



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

Submitter: Northern Sydney District Council of P&C Associations
Submitting as a: Parent or community organisations
State: NSW

Summary

Educational success:

- Development of the whole child as a present-and-future proofed individual.
- Developing capabilities at their own personal pace and learning attributes. Capabilities in basic and higher level skills of literacy and numeracy; general qualities such as problem solving, creative thinking and decision making; personal qualities such as self-awareness, empathy assertiveness and resilience ... and more
- Measurement of educational success:
- Value added in real time. NAPLAN and HSC measure limited aspects and research with an eye to the future strategy for whole-child development is needed.
- Supporting ongoing improvement:
- Reform/modernise the COAG agenda.
- Put students' interests first to meet Melbourne Declaration goals.
- Develop evidence/research-based strategies to implement 21st Century learning. Currently there is no explicit, agreed integrated strategy for paradigm change to a model fit for the 21st Century.
- The wide differences in student outcomes between schools and classes within schools is not acceptable, nor is the gap in performance between our best schools and where we need to be at this point in time.
- Set up a national Association of Education Providers to co-operate in research and improvement strategies for their businesses.
- Convert Education Departments into State Owned Corporations.
- Consider implementing an IPART style regulator but be careful.

- Reform the HSC, national curriculum and organisation within schools to provide effective, optimised learning and engaging pathways across the full cohort of learners.
- Reform teacher accreditation systems, and improve delivery of professional development.
- Develop a totally different strategic and co-operative approach to HR and IR matters.
- A main barrier to change is custom and practice built up over many decades combined with the lack of an integrated change vision and strategy and a lack of management will.
- There has been lost opportunities and neglect in areas such as STEAM and languages.

Main submission

Submission

Note: We have not attempted to catalog changes made in the NSW Department of Education over the last year. We are pleased with the approach and progress made over this period and hopeful of sustained positive improvements.

What should educational success for Australian students and schools look like?

- What capabilities, skills and knowledge should students learn at school to prepare them for the future?

There is much in the literature on what makes for a present-and-future proofed individual. Whilst some of these attributes have a lot to do with the home, school is a logical community place in which to integrate the many attributes to develop a confident, well adjusted, capable and satisfied adult.

Below is a list of attributes that are articulated in many place on the web, and that most parents would want to see developed in their children on their journey to adulthood. These capabilities must be mastered at each level, and then the student moves on at their own pace – not too fast, not too slow.

- Basic and higher order capabilities in literacy, numeracy, other subjects that they study and general communications.
- Capability in using technologies and adapting to technological change
- Capability for self-directed learning of skills and knowledge acquisition
- Positive self image that allows an individual to be comfortable in their own skin, be comfortable that there will always be others better and worse than

them in different areas, and be comfortable in making decisions sometimes against pressures from others.

- General qualities: decision making; problem solving; creative/lateral thinking; critical thinking; communication & presentation; interpersonal relationships;
- Personal Qualities: self awareness/mindfulness; assertiveness; empathy; equanimity; sense of humour; coping with stress, trauma and loss; and resilience.
- How should school quality and educational success be measured?

Value-added measurement is probably the best way to measure quality outcomes or performance.

NAPLAN performs this function but over a narrow field of basic attributes. Leaving credential examinations like the HSC are a once-off, end-of-schooling measure of a limited range of academic success which don't predict success in life.

Both NAPLAN and the HSC have some perverse outcomes such as teaching to the test; resort by parents to excessive use of external coaching providers; stress on students and families; and focussing on cramming and rote learning rather than higher value activities.

However, NAPLAN and the HSC are the only measures of public accountability available, and as such, are necessary.

There needs to be some serious research on measurement systems which can be used for both public accountability and to facilitate optimised personalised learning programs. These measurement systems need to somehow capture, in real time, the total advancement of students in the context of what is needed for their future well-being and contribution to society.

The one-size-fits-all approach to schooling in Australia must change to a 21st Century approach, and measurement systems must recognise and support change. A subject for more research.

What can we do to improve and how can we support ongoing improvement over time?

- How could schools funding be used more effectively and efficiently (at the classroom, school or system level) to have a significant impact on learning outcomes for all students including disadvantaged and vulnerable students and academically advanced students?
 - What actions can be taken to improve practice and outcomes? What evidence is there to support taking these actions?
 - What works best for whom and in what circumstances?

The 2008 Melbourne Declaration's goals and rationale are still valid. The central outcome in our view is that each and every student reaches their full potential. This is not the case by a long shot, and the students' interests must be put first, whilst understanding the need for staffing all schools with appropriate talent.

