



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

Submitter: Australian Schools Plus/2017 Teaching Fellows
Submitting as a: Other (Not-for-profit representing 2017 Teaching Fellows)
State: NSW

Summary

This submission is made by the recipients of the 2017 Commonwealth Bank Teaching Awards, together with the national charity Schools Plus.

Schools Plus supports schools in disadvantaged communities by connecting them with donors to fund projects that improve student outcomes. The Commonwealth Bank Teaching Awards are co-presented by the Commonwealth Bank and Schools Plus, with significant financial support from the Pioneers in Philanthropy (a group of distinguished business leaders and philanthropists).

This is a prestigious national awards program established to recognise and reward outstanding teaching and school leadership. In 2017, the Awards' inaugural year, 12 teachers and school leaders were chosen from more than 440 applicants and awarded Teaching Fellowships in recognition of their work transforming student outcomes in their schools.

The 12 Teaching Fellows, 10 of whom are from low ICSEA schools, have reflected on their own school's circumstances and the unique challenges faced by disadvantaged and remote schools. They have also taken into consideration the knowledge they gained from their visit to Singapore and in this submission, highlight learnings and recommendations based on their observations.

They emphasise the need for building teacher capacity, focusing more on STEM and digital technology-based learning, tailoring curriculum to students' needs and creating more partnerships, especially for disadvantaged and remote schools.

They also make three additional recommendations:

- (1) disadvantaged schools be allocated a permanent extra teacher to enable the release of staff to have learning conversations and reflect on the curriculum.
- (2) a Remote Education Resource Institute be based in Alice Springs to provide support to schools in remote locations.

- (3) Teacher training to have more emphasis on understanding our Aboriginal history, culture and the effects of poverty and trauma on the growing brain.

We trust that these concerns and ideas will be of assistance.

Main submission

INTRODUCTION

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THE 2017 COMMONWEALTH BANK TEACHING FELLOWS ARE:

- Sharyn Angel, Deputy Principal, Shailer Park State High School, QLD
- Chad Bliss, Principal, The Canobolas Rural Technology High School, NSW
- Shanti Clements, Principal, Beauty Point Public School, NSW
- Leah Crockford, previous Principal, Berry Springs Primary School, NT currently at Leanyer Primary School, NT
- Michael Devine, Principal, Western Port Secondary College, VIC

- Wilbur (Charlie) Klein, Teaching Principal at Tjuntjuntjara Remote Community School, WA
- Dr. Sarah Mathews, Master Teacher, Brisbane Bayside State College, QLD
- Lesley Mills, Principal, Tabulam Public School, NSW
- Dr. Christine Roberts-Yates, Assistant Principal, Murray Bridge High School - Disability Unit, SA
- Craig Skinner, Principal, Calista Primary School, WA
- Belinda Wall, Principal, Woonona High School, NSW
- Eddie Woo, Head Teacher Maths, Cherrybrook Technology High School, NSW

WHAT SHOULD EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS FOR AUSTRALIAN STUDENTS AND SCHOOLS LOOK LIKE?

We believe success in schools extends beyond literacy, numeracy and ATAR scores. To ensure students leave school well-equipped to face the ever-changing world, teachers should ensure students have the necessary future-focused skills. We must aspire to "create resilient citizens with a capacity for problem solving, creativity, innovation and empathy" - Lesley Mills. Specifically, students should learn social, emotional and cognitive skills along with the necessary values and attitudes that enable them to navigate in the world, be adaptable to change, have intercultural awareness and show resilience.

The challenge for schools is how we teach these skills because we are "hamstrung by systems that have not changed accordingly" - Michael Devine. The measures we currently use are dated, narrow and do not take into consideration the future-focused skills our students must be taught.

The measures should therefore be broadened. For example, "we need to make sure students are completing their senior secondary schooling before just looking at ATAR scores as a measure" - Michael Devine. A construct can be developed to demonstrate student acquisition of such skills and attributes that should be adapted to match the needs, challenges and goals of different types of schools, local language, culture, socioeconomic status and student outcome strengths.

