

**The Foundation for Young Australians
Submission to the Senate Inquiry on the
Australian Education Bill**

February 2013

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INTRODUCTION

The Centre for New Public Education (CNPE) would like to thank the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Legislation Committee for providing us with the opportunity to submit to their inquiry on the Australian Education Bill 2012 (the Bill). CNPE is responding to the Senate's inquiry on behalf of the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA).

FYA is a national, independent, non-profit organisation dedicated solely to young people. FYA believes that all young people have the courage, imagination and will to shape their education and create social change. Our vision is for a generation of connected, confident and optimistic young people with a deep sense of purpose and belonging. Our mission is to empower young Australians to be successful learners and creative, active and valued citizens through research, initiatives and partnerships and by harnessing the passion of young people. CNPE, an initiative of FYA, is working to connect and empower people to influence education so all young people are ready for their future.

Section A argues for the central role of students in education policy, drawing on CNPE's experience with the Student ShoutOut program in 2012. The concerns raised by the participants of this program provides an indication of how the views of students compare with the goals and reform levers identified in the Bill.

Section B explores the educational goals outlined by the Bill. Excellence and equity are, and should be, the primary goals for any high-performing education system. However, the focus on international rankings in literacy, numeracy and science ignores the breadth of skills, knowledge and capabilities needed to prepare Australian students for their future, including collaboration, problem solving skills, innovation and entrepreneurship. Performance indicators in the education system should reflect these broader outcomes.

Section C responds to the reform levers identified in the Bill. While all reform levers are needed, we focus on how transparency and accountability can deliver the goals of excellence and equity. Successful accountability needs to focus on translating data into improvement in schools, as well as clarifying the role of different levels of government.

Section D argues for the importance of stakeholder engagement in education policy making. Building a successful 21st century education system requires recognising the different partners who contribute to a learning ecosystem. The lack of student

consultation in the Bill limits the ability to align policy to student need. The Bill also fails to recognise the valuable role of non-government organisations in developing an excellent and equitable education system for the 21st century.

Recommendations

1. The objects of the Bill in Section 3 need to define excellence and equity in 21st Century terms:
 - a. **Excellence** means delivering the range of skills, knowledge and capabilities that prepare students for their future in life and work. These skills have been outlined in the Melbourne Declaration.
 - b. **Equity** means all students, regardless of their background or what school they attend, receive an excellent education that prepares them for their future life and work. **School funding that uses loadings based on student need is an important first step towards delivering educational equity.**
2. The focus on international rankings in literacy, numeracy and science in Section 3 (b) (iii) of the Bill implies a narrow definition of an excellent education. **This goal should be combined with a wider range of educational outcomes, or removed from the objects of the Bill.**
3. The accountability framework in the National Plan should:
 - a. **Clarify the roles of different stakeholders**, particularly the state and federal governments, by balancing autonomy and accountability in order to deliver educational excellence and equity
 - b. **Create accountability for equity** through the use of disaggregated data, focussed on subgroup performance
 - c. **Include a range of indicators of educational excellence and equity** in 21st century terms.
4. The Bill should:
 - a. **Recognise students as partners in educational improvement**, who should be consulted in the implementation of the National Plan.
 - b. **Acknowledge the role of non-government organisations** alongside parents, teachers and employers in delivering educational excellence and equity.

SECTION A: STUDENTS ARE THE CORE STAKEHOLDERS OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

As the primary beneficiaries and stakeholders in the education system, students have an important role to play in shaping the education system at a classroom, school and system level. However, students are often “*at the bottom of the education status list,*” and are more used to having things done “to” them rather than “with” them (Levin, 2000, p. 155).

Without representation, the concerns of students are left out of decision-making processes, and students become “*passive recipients or objects of educational reform*” (Black, 2011, pp. 75–76). CNPE believes the views of students should be an important factor in major educational reforms, such as the Australian Education Bill. Presenting the views of students on the Bill is beyond the scope of this submission. However, CNPE previously ran a student engagement program called Student ShoutOut, which provides an indication of student views on what matters to them in education.

