



CATHOLIC SCHOOL PARENTS AUSTRALIA

SUBMISSION

**Productivity Commission's Review of the National Policy
Initiatives and the Measurement Framework under the
National School Reform Agreement**

17 June 2022

INTRODUCTION

Catholic School Parents Australia (CSPA) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Productivity Commission's review of the National Policy Initiatives and the Measurement Framework under the National School Reform Agreement.

Catholic School Parents Australia is recognised as the national body representing and advocating for the parents and carers of 785,585 children and young people who attend the 1,755 Catholic schools across Australia. CSPA works in collaboration and consultation with the National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC)*, the Australian Catholic Primary Principals' Association and Catholic Secondary Principals Australia, and is recognised in our national role by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference through the Bishops Commission for Catholic Education.

CSPA acknowledges the ongoing support of the Australian Government in funding Catholic schools. However, families also play a key role in resourcing Catholic education, taking on a little under 29% of the annual cost of their children's education and providing almost 90% of the funding needed for school buildings and capital works. In 2019, this family contribution to their children's education came in at a little under \$4 billion (data from NCEC, 2022).

CSPA believes that Australian education is all the richer for parents and carers having real choice in being able to affordably access education that most suits their beliefs and values and the needs of their children.

CSPA COMMENT

This CSPA submission* has been developed under the following headers:

- a) The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration.
- b) Australian Curriculum.
- c) Senior secondary pathways post school.
- d) Pre-service Teacher Education Programs.
- e) Implementation of a national unique student identifier (USI).
- f) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education
- g) Rural and Remote education
- h) National data collection.

(*CSPA acknowledges that some aspects of this submission have been informed by documentation from NCEC).

a) The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration.

At a recent meeting of the Australian Curriculum Assessment Authority (ACARA) and national principal and parent bodies, reference was made to the Mparntwe Declaration and the lack of follow through of a number of the eleven recommendations. ACARA has highlighted that four of the eleven recommendations have no measures by which progress might be determined, these include:

- i. Quality early childhood education;
- ii. Teacher quality and support of principals and school leaders;
- iii. Partnership with families and communities in supporting young people through education; and

- iv. Capturing student wellbeing, critical and creative thinking and English language proficiency data.
- i. Quality early childhood education.
CSPA keenly supports the further development of early childhood opportunities, which will not only enrich children's learning, but will also provide additional options and flexibility for families in relation to paid work. The wellbeing and learning of pre-school age children will be enhanced where families and early childhood staff can work in partnership. A 2022 Australian Early Development Census ([AEDC](#)) report noted that "the percentage of children who were on track on five domains decreased for the first time since 2009 (from 55.4 per cent in 2018 to 54.8 per cent in 2021)". This work¹, and for example that of ARACY², provides convincing evidence for further work and resourcing for these vital learning years of every child's life. Should this additional year of compulsory schooling be adopted?
- ii. Teacher quality and support of principals and school leaders.
Discussed later in this submission.
- iii. Partnership with families and communities in supporting young people through education.
(Much of this discussion is taken from the CSPA Submission to the *Quality Initial Teacher Education Review* (18 July 2021)).

The Melbourne Declaration on the Educational Goals for Young Australians (December 2008), under the header of *A Commitment to Action – Developing Stronger Partnerships* stated that:

Partnerships between students, parents, carers and families, the broader community, business, schools and other education and training providers bring mutual benefits and maximise student engagement and achievement.

In the *Through Growth to Achievement: Report³ of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools* (2018), it was recommended to:

Develop and disseminate evidence-based tools and resources to assist early childhood education providers, primary, and secondary schools to implement best practice approaches to supporting parents and carers to engage in their children's learning throughout their education.

Similarly, in the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (2019), under the header of *A Commitment to Action – Developing Stronger Partnerships*, it is stated that:

It is critical for the education community to work in partnership with parents, carers and families to support a child's progress through early learning and school.

¹Extracted from *Findings from the AEDC* (2022) through <https://www.aedc.gov.au/schools/findings-from-the-aedc>

²Extracted from *Giving children the best start to life* in Early Learning (October, 2019) through <https://www.firstfiveyears.org.au/early-learning/giving-children-the-best-start-in-life>

³Australian Government (March, 2018) *Through Growth to Achievement - Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools*, David Gonski (Chair).

