schools serve a public purpose by cultivating it. It is important to still consider whether these overall rates of association are indicative of broader trends of decreasing social connectedness and belonging.

Millennial graduates commonly share an interest in belonging to sporting, leisure or cultural groups.

Millennials belong to the following associations and groups:



The greatest difference in affiliation is seen through engagement with churches and religious groups.

There are large differences in group affiliation regarding membership in a church or religious group, with Christian school graduates most likely to be active members (45%). While Christian school graduates are the most likely to be an active member of a church or religious group, they also demonstrate high rates of involvement in trade unions (20%) and political parties (20%).

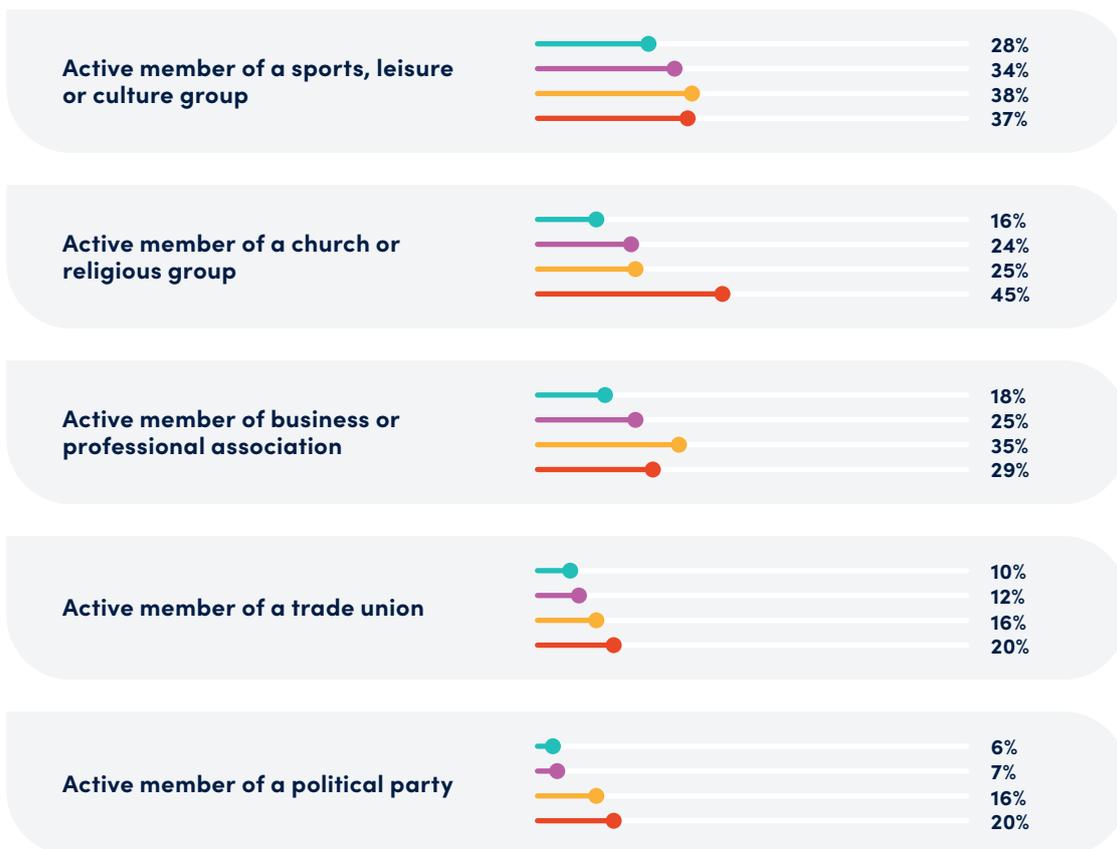
Government school graduates display lower levels of engagement across groups and associations compared to

other sectors, but often only marginally. More than a quarter of Government school graduates (28%) are an active member of a sports, leisure or cultural group which is the group Millennials are most likely to similarly be engaged in. Sports groups are also where Catholic school graduates are most likely to be active members (34%).

Independent school graduates are most likely to participate in business or professional associations (35%). This possibly demonstrates a commitment to the associations that sustain the fields of work they are most likely to be employed in.