As a society we must also invest in the wellbeing of our young people. More emphasis should be placed in designing student wellbeing and health programs that focus on the whole student. This should be done in a structured way so that students' development in these areas can be tracked and reported.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO IMPROVE AND HOW CAN WE SUPPORT ONGOING IMPROVEMENT OVER TIME?

Collectively we believe that school funding will have the most impact if used more effectively and efficiently in these areas:

1. Investment in staffing, particularly in remote and regional areas.
2. Investment in infrastructure that can support STEM and digital technologies.
3. Investment in the development of partnerships.
1. Investment in staffing, particularly in remote and regional areas.

a) We need more teachers in remote and regional areas

"Our best teachers should be in disadvantaged, regional and remote schools if we are really serious about equity in education and closing the gap for these students"- Lesley Mills. Students in these areas are often already highly disadvantaged due to socio-economic circumstances and isolation and they need considerable guidance and encouragement. Funds must be allocated to provide attractive conditions in terms of career pathways, high level professional learning opportunities, additional salary remuneration and conditions to attract expert teachers to work in remote and regional areas where they are needed the most. If systems truly value, support and promote ways to elevate the importance and status of directly contributing to learning in remote and regional areas, it should be seen as a privilege to teach in these areas and not a post of last resort. The Teaching Fellows who work in schools in remote and regional areas collectively agree that the skills and professional satisfaction to be experienced in such areas is invaluable to the growth of the teaching profession.

b) We need a greater calibre of teachers across all schools

The calibre of teaching regardless of the schools teachers teach in, should be of a high standard. "Those wishing to become teachers need to be aware of 'what being a teacher' is"- Sarah Mathews. Singapore, which has one of the most advanced and effective teaching models, has built-in extensive pre-service in schools before acceptance into teacher education as well as a tight selection system with high standards. This ensures only the 'cream of the crop' can work in the teaching profession and these teachers understand what it means to be a highly effective teacher. We recommend this approach be explored in Australia.

c) Teachers should have ongoing development opportunities.

Teachers need to adopt the best teaching practices. We suggest mentoring sessions where teachers can visit mentor teachers in other schools, giving them a chance to experience professional dialogue outside of their own environment and reflect on their own practice. In Singapore, a trainee teacher spends a year in a classroom with

a mentor teacher before doing teacher training. This directs the human resource towards excellence, allowing reflection and capability building in all staff. We also recommend a strong model of professional coaching that can be supported at the system level. For example, Queensland has put Master Teachers into some schools to support building capability. Funds will need to go into school leadership to ensure that this teacher is utilised effectively with accountability to schools. This is a model worth expanding to other states.

d) Teachers need clear career tracking and checkpoints.

We know from our own experience that many teachers stay in a routine and are unwilling to change. Again, reflecting on the Singapore model, we suggest investing more time and professional learning into teachers at certain stages of their career to drive reflection and self-improvement. It may be likened to a mini-sabbatical where teachers undergo some rich professional learning and come back re-invigorated. We need to develop a sustainable cohort of educators and leaders who have appropriate long-term commitment and capacity to initiate and sustain innovation and development.

e) Teachers need sufficient time for reflecting.

To improve practice and outcomes, we need the time to reflect, plan and unclutter the curriculum. "Too often teachers are trying to fit too much into the learning day and deep learning and understanding of concepts and skills can be sacrificed"- Lesley Mills. A quality education system is dependent on the quality of its educational practitioners.

We continue to therefore highlight the need for capability building of teachers as a priority.

2. Investment in infrastructure that can support STEM and digital technologies:

The needs of the workplace will continue to change as new technology is being developed. The curricula we teach therefore must reflect this fluidity and address new and emerging skill sets. To have the most effective impact, we recommend that school funds be spent on infrastructure that can support STEM and digital technologies. Especially in disadvantaged schools, there is a great demand for infrastructure that can support STEM learning. A student's or school's postcode should not limit their accessibility to learn these skills. A lack of access to technology can hinder a student's opportunity to develop adaptability in our ever-changing and technology-fueled world.

