Review to **Achieve Educational Excellence** in Australian Schools

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

Submitter:	NSW Primary Principals' Association
Submitting as a:	Peak body
State:	NSW

Summary

see submission

Main submission

THE NSW Primary Principals' Association is a professional body representing 1800 school principals working in government primary schools, Schools for Specific Purposes, Environmental Educational Centres and Central & Community schools throughout NSW. We work closely with the Department of Education, NESA and the NSW Minister for Education, providing advice on critical matters, to ensure our schools are efficient, supported and well-resourced to scaffold students to achieve their best.

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

The key areas of student learning are specified in numerous publications published within Australia and overseas including the OECD. Specific reference is made to the Melbourne Declaration.

The question of what capabilities and skills are required by a future Australian workforce has long been settled in the literature and research. While, themes may vary marginally at the edges, the education community world-wide is consistent on the challenges and opportunities confronting learners and systems.

The NSWPPA echoes the OECD/CERI International Conference Learning in the 21st Century: Research, Innovation and Policy conclusions:

"Educated workers need a conceptual understanding of complex concepts, and the ability to work with them creatively to generate new ideas, new theories, new products, and new knowledge. They need to be able critically to evaluate what they read, can express themselves clearly both verbally and in writing, and understand scientific and mathematical thinking. They need to learn integrated and usable knowledge, rather than the sets of compartmentalised and de-contextualised facts.

They need to be able to take responsibility for their own continuing, life - long learning."

The following attributes are essential capacities for an Australian operating successfully in a global economy.

- World Language(s) incl. English

- Arts

- Geography

- History

- Mathematics

- Science

- Compassion, resilience and empathy

- Civics, literacy and global Awareness

- Financial, Economic, Business and Entrepreneurial literacy

- Health Literacy

- Critical Thinking & Problem Solving

- Creativity & Innovation

- Communication, Team Work & Collaboration

- Flexibility & Adaptability

- Productivity & Accountability

- Leadership & Responsibilities

- Able to manage their wellbeing and be connected to communities

Recommendations:

- Successful development of a child involves recognising students develop in a range of areas. Measuring success therefore requires using a broad range of tools and not just NAPLAN. We encourage the Gonski Panel to establish a sub-group to explore the available tools for measuring success in the various areas indicated above.

- Measuring student growth by using ACARA's Learning Progressions and use of the syllabuses General Capabilities would be a strong means of showing teachers, schools and jurisdictions student growth.

How should school quality and educational success be measured?

The crude use of NAPLAN, highlighted on the MySchool website to rank schools, is not how the NSWPPA believes schools success should be measured. An agreed

comprehensive framework around school excellence would enable schools to assess where they are over a broad range of criteria and where they have to go to be more successful. Validation of the school's self-assessment would be advantageous.

Schools support the development of the whole child with an emphasis on those skills, knowledges & understandings elaborated in the point above and it is more relevant to measure school's effectiveness on student growth and school improvement.

Student growth is the key measurement needed to show success for students. Schools collect a great deal of both quantitative and qualitative data about the students they teach and through triangulation and moderation of tasks and evaluations with colleagues, teachers are able to determine growth and where they need to teach next.

Recommendations:

- Schools need an agreed comprehensive framework around school excellence taking into account the diversity of the community. The panel should research the NSW DoE Schools Excellence Framework [Learning/ Teaching/ Leading] as an example of such a framework.

- A Framework to articulate needs of the learner beyond Literacy & Numeracy –against the general capabilities espoused would be advantageous.

- Teachers need to use pre & post testing with learning intentions & success criteria so learners are aware of expectations and teachers are aware of growth and areas to work on.

- As mentioned previously, ACARA's Learning Progressions would seem to be a strong tool for both teaching and assessing student performance. Schools could then assess growth across the school. This data would be for internal use only.

- Tools which measure student wellbeing such as DoE's Tell Them From Me [TTFM] also would indicate school and student success.

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?

Needs based, sector blind funding which addresses equity needs is the best means to ensure we have a significant impact on the learning of all students, but particularly the needs of the disadvantaged & vulnerable. Funding however needs to get inside the school gate without the jurisdictions siphoning off funds for their projects that may have little to do with student learning outcomes. Allowing schools the freedom

to meet the needs of students in their context is important & their choices are enhanced if we have a repository of best practice to "tap into".

The days of simplistic analysis of Australia's education performance needs to end.

A deeper and more productive examination is required by all levels of the community and government. We, therefore also need to equally acknowledge the areas of consistent underperformance in our nation.