Student ShoutOut: Student perspectives on education

In 2012, CNPE launched Student ShoutOut (SSO), an engagement initiative targeted at students aged 13 to 18 across Australia. SSO engaged 4,436 students through facilitated workshops and an online platform where students submitted and voted on questions for Education Minister Hon Peter Garrett MP. The Minister responded in person to the questions that received the most votes, and the forum was broadcasted from Canberra to the public from Canberra.

What did students say?

While SSO was not a traditional survey, CNPE analysed the major themes indicated by their popularity among student votes. We found:

- Students were most concerned about the failure of the education system to engage them and meet their learning needs (34%).
- Students strongly felt there was unfairness in educational opportunities, particularly for the disadvantaged (25%).
- Many students were concerned their education was too narrowly focussed and was not preparing them for the future (22%).
- Some students were concerned about how to improve teacher quality, recognising its impact on their education (12%).
- Although attracting fewer votes, a significant number of students voiced their concern over the prevalence of bullying and discrimination in their schools (4%).

Student ShoutOut demonstrated that when engaged, young people are keen to participate in shaping their education. They have important things to say on their education and have unique knowledge and relevant perspectives that are not always represented by other stakeholders (parents, teachers or government).

Comparing student concerns with the Australian Education Bill

While SSO was not specifically structured to engage with the Australian Education Bill, the concerns raised provides an indication of how the views of students compare with the goals and reform levers identified in the Bill.

There are significant common ground between student concerns and the Bill:

- Educational equity, which was the second most important topic among students, is also reflected in the second object of the Bill - “for Australian Schooling to be highly equitable,” (*Australian Education Bill, 2012, sec. 3 (b)(ii)*).
- Teacher quality was also important to students, who usually tied it to teachers’ ability to engage students. This aligns to the Bill’s first reform lever – “Quality Teaching,” (*Australian Education Bill, 2012, sec. 7 (1)*).

There are also notable differences between student concerns and the Bill:

- Many students believed their education wasn’t preparing them for their future. They raised concerns that education is too focussed on exam results, without demonstrating the relevance of what they learn. Meanwhile, the Bill defines success in the educational system through a narrow focus on literacy, numeracy and science.
- The most important issue for students was student engagement in the classroom and greater student input in the education system. The active participation of students is largely absent from the Bill, although this may be reflected in the implementation of the reform levers in the National Plan, such as Quality Teaching through Professional Standards in the teaching profession.

A selection of views expressed by students are presented by the quotes throughout this submission. CNPE has previously presented the full results of Student ShoutOut in a submission to the Senate Inquiry into Teaching and Learning – “Student ShoutOut: Students’ Perspectives on Education,” (The Foundation for Young Australians, 2013).

SECTION B: OBJECTS OF THE BILL

What does equity and excellence mean in the 21st century?

The Bill identifies excellence and equity as the primary goals of the education system (*Australian Education Bill, 2012, sec. 3*). This is consistent with the extensive work FYA has completed in this area, identifying excellence, equity and effectiveness as the core aspirations for the Australian education system (Keating, 2009, 2010; The Foundation for Young Australians, 2012a, 2012b).

The goals of a 21st century education system are different to those of a 20th century system. A 20th century education system was designed to sort the populace then train it for different parts of the labour market. Only a few needed a university education, with the majority requiring basic skills to work in manual, skilled or semi-skilled jobs (Barber, Donnelly, & Rizvi, 2012, p. 53).

In the 21st century education system all students need to be provided with a broader set of skills, knowledge and capabilities necessary for their future lives and careers. Delivering an excellent education means that education policy needs to:

- Focus on the future needs of Australian students.
- Define the skills, knowledge and capabilities needed by Australian students.
- Find and implement ways to measure these outcomes.
- Ensure that Australian education systems deliver on these outcomes.

