

Recipient Details

Name of organisation or individual: [I] Mahony, Nikki

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Responses

Curriculum and assessment

The sheer volume of learning material in the Australian curriculum is overwhelming. If a child feels inadequate or not valued in the early years, they can quickly take a set against school & it is a long haul from there to year 12. Many children feel stressed by tests and assessment (they do well at other times but freeze up under test conditions). These students have capacity but need their skills to be tested in different ways so they stay encouraged and feel supported and that they matter.

Community relevant curriculum options are a must e.g. in a farming community, maths problems that revolve around e.g. land area and farming practices using real current price estimates, harvest tonnage etc. While teachers have the capacity to organise this themselves, few have set foot on a farm or are even aware of the industries that support the community in which they are working.

I would like to see kids being given the opportunity to be creative and exploratory with their homework within their capabilities - for example take a maths problem home and represent it in the context of their home environment (incorporating maths problem from the week with several spelling words e.g. re-creating a cake recipe or working out how much fertiliser is required to cover an area of crop with a certain deficiency etc...). They could even be encouraged to take turns presenting their "homework problem" either as a demonstration of how they did the working, reading the paragraph they prepared or even for others to solve. This not only gives them a sense of how their learning is relevant to them, it also helps them take on responsibility, be interested in their home lives and an appreciation of all members of the community. Minimal homework that encourages creative problem solving and is fun, turn their jobs or afternoon recreation time into fun learning opportunities.

Homework is critical in high school and senior years and by then they should have developed their own structure within which they know how to work and feel comfortable with.

Rating: 6

Teachers and teaching

Key initiatives that draw people to our area are the higher points for regional - many then move on, but a good number stay on if they have the opportunity to develop relationships locally. The best teachers are often those connected with someone in the community or having made the effort to learn about their students background. We try to run Farm Days and Teach the Teacher programs locally and have had some success. it would be nice to have some encouragement from government to incentivise teachers to take up these opportunities and to build learning opportunities for children out of them (For example we ran a Teach the Teacher afternoon where all local teachers who were able to were loaded onto the school bus, run out to a cattle property, given afternoon tea and provided with the opportunity to see cows being pregtested and weighed and cattle being worked

with dogs, horses and motorbikes. One enterprising teacher then approached us to bring her highschool students out for their reproductive unit. These children gained a very practical understanding not only of reproductive importance in a scientific sense (discussing genetics, environment and reproductive systems), but also caught a glimpse of what might happen on a cattle property, how technology and science play a part in running a farm and loved the outing.

Teachers being given the opportunity to learn about the industries and professions in their area are able to enrich the learning of their students by being able to pass on more relevant examples.

I have also been involved in a supporting role within the health industry. I spent some time as a "local coordinator" where my role involved checking any relevant training opportunities for nurses & doctors, organising for example "Men's Health Nights" and importantly ensuring any trainee doctors were given good local immersion opportunities so they may be tempted to come back into a rural setting once graduated. This type of thing would be ideal in an education environment.

Security of tenure and longer term contracts I think are also critical for some teachers.

Rating: 7

Leaders and leadership

As with teachers - a good community immersion is essential for school leaders. If principals were encouraged to actively seek out partnerships or given contact to identified key community groups and members who might be able to help, this is a good step. Quite often this will be the P&C committee and/or local ICPA in some areas.

I think a wonderful opportunity exists for school principals or HODS to attend a State ICPA conference to get a feel for what opportunities are out there and a chance to network with people dealing with educational issues (some smaller, some larger), but in the end we are all teachers. A program to support this should they wish on occasions to attend would be most appreciated and worthwhile. As a small ICPA branch, we are often able to raise funds to pay for conference registration but not accommodation or travel nor cost of fill-in / replacement teacher for the time school leader would be away.