% of millennial graduates who are involved in the following groups and associations

● Government School ● Catholic School ● Independent School ● Christian School





Generosity

Giving and volunteering

A third of Australians have volunteered (33%) while more than one in five have been involved with fundraising for a specific charity (23%) or advocating and raising awareness (21%). Almost half of those who volunteer (48%) do so at least once a month, while more than a quarter (26%) volunteer at least once every few months. Furthermore, over seven in ten Australians (72%) give annually. This rate is quite high but represents a 5 percentage point drop since 2019 (77%)^{iv}. The good that has resulted from Millennial graduates' education is not just seen through employment or educational outcomes.

The common good is promoted through Millennials' generosity in giving and volunteering once they have graduated.

Millennial graduates are more likely to donate than volunteer time.

The findings about Millennials and generosity highlight the need for further discussion regarding how schools can better play a role in shaping their graduates to be even more generous with their time and money. The data collected reflects the ways in which Millennial Australians are engaged in giving however, other data suggests there may be a downward trend in giving among Australians^{iv} which emphasises a need to focus more on this area in schools.

Millennial graduates are driven to volunteer with organisations that help the poor.

Organisations that help the poor are where Government (40%), Catholic (37%) and Independent school graduates (50%) have volunteered the most in the past 12 months. Overall, Christian school graduates volunteer most frequently (48%). This is most likely through church or religious organisations (55%). Independent school graduates are likely to both volunteer their time (42%) and to give to non-profit, charitable organisations or groups (70%).

Christian and Independent school graduates are more likely than Catholic or Government school graduates to volunteer with both environmental (40% Christian, 35% Independent) and political organisations (31% Christian, 24% Independent).

Three in five Millennial graduates have donated money in the past 12 months.

Donating money to non-profits, charitable organisations or groups is the most common way Millennial graduates are displaying generosity. In the past 12 months, between 62% and 70% of Millennial graduates have given financially.

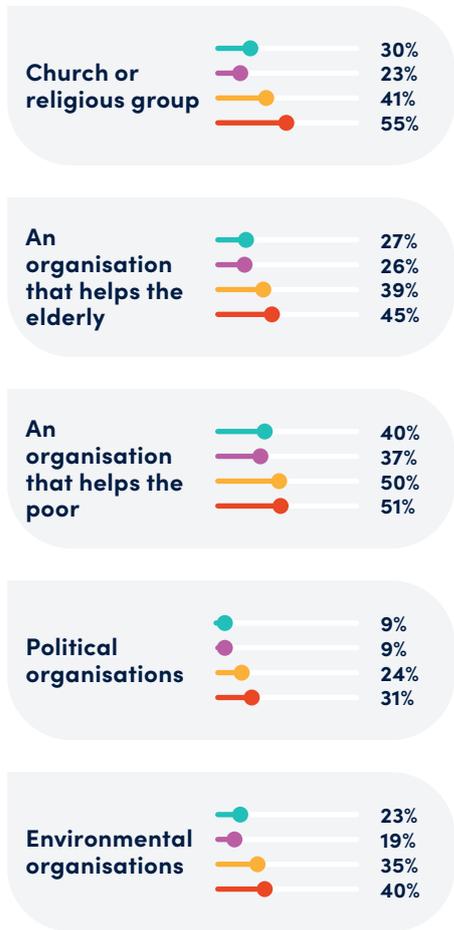
Catholic school graduates have high frequencies of giving. In the last 12 months, 68% of Catholic school graduates have donated to a non-profit, charitable organisation or group. While they do have the highest household incomes, their giving highlights an outward-facing approach when it comes to stewarding the resources they have earned.

Christian school graduates who have donated money in the last 12 months are most likely to be donating to a place of worship, including churches (45%), and to political causes (23%). A similar proportion of Independent school graduates have also donated to a political cause (21%).

