



New South Wales Primary Principals' Association ***Review to Inform a Better Fairer Education System***

2 August 2023

The New South Wales Primary Principals' Association welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Expert panel on the National School Reform Agreement consultation paper.

The New South Wales Primary Principals' Association is the professional Association representing 1800 government primary school principals across NSW. Our schools span the full range of contexts including rural, regional and remote, SSPs, hospital schools, environmental education centres and central/community schools. A third of our membership are teaching principals.

David Gonski, Chair of the Review of Funding for Schooling expert panel said:

“Every child should have access to the best possible education, regardless of where they live, the income of their family or the school they attend.”

Just as importantly, Dr Philip Riley (Chief Investigator of the Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Surveys) reminds us:

“Today’s children are tomorrow’s nation builders. We owe it to them and ourselves to give them the best opportunities we can.”

The current review being undertaken is a **once in a generation** opportunity to positively impact and shape the education system in Australia. This rebuilding of our nation’s schooling system should start in government primary schools which are the foundation of communities throughout the country.

The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration prioritises an education system that promotes excellence and equity, and supports all young Australians to become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community.

Primary schools provide a holistic education; every Year 6 student must leave primary school with high levels of literacy and numeracy, be healthy and find joy in learning to be prepared for secondary education. By having these attributes, students will demonstrate high levels of engagement, feel valued, and have acquired the dispositions to be effective learners.

In order to achieve vision of the Mparntwe declaration, our government primary schools require appropriate resourcing and recognition from their respective State Governments as well as the Federal Government.

Noticings in a range of reports, including the Productivity Commission, 2023:

- Primary SRS being significantly lower than secondary (over \$3105 differential)
- Funding to Government schools being limited to less than 90% of the SRS in most states and territories across Australia.
- In effect, government primary schools in some states and territories are funded at less than 65%

SRS when they should be funded at 80%.

- Currently 1/3 of Independent and Catholic schools receive more government funding than 50% of government primary schools.

Primary school teaching is a highly specialised profession as teachers are required to have knowledge of all learning areas, whilst supporting the social and emotional development of each individual student. These are the critical formative years for students.

Research and educational experts, including Pasi Sahlberg, attest the issues arising with the focus on national testing in many jurisdictions around the world. He laments that what is most worrying: *'is the shift of teachers' and students' attention from teaching and learning for understanding towards being successful in high stake tests and exams'*.

The importance of teachers in the learning process is well acknowledged as a critical driver. A real investment on Early Childhood Education must be made – EVERY child must have access to high quality pre-schooling to foster play, creativity and engagement. Dispositions for learning are formed in early education which provides a strong foundation for successful lifelong learning. Ensuring interagency support and services are wrapped around students and their families is an essential element to optimise learning.

Wellness of our workforce must be addressed. At a corporate level – Education Support Team, at a Principal level and at a teacher level. Our education system underpins all others – everyone goes to school.

Our teaching and executive workforce are experiencing:

- *Teacher workforce shortage*
- *Excessive workloads and working hours*
- *An increase in anti-social and disruptive student behaviour in line with current societal issues*
- *Increased management of bullying, and reactive management strategies*
- *Aggression from parents*

Key Reform Focus Areas for the next NSRA:

1. Coordinated support for children (interagency coordination), provision of allied health and social services.

There are many aspects to children's learning and wellbeing. Children need access to allied health supports and screening services, both prior to school and in school. Research shows that early intervention maximises the success for students.

2. Accountability and NAPLAN.

NAPLAN has a place in our schools – it can provide a valuable data set for school planning and improvement in a limited scope of literacy and numeracy. Schools are experts at using a range of valid and reliable data to assess the growth and achievement of student learning and to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and learning programs.

3. Resourcing for primary education and prior to school programs and pedagogy is a priority. More resources must be devolved to the school level and senior educators trusted to make good decisions in their local contexts.

4. Local Decision Making

School leaders need to be supported to tailor systemic priorities to meet the needs of their local context.

5. Attraction and Retention.

To keep teaching staff in schools, we need to remunerate and respect them for the work they do and provide time for collaboration and high quality professional learning.

