



Australian Secondary Principals' Association (ASPAA)

A Better and Fairer Education System

Submission

Submission Date: 2nd August, 2023

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A thriving public school system is essential to nation building. Australian Government schools cater for the majority of students including those students who experience disadvantage. At a time when the myriad of socioeconomic and related health impacts on children are being discovered, and uncovered, the Australian government has an opportunity to lead and support their communities by setting and maintaining funding levels that facilitate a thriving public education system filled with excited children at the heart of families proud to send their children to government schools.

Equity of educational outcomes

Universal access to education does not currently translate to a nationally consistent minimum standard of education provision for all students. The national goal that all students achieve their potential requires a powerful funding response that closes the gaps that exist in the universal, yet imbalanced education provision that prevails today. There is also evidence from across the nation, that the proportion of students with higher and more complex learning and social needs is growing in government secondary schools compared to other sectors.

In a country where the government has a public, moral and human rights obligation to every child, any funding model must have social justice and equity as a foundation. Our current system is high quality but low equity.

This disparity in income distribution is acknowledged internationally (OECD reports) as an indicator of student performance on any measure - that is, that students from families with higher income are more likely to achieve at higher levels than students whose families' incomes are lower. Low income is not a guarantee of low levels of achievement, but the data comparisons are compelling and deeply concerning.

As a Nation, for what purpose do we provide education for young Australians?

It is the position of the Australian Secondary Principals' Association that the Federal Government has an obligation to ensure that high quality public secondary education is provided to every young person no matter what their geographic, social or personal circumstances.

Education in our Nation is a democratic and human right. In contemporary Australia, the provision of education also comes with an expectation of a minimum standard that ranks highly when international comparisons are made. Australia has slipped in this area in recent years. For more than a decade funding models for school education have not targeted school performance and need, but relied on a distribution of resources that did not best nurture the future prospects of the young in Australian communities - Australia's future.

The adolescent years are **high stakes years** as they are significant predictors for life success and wellbeing. It is during these years that exposure to adult and community problems have the potential to change the lives of young people. The opportunity to fund and support the needs of each adolescent is essential. The inclusive priorities of our national secondary school system should be the centerpiece of a fair and productive school-funding model. Further, there must be recognition that the core purpose of all secondary schools is education and that funding and additional resources should be targeted to ensure that all secondary schools can focus on the key work of teaching and learning.

Only government can ensure that there is a quality secondary schooling option for everyone and only government, working with the profession, can require achievement benchmarks that reflect the quality of that schooling. Transparent, consistent and equitable funding of national secondary education will be the measure by which the young people of this nation, their parents, teachers and principals will judge the commitment of governments to the education of all Australians.

Australia's challenge is to redress disadvantage through investment in government education, where the greatest challenges demonstrably lie. The review of Funding for Schooling Final Report (2011) provided more than sufficient evidence to suggest that Australian education was not meeting the needs of the most vulnerable. The Report outlines the findings by a highly credentialed independent review body. This was the most comprehensive review undertaken and it has not been fully implemented.

The Australian Secondary Principals' Association advocates for the full implementation of the needs based funding model to enable school leaders to put in place sustainable interventions and staffing to address the needs of students in their communities.

A non-political approach to Education:

It would be reasonable to assert that our educational leaders are best placed to make strategic decisions about the educational future of schools and systems but it appears unfortunately, that many decisions concerning education are made for political reasons and not necessarily sound educational reasons.

Something as important as education should not be dependent upon political funding or election cycles. It is time for agreement from all political parties around education to secure the future for our students. Education needs our political leaders and our education leaders to commit to a long term (10 year plus) plan and a structure for regular review. The further challenge then is to commit to its sustainability by ensuring adequate funding. Finland made a conscious decision in the recent past to adopt a non-political approach to education; making universal decisions about key factors that would not change with election outcomes. Australia **MUST** take this path if we are to achieve the outcomes desired by all Australians.

There is general agreement from all sides of politics on the aims for education and goals for our students. There is much common ground but we get tangled up in political cycles and trying to solve the same problems in different ways.