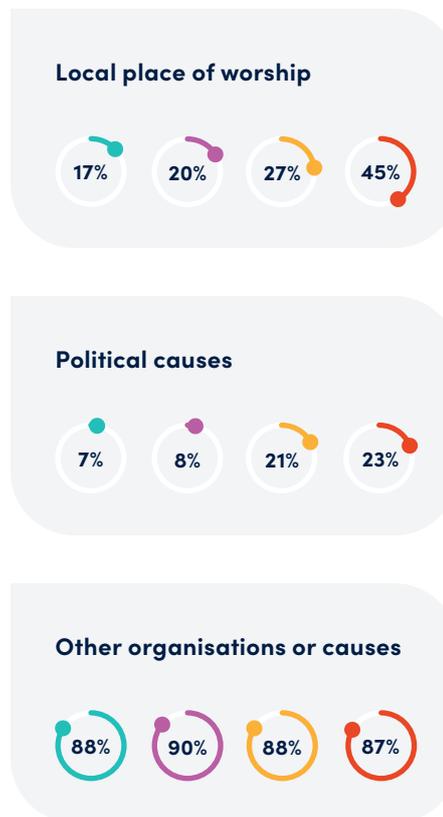
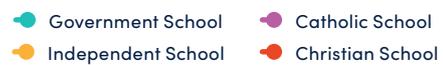
% of Millennial graduates who have volunteered in the past 12 months



% of Millennial graduates who have volunteered with the following groups in the past 12 months



% of Millennial graduates who have donated to the following in the past 12 months



% of Millennial graduates who have donated to a charitable organisation in the past 12 months



Family



Marriage and relationships

Marriage is a long-term societal tradition across many cultures and nations. It plays an important part in an individual's happiness and family security and is a building block for society. To achieve common good outcomes in education, schools and families need to work together. Healthy schools need healthy families and vice-versa. It is a combination of both that children need for their formation, growth and development into adulthood. Developing a strong connection between home and school is vital as both spheres influence the lives of students as they become adults. It's not schooling alone that impacts the adult family life of Millennials but also the family background and family life of their own upbringing.

To achieve common good outcomes in education, schools and families need to work together.

Family life looks different for Millennial graduates from different sectors.

Christian school graduates are the most likely to be married and never divorced (53%). More than two in five Government (41%), Catholic (43%) and Independent (43%) school graduates are married and have never been divorced.

Government school graduates are the most likely to have never been married (51%), followed by 50% of Catholic school graduates.

Marital outcomes of all Millennial graduates:

51% of Australian Millennial graduates have been married. Of these graduates, 15% of them have divorced at some point in their lives.



49% of Australian Millennials have never married



36% are living with an unmarried partner



Marital status of Millennial graduates

● Government School ● Catholic School ● Independent School ● Christian School

**Married
(never divorced)**



Never married



Religion

Faith and spiritual commitments and practices.

Australia's religious profile has shifted considerably in the past two decades. Australians are identifying less as Christian and an increasing number do not identify with any religion at all. Other religions are growing within Australian society including Buddhism, Sikhism, Islam, and Hinduism^v. Instead of finding meaning and identity in a deity or religious tradition, Australians are turning to alternative sources such as work, relationships, sports, entertainment and material possessions. However, faith and belief not only provide a sense of purpose, and the associated benefits of good mental health and wellbeing, but it also provides places of belonging and community connection.

Schools take different approaches and place different emphases on the importance of fostering a sense of the transcendent in students. This, alongside family background and other variables, is likely to play an important role in how students and high school graduates relate to religion or spirituality. Regardless, research shows the value in teaching students about faith and religion as it promotes social understanding and connection between people, therefore furthering notions of the common good^{vi}. Schools can, however, appeal to different ideas of the transcendent in ways other than traditional religious practices, such as educating their students to care for the natural world.

Millennial graduates have differing views of God.

Christian school graduates are the most likely to believe that God is a personal being involved in the lives of people today (45%), while Government school graduates are most likely to believe that God does not exist (35%). Government school graduates are also the most likely to be unsure what they think about God (22%).

Across the sectors, a similar proportion of Millennial graduates (between 15% and 19%) believe God is not personal, but something like a cosmic force. Catholic and Independent school graduates are more likely to split at both ends of the spectrum, believing either God is a personal being involved in the lives of people today (27% Catholic, 24% Independent), or God does not exist (26% Catholic, 25% Independent).

Prayer is the religious expression Millennial graduates are most likely to engage with.

