Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System

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Q54.

Chapter 2: Improving student outcomes – including for students most at risk of falling behind

Q1. 1. What are the most important student outcomes for Australian school students that should be measured in the next NSRA? Should these go beyond academic performance (for example, attendance and engagement)?

Learning growth from Years 9 - 12 is a vital measure that affords schools direct feedback and insight to their effectiveness with students. It is a natural progression from the NAPLAN learning gain methodology and would require a national Year 12 exit credential. In addition there is a need for greater sophistication in regard to retention and transition data from Years 10, 11 and 12. Many students actually make successful transitions in these senior years to TAFE, apprenticeships and work. Schools that guide and support students in this regard are successful and should be recognised for that work in order to build community and prospective parent confidence. Graduating student preference data is another measure worth capturing to enable schools to reflect on the satisfaction of students, their subject selections, and the alignment with their aspirations for post school learning. The % of students entering University, TAFE, and the work force should be standard measures for all Australian secondary schools.

Q2. 2. What are the evidence-based practices that teachers, schools, systems and sectors can put in place to improve student outcomes, particularly for those most at risk of falling behind? Are different approaches required for different at-risk cohorts?

Flexible ability grouping based on regular 3-4 week pretest and post test results has proven successful in Primary schools. The availability of specialised testing (such as WISC) for students from lower socio economic backgrounds is vital. Experience indicates that families in Low SES and disadvantaged communities do not have the means to readily access such services and often have to wait many months for access through community health or other providers. Skilling teachers to administer these tests or providing funding for greater clinical support in high needs schools is essential for informed early intervention.

Q3. 3. How can all students at risk of falling behind be identified early on to enable swift learning interventions?

Early and regular testing is essential. Especially in key years such as Kindergarten and then the transition points at the end of stages 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 (in NSW). Teachers and schools also need to identify core metrics such as attendance patterns over 10 day periods for all students as lateness and absences are often an initial sign of disengagement. The practice of pre testing and post testing, before and after units of work within the scope and sequence of a teaching program, is a practice which informs the teacher of every student's knowledge and ability to some degree. Such practices also enable differentiation of the student learning to assist in identifying and supporting students at risk of falling behind.

Q4. 4. Should the next NSRA add additional priority equity cohorts? For example, should it add children and young people living in out-of-home care and students who speak English as an additional language or dialect? What are the risks and benefits of identifying additional cohorts?

The concept of additional priority equity cohorts has merit. From experience, students coming to Australia as migrants and refugees during their secondary years would benefit from additional priority equity cohort structure, especially in the period of later secondary schooling. For children and young people living in out of home care, this is also a concept worth exploring. In my experience with Sudanese refugee students, there are risks associated with this concept as the lived age and physical, and emotional maturity of students can be unsettling when they are a more mature minority among younger students. This was particularly noticeable with the senior female students who, due to cultural pressures and cultural norms, were often entering marriage and long term relationships and having children before completing school, as young women in their late teens and early twenties. University foundation offerings for students in preparation for undertaking undergraduate study have been popular with many of these students as they move into a more adult learning setting. The benefits of additional priority equity cohorts is that they essentially provide more time, which is required.

Q5. 5. What should the specific targets in the next NSRA be? Should the targets be different for primary and secondary schools? If so, how? What changes are required to current measurement frameworks, and what new measures might be required?

Currently many schools and systems are using the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) PAT testing. There is a need to provide schools and systems with a greater alignment between the progressive achievement testing approach (PAT) and NAPLAN. Both are vital and can complement each other in a constructive way. At present there is a dichotomy in which schools, relying on PAT testing, often do not understand nor appreciate the importance of the NAPLAN measurement and reporting. The need for alignment between these two major platforms operating in Australia is important to mediate. In addition to these specific targets on literacy and numeracy, there needs to be professional learning for existing teachers and a greater focus for undergraduate teachers on explicit instruction. The lack of confidence of many new teachers with basic literacy conventions undermines their confidence in teaching the students. The curriculum in Australia in many jurisdictions is overcrowded. A pragmatic approach to recommended curriculum hours in all subjects is required with clear priority for literacy and numeracy through increased hours for Maths and English.

Q6. 6. How can the targets in the next NSRA be structured to ensure evidence-based approaches underpin a nationally coherent reform agenda while allowing jurisdictions and schools the flexibility to respond to individual student circumstances and needs?

The targets should be structured around NAPLAN testing for students up to Year 9. Until there is a consistent and unified Year 12 exit credential in this country, it is very difficult to establish targets for students beyond Year 9. Therefore, it is of national importance that Australia moves to a single coherent, consistent, Year 12 exit credential. Currently the universities seek to make, for example, a consistent entry with the ATAR, however in reality, it is calculated in different ways depending on the jurisdiction in which the student can leave school. The principles of competency, growth, learning gain and appropriate progress at each year level underpin our NAPLAN structure. To extend this to Years 10, 11 and 12, is important, conscious that students transitioning to other modes of learning post school need to be captured as well as those concluding Year 12.