However, the fundamental issue of this enormous continent is easily articulated by the simple concept of equity of excellence and opportunity, but tremendously difficult to address, or as Fred Argy from the Western Australian University wrote:

'there are also serious geographical disparities in education standards - both within urban Australia and between urban and rural/remote young people. Country students are less likely to finish school, tend to perform more poorly than urban students and have a more restricted choice of subjects. Education performance is also relatively low in almost all outer suburbs of the major cities because of the more limited choice of schools available.'

The Federal Government has few levers, other than the crude financial to push to bring about improvement or change. Therefore, any initiatives must be evidence based and non-political in nature or they will be rejected as a harmful intrusion into state rights.

- What actions can be taken to improve practice and outcomes? What evidence is there to support taking these actions?

There needs to be a closer view of the programs & learnings that our trainee teachers are exposed to and ensure they are "classroom ready" when they graduate. ITE needs to ensure the trainee teacher is exposed to a significant time in schools. Practical Experience (the practicum/ PEX) is critical for the trainee teacher to develop an authentic view of students, teachers and school operations. Universities need to ensure the mix of theory and in-school experiences with teachers who are experienced coaches to ensure at the completion of their training, they are "classroom ready".

There is no panacea to follow that will ensure all students and their schools improve. However there does need to be professional sharing of best practice, the development of professional learning communities and the development of a Framework of Excellence to encourage schools to self-assess. Schools need to then be supported to determine the pedagogical model that best suits their context with ongoing professional learning & sharing of practice.

In NSW, the Early Action for Success (EAfS) initiative which employed an Instructional Leader K-2 has been exceptionally successful with its focus on coaching, data

collection and evidence based decisions, modelling, explicit instruction and intensive professional learning. It's a model that can be shared Australia wide.

The principal as the "Instructional Leader" needs to be emphasised. As the educational leader in the school, the principal needs to be able to focus on the pedagogy, student and school improvement and the professional development of staff so as to ensure increased learning outcomes for students and increased capacity of staff. Administrivia & general compliance activities have no place on the desk of the lead learner in the school and need to be both curtailed at the jurisdiction level and/or transferred to other non-teaching staff.

Recommendations:

- A strong quality prior to school program for all children will enable them to start with a better foundation

- A review of Middle Schooling to determine why there is such a "dip" in performance in the early years of high school.

- With all evidence showing those students in rural & remote settings are well behind in performance – a comprehensive review of incentives to lure and keep quality leaders and teachers in these settings

- Strong leadership that raises expectations- supported by a trusted system and community. Establish a mentoring/coaching model for all new principals and principals with limited experience in implementing inclusive education to increase their capacity to lead inclusive schools

- Carefully selected high quality teachers who are committed to professional collaboration and are provided with explicit ongoing training and feedback.

- All schools to dedicate professional learning time, aligned to the goals of the school plan in relation to improving inclusive teaching and learning practice

- Shifting assessment and reporting towards a growth mind-set to improve the learning

- Positive school culture focussed on learning with multiple options for support of all learners.

- Re-engaging parents and the community to build national trust and respect for education.

- ITE must include a minimum of 100 days practicum/PEX with an early experience in Semester 1 and a longer, internship in their final year.

- ITE course must include Core competencies: numeracy & literacy, childhood development, understanding co-operative learning, inquiry learning, classroom management and teaching styles.

- Employment of Instructional Leaders who have the capacity to operate full time with classroom teachers, sharing, modelling, coaching and supporting data collection and analysis.

- Compliance activities need to be taken from the principal. Funding should be provided for school management by jurisdictions and decisions under the guise of more authority to the school need to be returned to jurisdiction level who are the more appropriate agent for this role.

What works best for whom and in what circumstances?

Schools don't work in isolation, but are more successful when they are involved with professional learning communities. These communities don't need to be geographical, but can be arranged around interests, "like schools", joint research projects or programs. Sharing within these professional networks where there are common goals, plans, expertise and professional learning should be highly encouraged.

The use of NAPLAN as the sole measure of student and school performance is not supported by the NSWPPA. As mentioned previously, primary schools support the development of the whole child [social, emotional, physical and academic) and tools need to be developed that can assess the successful growth of a child in these broad areas.

Teaching also needs to focus on the broader curriculum, beyond literacy & numeracy, best summed up as the general capabilities: Information and communication technology (ICT) capability; Critical and creative thinking; Personal and social capability; Ethical understanding; Intercultural understanding. This focus supports the Melbourne Declaration and preparing our students for life and also requires a review of the ACARA syllabuses. Currently the syllabuses are crowded with extensive content and teachers struggle to teach them.

The use of Technology as a support for learning needs a raft of support if IT is to be used effectively. Classroom teachers have little time to configure, repair or set up hardware, so for successful use of technology, technician support is essential as is Professional Learning for the classroom teacher.

