

Q44.

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)?

Student wellbeing - particularly their sense of engagement, connection and the relevance of their school learning to their current and future lives. These are critical factors to student motivation, their career choices and subsequently their relationship with both their teachers and broader society. They also have a significant domino effect in the system - a lack of relevance and engagement can consistently lead to students wasting time in schools, disrupting other students learning, harming teacher wellbeing and relationships, adding to their administrative burden and the wider school's administrative burden. Student career knowledge, understanding or planning. There is a marked gap in schooling connecting to students career pathways, their active role in thinking, being informed and making decisions for these potential pathways. Given how important this is for helping students make good decisions for their current and future lives, while minimising the debt they incur, years of life wasted in training or education they don't need and the impact on the efficiency of the economy, it is a sorely neglected area of understanding in the system.

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?

Different approaches are not possible in a system that is highly restrictive. The current model has standardised outcomes and syllabus content, particularly in high school, to the point that meeting students needs, particularly those at risk, has become increasingly difficult. When students are not given time to lead their learning, set their own goals and choose more in their learning, all students become more disengaged. The reality is the students most at-risk often do not fit in with these standardised curricula and become more pushed out of the system into even less advantaged schools or ostracised from their age group and wider society. Regardless of what 'teachers can do' or 'how teachers teach', if students feel their learning is irrelevant, then there is little any good or bad teacher can do. This means that systems need to better design curriculum and assessment for teachers to co-design, collaborate and allow students to lead more of their learning. It also means student voice needs to be better heard as many at-risk (and simply disengaged students) do not have their frustrations heard, yet I've spent years speaking to a diversity of adolescents who see this problem.

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

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?

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?

Measuring more qualitatively the experience of students is critical in the system. Ideas I've mentioned about students sense of belonging, the relevance of their learning, relationships with their teachers and related topics are critical if we want students, particularly those at-risk, to stay in schools. Too often teachers are not heard, but worse, too often teachers and the system do not listen to students, particularly those at-risk. This means the voices need to be amplified as even NSW data - the Tell them From Me survey - reveals shocking data on the above topics and related topics for student wellbeing. However, it remains quantitative with no solutions and merely tokenistically pretends to monitor student experiences, rather than work with them for their voice to lead to more of the system wide change necessary for target to be met across the board.

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?

Alongside designing more wellbeing based targets and offering greater qualitative opportunities for students and teachers to express the challenges, a body for students at different levels is really critical. These need to represent the diversity of student populations out there, including regional, remote and urban, alongside cultural, racial, socio-economic and gender and sexuality. This will better ensure that education reform is done more with students, rather than done to them. Many students are already learning despite schools - through YouTube, Google and social media - or opting out because they can see the potential of this technology and AI to offer more relevant, engaging and independent learning, while the system fails to meet their needs because it has become too top-down, standardised and lacking bottom-up democratic mechanisms, as well as flexible designs in the system - particularly assessment and syllabi.

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

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?

It looks far more like a partnership and offers students far more opportunities to be heard. I have worked in a school that was the first in the state to permanently hire a social worker, and whilst working alongside her have found great progress with many students. Her approach and the knowledge and skills of social workers is not driven by assessment tasks or syllabus dot points as teachers are often measured by. This leads to a far more supportive, personal, democratic and equitable relationship between students and adults. However, without her role and individuals with mental health, careers and student aspirations at the centre of their interactions, many students become treated like a blank slate or as not unique. In reality, the individual approach that is far more trusting, shared and safe for students to speak to adults allows for mental health and wellbeing to be addressed as it becomes more about the individual, their needs and aspirations, rather than the systems desired outcomes or 'measures of success'.

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

Social workers as mentioned above and curriculum design that offers greater empowerment of students to be in partnership with teachers - there is quite a lot of evidence that similar programs or projects have worked in various contexts. For instance, we've seen this programs work in juvenile justice in the US and alternative schools in Australia already build these environments - ones where adults work alongside, more as mentors and coaches than merely teachers expecting compliance - for the most disadvantaged and for those who have left the system (some who have opted out because of boredom and others suffering from continued trauma). Some papers to consider: https://www.oup.com.au/_data/assets/file/0009/132102/9780190309770_SC.pdf <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13603116.2014.961684> <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9780429422461-8/alternative-education-social-justice-considering-issues-affective-contributive-justice-martin-mills-glenda-mcgregor-aspa-baroutsis-kitty-te-rielle-debra-hayes> <https://www.aare.edu.au/blog/?p=845>

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

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?

YES. This in general is critical and sorely lacking across the system.

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

Teachers and schools have more than enough training for these issues, though social workers can be helpful for their deeper knowledge and understanding, as well as their relationship. However, we have to shift our perception of teachers roles away from purely curriculum experts and 'teachers' if we want to take this more seriously or expect this to be a greater part of teachers roles. Working alongside social workers would be important given their relationship with students and in schools is different, however, better voice and empowerment of students in their learning would certainly minimise mental health challenges and inherently improve their relationship with teachers. This would likely prevent those most at-risk from being pushed out or lost in systems and improve many outcomes to keep them in schools and on stable, healthy life trajectories.

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

Greater transparency, more time and less admin.

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?

Better integration of technology that allows for schools and local services to connect and share information.

Q56.