A great deal of this work has already been done within Australian education policy. However, the Bill and corresponding National Plan seems to have reverted to a 20th century understanding of education.

What do we mean by excellence?

Students need to be prepared for their future

Internationally, there are increasingly widespread concerns that the current focus of schools fails to adequately prepare students for their future lives and careers. Pearson's Learning Curve report argues that "*many of today's job titles, and the skills needed to fill them, simply did not exist 20 years ago. Education systems need to consider what skills*

today's students will need in future and teach accordingly" (Kielstra & Barber, 2012, p. 11). Yet so many schools still resemble those of current students' parents, or even of their grandparents.

The urgent need for education to prepare students for their future is demonstrated by the disconnection between teachers, students and employers' perceptions of work readiness. A recent international survey by McKinsey & Company revealed that only 42% of employers believed their new employees were job-ready. This concern was shared by students, where only 45% surveyed felt that their education prepared them adequately for entry-level positions. Meanwhile, 72% of education institutions believed that students left prepared for the job market, indicating a significant disconnect between the current focus of education and the needs of the workplace (Mourshed, Farrell & Barton, 2012).

In Australia, the growing interest in school-business partnerships highlights the demand for Australian education to be more closely linked to the needs of the workforce (Business-School Connections Roundtable, 2011). In 2012's *How Young People are Faring* report, Walsh's foreward argues that "*a changing youth labour market, long-term unemployment and persistent marginalisation experienced by certain groups reinforces the need to ask: how well are young people prepared for increasingly fluid worlds of work?*" (Robinson & Lamb, 2012, p. 4).

Case Study: Educating for future skills in Singapore

Over the past decade, Singapore's Ministry of Education has conducted future scanning for the jobs and relevant skills that will be needed in the economy of the future. Singapore's Professor Sing Kong Lee explains that "*of today's job titles compared to those of 1995, many are very new; the skills are very new. We anticipate that evolution will be fast into the future*". This scanning has led the Ministry to shift away from purely rote based learning towards the development of higher levels skills such as critical thinking and creativity. "*We feel it contributes toward the students acquiring knowledge and skills of cognition and creativity, attributes which are very important in the 21st century landscape,*" (Kielstra & Barber, 2012).

What are 21st century educational outcomes?

"Today, there is a lack of connection between what is being taught in the classroom and its application and usefulness in the real world." – Student ShoutOut participant from a NSW urban Catholic school

Given the widespread consensus that educational requirements are broader in the 21st century, there have been several attempts to define a range of '21st Century Skills' that need to be developed. The Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills (ATC21S) project divided these skills into "*ways of thinking, ways of working, tools for working and skills for living in the world*" (ATC21S, 2012).

"We believe that a primary aim of the education system should be to develop and apply key life skills such as leadership, communication, teamwork and community involvement in order to overcome challenges and solve future problems". – Student ShoutOut participants from a WA urban state school

The Australian understanding of 21st century educational outcomes is best captured by the Melbourne Declaration (MCEECTYA, 2008), which sets out a range of skills, knowledge and capabilities for Australian students to develop:

- **Becoming successful learners:** literacy and numeracy, technology (ICT) skills, logical thinking, problem solving skills, collaboration and communication
- **Becoming confident and creative individuals:** innovation, optimism, entrepreneurship and creativity
- **Becoming active and informed citizens:** ethical integrity, civics and citizenship.

These outcomes form the basis of the General Capabilities outlined in the National Curriculum (ACARA, 2013a). It is crucial that the reforms delivered by the Bill and the National Plan are aligned to this broad set of outcomes.

Rankings in literacy, numeracy and science are narrow goals

An implicit definition of educational excellence is provided by the third object of the Bill:

“... for Australia to be ranked, by 2025, as one of the top 5 highest performing countries based on the performance of Australian school students in reading, mathematics and science, and based on the quality and equity of Australian schooling,” (Australian Education Bill, 2012, sec. 3 (b)(iii)).

