



Interim Report - National School Reform Agreement October 2022

FEDERATION OF PARENTS AND CITIZENS ASSOCIATIONS OF NEW SOUTH WALES

Locked Bag 5114, PARRAMATTA NSW 2124

Telephone: 1300 885 982

Fax: 1800 655 866

Website: www.pandc.org.au

ABN: 37 439 975 796

Introduction

The Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales (P&C Federation) is thankful for this opportunity to contribute to this Productivity Commission's Interim Report into the National School Reform Agreement (NSRA). P&C Federation supports the position of individual educational and developmental needs met by a range of differential services expressed through appropriate and well-planned curricula, programs and environments conducted by sensitive and well-trained personnel in conjunction with parents¹ and families.

The core belief of P&C Federation is that the education of our children and youth is the most fundamental means of ensuring individual success and success as a nation. Government's primary responsibility is to ensure education is equitable, well resourced and fully funded.

P&C Federation is a representative voice for parents and students in public education in NSW. With over 1800 member associations, 5000 association executive members, and 820,000 public school children and their parents making P&C Associations one of the largest volunteer based organisations within Australia. Our understanding of the issues within education is broad and carries with it the voice of a substantial body of parents and carers.

Submission

Information request 2.1 Realising the full potential of evidence-based research through the Australian Education Research Organisation

What steps could governments take to realise the full potential of evidence-based research through the Australian Education Research Organisation?

The Interim Report states that the USI and OFAI have stalled mainly due to disagreements about design and underestimation of the challenges involved. P&C Federation and other stakeholders have concerns about these tools, particularly the USI, in terms of potential privacy and security issues with the data involved. The Interim Report sheds little further light on how these issues are to be addressed. Moreover, we note that students can already be identified by other means. Given this, we reiterate that we do not see this tool as a high priority.

More generally, although P&C Federation can see some benefit to a national, centralised repository to inform teaching practice, we do not see it as a national priority. The danger with any nationalised advisory organisation is that it becomes the de facto standard at the exclusion of all else. P&C Federation is still not convinced that this national body will be worth the investment and time considering NSW already has an educational research organisation (CESE).

Information request 2.2 Options for enhancing accountability in the next agreement

P&C Federation would suggest the following general principals:

1. Each outcome of the NSRA should include an implementation plan with clear KPIs and timelines for implementation.
2. The expected outcomes should be high-level, so as not to shoehorn the diverse character of each jurisdiction.
3. The outcomes and implementation plans should be designed with extensive consultation with parents, teachers, principals and students from all school sectors.

4. Outcomes and implementation plans should be regularly reviewed to ensure they are adequately achieving their goals.

Information request 3.1 Intensive, targeted support for students who have fallen behind

P&C Federation is surprised that the Interim Report considers concerns about insufficient resourcing for schools to address barriers faced by students from priority equity cohorts to be outside its scope. In our view, it is difficult to separate the lack of equity for such students from the inequitable sector funding that exists in Australia.

We reiterate our recommendation in our initial submission, that urgent priority be given to addressing the inequities within the education system, particularly sector funding.

In our view, this would be the most meaningful way the Commonwealth Government could support to students who have fallen behind.

Information request 3.2 Priority equity cohorts for the next agreement

We acknowledge the Interim Report's observation that there are some disadvantaged students not identified as a priority equity cohort in the NSRA, and we do not rule out including some groups identified in the Interim Report as equity cohort groups (such as students living in out-of-home care). However, there are myriad ways that students can be considered disadvantaged, and it is unlikely that the NSRA will succeed in capturing all such students. The risk of expanding the number of priority equity cohorts is that the government resources may be stretched too thin in targeting them all, thereby diluting the effectiveness of the NSRA.

Information request 3.3 Implementation plans

P&C Federation would support the principle of having more accountability through transparency, and of having implementation plans be developed in consultation with those with direct experience with priority cohorts. Such consultation should include teachers and parents of students in those cohorts, as well as where possible students themselves. Consultation, however, can risk becoming tokenistic and an exercise in box ticking. There should be mechanisms to ensure the consultation is meaningful and that consultees were given ample scope to provide feedback, and that the implementation plans reflect the general feedback as far as practicable.