We have to get commitment from all parties to State initiatives and transparent long term planning and funding which will enable the systematic achievement of common goals. The education of our children is too important to let politics get in the way.

The following is ASPA's response.

ASPA strongly believes that the National Schools Reform Agreement (NSRA) is the appropriate vehicle to support the needs of all Australian students – the future of Australia.

Through addressing the very large inequities that currently exist between our educational systems and establishing an equitable distribution of resources/funding (based on need) we may be able to address the many deep seated issues in our Australian society e.g. domestic violence, youth crime etc.

1. What targets and reforms should be included in the next NSRA to drive real improvements in student outcomes, with a particular focus on students who are most at risk of falling behind and in need of more assistance - for students from low socio-economic backgrounds, regional, rural and remote Australia, students with disability, First Nations students and students from a language background other than English
 - All jurisdictions to have 100% of SRS funding allocation
 - Jurisdictions to use agreed contemporary literacy and numeracy solutions (culturally responsive strategies and pedagogies in place for all schools and are reviewed as part of school reviews) – not NAPLAN (outdated test, wait for results) – all systems (Government, Catholic and Independent) to use and publish these metrics

2. How the next agreement can contribute to improving student mental health and wellbeing, by addressing in-school factors while acknowledging the impact of non-school factors on wellbeing
 - Explicit licensing by ACCARA and jurisdictional curriculum authorities for schools to choose their 'essential' curriculum priorities to make room for learning activities that build social and emotional confidence, self regulation and resilience. For example; clubs, the arts, camps and real-world experiences.
 - Ensure ITE programs integrate training on child development and psychology, and courses that build teacher skill and understanding of soft skills such as emotional intelligence and relationship maintenance.
 - Enable schools to easily employ and utilise the skills and experience of non-teaching staff to contribute to the life of a school.
 - Enable schools to include allied health and other professional expertise in their staffing profile.
 - A multidisciplinary team established and resourced around each child e.g. AHP, Police, legal authorities, cultural groups, educators etc
 - Programs implemented to effectively engage parent, cultural and local communities in the young people's education.

3. How the next agreement can support schools to attract and retain teachers
 - Explicit, meaningful acknowledgement, and support to retain and sustain principals in any agreements or reforms
 - establish a national principals advisory council comprising the leaders of the government school principals' associations to support the efficacy of policies and actions affecting principals and schools.
 - Implement a nationally consistent agenda for addressing occupational violence, reducing workload and providing appropriate resources that allow school leaders to effectively lead school communities; for e.g. administrative staff availability and capability, efficient business systems
 - Develop nationally consistent training and development programs specifically tailored to school principals, aligned to AITSL standards
 - Support ongoing research and data collection on principal health & wellbeing and commit to acting on recommendations from this research e.g. sabbatical leave as used by the Catholic system.

4. How data collection can best inform decision-making and boost student outcomes
 - Provide resources to implement any data collection so the impact on schools is minimised.
 - Make data available to schools in a timely and intuitive way, so it can be used effectively.
 - Consult with principals about the types of data they need to inform practice
 - This is best lead by education leaders and not bureaucrats – a good role for the Principal Advisory Council

5. How to ensure public funding is delivering on national agreements and that all school authorities are transparent and accountable to the community for how funding is invested and measuring the impacts of this investment.
 - A national agreement is a national agreement – no jurisdictional modification once agreed

In addition to the above, ASPA offers the following in response to the NSRA's Expert Panel questions –

Improving student outcomes – including for students most at risk of falling behind

1. What are the most important student outcomes for Australian school students that should be measured in the next NSRA? Should these go beyond academic performance (for example, attendance and engagement)?