Q7. 7. How should progress towards any new targets in the next NSRA be reported on?

Targets in the next NSRA should be reported on using the wealth of data we already have through NAPLAN and with a clear plan to establish within the next 5 years, a common Year 12 exit credential and a common arrangement in each jurisdiction for transition requirements for those students leaving school in Years 10, 11 and 12, before the end of Year 12, who enter TAFE or apprenticeships or the workforce.

Q55.
Chapter 3: Improving student mental health and wellbeing

Q8. 8. What does it look like when a school is supporting student mental health and wellbeing effectively? What is needed from school, systems, government and the community to deliver this?

Schools who support student mental health and wellbeing effectively have the following characteristics: i. An engaging and well attended parent education program ii. A clear pastoral structure in which the social and emotional needs of students are catered iii. A school culture that defines the best pastoral care as good teaching and learning iv. Ready access to trained clinicians such as psychologists, speech therapists, and other ancillary health professionals v. Building student resilience From the perspective of Catholic education there is no doubt that wellbeing and health are also linked to a young person's spiritual development. There should be an expectation in all schools across each sector and system that there are appropriately trained counsellors and the ratio of counsellors and psychologists employed at a school should be influenced by the level of advantage of the community.

Q9. 9. What evidence-based wellbeing approaches currently being implemented by schools and communities should be considered as part of a national reform agenda?

The ACER wellbeing survey has been used in schools for well over 15 years. It is now a repository of standardized data by which schools can assess the wellbeing of students and their structures to support students. In addition to this is the intentional emphases of schools to characterize excellent teaching and engaged learning as the most appropriate form of pastoral care and promotion of student wellbeing. The element of learning aspirations as a motivator for students in the learning process, is also evident in highly successful schools. The research in regard to motivation, aspiration, target setting and imagination emphasizes the power of this element of school life.

Q10. 10. Should a wellbeing target be included in the next NSRA? Could this use existing data collections, or is additional data required?

The wellbeing target should be included in the next NSRA with a common instrument to be used throughout the country such as the ACER wellbeing survey.

Q11. 11. Would there be benefit in surveying students to help understand student perceptions of safety and belonging at school, subjective state of wellbeing, school climate and classroom disruption? Would there be value in incorporating this into existing National Assessment Program surveys such as NAPLAN?

The work done on engagement through PISA analysis and the Gratten Institute in regard to student engagement is important to be highlighted in the ways suggested in this question. The importance of student voice and school climate have been thoroughly researched by Edith Cowen University and Dr Paul Rijken from South Australia.

Q12. 12. To what extent do school leaders and teachers have the skills and training to support students struggling with mental health?

School leaders and teachers do have skills in identifying students struggling with mental health. Importantly, school leaders and teachers need support in appropriately referring students struggling with mental health to the appropriate health care providers. It is not appropriate for teachers and school leaders to try and undertake the more sophisticated elements of treating young people with serious mental health issues as it can, inadvertently, minimize the suffering a young person is experiencing.

13. 13. What can be done to establish stronger partnerships between schools, Local Health Networks and Primary Health Networks?

The most effective way in which to build stronger partnerships is by convening gatherings of the stakeholders named. From experience, this was a highly successful strategy of the NSW Police in southwest Sydney during the early 2000s when there was heightened activity of terrorist cells around Lakemba, Wiley Park, Punchbowl and Greenacre. The Local Area Commands established with schools a range of relationships, procedures and networks very successfully and schools from different sectors worked cohesively in a very difficult social climate.

Q19. 14. What can be done to ensure schools can easily refer students to services outside the school gate that they need to support their wellbeing? How can this be done without adding to teacher and leader workload?

The serious need to support students in their wellbeing necessitates student services being advertised prominently in the school and with parents in a manner not dissimilar to the police and emergency health services. Community Health and other providers need to be promoted and relationships formed by the school in an introductory way with parents.

Q56.
Chapter 4: Our current and future teachers

Q20. 15. What change(s) would attract more students into the teaching profession?

Changes that would attract more students into the teaching profession include: i. a greater emphasis on the vocation of teaching as well as the profession of teaching. Young people are called to teach. They derive satisfaction from helping someone else master knowledge, skills and competencies. This essential element that drives and motivates teachers, must be better described, identified and nurtured. ii. Sadly, Australian teacher preparation has declined in the most critical area of development of a good teacher, namely practical experience under supervision. As a teacher who graduated in the early 1980s, fellow undergraduates prior to obtaining a Bachelor of Education, had undertaken approximately 100 days of practicum experience in a three year diploma, taught full time for 3 years and studied part time in their second and third year out of teachers college to achieve their Bachelor. Therefore, as a graduate teacher, with a Bachelor of Education, you had not only a 4 year degree, but the equivalent of approximately 730 teaching days. In addition to this, there were experienced teachers appointed to new teachers as mentors for at least the first year.