Information request 3.4 Transparency of funding for students from priority equity cohorts

The primary risk of requiring more transparent reporting is that it will impose yet more administrative burdens on schools, thereby diverting more time and resources away from education of students. It is generally agreed that teachers' administrative work has increased over the years. This is already one of the principal complaints we hear in NSW from teachers today, and while P&C Federation does not oppose more data collection on this matter, we would not want it to be at the expense of teaching and education.

Information request 3.5 Embedding the perspectives of priority equity cohorts in national education policy and institutions

What specifically could be done to embed the views of priority equity cohorts in national education policies and institutions, including outcomes, targets and policy initiatives in the next intergovernmental agreement on school education?

See response to Information request 3.3 above.

What are the merits of establishing a national Indigenous consultative body on education? How might such a body be structured? If pursued, would this best occur through a successor national school reform agreement or some other avenue?

P&C Federation would not necessarily oppose the establishment of such a consultative body, however it carries the risk of imposing another layer of bureaucracy on national education. We would suggest the establishment of such a body should probably occur outside the NSRA, especially if the terms of reference for this consultative committee are to be broad. The NSRA, in our view, should be focused primarily on improving the educational outcomes of students.

Information request 4.1 Should there be National Policy Initiatives to improve student wellbeing?

P&C Federation would support including the improvement of wellbeing in the NSRA, acknowledging that in reality, it is difficult to define and measure. For the purposes of the NSRA, wellbeing may be defined to include how engaged a student is with their schooling, as measured by (for example) their attendance, their completion level of school work, and to what extent their outcomes decline or improve over time. Some steps that could be taken to do this include:

- assessing student wellbeing as part of the NAPLAN process to gauge children's level of engagement at school and understand their issues, fears and aspirations.
- Funding and resourcing for health and wellbeing initiatives.
- Gathering data around student attainment, retention, wellbeing.

However, we reiterate that this must be done in a manner that does not create any additional burden on the school, teachers, parents or students. It must not interrupt teaching and learning, and it must have the privacy of the student and their families protected. In addition, any such data collection must be tied to an outcome, goal or initiative to drive positive outcomes.

Information request 5.1 Teaching Performance Assessment

While measuring and improving overall teacher effectiveness is highly complex, P&C Federation agrees with the Interim Report's assessment that teacher shortages are a significant factor. P&C Federation sees the largest factor as the steady decline in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) course enrolments over the last decade and the lack of permanent teaching positions. Simply put, there are fewer teachers graduating, and fewer permanent positions providing certainty to those graduates. Complicating this is the increasing number of experienced teachers choosing to leave the system. Although there are several reasons for this, the loss of these experienced teachers losing teaching capacity and mentoring capacity.

We would argue the following recommendations should be incorporated into a renewed national strategy:

- undertake an urgent national strategy to promote teaching as a profession including
 - o incentive packages to entice ITE enrolments for school leavers
 - o incentivise mid-career retraining to attract other professions into teaching
- Significantly reduce the administrative burden of teachers, allowing them to spend more time teaching and reducing stress levels.
- Ensure that all schools have the necessary funding to ensure they can employ appropriate numbers of staff.
- Ensure all work done by teachers has a direct and demonstrable benefit to their students' education.
- Each teaching course should include practicums for at least a term each year, starting in the first year of teaching courses, so that poor performers can be identified early.
- Practicums should make up at least 20% of the ITE course.
- Investigate the training and support of appropriate mentors for initial teachers.

Information request 5.2 Induction and mentoring programs

There appears to be a lack of consistency across those that mentor new graduates or oversee practicums. In this crucial stage, graduates or practicum students need to be positively supported, given

constructive feedback and have their confidence enhanced. There are many mentors within systems capable of doing so but equally many mentors that are abrupt, unsupportive, and overly critical or simply overloaded with work with little time for new graduates or practicums. Depending on the school situation, the mentor may well be a teacher with only a few years' experience or a long-term teacher unwilling to embrace new methods. Training, support and validation of appropriate mentors is essential to support long-term quality of new teachers.