- The NT's context is significantly different from other jurisdictions in Australia, with the schooling system operating in Australia's most challenging socio-economic and geographic context. The NT has the highest concentration of very small schools in remote and very remote areas with a range of complex external factors contributing to the challenges of students engaging in and attending school, educational achievement, school completions and entry into employment. To drive student achievement and outcomes, future reform priorities require greater support, flexibility and tailored responses that will deliver effective on-ground outcomes appropriate to jurisdictional needs.
- Measuring literacy, numeracy and science academic performance are narrow measures that do not capture the goals of the Mparntwe Education Declaration. We need to consider how we measure these goals- how to go beyond academic achievement levels to the growth any child makes in their learning and how they achieve the second goal: (1) the Australian education system promotes excellence and equity, and (2) all young Australians become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community.
- We need to identify more appropriate measures for excellence and equity in our education system? Equity can only be achieved when funding matches the needs of our most disadvantaged student and families. Government schools need 100% of the SRS to be able to achieve excellence and equity.
- We need to make all education sectors in every jurisdiction equally accountable through the NRSA rather than just the government sector. One example is ensuring that all sectors are responsible for the provision of an inclusive education system, rather than enabling the selective school approach which has pushed more disadvantaged students into public schools?
- Attendance is not an acceptable measure for schools when there are many factors beyond the school which contribute to poor attendance. A particular challenge for the NT in improving education outcomes is a lack of engagement, with many Aboriginal students disengaging from school for a variety of social, health and cultural reasons. Schools already work hard to engage all learners to attend as they know this is the mechanism to get improvement and results for every learner. Using attendance as a big stick measure is counterproductive to success. Greater support needs to be provided by government agencies and NGO's to support a child's family with the complex issues which impact attendance.

2. What are the evidence-based practices that teachers, schools, systems and sectors can put in place to improve student outcomes, particularly for those most at risk of falling behind? Are different approaches required for different at-risk cohorts?

- Start by using measures of growth- measuring the value added to a student's learning. Invest in the early years where students who are falling behind are quickly identified and provided the literacy and numeracy intervention to avoid the gap widening over time, which results in students not achieving their full potential, disengaging from learning and being provided limited pathways in their later years of schooling. This includes identifying the social and emotional needs of a child from an early age as this has huge implications on learning, and the support that a family requires.
- Education Systems need greater support from services which support families to address the out of school factors which impact on a student's learning outcomes. Too often schools are expected to be a 'one stop shop' that can address the child's or family's health, housing, lifestyle, nutrition, physical wellbeing, poverty, violence, mental health and wellbeing needs. Without resourcing, schools cannot provide additional resources to match these areas of need which are greatest in remote areas where socio economic status is low.

3. How can all students at risk of falling behind be identified early on to enable swift learning interventions?

- Schools need to use meaningful assessment for, as and of learning to identify those most at risk. It is not just one test that identifies a child at risk- teachers and schools use a range of assessments to identify those at risk and this needs to be contextualized to the clientele of the local school.
- Schools need to be resourced accordingly, to provide small group interventions which address the learning gaps successfully. Often interventions or adjustments to learning are expected to be implemented by a single classroom teacher in a mainstream setting. Any classroom can have more than 50% of students identified with individual learning plans or have needs that require adjustments. This contributes to teacher workload and burnout.

4. Should the next NSRA add additional priority equity cohorts? For example, should it add children and young people living in out-of-home care and students who speak English as an additional language or dialect? What are the risks and benefits of identifying additional cohorts?

- Whole school evidence-based practices and interventions will lift the performance of all students. The NSRA should be a mechanism to reflect growth for every learner who is provided the right support no matter their starting point, rather than focusing on cohorts of learners.

5. What should the specific targets in the next NSRA be? Should the targets be different for primary and secondary schools? If so, how? What changes are required to current measurement frameworks, and what new measures might be required?

- Targets need to be beyond academic achievement. We need to broaden the scope to measure the two educational goals of the Declaration.
- Measure equity by ensuring public money is spent where there is the greatest need. 100% SRS funding for every school. Make every school, no matter if they are public or private, accountable for their funding.
- Measure how inclusive a school is – catering to the needs of diverse learners no matter their background, race, abilities, socio economic status, etc. Remove mechanisms which allow private schools to expel students or move students to public schools because they can't cater for their needs. Prevent the privileging of an already privileged cohort in the private sector.
- There are already measures for the implementation of whole school approaches such as School Wide Positive Behaviour or a pedagogical framework suitable to the stage of learners within schools- which measure fidelity of implementation.