3. Investment in the development of partnerships:

Schools benefit substantially from collaborations and partnerships with those outside the school community. Such partnerships with agencies, education departments, universities, commercial companies, not-for-profit organisations and

philanthropic individuals pave the way to sharing knowledge and resources based on the input of expertise. As a nation we need a collective approach through mature systems and structures that help facilitate and embed such partnerships into education. In particular, extreme remoteness of some schools calls for unique approaches to facilitate learning and skill development, and partnership opportunities can significantly open doors and opportunities for students and staff.

Furthermore, partnerships and collaborations where local initiatives are supported with committed support from others, lead to successful, sustainable programs.

"When the school community leads with committed leaders and supporters, positive action and change happens"- Wilbur (Charlie) Klein. At his school, Mr Klein has established a partnership with Notre Dame University where they support a 'service immersion' camp that has had an impact on improving the physical resources of the school, building undergraduate teachers' knowledge of Aboriginal education and remote communities. Combined, this has provided more learning opportunities for students.

We also believe that disadvantaged schools need to have a permanent transition or preschool program. Students in these areas often do not access these services and are found to be already behind their cohort when they begin school, compared with more affluent and/or larger centres. Access to talk, play and literature as part of everyday life would have a big impact on future student wellbeing and success.

Especially in disadvantaged communities, we also need to ensure secondary schools partner more effectively with their feeder primary schools. This ensures greater continuity, collaboration and sharing of best practice and data on student progress. In turn, teachers will have the opportunity for early intervention and targeted approaches to ensure student needs are addressed and supported throughout their schooling and to provide a seamless transition.

We also propose that it would be advantageous to have joint appointments between schools and universities. This may entail a teacher or lecturer teaching a few subjects in a school and undertaking a school-based research project or tutoring at the University. "As a Queensland Master Teacher, I undertook a school-based project linked to a university and it was incredibly powerful learning. It was of great benefit to the strategic direction of the school and networked schools"- Sarah Mathews.

ARE THERE BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTING THESE IMPROVEMENTS?

Firstly, it is important that education is not politicised. "A sustainable vision for creating Global citizens with the capabilities of creativity, problem solving, innovation and empathy can only develop from a long term, focused education plan which cannot be interrupted by a change of government"- Lesley Mills. As a nation, we need an education plan that has commitment from all political parties, the corporate sector, education states and sectors, the teaching profession, students,

parents and community organisations. It needs to be far-reaching and highly aspirational in shaping the future of our country.

Secondly, as highlighted above, to grow and sustain improved student outcomes over time, we must ensure we grow and sustain teacher capability and capacity. We strongly believe one cannot exist without the other. We need more committed teachers who have opportunities to grow and professionally develop themselves, both individually and as a collective.

Thirdly, limited access to digital technology in disadvantaged areas is hindering student learning and their capacity to find employment.

We would also like to make these additional recommendations:

- Disadvantaged schools would benefit significantly from having a permanent extra teacher to enable the release of staff to have learning conversations and reflect on the curriculum. The students would be familiar with this staff member and the staff member would be familiar with the school enabling lessons to continue seamlessly for these students. For teachers in remote areas, it is a constant struggle and nearly impossible to find replacements. Very often student learning is disrupted due to the lack of a quality teacher replacement (or no replacement at all). It is unfortunately these students who can least afford interruptions to their learning.
- We recommend the establishment of a Remote Education Resource Institute based in Alice Springs. This would be managed by a board made up of educators and community leaders from remote schools. The Institute could provide support to schools in remote locations by facilitating the sharing of knowledge and innovation across the context, support research initiatives, support leader and teacher training, induction and ongoing professional learning, and provide some continuity and shared focus for the development of remote schools across Australia.
- As teachers, we would also like to take the opportunity to address the lack of empathy we see for students and families who are stuck in the poverty cycle. Teacher training should have a far greater emphasis on understanding our Aboriginal history, culture and strengths and the effects of poverty and trauma on the growing brain. It is essential that we develop strategies to teach with increased empathy, displaying compassion for students and their circumstances.

These are some of the collective reflections of the 2017 Teaching Fellows on the needs of educators and students across the nation, with a specific focus on disadvantaged and remote schools. We trust that our concerns and ideas will be of assistance.