Q32. 16. What change(s) would support teachers to remain in the profession?

Teaching methodology is the art of teaching, the management of students, the development of relationships, and the ability to lead large groups of students. Paucity of training in these areas leads to the failure of people to stick with the vocation because they do not feel confident. Greater practicum experience and a greater focus on how to teach successfully in the first years of teaching are essential. In addition to this, there is a growing dearth of male teachers in primary and secondary school. Australian political leaders are urged to look at other countries in the OECD and compare teacher salaries and teacher conditions. Teacher's salaries need to be increased but also the expectations of teachers in regard to student stand down periods. The vast majority of teachers in Australia have a gazetted four week annual leave. The other 6 weeks are student stand down but it has become an expectation and custom and practice that these are teacher holidays as well. It is important to have every teacher involved in preparing lessons and program writing during for at least 3 weeks per annum in the student stand down periods.

Q31. 17. What change(s) would support qualified teachers to return to the profession?

It is important that Australia has again a national approach to the teaching profession. The amount of paperwork and bureaucracy to be registered to teach in different states and territories is problematic. In addition to removing these obstacles and having a unified national approach, there needs to be appropriate recognition for teachers who have left the profession for a period of time and a streamlined way of rejoining the profession without arduous proof of competency.

Q30. 18. What additional reforms are needed to ensure that the schools most in need can support and retain highly effective teachers?

Schools most in need can support and retain highly effective teachers if additional resources are provided and in particular, flexibility in relation to salaries and time. Therefore schools in difficult to staff areas or in schools most in need, should be staffed at a higher level where teachers and school leaders have more time to devote to a smaller cohort of students in their care as well as salaries which are commensurate with the effort being put in. In the United Kingdom, the highest paid teachers are in the schools most in need and this has been the case for almost two decades.

Q29. 19. What can be done to attract a diverse group of people into the teaching profession to ensure it looks like the broader community?

Target schools with the most diverse student populations and present the benefits and joy in becoming a teacher.

Q28. 20. What can be done to attract more First Nations teachers? What can be done to improve the retention of First Nations teachers?

To address this issue is to speak to First Nations leaders and listen to their ideas in regard to teaching and First Nations teachers.

Q26. 21. What reforms could enable the existing teacher workforce to be deployed more effectively?

School autonomy is vital in the employment of teachers. There are wretched experiences of young teachers in various systems who are made temporary for up to 4 or 5 years and in that time are ever under the scepter of being moved. Principals need to be the key role in the employment of teachers. Even the use of the verb "deployed" underlines the depersonalization of the teaching vocation and the importance of the relationships that underpin great schools.

Q25. 22. How can teacher career pathways, such as master teachers and instructional specialists, be improved to attract and retain teachers? How should this interact with the Highly Accomplished or Lead Teacher (HALT) certification and the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers?

Increased salaries. Most effective way of improve teacher workload and streamline administrative tasks is for teachers to work in teams. By sharing the responsibility for preparing teacher programs and therefore sharing one another's work, is healthy professional practice and a pragmatic way of lessening teacher preparation time.

Q24. 23. Are there examples of resources, such as curriculum materials, being used to improve teacher workload or streamline their administrative tasks?

An important area for teachers to improve is the nature of assessment. Too often teachers will prepare for large cohorts assessment tasks which are inordinately time consuming to mark and provide feedback. There are many skills in developing appropriate assessment tasks that require varying levels of thinking skills by students but are not overly onerous to mark or time consuming in providing specific individualised feedback.

Q23. 24. How should digital technology be used to support education delivery, reduce teacher workload and improve teacher effectiveness? What examples are you aware of?

Digital technology can be used to support education delivery and can reduce teacher workload and improve teacher effectiveness most importantly through the development of assessment matrixes. Many digital student management platforms can provide a wealth of data however, the nature of the data is vital to discern. School based assessments, coupled with external validating assessments such as NAPLAN, are important to capture for teachers and individual students in readily accessible ways.

Q22. 25. Are there benefits for the teaching profession in moving to a national registration system? If so, what are they?

There are enormous benefits for the teaching profession in moving to a national registration system. These include portability between states and territories in an increasingly more mobile population, shared best practice between states and territories in relation to the nature of teaching standards, the development of highly skilled teachers and lead teachers. A national registration system is a logical development from a national curriculum and a national assessment program and as previously posited, a national school exit credential.

