



Public submission made to the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools

Submitter: Miss Martine Beaumont
Submitting as a: Parent or community organisation
State: NSW

Summary

The community based organisation HOPE (HSC, Opportunity, Potential, 4 Everyone) came together in response to the recently introduced NSW requirement to now pre-qualify in both literacy and numeracy for the HSC.

Whilst we agree with improving literacy and numeracy standards we believe this should occur as a result of long term curriculum and classroom based initiatives. To suddenly introduce a poorly communicated high stakes standardised test without adequate preparation or supports in place for those that struggle has set off an avalanche of anxiety in a demographic where 1 in 5 already meet the criteria for a serious mental health issue. We have put forward the key issues/problems our 15,000 members have experienced as evidence of what not to do and what should have been considered prior to implementing this harmful and discriminatory policy.

We have grave concerns about the move in Australian education policy to standardised testing when all relevant stakeholders other than bureaucrats and edu business believe these cause more harm than good to student outcomes. Teachers are ultimately best equipped to give feedback on where a child struggles and what supports they might require.

Citing the WA example as a success is an insult to the 1000s of students who are now heading off into life without their WACE and the impact this will have on their life and wellbeing. These students are disproportionately from indigenous, state and regional areas further widening the divide between the haves and have nots. Furthermore to compare WA to NSW is comparing apples with oranges as WA at least has foundation subjects in literacy and numeracy that are offered to all students not meeting the standard. These subjects count towards their WACE and are not an additional burden on students already struggling with the curriculum.

Main submission

HOPE (HSC, Opportunity, Potential 4 Everyone) is a community group formed in response to the recent NSW policy requiring students to meet minimum literacy and numeracy standards as a pre-requisite to receiving their HSC. The first opportunity to meet this standard is in achieving Band 8 or above in Year 9 NAPLAN. Those students who do not achieve this standard have a further two opportunities each year to pass online literacy and numeracy tests in Year 10, 11 & 12 and up to the age of 22.

HOPE has had over 15,000 change.org signatures and comments from students and families (please take the time to read these comments) impacted by the introduction of this policy as well as an active Facebook page.

https://www.change.org/p/scrap-devastating-nsw-hsc-reforms-which-label-kids-from-14-as-failures-exclude-them-from-doing-their-hsc/w?source_location=petition_nav

<https://www.facebook.com/HOPE4HSC/>

HOPE members are at the coal face of this education policy and represent 'real life' evidence of how a poorly communicated high stakes standardised testing policy without proper supports in place is harming the wellbeing, education and future prospects of students.

HOPE are in favour of improving literacy and numeracy outcomes in students. We believe teaching not testing leads to better literacy and numeracy. Teachers are best equipped to know which students struggle and require help. Well funded and researched interventions should then occur.

We note that the Panel has been asked to examine evidence and make recommendations on how school funding should be used to improve school performance and student outcomes.

We note that the Panel's Terms of Reference requires you to 'improve student outcomes and Australia's national performance, as measured by national and international assessments of student achievement'. We are concerned that this focus on lifting Australia's measured performance (PISA rankings) could lead the Panel to potentially overlook what education is and ought to be about. We ask you to read this letter from 80 academics who express their deep concerns about the damage to education when policy is aimed at lifting rankings.

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/may/06/oecd-pisa-tests-damaging-education-academics>

We ask that the Panel consider the following issues raised by our members as evidence of the danger of implementing educational policy based on edu business

influenced theory rather than the real life considerations, challenges and complex contexts of the students and families they apply to.

We hope that they inform the Committee as to what not to do and what should be considered prior to making recommendations as to how best use funding to improve school performance and student outcomes:

- Having an HSC has been a rite of passage in NSW since 1967. To suddenly cast doubt on a student's right to receive their HSC notwithstanding them completing the work required is sending ripples of panic through the community. How do you explain to a child that their brother or sister did the work and received their HSC but they may not? How do you keep a child that struggles at school engaged without the promise of an HSC at the end of all their hard work?
- Not having an HSC will impact students future wellbeing and prospects in life relegating them to an underclass. Employers discriminate against students who do not have an HSC, the assumption is that those without an HSC are either delinquent or stupid. Many study and career pathways are made significantly harder without an HSC. Even purely creative courses such as the pre professional year at Sydney Dance Company require an HSC. Many traineeships and advancement in careers such as the Police Force are made more difficult without this qualification. (See Appendix 1)
- The introduction of this policy has lit a match under the already profound mental health issues in this age group (1 in 4 of 15 - 19 year olds meet the criteria for a serious mental illness). This is evident in the over 10,000 comments we have received from students and parents who are experiencing a significant escalation in anxiety and depression symptoms in their children, with one child going so far as to attempt suicide. She cited the extra pressure this policy placed on her as pushing her to this point.
- The NSW Numeracy & Literacy Strategy 2017 - 2020 paper states 'early intervention in the first few years of schooling can limit the impact of disadvantage, and reduce performance gaps'. It references the \$261 Million provided for K - Year 2 literacy and numeracy between 2012 - 2016 and goes on to provide an additional \$340 Million from 2017-2021 for this purpose. This means children who are in Year 5 and above in 2017 have received none of these crucial early interventions but will have their futures depend on meeting the same standards. This is discriminating against these students and punishing them for the failure of the education system to properly address their literacy and numeracy at a sufficiently early age.
- * Introducing this policy prior to having existing resources and support in place for the 68% who didn't make the cut in Year 9 NAPLAN is setting them