Given the broad range of skills recognised elsewhere in education policy, this goal provides a remarkably narrow concept of an ‘excellent’ education. It also ignores the global movement towards the use of a broader range of indicators to measure educational success.

Performance indicators are important, but rankings can be arbitrary

The desire of governments and the growing need for education policy to track learning outcomes creates demand for benchmarking and data. The relatively wide use and solid methodology of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) testing regimes, make the results of these tests a tempting indicator of educational outcomes.

The Pearson’s Learning Curve report attempted to develop a more comprehensive picture of international educational outcomes by developing the Global Index of Cognitive Skills and Educational Attainment (Kielstra & Barber, 2012, pp. 2–3). While the report illuminates several important debates in education policy, the relative modesty of their findings also reveals the limitations of international comparisons of testing. The index and rankings developed in this report combine international testing in TIMSS, PIRLS and PISA with educational attainment rates, which were the only educational outcomes that were widely available with sufficient data quality. The UK ranked 12th in the aggregate of international testing, but rose to 6th due to its relatively high attainment rates. Meanwhile Singapore has very limited data on attainment so it dropped to 5th in the index, even though it was 2nd in testing results (Kielstra & Barber, 2012). This shows that international rankings can change significantly depending on what is measured, and should be used with caution.

International testing can miss important 21st century skills

PISA does not measure all types of learning or outcomes that matter to a society (Barber *et al.*, 2012, p. 46). If Australia values innovation and entrepreneurship, then high ranking PISA results may not be the most relevant indicator of success. Zhao found that many of the highest performing countries in PISA and TIMSS (particularly in East Asia) showed a low level of confidence in their entrepreneurial abilities as measured by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (Zhao, 2012).

We need to ensure that the performance indicators and goals of Australian education reflect the wider range of outcomes that matter. We need a generation of young people who are leaders, innovators and engaged citizens. Prime Minister Gillard was correct when she told Michael Barber, "*It's not an either/or ... literacy and numeracy go together with creativity and innovation*" (Barber *et al.*, 2012, p. 48). We need all young Australians to develop these broader 21st century skills as well as literacy and numeracy, and this needs to be recognised in the Bill and the National Plan.

What do we mean by equity?

Equity in the 21st century means that all students, regardless of their background or what school they attend, are provided with the skills, knowledge and capabilities required to prepare them for their future. Australian education needs to acknowledge the existing equity gaps in traditional literacy and numeracy outcomes, but also focus on delivering equity in 21st century educational outcomes.

The best education systems deliver equity as well as excellence

The inclusion of excellence and equity as educational goals should not be interpreted as a trade-off. Most of the best performing school systems (Finland, South Korea, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Canada and Japan) manage to provide highly equitable education without compromising quality: "*students tend to perform well regardless of their own background or the school they attend,*" (OECD, 2009, p. 13). A commitment to equity can significantly diminish the correlation between family income and educational outcomes (Kielstra & Barber, 2012; OECD, 2012).

What is the Australian equity challenge?

“How will the government ensure that students from regional schools are given the same opportunities as students from schools in the cities?” –Student ShoutOut participant from a NSW regional state school

Australia’s education system is currently far from delivering equity in learning. Even within the limited educational goals of literacy and numeracy, Year 9 students in the lowest quartile of socioeconomic status (SES) are three years behind their peers in the top SES quartile. This is without considering the additional equity gap in 21st century educational outcomes.

Policy debates around equity often reduce educational disadvantage to SES, although there are other important dimensions that need to be considered. The Review of School Funding acknowledged that in Australia, socioeconomic status, disability, indigenous background, remote schooling and non-English background all create educational disadvantage (Gonski *et al.*, 2011, pp. 105–111). The Bill addresses these sources of disadvantage in the loadings proposed in the Bill (*Australian Education Bill*, 2012, sec. 9 (c)).

