



AGPPA
Australian Government
Primary Principals
Association

Promoting and Advocating for Government Primary Schools

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Working Group Secretary
National Declaration Working Group Secretariat
Emailed to: Declaration@education.gov.au

Review of the Melbourne Declaration

Dear Secretary

The Australian Government Primary Principals Association (AGPPA) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to this Review. Our submission is based upon the professional opinions of public primary school leaders, AGPPA position papers, reports and research projects undertaken on behalf of AGPPA, and research undertaken by other bodies such as the OECD.

AGPPA also looks forward to involvement in the ongoing discussion relating to this very important topic.

Ian Anderson

President

Australian Government Primary Principals Association.

Summary

The following recommendations are contained in the main submission below.

Recommendation 1: AGPPA recommends that as part of the updated National Declaration on Schooling that State and Federal governments commit to funding 100% of the Schooling Resource Standard (fully indexed) and commit to a target date.

Recommendation 2: AGPPA recommends that State and Federal Governments commit to the replacement of NAPLAN testing with sample testing supported by a suite of high quality school-based accountability options.

Recommendation 3: AGPPA recommends that a greater focus on early and sustained intervention relating to educational disengagement is required, particularly from years 3 to 6.

Recommendation 4: AGPPA recommends that a commitment to supporting school leader and teacher wellbeing be added to the revised declaration along with student wellbeing.

AGPPA Background

The Australian Government Primary Principals Association is the national professional association for public primary school principals in Australia. AGPPA represents over 5300 principals in public primary schools in every corner of every state and territory. AGPPA's National Council includes representatives from six states and two territories, with two members from each jurisdiction. This group represents a shared national commitment to both highlight the importance of the primary years and to promote excellence in public primary education in Australia.

Our advocacy is based on the vision of every child attending a school with healthy, high-performing leaders and quality staff, along with the knowledge that primary schools are where Australian children acquire the necessary foundational academic, social and emotional skills to lead fulfilled and enriched lives. It is imperative that our education policy enables this noble intent so that all children can experience such success, both at school and through later life.

AGPPA initiatives, actions and projects are research informed. However, AGPPA cautions that evidence-based practice must be proven to be transferable to all school contexts. It cannot be assumed that the application of a universal solution or the adoption of successful policy from other areas, countries or jurisdictions will be suitable for the diverse range of school settings across our country. AGPPA aims to assist in making Australia's education system a beacon for all.

This aim is perhaps best enunciated using the words of David Gonski, Chair of the Review of Funding for Schooling expert panel, who said:

"Every child should have access to the best possible education, regardless of where they live, the income of their family or the school they attend."

Just as importantly, Dr Philip Riley (Chief Investigator of the Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Surveys) reminds us:

"Today's children are tomorrow's nation builders. We owe it to them and ourselves to give them the best opportunities we can."

AGPPA's response to the Review is shown below.

AGPPA's Expectations

While AGPPA believes much of the existing National Declaration on Education remains relevant, we believe that there is an opportunity to ensure that it becomes more meaningful for all schools, particularly for primary schools. We believe the two goals in the existing document remain strong and we reinforce the importance of equity for the wide range of learners in our schools, particularly those in the target groups identified by David Gonski in the Gonski Review of Funding for Schooling (December 2011). This was the most comprehensive investigation of the way our schools are funded in almost 40 years. The review recommended that schools be funded according to identified needs of their student populations. It also identified what level of funding was required to educate each one of them, no matter what their individual circumstances, to a high standard.

The review identified that government schools have the majority of students with high levels of educational need. However, it also recognised that within all sectors there are schools serving very disadvantaged students that will benefit from additional funding. The intent of the Gonski Review was that schools and sectors with the highest level of need should receive the most support.

Support loadings were to be provided for:

- Students from low socio-economic backgrounds.
- Students with disabilities.
- Students from Indigenous backgrounds.
- Students who need help with English.
- Schools that are disadvantaged by their size or remoteness.

The noble intent of the Gonski Review of Funding for Schooling has not yet been fully realised, and will not be achieved until all primary schools have achieved 100% of the Schooling Resource Standard, fully indexed. This requires a commitment from both State and Federal governments to make it a reality. AGPPA believes this should be a key addition to the National Declaration.

Recommendation 1: AGPPA recommends that as part of the updated National Declaration on Schooling that State and Federal governments commit to funding 100% of the Schooling Resource Standard (fully indexed) and commit to a target date.

While the audience for the National Declaration remains the wider education community, including Schools, Education Departments and State and Federal Governments, successful enactment of the intent of this document requires an empowering of principals, teachers and school communities. This can only occur if the current focus on external accountability characterised by high stakes testing is replaced by a suite of school-based options to ensure accountability at the local level, supported by sample testing. These options should not attempt to create a 'one size fits all' solution, nor should particular aspects be mandated. Rather, they should allow for choice at the local level. This requires placing trust in schools and educators rather than relying on external national testing, which is destructive to the areas of creativity and innovation.

This sentiment is echoed by educational experts like Pasi Sahlberg who has regularly bemoaned the focus on national testing in many jurisdictions around the world. He laments that what is most worrying: *'is the shift of teachers' and students' attention from teaching and learning for understanding towards being successful in high stake tests and exams'*. As an alternative, AGPPA has long indicated strong support for sample testing rather than wholesale NAPLAN testing. Such a change would remove the high stakes nature of the testing and allow a greater focus on effective teaching and learning at the school level. The other benefit of such a change is that sample testing still provides systemic data suitable for bureaucracies and governments to guide policy decisions.

Recommendation 2: AGPPA recommends that State and Federal Governments commit to the replacement of NAPLAN testing with sample testing supported by a suite of high quality school-based accountability options.