6. **Initial Teacher Education**

Content and quality must be relevant and transferrable into schools – an apprenticeship model for ITE students in schools is critical to grow practice and attract a stream of future educators into the profession.

7. **Interagency Support**

A true mechanism for reform, the NSRA must extend beyond schools, to the myriad agencies and services children and their families have to deal with. We must have coherent and interconnected services that work with children and families in need.

8. **Resourcing**

Primary schools are funded significantly less per student than their secondary equivalents. Primary outcomes substantially predict the course of a student's life.

9. **Trust in the Profession**

The status of the profession needs to be elevated and pay scales need to be reviewed and increased. In jurisdictions where teachers are well paid, the workforce is more stable, has more capacity and the student outcomes are higher. Remuneration is but one aspect - if we want to connect teachers to their workplace and for them to stay connected with the profession, we also need to substantially improve their conditions. Teachers must have **time** for planning, assessment, and reporting, and these need to become scheduled as part of the working week. Higher remuneration for educators would demonstrate respect and value for the work teachers and principals do. In turn this would attract and retain a workforce of the highest calibre.

What would happen if government primary schools were fully funded by the NSRA now?

In short, it would amplify the ability of every primary setting to meet the educational needs of every student.

Government schools are about EQUITY and EXCELLENCE - prioritising and investing in primary schools NOW matters. It is **now** we need to be stepping up together for a **Better and Fairer Education System**.

On behalf of the NSWPPA Executive,

Kind regards

Robyn Evans

President

New South Wales Primary Principals' Association.



1. Meeting the needs of all students and shaping the nation's future

- Equity needs to be addressed. Targeted funding for disabilities, Aboriginal and remote students backed up by system improvements – staffing, access to curriculum breadth etc
- NSRA MUST be delivered NOW in NSW - not in 2027 – the students of today must be funded. THIS is the EQUITY public education requires.
- Completely agree with the agreement on the purpose of schooling
- Data - Use existing data, don't measure more things at more points. Perhaps use the NAPLAN points as descriptors and review A - E reporting. Develop comparable equity measures that consider in-school and non-school factors and ensure data sharing.
- *The delivery of excellent education needs to be attuned to the needs of students from all backgrounds, including First Nations students, students with disability, students in regional, rural and remote areas, students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, and students from a non-English speaking background – it is essential that it is recognised that these students are concentrated in government schools.*

2. Improving student outcomes including students most at risk at falling behind

- A common definition and measuring equity is required.
- Recognition in funding that schools with a high concentration of the most advantaged or disadvantaged intensifies the positive or negative outcomes.

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)?

- In theory it is fine to include such additional measures, but they must be meaningful rather than just available – the NSW experience has not been particularly positive. There is always the danger that failure to meet politically driven targets can be used as a stick to beat schools and educators with.
- Teacher workload to implement new measures must also be considered.

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?

- Universal access to an adequate supply of high-quality teachers in all schools would be the single most effective resource to meet the needs of at-risk students – in schools serving at-risk communities the staffing shortage is generally the most keenly felt.
- There needs to be a holistic approach to address why the student is at risk of falling behind. Address poverty at home, health issues, family violence etc as well as learning at school.
- Access to universal preschool.
- Identify and work with families at risk pre-birth onwards (resources provided to support this).

- Tiered approaches, a model of small group tutoring, effective, skilled school-based learning support teams

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

- 100% access to quality pre-schools, thorough assessment and easy access to meaningful support – easy to identify, hard to provide.

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?*

- Is there significant overlap between existing equity cohorts and those that are being considered? For example, by boosting equity for ATSI and low SES students, are we already covering the majority of out of home care students?
- EALD students are not a homogenous group. Is there value in also looking at exactly which EALD background are experiencing the most significant educational disadvantage? This comes with the risk of stigmatising some cultural backgrounds.
- Out of home care is poorly defined as many students in our equity cohorts aren't in formalised care.

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?*

- The target needs to be EQUITY – each and every community will require something different – it can't be a blanket approach – this is to ensure we meet the needs of individual students in our schools.