Recommendations:

- Learning communities need to be encouraged and funding made available for joint action research which can be shared at larger events.

- Learning Community projects should operate with University (Academic partners) &/or Professional Associations mentoring

- ACARA needs to investigate & develop assessment tools for the general capabilities espoused in the ACARA's curriculum.

- There needs to a review of the ACARA syllabuses and a paring back of the prescribed content, with investigations focused on how we can develop integrated units of work with the focus on the general capabilities.
- IT support and Professional Learning needs to be available for teachers if we are to successfully use IT in the classroom.

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?

Employers could easily host a repository of Best Practice which would be web based for ease of access as well as share electronically any evidence based best practise through their communication systems. Professional Associations, that usually have web sites, could also offer this support as could ACARA (curriculum) and AITSL (leadership, teacher development).

Learning Communities should be encouraged not just geographically, but also at interest levels. Schools and their teachers meeting, sharing, and modelling best practice should be established to ensure evidence based best practice is shared and trialled.

Recommendation:

- AITSL's Professional Portfolios around the standards for teachers is a wonderful clearinghouse of exemplars and should be continued and expanded.
- Support for Learning Communities with funding for Action Research projects should be further investigated.

How can system enablers such as targets and standards, qualifications and accreditation, regulation and registration, quality assurance measures and transparency and accountably provisions be improved to help drive educational achievement and success and support effective monitoring, reporting and application of investment?

High performing educational systems have several key often neglected factors that significantly impact on student outcomes. Overwhelming, high achieving educational systems are trusted, supported and highly valued by the parents, political systems and communities.

This level of trust is not evident in the Australian culture.

Another universal constant in high performing systems, is there appears to be universal access to quality early education, as students were more likely than others to have attended preschool.

Professional Associations have a huge role in the accreditation of aspirant and current school leaders. Using frameworks developed by AITSL, Associations have a key role in the development and implementation of programs that support capacity building and leadership development. Leaders developing leaders brings authenticity to professional learning and projects such as the NSW PPA's "Principal Credential" 18 month learning journey, embedding the AITSL Principal Standard with 50% of an M.Ed. at the University of Wollongong on completion, is a model that can be extended across Australia.

It is recognised that the professional development of teachers is key to improving student learning outcomes. Time away from face-to-face teaching is important to collaborate with their teams, research, analysing student work samples etc. as is evidenced in high performing systems. The NSWPPA supports the need for additional funding to support this release.

Recommendations:

- Professional Associations should be funded to work with AITSL to co-jointly develop and implement substantial leadership programs across Australia. These should be based on the Principal Standard with portfolios of work used to evidence the learning and validated by peer principals.

- Funding for additional release from face to face teaching should be provided to enable opportunities for collaboration, research, analysis and teaching & individual student program preparation.

Are there any new or emerging areas for action which could lead to large gains in student improvement that need further development or testing? What are they and how could they be further developed?

- Adequate resourcing of students with identified needs to enable them to reach their potential

- STEAM

- Neuro Science and link to student wellbeing

- Use of NCCD to support students

- Professional Learning for staff particularly focused on Mental Health [anxiety, depression, use of drugs]

- Parent training to support them through the different stages of child development

Are there barriers to implementing these improvements?

In 2009 in a paper entitled Overcoming the barriers to engagement and equity for all students' Dr Lucas Walsh and Rosalyn Black articulated both the need and the future direction of education by stating:

There is strong agreement that the solution to disengagement lies in the

Redefinition of the learning experience along personalised or student-centred lines. Student- centred learning underpins the practice of the comparatively few schools internationally that combine high student. Poverty with high achievement. These schools have a challenging curriculum that is connected to students' lives and to the real world.

Finally, on assessment, the independent newspaper summed up the concerns of most educators in Australia by stating:

The pendulum has swung too far in the other direction. Many teachers find themselves doing little else than priming and preparing pupils for the next round of tests. This stifles creativity and is a terrible way to engender a love of learning among children. The system is also counter-productive from an educational perspective. Pupils are increasingly being "taught to the test". They become adept at jumping through hoops but not at thinking for themselves. As an Ofsted report on maths teaching in secondary schools put it: "Although students are able to pass the examinations, they are not able to apply their knowledge independently to new contexts, and they are not well prepared for further study."

At the heart of the problem is the fact that our testing culture appears to be politically, rather than educationally, driven. Government ministers like tests and the constant stream of results they produce because it enables them, in their dealings with the media, to point to rising educational standards.

Not one teacher objects to testing or accountability, but we need to ensure that the testing has purpose and meaning for student learning. Let it make a difference. Let us test and report on what really matters – creativity, problem-solving and collaboration.

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