Our school also having the disadvantage of being a lower band school so really good principals have to take a wage cut to take up a position here. Some fantastic principals have been willing to do that and still not been able to stay due to no security of tenure the previous principal has tried for a role elsewhere but no relinquished their tenure on position at our school, and has then returned (moving on the fill-in principal looking for longer term tenure). before too long, the old school leader has moved on because they didn't really want to be there at all. It happens time and again with teachers and principals. It is disheartening for us and them.

Rating: 6

School and Community

A close tie-in with community is essential. As indicated in the discussion paper, things can very quickly turn sour when trust is eroded. We had one instance in which a school principal came in and immediately put a stop to ALL extra curricular activities and community sharing arrangements (many of which we as parents and community members spent years setting into place). The kids hated school - fighting, rumormongering and suspicion became commonplace. In one semester we lost 30 children out of a 120 kid school, two teachers had to take stress leave and I think both disputes ended up having further action taken. Two passionate teachers who could have been better

directed are most likely lost to the system and our school is still struggling to pick up numbers. We are down to 16 children in the high school but do not qualify as a bypass school. For the past two years we have had NO language teacher. It was dark period no school should allow to happen. There was no community engagement. Thanks to a wonderful initiative the children now have skype lessons and music classes are being encouraged, as too is optiminds and interschool sports once again. Our small ICPA branch sponsors membership for the school principal and endeavour to hold a meeting with them once a semester to discuss any educational issues that may have arisen. Long term partnerships and structures should be encouraged to withstand staff turn-over.

Rating: 7

Information and Communication Technology

Many rich educational avenues exist thanks to ICT. Our own small school shares a language teacher via Skype lessons. They are a real hit and a fantastic initiative.

I know that Griffith Youtube and other real time classroom opportunities are also out there and are a real option for high school students in small schools where the highschool is under threat of closure or minimal numbers limit subject selection. There are also circumstances where facilities limit what can be performed in class - e.g. science experiments where educational links via technology come into their own.

A structured framework for accessing these opportunities is essential especially for high schools struggling with numbers and in some instances year 11/12 students without easy access to classrooms.

Obviously internet access, speed and data allowance is a crucial prerequisite to access these opportunities.

Rating: 4

Entrepreneurship and schools

Entrepreneurial education should begin with homework in primary school focusing on simple, fun and creative problem solving weekly tasks that encourage the student to pay more attention to his surroundings and perhaps even work together with other classmates. As quoted at the start of the discussion paper "We are what we pay attention to.....what we choose to focus on has enormous consequences....." You know the rest

I wholeheartedly agree with specialies local industry based programs that are relevant to the community in which the child lives. If the teacher begins to pay attention to and draw attention to the opportunities that exist locally, the children also feel a sense of value and purpose in being part of the community, enterprise or project.

Many rural roles are seen as being old-fashioned, low intelligence, heavy labouring. In fact most farms now use cutting edge technologies such as robotics, phone apps, GPS monitoring and control as part of their everyday. If children were given the opportunity to catch a glimpse of where their interests and skills (which they may have originally thought would limit them to an off-farm career) may be applied locally, the opportunities are endless. Necessity is the mother of invention and Rural Australia is a hotbed of entrepreneurs constantly seeking talented and energetic others to help develop new and better ways of doing things.

As individuals we have worked hard to provide the local schools with information on information and education days that may be of interest or relevance to both staff and students and have developed

a good relationship. It still requires most of the input and effort from our end and it would be good to see schools being encouraged to seek these out and develop more secure partnerships.

