



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

Submitter: The Parenthood
Submitting as a: Parent or community organisation
State: Qld

Summary

Look at education holistically, not in silos. Learning begins at birth.

Invest in our educators. From early childhood through to tertiary.

Educators make all the difference. Support them, pay them well and help them continually develop.

Support parents to become more engaged in schools.

Main submission

The Parenthood would like to put on record our disappointment that, “The Review will not reconsider school funding calculations and distribution, early childhood education, or tertiary education.”

We believe that to avoid the conversations about funding, about early childhood education and tertiary education is incredibly myopic. Addressing education in a holistic manner from birth is the only way to ensure success, to break down the silos of government- and sector-thinking and to truly revolutionise education in Australia.

We cannot address primary and secondary education without addressing the pipeline – early childhood education. Our ad hoc and seemingly temporary year-on-year commitment to the early education sector is both ineffective and short-sighted. Without including early childhood education in this review (and in regular education funding generally) we are sending a clear message that this education is ‘less’ than that which occurs in schools, universities and TAFES. The

Educational success for Australian students and schools should not be measured by increasing standardised testing. Surely the aim of school is to prepare students for life after school and, as such, measures of post-school success (entrance into university/TAFE and/or employment) are more important.

Without doubt, the most effective and efficient way to use schools funding is on excellent teachers. Teachers are the difference between mediocre performance and excellent performance, and they are leaving the profession at too great a rate.

A very recent US Federation of Teachers survey of nearly 5,000 educators in the US found that more than half point out their mental health is an issue. 58% said their mental health was “not good” for seven or more of the previous 30 days. In a similar 2015 survey, just 34% of respondents felt the same.

61% of respondents say their work is “always” or “often” stressful. This phenomenon is not exclusive to the US, however. A recent study from the Australian Scholarships Group and the Australian College of Educators has found that almost half the teachers surveyed said they felt stressed “most of the time” or “fairly often” in a typical week. We can only imagine that these high levels of stress spike at points through the school year.

Teaching is a complex and demanding profession. The competing demands of students, the administration and parents, as well as changing government priorities can often make teachers question their vocation. The same study found that one in five teachers considered leaving the profession in the past three months, yet respondents overwhelmingly (96%) said they found teaching very rewarding. This information should be of great concern to policy-makers and parents alike – teachers love teaching, yet they aren’t sure if they want to keep doing it.

The lack of support for beginning teachers has long been cited as a problem with retention.

An Australian article of July 11, 2017 quotes ACE chief executive officer Helen Jentz. “A lot of the issues with retention come within the first five years. Education is like no other profession. You come out of university; you’ve learnt your pedagogies, your theories, your behaviour management, and then you’re it.

“You’re in charge of a classroom. You’re in charge of 30-odd students. It is down to you. Ensuring that early-career educators are well equipped to be able to handle that level of pressure, and that level of autonomy and authority is absolutely imperative.”

According to John Hattie (2003), while the ability of students accounts for about 50% of the variance of students’ achievements, the second greatest influence is teachers (at 30%). Not principals, not the school itself, nor the student’s peers or home. It is teachers who make the difference. It is therefore the position of The Parenthood that our greatest, most impactful use of funding for schools is in attracting, training and retaining excellent, high-achieving teachers.

Previous schemes of attraction included subsidised study and a teaching bursary. However, attractive salaries and a cultural shift that sees an increase in society’s

estimation of teachers will also need to occur. The elevation of the status of educators from the early childhood sector, through to the tertiary sector is vital, but is not quick. In an environment where Federal and State Governments can change frequently, much work is to be done to affect change.

Almost half the teachers surveyed also thought there was too much standardised testing, such as NAPLAN, while 45 per cent said current way of testing outcomes in schools was ineffective.

A recent UCLA study found 51.4% of teachers reported more students experiencing “high levels of stress and anxiety” than in previous years. Is the increased focus on standardised tests such as NAPLAN (and the proposed Year One tests) really achieving what the policy makers intended? We would say no.

We’re stressing out our teachers and we’re stressing out our students. Is this what school should be for? We should be inspiring our students’ curiosity, inspiring a life-long and life-wide love of learning and helping them develop the skills they will need for the workplaces of the future. We can measure the effectiveness of schools’ ability to do this in qualitative ways, rather than constantly requiring quantitative data that puts undue pressure on all stakeholders.

We often talk about the great educational outcomes of other nations. In particular, we cite the Finnish example as one to aspire to. Yet, we don’t make the wholesale changes that would be required to achieve these results. Perhaps learning from those who are setting the standard should be our first port of call.

Our second should be to engage with the primary stakeholders in this space: the students, the teachers and the parents. Engaging them in a conversation about what makes good schooling and how they best think this could be achieved, while giving them the best examples from around the world, would enable policy makers to gain a greater understanding of what is required.

Parents are often baffled by schooling. It isn’t the same as when they went to school and they have a harder time understanding what is being taught and how. Engaging parents is key to achieving change.

The Parenthood believes that investing in education from birth, as well as investing in those who educate our children (including, but not limited to pay, support, training, status) we will be able to achieve greater results.