Q57.
Chapter 5: Collecting data to inform decision-making and boost student outcomes

Q27. 26. What data are of most value to you and how accessible are these for you?

Enrolment data – community confidence Attendance data – student engagement NAPLAN data – ethical learning growth comparisons and teacher efficacy Junior and middle school based assessment data - senior school subject advice and direction, setting up students for success Exit credential results – teacher, student, school performance and parent satisfaction Student Preference data – student aspirations Destination data – the next stage in the learning journey for each student

Q35. 27. Is there any data that are not currently collected and reported on that is vital to understanding education in Australia? Why is this data important?

The Australian Bureau of Statistics has a case study named Australian's Journeys through Life. This data captures Year 11 and 12 students from a point in time and traces their education and employment in early adulthood. The impact of school education as captured in this data set is something that should be made a priority in our society. It is enormously important in determining the effectiveness of school systems and individual schools as well as identifying trends in the patterns of transition from school to further learning and employment. There also needs to be a far more sophisticated capturing of post Year 12 destination data, student preference data as they transition from school to further learning and work. This data is important because it measures and reports on the fundamental reality for every young person's journey through school. Where do they transition and how? There would also be enormous benefit in a national student school satisfaction survey.

Q34. 28. Should data measurement and reporting on outcomes of students with disability be a priority under the next NSRA? If so, how can this data be most efficiently collected?

This should be a priority due to the fact that current measures such as NAPLAN are skewed without explanation, particularly for schools with high percentages of students with disabilities. It is not affording young people with a disability, appropriate dignity to have them without a specific and differentiated data measurement and reporting outcome.

Q33. 29. Is there a need to establish a report which tracks progress on the targets and reforms in the next NSRA? Should it report at a jurisdictional and a national level? What should be included in the report?

Competition in education is a proven motivator. The next NSRA should report at a jurisdictional and national level particularly in meeting literacy and numeracy standards. Teacher retention data needs to be collected by school systems, sectors and jurisdictions and research undertaken to discern what differences exist and why they exist in successful teacher retention. Professional experience suggests strongly that a more developed sense of vocation as a teacher nurtures greater resilience and satisfaction for all teachers but particularly for those in their first 5 - 10 years.

Q32. 30. Is there data collected by schools, systems, sectors or jurisdictions that could be made more available to inform policy design and implementation? What systems would be necessary to enable these data are made available safely and efficiently?

no comment

Q31. 31. The Productivity Commission and Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) have identified the need for longitudinal data to identify the actual students at risk of falling behind based on their performance (and not on equity groups alone) and to monitor these students' progress over time. Should this be the key data reform for the next NSRA?

Yes. AERO have identified an urgent need for Australian schools.

Q30. 32. Should an independent body be responsible for collecting and holding data? What rules should be in place to govern the sharing of data through this body?

No comment

Q29. 33. Is there data being collected that is no longer required?

No.

Q28. 34. How could the national Unique Student Identifier (USI) support improved outcomes for students?

Mostly in assisting students who move schools and tracking their learning progress.

Q58.
Chapter 6: Funding transparency and accountability

Q36. 35. Are there other objectives for funding accountability and transparency we have missed?

Funding accountability and transparency are essential in the Australian educational landscape. Increased funding however, must be based on socio economical need rather than inability of a cohort to achieve minimum standards.

Q39. 36. How can governments make better use of the information already collected and/or published to achieve the objectives?

There needs to be a far greater and overt emphasis on the learning gain data captured in NAPLAN and celebrated appropriately. Schools that are performing well always, unfailingly, demonstrate comparative success when comparing students from statistically similar backgrounds and students with the same starting scores between the established NAPLAN test periods.We have a world class national assessment tool that is being misused and misunderstood in the public domain.

Q38. 37. What other funding accountability and transparency information regarding schools (both your school and the education system more generally) would be useful?

There are education authorities in the public and non government sectors that have ballooned bureaucracies. It would be helpful for a set of guidelines and expectations to be developed that captures an appropriate percentage of annual turnover of a school or system budget that can be attributed to system leadership. This would obviously need to be carefully designed on a scale linked to the ICSEA of school communities however, some broad guidelines would be useful to ensure that system administrations were resourced at an appropriate level.

Q37. 38. What are the priority gaps in the current funding transparency and accountability arrangements from your perspective?

There is an enormous amount of misinformation in regard to the current funding arrangements. It is simply deceitful to continually have non government schools presented as receiving more government funding than government schools. This lack of transparency is divisive in the Australian community.

Q59. Do you have any additional comments? (2,000 characters)

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this national consultation.

Q52. If you have more information you would like to share with the Expert Panel, please send a written response as a .docx or RTF format to NSRA.submissions@education.gov.au. An additional PDF version may also be submitted. Please make sure to note that your email is to be considered alongside your current submission.

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