Rating: 5

Improving access – enrolments, clusters, distance education and boarding

I absolutely agree that the combined impact of the loss of a group of students out of a small school can be very significant. I have four children and live 45km out of town. We always knew at some stage, they would have to board (our local school is a P-10). I was determined they should stay in the school for as long as they were participating and learning to the best of their ability. Each of my children started to drop in their marks in year 6 and 7 and shown a loss of incentive to participate, to maintain their previous level of excellence and care or to push themselves to be better. 3 out of my 4 have since gone onto boarding school where they are immersed in sport (the main thing they lack locally as teams only play to under 12s) and surrounded by others who want to learn. The change in their marks and their attitudes is incredible. Each has chosen for themselves when they wanted to "leave", and I think their decision was based on talking to friends who were also leaving to go to boarding school (there is very much a "pull" factor within the kid's circles happening in our school rather than a "push" factor by parents on parents, although I have no doubt there is some of that too). Some families who live close enough to town, drop their children in to catch a bus to another town to attend high school there, rather than stay at the local P-10 school. Quite often, these kids just need to chance to put themselves in a different environment to break out of their rut. Sadly this diminishes options at our local school what has to come first? Student numbers, creative subject options? An amazing school leader who can turn around the culture? I do not know. I do believe each child and parent should be encouraged to ask the very question you pose "Am I learning to leave, stay or have options" so they at least make a choice with purpose.

Rating for enrolments: 5

Rating for clusters: 7

Rating for distance education: 6

Rating for boarding: 7

Diversity

Focussing on diversity is critical for students and indeed teachers and parents to feel valued and therefore have a desire to improve and excel. Many children learn and communicate in different ways, not just those with recognised learning difficulties or special needs. Diversity is a gift to embrace and not a tool to be used to discriminate.

In a small school environment a student with special needs can be of benefit to the class (especially if they have been part of the cohort since kindy or prep). In our school we have one child with special needs who was part of my son's class. The entire cohort learned Makaton sign language and with a united, firm but loving approach by parents, teachers, aide staff, counsellors and kids the child has learnt to be responsible for their own actions and be aware of how to act socially within their capacity. Classmates happily care for, play with and discipline their classmate - they know no different and it is a joy to see.

We have had other instances where a child with special needs has been such a disruptive and violent influence on the class that all learning has been jeopardised. In these instances the good of the

group must be taken into consideration - without significant outside support some circumstances have also been the cause of other children and families choosing to leave the school.

Our school also has a rich indigenous cultural awareness and influence. There have been occasions when resentment has built up. In nearly every instance special programs and opportunities have been offered only to indigenous kids when the capacity existed to include the entire class. In one instance 4 children out of a school of 120 kids had an entire day of sport coaching with 3 well known players and two support staff. It caused such a backlash in the lead-up that even the kids involved didn't want to participate if their mates couldn't as well. Sensibility prevailed and all students were offered the opportunity. Inclusiveness is key ... connectivity over competition.

Rating: 6

Transitioning beyond school

A large obstacle for children transitioning from school to further study, can be the enormity of the unknown. Children who attend boarding school have taken one step away from home already and been exposed to a variety of subjects, sports, cultural influences and had a taste of life in the city (a large part of which entails negotiating large numbers of people, cars, public transport systems and building friendships with "locals"). Increasing the AIC boarding allowance makes this transition process far easier.

It could be quite exciting to have an opportunity for rural kids to access a supported immersion learning program as a stepping stone after school, should they wish to enter further education. At this point finances do come into it again and regardless of background are a huge barrier to entry. Urban counterparts are more likely to persevere and find a way somehow, mostly perhaps because of peer group pressure, family expectation & finance - ability to keep living at home for example, and that their options for employment seem far more limited in the scope of things without a higher education certificate.

With the right support and encouragement during the primary and highschooling years, one would hope that children eventually find a path to upskilling or higher education at their own pace. Importantly for our regional communities it is the very kids who came from there who are most likely to bring skills back into them. With this in mind incentives like reducing the period regional and remote students need to be employed under the self-supporting criteria from 18 months to 14 months is absolute Gold. One and a half years in the "wilderness" (especially if in a comfortable or easy job, or earning good money) can be a disincentive to prioritise further study.

Rating: 7

Additional Comments

Being 11:45 at night, with a normal bedtime of 8pm, I have no desire to write more, only to hope that my submission will save successfully and the internet won't fail (I shudder at the thought of having to rethink all that through again!). Thank you for your consideration. I believe we all have to sweat a little to become great but look forward to not having to sweat so much. I look forward to a future where all students feel thankful for and privileged to have far easier access to quality education choices and make the most of those opportunities.