School funding reform is an important first step towards equity

A new school funding model, based on student need and fixing current inconsistencies, is an important step towards closing equity gaps in Australia. A core finding of the Review of School Funding was that “*Australia lacks a logical, consistent and publicly transparent approach to funding schooling*” (Gonski *et al.*, 2011, p. xxii). School funding reforms need to fix existing inconsistencies, rather than add to the complexities of current funding models.

CNPE strongly supports the adoption of needs-based school funding. While funding reform is necessary, it will not be sufficient to deliver an excellent education system, as it matters greatly how the money is spent. The Bill reflects this belief, by including reform levers alongside funding reform.

Australia's unique system creates difficult equity issues beyond funding

"As a young Australian, I don't want to grow up in a society where the amount of money I make will determine the level of education my children will receive". – Student ShoutOut participants from a VIC urban independent school & VIC urban state school

Australia is unique in the OECD in having an education system where all schools receive government funding, whether government, Catholic or independent (Keating, 2010). Australia is also distinct in having high levels of choice between schools and between sectors. International comparisons show that when policies regarding school choice are poorly designed they can exacerbate educational disadvantage (OECD, 2012, p. 65). If the combination of school autonomy, selective enrolment, and ability to gain additional funding through fees makes private schools a more attractive option for parents, wealthier parents may disproportionately leave the government school system. This departure of medium and high socio-economic status students can leave government schools 'residualised', where they disproportionately serve the most disadvantaged students (OECD, 2012a). This creates additional problems of 'concentrated disadvantage' which amplifies the challenges of providing an excellent education in these schools. Preliminary data from the OECD indicates that in Australia approximately 80% of the lowest SES quartile of students attend government schools, compared with only 40% of the top SES quartile (OECD, 2012, p. 66). There is limited data available addressing the dynamics of school choice in Australia, particularly on the part of parental motivations and the 'public school brand'. This is an important area for further analysis in order for Australia to deliver on its equity goals and get beyond the ideological divides that currently dominate the debate.

Delivering educational equity in Australia will need to address Australia's unique educational and political context. Funding reform is an important first step, but other key reform levers need to be focussed on delivering educational equity and addressing disadvantage in specific ways.

Recommendations 1 and 2:

1. The objects of the Bill in Section 3 need to define excellence and equity in 21st century terms:
 - a. **Excellence** means delivering the full range of skills, knowledge and capabilities that prepare students for their future in life and work. These skills have been outlined in the Melbourne Declaration.
 - b. **Equity** means all students, regardless of their background or what school they attend, receive an excellent education that prepares them for their future life and work. School funding that uses loadings based on student need is an important first step towards delivering educational equity.
2. The focus on international rankings in literacy, numeracy and science in Section 3 (b) (iii) of the Bill implies a narrow definition of an excellent education. This goal should be combined with a wider range of educational outcomes, or removed from the objects of the Bill.

SECTION C: THE REFORM LEVERS

The reform levers are in the right direction

The reform levers identified in the Bill (quality teaching, quality learning, empowered school leadership, transparency and accountability, and meeting student need) (*Australian Education Bill, 2012, sec. 7*) are supported by the international evidence as some of the main drivers of improved performance (Grattan Institute & Jensen, 2012; Hattie, 2003; Kielstra & Barber, 2012; Mourshed, Chijioke, & Barber, 2010; OECD, 2011, 2012)

The accelerating rates of change and complexity in the world means that to be successful in the 21st century we need both system reform (using the levers identified) as well as innovation in education. We need the ability to “*learn from that innovation and continuously improve the system,*” (Barber *et al.*, 2012, p. 65). System-wide education reform is difficult as it requires sustained and coherent implementation across every level of the system. The challenge for the Australian government is to simultaneously pursue both of these objectives.