6. How can the targets in the next NSRA be structured to ensure that evidence-based approaches underpin a nationally coherent reform agenda while allowing jurisdictions and schools the flexibility to respond to individual student circumstances and needs?

- Learner proficiencies should be considered as a measure to capture a child's 13 years of schooling rather than the end of year 12 exams. A students' gains made over time in all areas beyond academic results should capture the concept of 'successful lifelong learners'

3. Improving student mental health and wellbeing

- This is a growing area of concern for schools to contend with and can often fall back to the teacher to provide the support for mental health and wellbeing, alongside the increasing demand to lift student performance and growth. This contributes to teacher and principal workload and the stress and burden of how to best support every learner. Currently government schools are under resourced to cater for this increasing need.
- To alleviate the burden of this stress on teachers and principals, school will need to be well resourced to provide the interventions that students or their families require. This would include having specialist staff to deal with mental health, programs for groups or individuals, and ITE which provides teachers with the skills and knowledge to teach social and emotional proficiencies. The location and clientele of any school requires a tailored approach to address the mental health and wellbeing needs of any school community. For example, a visiting allied health care teams who

spend time working with students and families rather than telling the school what a child needs and expecting that they add this to their already overcrowded day.

- Measuring the positive supportive culture of a school is very different to measuring the wellbeing of individual students. We need to consider how wellbeing is effectively measured again from a growth stance and to be mindful that wellbeing varies significantly on a daily basis. It is not static but fluid but influenced by many factors beyond the school fence. Perhaps a better suggestion is to measure the implementation of school wide programs and interventions (such as a 3-tiered approach) rather than measure the wellbeing of a child.
- It takes a village to raise a child and this thinking is required if we are to resource this increasing area of need. Any partnerships with organisations, NGO's or agencies s must be under the direct supervision of the school, and not work independently then tell the school what to do. Successful partnerships work together to achieve student outcomes such as Clontarf and STARS.

4. Our current and future teachers

- The demands and workload of teaching have increased yet the remuneration (pay), and respect for the position has not been commensurate.
- Teachers willingness to stay in the profession is impacted by the unrealistic demands of parents and society expectations which allow them to treat teachers with demands and disrespect, the increasing levels of abuse and violence and their lack of authority to address inappropriate behaviours. The focus for any educator or school leader is to always build positive relationships with the parent community, however when demands are unrealistic or their behaviour is disrespectful they are not supported by department.
- According to the NT *'Positive Behaviour and Occupational Violence in Schools Taskforce Report'* the NT has the second highest proportion of principals and school leaders in Australian jurisdictions subjected to physical violence (55%) and the third highest proportion of school leaders exposed to threats of violence (47%). Violence significantly affects students and teaching staff feeling unsafe to attend school or the workplace. Furthermore, threats of violence or physical violence, including break-ins (school and government employee housing), affects the school's ability to recruit and retain staff. In October 2022, the department launched its *'Positive Behaviour and Occupational Violence in Schools Taskforce Report'* to provide recommendations to assist the department with reducing and eliminating occupational violence and aggression in schools and to mitigate employee psychological injury.
- The next NRSA must identify and implement a nationally consistent agenda for addressing occupational violence, reducing workload and providing appropriate resources that allow school leaders to effectively lead school communities; for eg. administrative staff availability and capability, efficient business systems.
- Teachers lack the preparation through ITE courses to manage violent and disrespectful behaviours whether displayed by students or parents, to understand the craft of teaching or evidence-based pedagogical approaches which will best suit their learners. They are underprepared to manage the diverse and complex needs of learners in their classrooms especially when they are growing numbers of students with additional needs.
- Teachers require ongoing support throughout their career- mentoring is only possible in well-resourced schools who have the additional staff with expertise and funding. Teacher shortages have increased the number of teachers who teach out of expertise subject area. This is a real challenge in 'hard to fill' schools most where there are large numbers of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, or remote or regional schools.
- Teachers require time to invest in their learning throughout the day, not tacked on at the end of a busy day. Too often our system is restricted to how much release time a teacher has to invest in their own learning is dictated by an EBA agreement, rather than evidence-based approaches to what works best for what teacher. Individualise the support for every teacher so that they can continue to make the progress required in their professionally journey, just like other professionals do, and provide them the time to do this.
- The increasing evidence of declining levels principal and teacher wellbeing, needs to be addressed through the next NRSA. Schools require additional resourcing and funding to support the wellbeing needs of its staff, without it contributing to workload. Currently it is the current staff or school leader who are required to implement approaches to address staff wellbeing.
- Government Education systems have not taken advantage of IT systems to improve teacher or principal workload. Schools are still forced to use old fashioned marking and recording systems which are burdensome and time consuming. Any IT system should be able to reduce teacher workload through streamlined processes but this is not evident in government schools, especially those who are remote or lack resourcing to do so.
- Currently reporting to parents is one of the greatest burdensome tasks for teachers which contributes to the stress, wellbeing and workload of all. We need to adopt new ways of sharing the learning that takes place for a child, rather than an old fashioned A-E grade system every 6 months.
- It is imperative that we move to a National Teacher Registration body to streamline the movement of teachers across Australia. This is often a barrier to teachers wanting to explore different