The Melbourne Declaration highlighted the need to change to meet the fast growing demands of the 21st Century. However, the reforms undertaken under the COAG processes have sometimes amounted to fiddling at the edges. For example:

- The new National Curriculum, in key areas, is very similar to the previous NSW Curriculum. This effectively encourages advancement by age, rather than stage of development. Intellectually able students are bored, whilst at the other end of the spectrum students fall hopelessly behind. Students across the spectrum are not fully engaged for various reasons including the nature of the subject matter, the quality of the teaching and a variety of external factors.
- The Teacher Quality initiative in NSW is highly bureaucratic and generates a considerable load on existing teachers. It is unlikely to effect change in the short term. There is a focus on future teachers, which is admirable, but the impact, if there turns out to be a significant one, will be delayed as new teachers move slowly into the workforce. We have not seen any evaluation of the program and recommend that the system outcomes to-date be independently audited.

It is not surprising that these two examples feature approaches and outcomes more akin to pre-21st Century approaches when currently there is no explicit, agreed integrated strategy for paradigm change to a model fit for the 21st Century.

The wide differences in student outcomes between schools and classes within schools in NSW is not acceptable, nor is the gap in performance between our current best performing schools and where we need to be with all our schools at this point in time. In NSW schools, until fairly recently, insufficient effective reform has been undertaken and mediocrity had been accepted with below standard performance consistently tolerated.

Actions to be taken:

The COAG process and agenda needs a thorough revision to enable the breakthroughs which are now enabled by technology and recent research, and required if Australia is to keep its place amongst the world best schooling systems. Ideally, COAG would have an agreed, implementable high level change strategy to guide the jurisdictions. There is no place for self-serving complacency.

COAG itself is quite politicised, and there have been some suggestions in recent times that some of the co-operative activities be on an opt-in basis to counter the problem of action being vetoed when full agreement cannot be reached.

Although COAG has an Education Council (of Ministers) and there is the Australian Department of Education and ACARA, the operators of schools across the sectors do not have a body which looks specifically at the operational issues involved in the change agenda.

In the Australian Water industry there is an opt-in body called the Water Services Association of Australia www.wsaa.asn.au funded by its members. All the major water utilities are members in their own Utility Member category, with other categories for other interested parties.

WSAA's Objectives include:

- improving industry performance and establishing benchmarks and industry leading practices for water service processes; and
- fostering the exchange of information on education, training, research, water and wastewater management and treatment and other matters of common interest.

Apart from doing specific industry research on a co-operative basis, WSAA developed an input (or process) benchmarking tool which has been adopted by some other utilities overseas. Using the tool a utility can identify gaps in processes which are prioritised for improvement. WSAA also hosts confidential workshops to allow members to share learnings and best appropriate practice. The water industry tool would not fit education, but a similar concept could be adopted.

A WSAA style body could go a long way to improving practices and processes in Education Departments and private providers - within the schools, senior educational management and internal support businesses and policy areas.

We are not education professionals, but there seems to be a consensus amongst those interested in reform that we need to move away from the relatively one-size-fits-all industrial era production line model to something called "21st Century learning". We understand this to mean a system which has:

- Real personalised learning plans for every student, matching individual learning styles and capabilities.
- Advancement by the stage of learning rather than the illogical current method of advancement by age. The current method has been the only practical way to manage a school until recent rapid developments in technology which can allow for individual assessment of students and programming of their learning.

- More flexible “classrooms” with a team of teachers looking after a larger group of students. It is difficult to think of any other comparable occupation where staff members are as isolated as teachers. Teams allow optimising the use of skills and time, better practical collaboration, better support for individual teachers in real time, better opportunities for mentoring, greater ability to differentiate learning and more choice for students in approaching a teacher.
- Use of external part-time tutors, particularly in STEM subjects in primary schools where deep understanding of the concepts may not be available in every situation.
- Project-based learning and students learning from students

In NSW such a system is running in our area at the new Anzac Park Public School, and will be utilised in the Lindfield Learning Village due to open in 2019..

There are considerable barriers to implementing change, some of which will be outlined below.

- What institutional or governance arrangements could be put in place to ensure ongoing identification, sharing and implementation of evidence based good practice to grow and sustain improved student outcomes over time?

State Owned Corporations (SOCs) have skills-based Boards between the organisation and the Minister. This means that the Minister has more support in trying to ensure that all aspects of the business (core, policy and support) perform together to meet short and long term objectives, and that senior staff recruitment and management structures are adequate for the whole business.

A Board also means that there is continuity in the case of change of Minister.

SOCs are also regulated by organisations such as IPART NSW and the Australian Energy Regulator (AER). IPART regulates both on price and performance against the SOC’s “Statement of Corporate Intent” as agreed with the NSW Government. Performance is in two parts – past performance and future potential performance based on an audit of the organisation’s capability.

Regulation doesn’t always lead to good outcomes as demonstrated in the energy market.

Association of Education Providers

As mentioned above, a Water Services Association of Australia-style organisation owned and funded by providers such as the NSW Department of Education, should be set up to focus on the nitty-gritty of improving their businesses of delivering education in schools.

This will work best if CEO's of these providers are appointed for their high level strategic CEO-level management skills and their commitment to sustained and meaningful reform.

NSW Education Standards Authority NESA

NESA is a hybrid regulator and service provider.