Chapter 4: Our current and future teachers

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

I teach university students studying to be teachers and their expectation of teaching, in comparison to the reality, is often what pushes them out of the profession early (it even did it to me, but I'm trying to fix it). Many student-teachers hear of the disillusionment and depression in their faculties when they already go out on their pracs during their undergraduate degrees. We need to improve the working conditions of teachers, but part of this is allowing for greater trust in teachers, which will mean de-standardising the curriculum, assessment and accountability measures. It also will mean some of the suggestions I've given here that can lead to better student engagement and greater partnerships and community within schools so the workplace is safer for teachers, more rewarding and less focused on controlling students at every corner and compliance in all teaching practice. I would argue that here is another point where teenagers and young adults need to be asked - why don't they go into teaching? I think part of it is likely they had bad teachers and bad experiences of school, so why would they want to go back into that environment?

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

Reducing workload by: - minimising standardised assessment pressures so that teachers don't always have to be marking, documenting and organising exorbitant amounts of work - reducing face-to-face teaching time, whether this is by expanding recesses/lunches and minimising the expected hours of time in each content area or bringing external partners from the community to help co-teach (such as local artists, musicians or tradesmen) or vice versa, allowing students to take more control of their learning by going out into the community on more work experience/internships to help with career development and minimise hours on teachers - greater flexibility in their teaching, what I've mentioned about broadening the curriculum options and allowing time for students (e.g. one term per subject/per year for instance) to co-design learning with teachers that minimises the leading of learning and preparation of work for students, but rather works alongside students as they learn.

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

Frankly, better conditions in schools would make teachers want to come back, rather than simply training. The only training that would help would be that which updates teachers - for instance training in new technology or software to ease their assessing of students or feedback.

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

Funding remains critical - outside of my points about syllabi and assessment. Finding ways to allow funding to properly reach the disadvantaged areas helps for shaping environments people want to teach in and students want to go to learn.

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?

Greater voice, choice and trust would allow people to better connect with their experiences in schools.

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

Same points as above.

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

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?

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

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?

Some assessment software can be useful or independent work - such as content that needs to be taught and can be via videos and tasks. Software such as Edrolo can be useful.

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

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?

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?

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?

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?

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?

The work from Tell Them from Me is useful, though could be tweaked and is too hidden from policy makers and the public. Student wellbeing data in that survey is quite shocking and disappointing (and has been for a decade), yet changes don't come from it and it shows the power of students voices. More importantly, it needs to be less tokenistic, student voices need to be heard more regularly with real change occurring more consistently.

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?

Definitions of what 'falling behind' need to be more nuanced. Literacy and numeracy are narrow measures that don't mean individuals can't get a job or a trade for instance. Meanwhile, they don't measure or reveal much about students social or emotional development that clearly have costs on society - consider the continued high numbers of domestic violence in Australia or suicide among men. Data needs to better capture the warning signs of these phenomenon that have far reaching impacts beyond the individual and more than likely will correlate, but also may reveal hidden populations or individuals who might not be found in traditional measures such as literacy and numeracy. Furthermore, numeracy and literacy needs to be better nuanced - such as monitoring of financial numeracy that has a greater impact on long-term outcomes for individuals, as well as informational literacy that similarly is more contextually empowering of individuals than other literacy content and skills.

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?

The more streamlined these data collecting mechanisms and less compliance based bodies the better. More of these over the years have significantly undermined public trust and respect for teachers, whilst minimising the actual use of data for change instead created a culture over-assessment and capturing of data for its own sake.

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

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

Q58.
Chapter 6: Funding transparency and accountability

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

There needs to be better capturing of private funds and donations in schools that must impact and minimise the funds given to schools that are far more advantaged. There also needs to be greater capturing and understanding of schools own wealth data - i.e. the quality of their facilities, the value of their land and other resources - to better account for inequity in the system. This also needs to be less subsidised by state and federal governments as these are investments schools and their communities make that are a luxury, rather than a necessity or a fair distribution of public funds.

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

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

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

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

I am working in the space of student agency as it is a canary in the coalmine of education. Schools, unions and media seem to ignore or outwardly hide students lack of engagement in schooling (and this is not just a low-SES problem). Meanwhile, the emphasis in our culture on teacher quality and school quality has led to a continued ignorance of this problem where students can learn whatever they want - from their phones or laptops - whenever they want, if they wanted to, but go to schools that continue to ignore this fact. And this is a system wide issue, not just a school one. Given the impact of AI and ChatGPT already, it is a pressing concern for curriculum design, the purpose and role of both schools and teachers, which we are failing to discuss and are drastically behind on even addressing. Yet in all the schools I have taught, student behaviour is a critical factor in teachers leaving and while 'workload' is always raised, often what is ignored is how exhausted teachers are emotionally because of student behaviour. Systems continue to hide this data (like the Tell Them from Me survey) and the schools most experiencing this stress, which has already created a feedback loop exacerbated by funding and My School, whereby the most difficult students go to the most disadvantaged schools and vice versa. As politicians have created a culture of 'parents buying education' and school competition, it has simply furthered this gap - the work of Emeritus Professor Bob Lingard has even tracked that this has gotten worse in the last decade in NSW. It is not extreme to raise the concern that we are following down the part of an American system that is so polarised and ghettoised that we may not be able to ever turn back if it isn't taken seriously.

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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