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

- Extremely important that schools be the primary decision makers in addressing the needs of their students – need to avoid an overly prescriptive, top-down approach.
- Targets must be structured to allow ongoing monitoring and to be responsive - timely interventions are identified and used.

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

- NSRA targets need to be reported on as we do school and system targets – there is indeed an accountability for that.
- Annual reporting mechanism that shows value add for investment

3. *Improving student mental health and wellbeing*

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

- Systems and inter-agencies working with schools with a targeted wrap around service working with the student and their family.

- Attendance, classroom engagement and climate, physical health, community service culture and academic outcomes are high.
- Schools as community hub model is needed and schools should not coordinate this nor bear responsibility for funding allied health services from teaching and learning budgets

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

- The NSWPPA Anxiety project – training in school support people for reducing anxiety in students – providing support and training for other staff.

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

- NSWPPA believes so – wellbeing underpins all targets.
- Existing data is not comparable and doesn't address the outcomes. Self-reporting of students is needed and a challenge for our youngest.

4. *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?*

- This is already undertaken at a state level in NSW. This is an area which is difficult to measure accurately.
- Student voice – all ages MUST be heard.

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

- The NSWPPA Anxiety Project prepares staff and parents to address anxious behaviours
- Explicit programs aligned to the continuum of care must be provided.
- Teachers require quality professional learning, time and resources to deal effectively with increasing mental health issues. We are not mental health experts and should not be expected to be the lead agency in dealing with this.
- Along the Murdoch Childrens' Wellbeing Continuum, 'struggling' requires expert help and teachers should be supported by expert staff and not expected to do this themselves.

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

- THIS IS A MUST. The interagency support needs to wrap around our schools and our community - early intervention is KEY. Fly in support teams – virtual and on the ground MUST be available for our regional rural and remote schools – experts in their field.

7. *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?*

- Currently the education system is filling the gap in health services, particularly for the 5-12 years age group.
- Consideration of co-locating health services staff in schools – either specialist OTs, Speech Therapists, mental health experts or a generalist health professional who can triage and help families to engage support. Employing a dedicated staff member to coordinate referrals and

services outside the school in partnership with the school's learning and support team is an essential consideration.

- Schools are increasingly being seen as the welfare agency. Clear definition of the role of education, health, Departments of Community & Justice, housing etc. An integrated response that wraps around the student and family should be prioritised. This is not the sole responsibility of schools or education systems.

4. Our current and future teachers

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

- Competitive pay & conditions.
- Sustainable and manageable workload.
- Raising the status of the profession through a focus on the positive and rewarding aspects of the work.
- Highlighting the enjoyable, creative, dynamic and innovative parts of the role of a teacher.
- A renewed focus on the 'fun' of teaching – the narrowing of the curriculum and relentless focus on literacy and numeracy at the expense of or syllabus areas that add variety and creativity have impacted role satisfaction for teachers.
- Strong support for student wellbeing and behaviour to ensure that all students are supported to be successful and allow teachers to focus on high quality teaching and learning.
- An apprenticeship into the profession whereby preservice teachers are remunerated while mastering the craft.
- Lifting the status and respect of the teaching profession.
- Higher pay, quality professional learning, quality mentorship and time to do things well.

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

- Shift the workload back to teaching. Give time to teachers for lesson design and collaboration.
- Competitive pay and working conditions, including an allocation of leave that can be used flexibly for all teachers.

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

- Better pay & more sustainable workload. Most teachers in other work comment that they are getting similar pay for much less work.

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

- Increased and enhanced incentives, bonded scholarships.
- Targeted development of leaders to move to areas in most need.
- Provide a staffing differential for principals and executive in high need schools – they should automatically go in at an elevated category and after a period at these schools performing at a satisfactory level, they can either transfer at this level or stay and qualify for additional pay or holidays.
- Flexible incentives, broader salary packaging options.

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

- Competitive pay, workload considerations.

6. *What reforms could enable the existing teacher workforce to be deployed more effectively?*

- More flexible merit selection & recruitment processes.
- Flexible incentives.
- Fit for purpose Teacher Housing.