Later, under the header of *What it means*, in relation to this same recommendation, the report states:

Early childhood education services and schools need assistance (information and tools) to help parents support their children to learn.

Clearly, engaging parents in their children's learning is central to the learning agenda as set out in these documents and, since 2015, had been a key cornerstone of the federal government's ⁴*Students First* agenda. Parent Engagement is a key influential factor in improving student learning and wellbeing and fifty years of national and international research would support this claim.

A comprehensive list of this research can be found in the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) ⁵*Parent and Family Engagement: An implementation guide for school communities*. It is also noted that, over time, families have been respected as the first educators of their children and it has only been across *the last two centuries, as schooling has gradually become compulsory for most people in the developed world, the roles of teacher and parent have grown apart.*⁶

Over many years, ARACY have undertaken extensive work in relation to Parent Engagement and their implementation guide referenced above is testament to this. When ARACY speak of parent and family engagement in learning they are *referring to the role of schools and educators as one of supporting families, understanding and leveraging how they interact with their child's learning, and supporting them to do that in equal partnership with the school* (p.13)⁶.

Since 2020, school education, in some contexts, has become notably more reliant on this partnership. The COVID pandemic has interrupted life as we know it in relation to all aspects of living, and not least of all in education. Suddenly, in some contexts, schooling has been profoundly interrupted and much data has been gathered to more fully appreciate COVID's impact. For example, based on survey data from Victoria, one of Australia's states worst hit by COVID, John Hattie⁷ observed:

School principals, teachers and parents all spoke overwhelmingly of the positive relationships built over the period of remote and flexible learning. Many parents have sat with their children during this period: They have become more engaged in their children's learning and now better understand their work. Schools also learned more about the home situations of some vulnerable students and can better incorporate these insights into their teaching and student support.

Later in the article, Hattie concluded:

COVID-19 has brought great challenges and negative impacts, but for schools it may

⁴Australian Government: Department of Education (2015) *Students first - Engaging parents in education*.

⁵Barker, B., & Harris, D. (2020). *Parent and Family Engagement: An Implementation Guide for School Communities*. Canberra: ARACY.

⁶The impact of parent engagement on learner success - A digest of research for teachers and parents (N1, Spring, 2010). Gems Education, Centre for Real World Learning, Research into Practice.

⁷Hattie, J. (November 2020). *Education's Golden Ticket: Lessons Learned from COVID-19*. Corwin Connect, COVID 19 – Distance Learning.

be the greatest educator innovator and accelerator we know. After past disruptions such as earthquakes, floods, strikes, and wars, we rushed back to the comfort of old schooling hierarchies. The worst consequence of the pandemic for schools and students may be not learning how to bring back better. The Golden Ticket handed to us by the current situation is our best opportunity to dramatically change and improve the learning lives of our students—and it is an educator led revolution.

(Extracted from: <https://corwin-connect.com/2020/11/educations-golden-ticket-lessons-learned-from-covid-19/>).

CSPA suggests that parents/carers, the first and ongoing educators of their children, should play a key role in this *educator led revolution*. It is the ongoing view of CSPA that there needs to be a shift in culture and emphasis around promoting Parent Engagement such that the responsibility for the effectiveness and outcomes of Parent Engagement in learning is shared in partnership between school leaders, teachers and parents.

At the same time, one must not underestimate the challenges around this as many teachers are somewhat hesitant to interact with parents⁸. CSPA proposes that great leverage would be generated towards removing this anxiety and maximizing the potential of parents/carers working in partnership with schools around their children's learning if formal preparation in Parent Engagement became a mandated study requirement in all pre-service teacher education programs. While these programs are usually over-subscribed with topics for study, it is suggested that a subject such as *Engaging with parents to maximize student outcomes* could at least be offered as an elective course.

Also, the professional development of current teachers and parents regarding Parent Engagement will assist in embedding improved practices, and to assist this, CSPA is currently developing six videos for release in 2023. Assisted with funding from the Federal Government, CSPA is using the lens of COVID to create parent and teacher professional development resources on Home-School Connections: Student Health and Wellbeing; Home-School Connections: Student Learning; and Home-School Connections: Looking Ahead – Learnings from COVID. These videos will be made available to all schools through the [Gearing Up for Parent Engagement](#) website.