up for further failure and leaving them unsupported. Secondary teachers are not trained to teach numeracy and literacy and receive no specialist training for learning difficulties. Who exactly is going to be helping students to reach these minimum standards? Are teachers now going to have to teach not only to NAPLAN but also to level 3 of the Australian Core Skills Framework. What happens to the existing already overcrowded curriculum? Students in WA have been offered Foundation Courses in literacy and numeracy in Years 11 & 12 that count towards their WACE. NSW has none of these supports, just further tests.

- The 1 in 5 Children with learning difficulties are particularly impacted by this policy. No guidance has been given to this community about what provisions and extra support will be in place for them. Traditionally NSW has been the hardest state to qualify for provisions. In particular students from lower socio economic families and regional areas struggle to qualify due to their difficulty navigating a complex qualifying process, lack of funds, and restricted access to the relevant specialists required for diagnosis.
- The majority of children and parents do not understand the difference between an ATAR and an HSC until Year 12, meaning they interpret this policy as preventing them from pursuing tertiary education.
- An us and them culture is already apparent amongst Year 9 students with many students now identifying themselves as 'one of the 68ers'..
- Parents are finding it harder to motivate their kids to stay engaged at school. Many are now talking about leaving school early and using this policy as their primary reason. This goes against decades of policy aimed at keeping children at school.
- The linking of this policy to Band 8 in Year 9 NAPLAN contradicts the prior messaging that NAPLAN was purely diagnostic and makes it a test that determines children's futures. We are hearing from many families with children as young as Year 3, who are now experiencing increased levels of anxiety in relation to NAPLAN.
- NAPLAN(standardised testing) has failed to significantly improve student outcomes. The fact that 68% of kids failed to meet the minimum standard required is proof of it's failure. The only stakeholders in favour of standardised testing are bureaucrats and edu business. Teachers, parent groups, principals and academics unanimously find any benefit from these tests is outweighed by the significant costs. NAPLAN plays no part in the criteria used to distribute funding and amongst our supporters we are yet to find any parents whose children have received support as a result of their NAPLAN results.

- Marginal Improvements in NAPLAN results this year have come at the expense of extra tutoring, teaching to the test, the neglect of curriculum, an increase in cheating and huge stress placed on students. Once again children from state schools, regional areas and lower socio economic families are discriminated against. In WA 85% of students not receiving their HSC equivalent came from state schools.

APPENDIX 1

Examples of Impact of not having an HSC on Employment / Career / Further Training & Education Prospects

The NSW Police Force does not require an applicant to have their HSC in order to apply for the Police Entrance Exam.

However, in order to then apply to the Police Force the ranking system used to recruit makes it difficult to succeed without an HSC qualification.

The NSW Police Recruitment hotline spokesperson said “it will definitely be harder to get through the ranking process without an HSC”

http://www.police.nsw.gov.au/recruitment/application_process/eligibility_pool

National Art School requires school leavers to have completed their HSC to apply straight from school to study a Bachelor of Fine Arts

All diploma and bachelor courses at NSW TAFE require HSC for entrance (unless students obtain another certification which they wouldn't have if they were school leavers). Some of these courses include:

Diploma of Applied Fashion Design and Merchandising

Bachelor of Fashion

Bachelor of 3D art and Animation

Advanced Diploma of Visual Arts

Diploma of Graphic Design

Diploma of Interior Design and Decoration

Diploma of Community Services

Course in Vocational and Community Engagement

Diploma of Aboriginal Studies for Professional and Community Practice

Diploma of Screen and Media (for make up)

Diploma of Beauty Therapy

Diploma of Property Services (Real Estate)

Diploma of Sport and Recreation Management

Diploma of Event Management

Sydney Dance Company Pre-professional Diploma of Dance (Elite Performance)

HSC a pre-requisite

Director Linda Gamblin stated 'I will not consider candidates without their HSC as I assume they are not capable of committing to and completing a body of work.'

HOPE canvassed a sample of employers who were unanimous in saying they would be reluctant to consider applicants who do not have their HSC.

One of the typical replies came from a small business owner - 'My assumption is that applicants without an HSC are either delinquent or stupid'

Quote from one of our supporter's school principals 'An ATAR has a shelf life of 24 hours. You get the ATAR and 24 hours later the University offers are made. However, an HSC lasts forever. This is the qualification which shows that you have managed to apply yourself to study and have completed secondary schooling at the highest level.'