We would suggest the following recommendations:

- Each teaching course should include practicums for at least a term each year, starting in the first year of teaching courses, so that poor performers can be identified early.
- Practicums should make up at least 20% of the ITE course.
- Investigate the training and support of appropriate mentors for initial teachers.

Information request 5.3 The prevalence of teacher attrition

P&C Federation has recently made a submission to NSW Parliament on the matter of teacher shortages, where we noted the widespread casualisation and temporary contracts. Broadly, there are two key areas of concern:

- the impact on the morale, professional learning and opportunities for casual and temporary teachers; and
- the impact on teaching and learning for students

Regarding the first issue, casual teachers generally have less access to professional learning and mentoring. The piecemeal nature of their roles does not provide the level of experience gained by permanent teaching staff nor afford them the opportunity to settle into a more stable and consistent role where they can feel part of a school and establish a relationship with the class.

Since 2001 when the Department of Education introduced temporary positions, one in five teachers now have temporary status. In around 100 public schools there are more temporary and casual teachers than permanent staff. While there are many factors that can affect this, P&C Federation believes that there is an over-reliance on the use of temporary and casual teachers. Data shows that only one in four new graduates gain a rare permanent position. This leaves 75% of graduates having to work on a temporary or casual basis, which is likely to be demoralising and in some cases untenable in terms of stable income. With the cost of living increasing dramatically over the last decade, P&C Federation believes this may well be a contributing factor to teachers leaving for other professions that offer permanency and higher salaries.

Regarding the second point around the impact of teaching and learning, parents often comment negatively about the use of temporary or casual teachers. Nearly all parents can tell you of examples of casual teachers simply acting as a child-minding service. Temporary teachers can be hit or miss in terms of outcomes for students as factors such as the length of the temporary engagement, the teachers professional experience, professional learning, past mentoring and sense of belonging can impact the quality of the teaching.

Information request 5.4 Teaching assistants and support staff

What are the primary functions of teaching assistants and support staff in Australia?

Teaching assistants in NSW are primarily used to support teachers in their duties.

Could deployment and use of teaching assistants and support staff be improved to help reduce teacher workload? If so, should this be pursued through national collaboration?

P&C Federation would be open to a national framework to deploy teaching assistants and support staff to reduce teacher workload. Some steps for this could include a commitment that all work done by teachers should have a direct and demonstrable benefit to their students' education. Work that does not fit this criteria could be delegated to other support staff.

Information request 5.5 Streamlining pathways into teaching

What are the costs and benefits of re-introducing one year graduate diplomas?

The potential benefits are that it introduces teachers into the workforce at a more rapid rate. The potential risks are that the training is too rushed to make them effective in a classroom setting. P&C Federation would argue for safeguards against this, such as requiring that practicums should make up at least 20% of any teaching course.

What employment-based pathways could be explored?

This depends largely on the subject matter that is being recruited. For example, it may be possible to appoint someone with a degree in the sciences as a science teacher. However, they must be able to demonstrate aptitude to work with students in a classroom setting.

Information request 5.6 Understanding what happens in the classroom

We reiterate the submission of the NSW Department of Education on this question, which stated that new data measures should be 'cost-effective to collect, not pose additional burden on schools', and wherever possible rely on existing administrative data.

Information request 6.1 Fostering school leaders

Many years of involvement with the merit selection process anecdotally suggest that Principals are likely to spend up to 20% of their time dealing with recruitment matters, which leaves limited space to tend to other leadership roles such as management, financial oversight and administration. This estimated 20% does not include other staffing matters such as managing casuals, staff appraisals, dealing with staff conflict or performance management. The low numbers of staff applying for roles at present have only increased the burden on Principals.

We believe the following attributes are important leadership qualities that should be fostered in all schools:

- Putting the welfare of students as the main priority for all decisions and actions
- Ensuring all decisions and actions should contribute to, rather than detract from, good educational outcomes and student wellbeing.
- Communication with school communities should be inclusive.
- Transparency and accountability for all decisions and actions.
- Collaboration and consultation with school communities should be frequent, meaningful and effective.
- Exemplary interpersonal skills.