There are no silver bullets – System reform needs to be comprehensive

If the recent experience of education reform has taught us one thing, it is that there is no ‘silver bullet’ in education, whether it is teacher quality, school autonomy, testing or school funding reform.

“I believe that good teachers who inspire and motivate me to learn are important for my future.” – Student ShoutOut participant from a SA urban independent school

Teacher quality is fundamental to improving student outcomes, as the largest single in-school factor that contributes to educational results. This is reflected by recent state-level policy as well as its inclusion as the first lever of the Bill (Hattie, 2003; Mourshed *et al.*, 2010). Please see FYA’s state-level submissions for detailed discussion of teacher quality (NSW DEC, 2012; The Foundation for Young Australians, 2012a, 2012b; VIC DEECD, 2012). Keating argues that “*teacher quality is seductive for policymakers as it simplifies the highly complex sociology of schooling,*” (Keating 2009, p.13). A relentless focus on teacher

quality can result in teachers being cast as the saviour or the villain, with corresponding policies that can reduce the complexity of teacher effectiveness to single issue actions such as performance pay or a focus on teacher standards at the point of entry to the profession.

The same danger of oversimplification and 'silver bullet' tendencies applies to each reform area. For this submission, we focus on the challenges of transparency and accountability in a federal system as this reform lever needs more clarity than has previously been explored.

We need clarity on the role of the commonwealth, the states and schools

The role for the federal government in directly influencing learning outcomes is constrained by the fact that it doesn't directly operate schools. Meanwhile, the Commonwealth provides a significant proportion of government funding for non-government schools, as well as a smaller role in the funding of government schools (Gonski *et al.*, 2011, p. 17).

The Commonwealth government has already used a range of reform levers to implement improvement in school education. These range from:

- The Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2013b).
- Professional standards for the teaching profession through the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) (AITSL, 2011).
- Measuring performance through the National Assessment Program (ACARA, 2013c).
- Transparency and accountability at the school level via the My School website (ACARA, 2013d).
- Targetted National Partnership funding towards specific educational needs such as teacher quality, literacy and numeracy, and low socioeconomic status school communities (DEEWR, 2013).

The Bill implies that these reform levers are developed further in the National Plan. Going forward, it is important that these levers are evaluated to determine their effectiveness and how they can be improved to better deliver educational improvement.

The challenge of balancing autonomy and accountability

The OECD's educational equity research has identified that a key challenge for delivering educational equity is the balance between autonomy and accountability, to *"ensure that resources reach disadvantaged schools and are well spent."* The OECD recommends that: *"schools should keep autonomy in areas where school-level knowledge is more relevant, such as managing their personnel, while the central level should control resource levels and performance standards,"* (OECD, 2012, p. 71).

The key to resolving this tension between spending and control is appropriate accountability frameworks across different levels of administration. This distinction has been confused in recent years with the proliferation of targeted programs, such as the National Partnerships, which have made it unclear whether responsibility lies with the federal government or the states. The Review of School Funding's Recommendation 6 was to move away from these targeted programs, instead using loadings and accountability at the state level (Gonski *et al.*, 2011, p. xxii). The National Plan for School Improvement should clearly delineate the roles of different levels of government, taking into consideration their existing roles in education policy.

Accountability does not guarantee improvement

A key area for reform by the Commonwealth has been transparency and accountability mechanisms, as delivered through the National Assessment Program (NAP) and the My Schools website. The Bill continues in this direction by planning to make *"schools more accountable to the community in relation to their performance and the performance of their school students"* (Australian Education Bill, 2012, sec. 7 (4)(b)). It is yet to outline what this looks like. These attempts to provide publicly available data on school achievement can help to identify problem areas and create urgency, but they do not in themselves improve school outcomes, unless they are correctly interpreted into changes in teaching or resources that lead to improvement. This involves collecting data which captures the outcomes that matter, and translating this data into specific actions that should be expected to deliver improvement.

