

RESPONSE

TO

PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION:
Draft research report into the Schools Workforce
(released on 17 November 2011)



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Productivity Commission: Draft Report into the Schools Workforce

Profile of the Schools Workforce

The Issues Paper comments that this study mainly focuses on those who support the practice of teaching, especially teachers, principals and other managers, and teaching assistants.

APC strongly argues against taking this approach because it effectively places parents at the periphery of the schooling enterprise. Parents must be at the core of considerations of the operation of the schools workforce and its purpose.

As we stated in our original submission:

Schools exist primarily to support parents with the education of their children and to fulfil society's expectation that all young people will be developed in such ways as will enable them to be active citizens and to make positive contributions to their communities.

A school cannot be expected to meet those obligations if its leaders, teachers and key support staff do not engage meaningfully with parents, or if the school fails to integrate with the community of which it is a part.

A school's workforce is comprised of several elements, all of which are critical to its success as an educational institution where all students can expect to receive a quality education to enable them to attain their potential. These elements include:

- *Appropriately formed, competent school leadership, encompassing the educational and 'business' aspects of a school's operations;*
- *A highly skilled, reflective and creative teaching staff who can adapt to evolving professional practices and technologies;*
- *Well trained teaching support staff;*
- *Competent administrative and ancillary staff;*
- *Parents and other 'friends' of the school who volunteer their time and skills to support the school to enable it to provide a diverse range of support and activities for students that would be beyond the means of the school to otherwise provide. In addition, parents of students and the student's family context hold the key to 60 per cent of the variation in student learning outcomes; and*
- *A network of community and specialist service providers who can assist with the provision of services that fall outside those that in-school staff can reasonably be expected to provide.*

Addressing imbalances in teacher supply and demand

In respect of draft finding (4.1):

APC Response

- APC supports attracting, supporting and retaining high quality teachers in rural and remote areas through the development of adequate financial and career incentives. This is consistent with one of the policy recommendations of the OECD for helping

disadvantaged schools and students improve in their 2012 report “Equity and Quality in Education: Supporting Disadvantaged Students and Schools”.

- APC would further propose that, in addition to developing adequate financial and career incentives, there should also be measures to address the growing evidence that parental engagement plays an instrumental part in eliminating achievement gaps for disadvantaged students, such as those in rural and remote areas. This is also supported by a policy recommendation from the 2012 OECD report which states “policies need to ensure that disadvantaged schools prioritise their links with parents and communities and improve their communication strategies to align school and parental efforts”.

Training and Professional Development (5)

In respect of draft recommendations (5.1 & 5.2):

APC Response

APC supports draft recommendations 5.1 and 5.2. However APC also considers that there is a need to ensure that:

- pre service education around parental engagement is available for teachers as well as continuing education and professional development for practising teachers about the impact of parental engagement on student success. Workplace practicums should provide pre-service teachers with opportunities and experiences of working collaboratively with parents.
- evaluation of data on parental engagement is documented so that information is available about how teachers can best partner with parents, where teachers need support in the area of parental engagement, and to help with any redesign of training and professional development for teachers in relation to parental engagement
- the development of standards for teacher knowledge and skills in parental engagement is supported so that higher education institutions, schools and other stakeholders can adequately prepare teachers in this area
- collaborations between training institutions, schools, parents and other stakeholders are supported to ensure that policies and procedures are in place to provide prospective teachers with field placements that enable them to learn about exemplary parental engagement practices.

Teacher Performance (6)

In respect of draft recommendation (6.1):

APC Response

APC welcomes the Australian Government’s announced changes to awards for teachers program and supports a reward scheme that is linked to the National Professional Standards for Teachers.

Workforce Composition and Innovation (7)

In respect of draft recommendation (7.1):

APC Response

- APC considers that workforce composition goes beyond teachers and principals and includes parents, volunteers, admin and ancillary staff, community and specialist service providers.
- APC supports workforce innovations where this includes conducting more research and sharing best practice and strategies for parental engagement.
- Any research dissemination should include the evidence from Australia that the employment of a paid parent liaison officers by schools is one of the most effective strategies in strengthening and sustaining parental engagement

Reducing Educational Disadvantage (9)

In respect of draft finding (9.1):

APC Response

- Meaningful engagement between parents and the teachers and school leaders in whose hands entrust their children to be schooled is a critical element of school reform
- OECD recent 2012 report “Equity and Quality in Education: Supporting Disadvantaged Students and Schools” lists five policy recommendations that are shown to be effective in supporting the improvement of low performing disadvantaged schools. One of these policy recommendations is “prioritise linking schools with parents and communities”
- The employment of a paid parent liaison officers by schools is one of the most effective strategies in strengthening and sustaining parental engagement
- APC believes that the Indigenous Parent Factor (IPF) program provides a very good example of how parents in disadvantaged communities can be engaged with their children’s schooling (see www.ipf.edu.au).

Policy Evaluation and Research (10)

In respect of draft recommendation (10.1):

APC Response

APC supports the Commission's recommendation.

Some Broader Framework Issues (11)

In respect of draft recommendation (11.1)

APC Reponse

- APC supports the establishment of a working group to consult with relevant stakeholders (including parents from the government and non-government schooling sectors) and to advise on specific options for improving their representation on high level policy forums
- APC proposes that Australia should aspire to the systematic and sustainable integration of parental engagement into all aspects of the reform agenda. Policies and practices that enable this strategic approach to parental engagement must be a part of schools workforce reforms
- The Commission mentions 3 specific areas for helping to facilitate effective engagement:
 - *Providing parents with more information on how their schools are performing will, if well implemented, provide a better platform for engagement. By empowering parents such information may also increase their collective willingness and desire to engage*
 - *The use of targeted training modules in both undergraduate teacher courses and in professional development programs for current and future leaders is another obvious vehicle. Some specific applications fo this approach, which to varying extents are already being employed, are outlined in the APC's submission*
 - *The provision of greater autonomy for schools that have the capacity to self manage their affairs will enable them to put in place high quality engagement processes. There will be a more direct nexus between the contribution that effective engagement can make to the performance of schools and the specific autonomy benefits that a school receives when it achieves or sustains a high level of performance*

APC strongly endorses the highlighting of these three areas in the report as being effective in facilitating parental engagement.