The study shows that Millennial graduates from across the sectors are relating to faith and religion in different ways. Prayer is the religious expression that Millennial graduates are the most likely to engage with, above attending church or religious services.

Millennial Christian school graduates are most likely to have prayed (62%), engaged with a religious text (46%) or attended a religious service (40%) at least monthly in the past 12 months. This spiritual formation and the commitment to practices of faith are the outcomes of both the educational context and the familial influence.

Despite Catholic school graduates believing their school had an emphasis on spiritual and religious values, this does not appear to translate into attending religious services in adulthood. Just 16% of Catholic school graduates have attended a service at least monthly in the past 12 months.



Millennial graduates' views of God

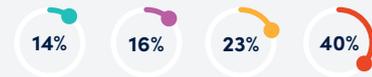
● Government School ● Catholic School
● Independent School ● Christian School



% of Millennial graduates who have engaged with the following at least monthly in the last 12 months

● Government School ● Catholic School
● Independent School ● Christian School

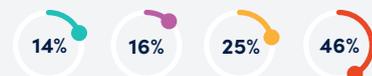
Attended a church or religious service



Prayed



Engaged with a religious text



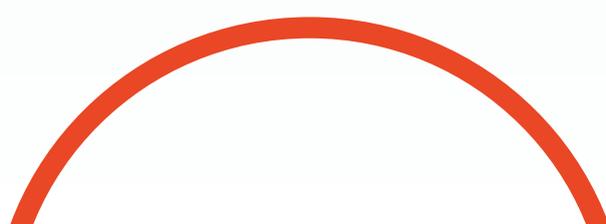


The future of educating for the common good

In educating for the common good, there are important priorities to be considered regarding effective academic learning and a service orientation, between the internal focus of one's self and the external focus of being others centred. Each schooling sector already separately considers questions regarding the outcomes of education, school reform, and their own practices of teaching and learning that form students to contribute to the common good. This CES Australia survey was commissioned to enable future international comparisons regarding these important outcomes across school sectors in the USA and Canada and also to stimulate conversations across all sectors within Australian education. It is hoped these conversations will contribute to the development and refinement of a narrative for education in Australia that provides the space for pluralism and difference across sectors whilst also validating the values or commitments we share in common.

Each Australian school graduate is not merely an individual but a member of a community and flourishing is only fulfilled if it is evident in both the individual and the community. This posture needs to be cultivated more widely in an increasingly self-interested and privatised public square. It requires a shift in cultural thinking to view the benefits that accumulate for society as a whole are greater than the benefits received by individuals separately. It requires a shift to focus on benefits that are not merely economic or privatised but more holistic. An aspiration of what life together might look like was the compelling story that shaped our country's identity and character toward nationhood. For Australia's enduring success, this needs to be our shared experience.

Each Australian high school graduate is not merely an individual but a member of a community that cannot be said to be flourishing if one of its members is not.





Methodology

The Cardus Education Survey was adapted for the Australian context. The data collection was administered between October and December 2019 by ORIMA Research to a nationally representative sample of 4,913 adults ages 25 to 39 who graduated secondary school in Australia.

There were 3,913 respondents who completed the survey online and another 1,000 respondents who completed it via computer assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) technology. Smaller segments of the population, such as graduates from Christian schools, were oversampled in order to boost the sample sizes and decrease margins of error in the analyses. The results used in this report are based on the full sample of 4,913 respondents.

A full-length documentation of the sampling methods, survey administration, creation of weights and other initial steps to clean the data are provided in online supplementary material that can be found on the [Cardus Education Survey Australia website](#).

This report is a summarised version of *The Cardus Education Survey Australia: Australian Schools and the Common Good* by Albert Cheng and Darren Iselin. Storytelling and visualisation by McCrindle.

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ⁱⁱⁱMcCrindle, 2020, Recovering from COVID-19: The Australian experience, generational impacts and the future outlook.

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^vSingleton, A, Rasmussen, M.L, Halafoff, A. and Bouma, G.D, 2019, The AGZ Study: Project report.

^{vi}Gross, Z and Rutland, S. D, 2019. How in-faith religious education strengthens social cohesion in multicultural Australia.

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