For accountability to lead to improved outcomes, the collected data needs to translate into improvement in schools. This role has been identified in the Bill's section on benchmarks and supporting improvement: *"gathering and sharing evidence about the most effective methods of improving the performance of schools and school students"* (Australian Education

Bill, 2012, sec. 8 (b) (iii)). At the federal level a vital part of this is the system leadership provided by AITSL, which should be acknowledged in the National Plan. Without the sharing and implementation of effective improvement methods, increased transparency and accountability will make little difference to student outcomes.

Accountability can happen in different ways

When developing an accountability framework, it should be noted that accountability can occur in radically different ways, and needs to respond to the social and political context of the system. The contrast in accountability between the two top performing nations in international testing, South Korea and Finland, highlights some different paths to success. Both countries share a commitment to educational excellence, but the accountability is *“articulated differently. In South Korea, accountability is exam driven; in Finland, it is peer accountability, but the impact is very similar,”* (Kielstra & Barber, 2012, p. 41).

Accountability in the Australian system needs to be similarly tailored to the social and political context.

We need accountability for 21st century educational outcomes

When it comes to policy at the system level, literacy and numeracy outcomes tend to dominate, largely because they are the easiest outcomes to measure. This has been seen in the focus on NAPLAN national testing, and now in the goals of the Bill.

However, there is increasing global momentum to develop new forms of assessment to measure broader skills. This momentum is being driven by a range of stakeholders, including business and policy-makers, and is being enabled through developments in technology. For example, the 2015 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) testing will include assessment of collaborative problem solving (Pearson, 2011). The Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills (ATC21S) program is an example of an international partnership that includes Cisco and Intel working with academics to develop mechanisms to measure some of these broader skills, such as collaboration and problem solving through ICT (ATC21S, 2012).

We need accountability for equity

The Bill identifies the need for higher quality, more detailed, more consistent, and more publicly available data on educational outcomes. A simple but powerful action to make

sure we deliver on educational equity is the use of disaggregated data – reporting a range of statistics of student outcomes, disaggregated by quantiles of performance, socioeconomic status, and other categories of educational disadvantage. Averages can hide a multitude of stories, so using disaggregated data ensures that performance measures do not hide subgroups of students left behind in a broader context of rising achievement. The use of disaggregated data accompanied by targets focussed on subgroup performance is essential to reveal exactly where disadvantage exists.

Case Study: Accountability for equity In Massachusetts

The Massachusetts state system classifies schools and districts on a five-level scale, with differentiated accountability and support mechanisms based on level.

The highest level of education department support is targeted at level 3-5, representing the lowest performing 20% of schools. High-performing schools in level 1 are given a high degree of autonomy, with little involvement of the Education Department.

This information is reported in aggregate for all students in each school and also for high need subgroups such as students with disabilities and economically disadvantaged students (Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education 2012). When this disaggregated approach was implemented, it revealed schools with relatively high average performance, but very low performance for disadvantaged groups, which were reclassified at lower levels, due to their low equity performance.

The targeted focus on subgroup performance helps teachers, schools and the system to deploy resources to where they are needed most and works to close equity gaps.

Recommendation 3:

The accountability framework in the National Plan should:

- a. **Clarify the roles of different stakeholders**, particularly the state and federal governments, by balancing autonomy and accountability in order to deliver educational excellence and equity
- b. **Create accountability for equity** through the use of disaggregated data, focussed on subgroup performance
- c. **Include a range of indicators of educational excellence and equity** in 21st century terms.

SECTION D: WHAT'S MISSING

Consult students, who are the core stakeholders in education

Young people have the potential to positively influence education outcomes for themselves, their schools, their communities and the system as a whole. Student consultation is fundamental to the development of effective education policy and improving learning outcomes. Not only do students have unique perspectives as the producers of education outcomes, but their involvement also increases the chance of policy buy-in (Levin, 2000, p. 156).