NESA, as a regulator, administers a Teacher Accreditation system that needs a thorough review to test whether it is effective, and whether it meets the needs of 21st Century learning strategies.

It operates the HSC, setting papers against curricula set by both ACARA and itself.

The HSC has come under increasing criticism in recent years. One of the issues is that it is designed for academic students only at a time when the school leaving age has risen to 17, and opportunities for alternate pathways such as TAFE have diminished.

The concept of a relatively one-size-fits-all HSC held at the end of Year 12 is contrary to the principal objective "that every student reaches their full potential". There should be other pathways or options for students such as:

- Seamless entry to a TAFE style system
- Specialist streams in some schools/institutions that provide for P-Tech type education, which potentially runs from Year 9 to Year 14 and having a tertiary qualification
- At least 10% of academic students accelerated through high school to leave for University after Year 11, thus making savings that could be redirected to areas of greater need
- How can system enablers such as targets and standards, qualifications and accreditation, regulation and registration, quality assurance measures and transparency and accountability provisions be improved to help drive educational achievement and success and support effective monitoring, reporting and application of investment?
- What are they and how could they be further developed?

Setting targets in the absence (or even with) a well understood vision and business strategy can lead to perverse outcomes. Teaching to a test like NAPLAN is one such perverse outcome.

If results in the HSC modified by factors such as SES, say, is used as a comparator, one finds, in NSW, fairly wide differences in performance that appear to be as a result of learning and other practices at these schools. In NSW schools, until fairly recently, no effective action has been taken and mediocrity had been accepted and below standard performance has been consistently tolerated. Quality assurance

measures need to involve an active management and cultural buy-in across an organisation rather than a few truckloads of written processes that never see the light of day.

It is essential that there is effective monitoring and reporting given the high stakes for students and the large sums of taxpayer funds involved. Current systems are not adequate and research taking into account newly evolving strategies needs to be undertaken.

- Are there any new or emerging areas for action which could lead to large gains in student improvement that need further development or testing?

21st Century Learning, as described elsewhere, needs to be the driver for change. There needs to be systems in place and people in key roles who are committed to sustained, effective action on change indefinitely into the future.

We need to stop treading water and get rid of the landing nerves. Sometimes it's a matter of ready-fire-aim, rather than telling war stories and producing ideas for new initiatives, but not acting on a systemic basis. A case of ready-aim-aim-aim-ready-aim....but no fire.

Are there barriers to implementing these improvements?

- If yes, what are they and how could these be overcome?

The main barrier is entrenched custom and practice built up over many decades combined with the lack of an integrated change vision and strategy.

In any organisation vested interests build up and even more so in long standing stable organisations like the NSW Department of Education. Vested interests are often powerful and have the most to lose from change.

Local Schools, Local Decisions in NSW has not seen significant improvements to-date, but we are starting to see changes now. Processes are still stifling, particularly in terms of rearranging roles and managing performance, and there is need of more management professional development. What is needed is a nuanced balance between local decisions and system decisions.

Successful sustained change programs need strong committed leadership, a strategy and narrative about the need for change, fair dealing and excellent two way communications that engender trust. Typically there are some who will strongly resist change, some who will strongly support change, and many in the middle who will generally go with the flow. It is not always possible to predict who will fall into the different camps – sometimes the challenge for existing recognised leaders is too great and they resist, and sometimes those who have previously been naysayers suddenly become champions. There are recognised change strategies and sometimes there is a need to bring in people with experience in a change journey.

One useful change management tool in vogue in some places is the customer experience mapping – where staff put themselves in the shoes of the customer (student, parent, other staff) for journeys over a day week, year or career.

There is a significant number of educators who will say that things are great, and the necessary changes are taking place. There are many educators, on the other hand, who distrust management, complain about their lot and have a negative view of their job.

The facts are that there are significant differences in student outcomes between like schools and like classes, between high SES and low SES schools, and between some city and some country schools.

These significant differences are a systemic weakness and need to be narrowed considerably. There is also a need for a considerable upward shift in performance of our school system as a whole to capitalise on the challenges and opportunities due to technology and globalisation, and to keep our relative position in the world's economy.

The last industrial agreements for teachers and ancillary staff signed in NSW continued previous elements which put students at the end of the queue behind system and staff interests. This is particularly evident in the fact that it has remained all but impossible to remove a teacher from teaching duties who is failing their students and their fellow staff.

There are exciting opportunities in this 21st Century world which can lead to much better outcomes for both student engagement and outcomes, and satisfaction for teachers.

What has been lacking in the past in NSW is a positive and trusting exchange of ideas between management and the teacher and ancillary staff organisations, with an agreed narrative on the improvement journey. In NSW there needs to be a totally different strategic and co-operative approach to HR and IR matters to that prevailing in the past.

Professional development for teachers and Principals must be improved. NSW is presently implementing a new system to train teachers to become Principals for example.

Lost opportunities and neglect ...

STEM and languages.

The Arts are also important, particularly when combined with STEM to form STEAM.