CSPA proposes that Parent Engagement could be raised in status if the Federal Government were to generate a Policy on Parent Engagement in Australian Schools, and its inclusion as part of a new National Schools Reform Agreement would be a useful place to start. Such a policy would be more robust and likely to have impact if all key stakeholders regarding the educative process have input. This includes: parents, teachers, school leadership, school students, system education leaders, university education deans and pre-service education students.

iv. Capturing student wellbeing, critical and creative thinking and English language proficiency data.

Discussed later in this submission.

⁸See for example a study by Doecke et.al. (2008) which found that for 82% of the teachers surveyed their greatest professional anxiety was around their work and relationships with parents.

b) Australian Curriculum.

CSPA supports Version 9 of the Australian Curriculum which resulted from a comprehensive review. ACARA and others have detailed work which is still required and/or underway, and CSPA would like to reemphasise the importance of Literacy and Numeracy.

The ability to read and write and complete basic operations of numeracy are fundamental to all children making their way in life. While arguments abound as to the best ways to achieve these outcomes, all agree that there needs to be vigilance around ensuring that the revisions to the F-10 Australian Curriculum will improve opportunities for literacy and numeracy learning – for all students.

National literacy and numeracy progressions need to satisfactorily articulate across all year levels for all students as it can't be acceptable, for example, that some children experience eleven years of failure in Mathematics. Satisfactory literacy and numeracy achievement standards need to be accessible to all students.

Challenges in relation to literacy and numeracy learning can often dominate in remote communities and more effective support is required particularly for First Nations students and English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) students.

c) Senior secondary pathways post school.

CSPA supports the twenty recommendations resulting from the Shergold Review as set out in the *Looking to the Future* Report (June, 2020) - notably, Recommendation 1 focusses on Literacy and Numeracy.

Keeping students in school and providing satisfactory pathways beyond school requires cooperation between all governments and effective partnerships between teachers and families.

d) Pre-service Teacher Education Programs.

Initial Teacher Education Programs need to be fit for purpose and play a key role in the provision of sufficient numbers of high quality early career teachers. Once again, rural and remote schools are hardest hit by the shortage of teachers, including appropriately qualified teachers, and student outcomes can be negatively impacted. Any national schools reform agenda must include expectation around the quality of the teaching profession - a key determiner of broad student success.

It is believed that the following characteristics should be required of all Pre-service Teacher Education Programs.

- Opportunities for pre-service teachers to undertake extended periods of paid, professional experience prior to full time employment – internships as paraprofessionals;
- The adherence to established national, minimal pre-service teacher entry and exit requirements;
- The inclusion of accelerated programs (3 or 4 semesters per year) that encourage practising professionals from other fields into teacher education programs; and
- Include a subject such as *Engaging with parents to maximize student outcomes* in the program of study.

All stakeholders need to play a role in raising the status of the teaching profession and providing more generous conditions of employment to school staff.

e) Implementation of a national unique student identifier (USI).

CSPA supports the on-going work to establish a USI which: maintains privacy and security of data while having an ability to track students during school and post school; is seamless by way of interaction with the VET USI; effectively and efficiently facilitates the transfer of data both within and between states and territories and between data sets and systems. Implementing a USI is obviously a complex challenge, however the value adding it will provide is worth the ongoing effort.

f) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education

CSPA supports more emphasis being placed on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education in a new National Schools Reform Agreement. Appropriate and adequate resourcing to support closing the gap initiatives is required including support for appropriately qualified teachers to live and work in indigenous communities.

g) Rural and Remote education

The unique challenges faced by rural and remote communities need to be identified and addressed as part of a new National Schools Reform Agreement. For example, access to appropriately trained teachers, specialist teachers, satisfactory internet speeds and IT devices should be equally available to students no matter where they live. Generally, adequate resourcing should be provided to facilitate access of every Australian child to a high quality Year 12 education if that is a preferred pathway.

More comprehensive discussion on f) and g) can be found in CSPA's submission to the *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education* (August, 2017).

h) National data collection.

CSPA supports the work in relation to the national and consistent collection of data, however, as suggested by ACARA, it would be useful to broaden the base to include such as generalised data in relation to: student wellbeing, post-school destinations and progressions of EALD students.