educational settings across the country, and extending their learning, skills and knowledge of teaching in a variety of settings.

- The pathways for teachers need to be made transparent early in their careers, and what knowledge skills and experience they require to take any pathway in education such as as either a specialist, a leader or to support the learning of others.

5. Collecting data to inform decision-making and boost student outcomes

- NAPLAN is not an appropriate measure for our indigenous learners. We need to identify more culturally appropriate measures of growth in learning. NAPLAN has become more purposeful for systems rather than schools and teachers. Any data used needs to be used purposefully by teachers and schools to track and monitor the growth of the individual students. The time and energy that currently is expended by teachers and school leaders to administer NAPLAN tests could be better spent on more purposeful testing which suits the cohort of learners. NAPLAN presents a challenge for older students who hold no value or purpose for this testing. Test refusal is common for year 9 students or they do not perform to achievement level possible.
- NAPLAN is time consuming and stressful for schools to administer and NT schools are challenged by the online testing as internet connectivity and access to quality devices is an ongoing issue for remote schools and those schools who cannot afford the latest technology. Schools should not be disadvantaged because of the lack of technology or access to wifi, but sadly this is the case.
- Measuring literacy, numeracy and science academic performance are narrow measures that do not align with the goals of the Mparntwe Education Declaration. We need to consider how we measure these goals- how to go beyond academic achievement levels to measuring the growth any child makes in their learning, such as the micro credentials and recognising the interpersonal skills and knowledge that are learnt which meet the goal of being confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners and active and informed members of the community.
- The NT recognises the need to develop systems so that quality data follows each child as part of a tailored education experience as students move geographically, through stages of schooling, and across flexible education settings. However, as a small jurisdiction, without the economies of scale, the NT is challenged to effectively develop and maintain the systems to collect, maintain and utilise student data and information. This requires significant capital investment for IT systems and ongoing staffing to support implementation.
- The priority first needs to be to have data and information to best support an improved experience for individual children and young people in the classroom, as opposed to system-level reporting.
- A national USI would be an advantage for a small system, like the NT. For a jurisdiction with high mobility between sectors and inter-state, greater ability to share information for the benefit of improving education delivery for individual students would be valued. This should include any data collected for NCCD purposes.

6. Funding transparency and accountability

- Funding to schools must be fairer so that all students can experience a quality education no matter where they live.
- Flexibility in how funding is administered is needed so that there are opportunities for place-based innovation.
- Funding models must support service integration and place-based approaches.

- Terms and conditions of funding should not create a barrier to developing place-based solutions to achieving outcomes, particularly those that are community led, or where our most vulnerable or disadvantaged children live.
- Future reforms should not result in more reporting requirements that result in additional workload to schools and instead allow school leaders and teachers to focus on student outcomes. This is particularly problematic in small schools and remote schools.