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

- There are a multitude of commercially provided resources to help teachers develop and deliver classroom activities and to assist school administration. A challenge for educators is to determine those most contextually relevant and useful whilst maintaining the autonomy of teachers to adjust the resources to meet the needs of their learners.
- Teachers should also have strong understanding of curriculum design, not just implementing work that others have done.

8. *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 is one of many useful tools that teachers can use to enhance learning through engagement as well as to empower students to create and critically evaluate content.
- The Rural Access Gap (RAG) initiative in NSW is an exceptional example of how digital technology supports teaching & learning, reduces workload and improves teacher effectiveness. In terms of supporting educational delivery and engagement, the initiative provided digital uplift through connectivity infrastructure and hardware delivery to schools in the form of devices for both students and teachers and Main Learning Displays in all learning spaces. Reductions in teacher workload were facilitated through digitization of admin processes including forms, communication between home & school and within the school, moving server-based files to the cloud to facilitate flexible access and enhancing access to digital resources. The most profound impact has been the improvement to teacher effectiveness through the creation of a Digital Classroom Officer position in every school which has provided shoulder to shoulder professional learning and mentoring to all teachers in the classroom and across the school.
- Education departments could potentially assist schools by organising thorough and meaningful school-based evaluation of the various commercial tools on offer and providing schools with reviews and feedback on the advantages/disadvantages of each. NSW DoE has facilitated this through the Administration Marketplace Panel for Schools (AMPS), the Digital Learning Selector and the Universal Resource Hub which provide quality assurance for both commercially available products and online learning materials developed by expert educators.
- NSW has some quality resources developed to help delivery to remote students through Digital Learning Packs <https://sites.google.com/education.nsw.gov.au/learning-pack-2022-year1-2-t1/home?authuser=0>

5. *Collecting data to inform decision making and boost student outcomes*

1. *What types of data are of most value to you and how accessible are these for you?*

- In NSW many schools prefer Check-in data over NAPLAN – more flexibility and far more timely feedback that can be used to support the next steps in teaching and learning.

- Data that can be used to develop a profile and suggestions for interventions is most beneficial.
- Teachers are experts at using valid and responsive qualitative & quantitative data sets, complemented by their expert knowledge of their students and how they learn, to inform teaching and learning programs and to evaluate the effectiveness of these programs.

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

- The more appropriate questions should be why are we collecting the data and what is the data being used for? It should not be used to facilitate punitive action towards schools.
- Trusting teacher judgement. Teachers can tell you which of their students will do well or not on NAPLAN for example through their deep knowledge of their students and their learning progress and goals.
- Students are more than a literacy or numeracy target. Current targets are academic. What about the other learning domains?
- Wellbeing – it's inextricably linked to learning.

3. *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?*

- NCCD captures a great deal of data about disability and all schools are required to use it.

4. *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?*

- Yes, at those levels and it show value add against the equity cohorts.

5. *The Productivity Commission and 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, as you can consider value add and growth.
- This is our core business as educators.

6. *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?*

- ACARA
- Data should be used to support schools to support student learning. It should not be used for public comparison of school success.

7. *How could the national USI support improved outcomes for students?*

- Yes, accountability for jurisdictions and systems.

6. *Funding transparency and accountability*

1. *Are there other objectives for funding accountability and transparency we have missed?*

- Non-government and government schools should have the same conditions for funding.
- There is no transparency – there are so many variables and differing funding sources, that even educators have difficulty in determining who gets what. The one thing beyond dispute

is that Australian schools are a long way from any form of funding equity, as this is reflected in student outcomes.

- Go back to the purity of the original Gonski model – based on equity and need.
- Government schools do not have the capacity to invest or create wealth, hold assets and this needs to be recognised in any model.
- To show value for money - to demonstrate the value add of systems to economic prosperity.

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

- Ignore the vested interests who stand in the way of true school funding equity – take the political hit if necessary. Do what is right for the future of our neediest students and communities.

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

- Simple – we are giving significant government funding to our most advantaged schools, for little discernible improvement in their students' outcomes.