While the Melbourne Declaration has served a purpose to date, it is timely to look to the future. AGPPA believes a greater focus on digital technologies is warranted, including a commitment to support students to engage with emerging technologies into the future. This is also an important area to consider in relation to students from low socio-economic areas who are at a great disadvantage when it comes to access to technology at home. The wider implications of socio-economic disadvantage and its effect on learning also need to be more deeply understood, and their implications mitigated. This could be supported by a greater focus on student diversity and its implications.

The increasing move away from manual labour towards service industries also carries implications for education into the future. AGPPA strongly believes that any new declaration should place an emphasis on the capabilities and skills that best prepare students for future life, including the capacity for lifelong learning. Key capabilities such as entrepreneurialism, problem solving, and creativity are important as globalism becomes more important to learners in Australia. To compete on a global stage, students need to develop skills in these areas.

AGPPA recognises the importance of students succeeding at all stages of learning. The Melbourne Declaration also recognised the special importance of the Middle Years. AGPPA is concerned that much of the Middle Years focus since 2008 around the country has been directed at the upper end of this stage (Years 7-9) rather at the lower end – (Years 3-6). We believe that this area needs greater focus because this is often the period when signs of disengagement appear. More targeted

resources for earlier intervention in Years 3 to 6 would assist greatly in this area.

Recommendation 3: AGPPA recommends that a greater focus on early and sustained intervention relating to educational disengagement is required, particularly from year 3 to 6.

While there is reference to student wellbeing in the current National Declaration, it is important to recognise that for this to occur, principal and teacher wellbeing is also paramount. If we are to achieve our vision of every child attending a school with healthy, high-performing leaders and quality staff, then the wellbeing of leaders and teachers needs to be part of this policy intent.

In terms of attraction to leadership positions, current research also indicates that, as our principals retire, other senior teachers are not prepared to undertake the school leader role. This trend is not limited to our country, but rather seems to be an international trend.

As Barry O'Rourke said in the Irish Times last year:

'The role of school principals used to be one of the most sought-after jobs in education. But many schools nowadays are struggling to attract applicants for the role of principal.'

He adds:

'Ask teachers themselves and most teachers say the extra money – after tax – simply isn't worth it ... given the pressure that goes hand-in-hand with the role of the modern principal.'

In November 2016, representatives from over 32 educational jurisdictions across the globe took part in an International Symposium held in Toronto, Ontario. The theme for this symposium was 'Principal Work-Life Balance and Well-Being Matter'. The White Paper which resulted from this gathering of minds argues that the issue of leader wellbeing, *'without urgent policy and practice intervention, will impact school and system-level outcomes for generations'*.

In fact, the paper sounds a stark warning for all involved in education, declaring that there is: *'a crisis in principal well-being on a global scale'*.

The importance of teachers in the learning process is also well acknowledged. Numerous research findings and the general consensus at schools is that the quality of teaching is the key to improving student outcomes. This was highlighted in the aptly named OECD document published in 2005, Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers – Pointers for Policy Development. In a section entitled 'Quality Teaching is Vital for Improving Student Learning' the article explored the variables which can influence student learning and stated:

'... of those variables potentially open to policy influence, factors to do with teachers and teaching are the most important influences on student learning. In particular, the broad consensus is that "teacher quality" is the single most important school variable influencing student achievement.'

Professor John Hattie, Director of the Melbourne Education Research Institute, agrees, suggesting *'... excellence in teaching is the single most powerful influence on achievement.'*

The 2010 Grattan Institute report, Investing in Our Teachers, Investing in Our Economy, stated that *'... teacher effectiveness has a greater impact on student performance than any other government school education reform.'*

The views expressed in the 2005 OECD document mentioned above have also not changed with the passing of time. In an OECD document produced in 2012, Preparing Teachers and Developing School Leaders for the 21st Century – Lessons from Around the World, edited by Andreas Schleicher, a familiar message resonates:

'... the quality of teaching is at the heart of student learning outcomes.'

Despite this critical importance, Professor Donna Cross from the University of Western Australia indicates that *'Teachers report the highest level of occupational stress in Australia, the United Kingdom and America'*, when compared to other occupations.

Key issues contributing to these concerns included:

- *excessive workload and working hours*
- *poor student behaviour including lack of motivation and effort, disrespect, violence, challenging authority*
- *management of bullying, and reactive management strategies*
- *aggression from pupils and parents*
- *classroom and school climate*

Wellbeing at the school level is also adversely affected by the propensity of governments and bureaucracies to impose additional responsibilities on schools without considering what else should be removed to make space for the added expectations. This has been exacerbated even further in recent years by an overcrowded primary curriculum.

AGPPA believes leader and teacher wellbeing need to be recognised as key issues and fully addressed as soon as possible.

Recommendation 4: AGPPA recommends that a commitment to supporting school leader and teacher wellbeing be added to the revised declaration along with student wellbeing.

In relation to measuring the progress towards achieving the National Declaration's goals, AGPPA believes that data should be sought from the front line – school communities on how they have been supported to attain these goals as well as providing an opportunity to identify what barriers remain in place.

As Professor Alan Reid states:

'If the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians is to be taken seriously, then the public purpose goals it sets out should be used as the benchmark for assessment. The sorts of questions that might be asked of policies, programs and practices would relate to the extent to which they contribute to the wider social good or community benefit. These would include consideration about whether they:

- *Help to develop capacities for democratic participation*
- *Contribute to the health of the whole system*
- *Include rather than exclude*
- *Support a quality education for all*
- *Promote a culture of collaboration*
- *Model democratic decision-making*

He also adds:

'...the government needs to make the Melbourne Goals the touchstone for its policy making, rather than consigning it to the margins.'

For queries relating to this submission, please contact AGPPA President, Ian Anderson.

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