Existing education policy at the state level recognises the importance of engaging with young people in educational decision-making and actively promotes it. For example the the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria) has highlighted the importance of *“encouraging active and meaningful student participation,”* and advised that: *“Schools should allow students to become active participants in their education, including involvement in decisions about how and what they learn, and how their learning is assessed,”* (DEECD, 2009, p. 10).

There is a growing appetite at a government and stakeholder level to engage in more direct and democratic consultation processes. New opportunities in communication technologies and emerging engagement models are providing vehicles to meet these demands. This need has been identified at a whole-of-government level by the Declaration of Open Government, which calls for public policy to embrace web 2.0 consultation models to enable *“collaborating with citizens on policy and service delivery to enhance the processes of government and improve the outcomes sought,”* (Tanner, 2010).

Despite the acceptance of the role of students in education policy, the Australian Education Bill reinforces this traditional view of students as passive objects of reform. The Bill mentions only that “student need” must be identified, but fails to acknowledge the role students can play as partners in education improvement (*Australian Education Bill, 2012, sec. 7 (6)*).

The CNPE's Student ShoutOut Program demonstrated that students are a rich source of data on learning and are underutilised as agents of change for educational reform in Australia. CNPE believes students need to be consulted to identify their needs and make use of their unique and important perspectives on the education system.

Case Study: Student feedback for learning in the MET study

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) research project has shown that students can also be valuable information sources for improving learning outcomes by providing feedback on teaching. The study found that well-structured student surveys are a more reliable measure of a teacher's student achievement gains than classroom observation (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012, p. 14).

In the 21st century, education doesn't just happen in the classroom

In the 21st century we should no longer consider 'schools' and 'teachers' as the only sources of education. In fact we should be leveraging other "*platforms and providers – digital technologies, business, community organisations and the media*" (Shanks, 2013).

The Bill is focussed on key elements of the education system, but appears to ignore the wider environment in which learning occurs and the range of stakeholders who support that learning. While we need to focus on improving schools with better funding, teaching and leadership, we also need to supplement schools by working with families and communities (Leadbeater & Wong, 2010). Family and community engagement is a surprising omission from the list of reform levers, having been mentioned only in the preamble of the Bill.

Rather than occupying a monopoly of learning, schools can best be understood as a central part of a learning ecosystem which involves many diverse stakeholders, such as non-government organisations. CNPE believes that along with students, families and communities, non-government organisations should be specifically recognised as partners that play an important role in supporting Australian education.

Recommendation 4:

The Bill should:

- a. **Recognise students as partners in educational improvement**, who should be consulted in the implementation of the National Plan.
- b. **Acknowledge the role of non-government organisations** alongside parents, teachers and employers in delivering educational excellence and equity.

CONCLUSION

The Australian education system needs to educate for the future not the past. However, this Bill appears to rely on a 20th century understanding of education. The use of literacy, numeracy and science as the definition of our educational success as a nation reflects this outdated perspective. For the future success of Australia's economy and society, we need to ensure our young people are prepared for a future of accelerating change and increasing complexity. Delivering this will need more than reorganising education to be more efficient – we also need to re-imagine education for the 21st century.

The Melbourne Declaration shows that Australian policy already recognises the importance of other skill sets and capabilities in providing students with the best possible foundation as they leave the system and follow their career paths. We need to ensure that Australian schools deliver on this aim of preparing students for their future. This should be our measure of success.

Educational equity also needs to look towards the future. In the past it has traditionally been based on vested interest debates between school sectors. Funding reform based on student need is a fundamental step we must take in order to deliver an excellent education for all young Australians, regardless of their background or what school they attend.

We must work to close equity gaps in foundational numeracy and literacy outcomes but we must also focus on delivering equity in 21st century terms. System reform requires sustained and coherent implementation of evidence based practices across every level of the system. In Australia with school funding from different tiers of governments and overlapping reforms, it is not currently clear where the accountability for school outcomes resides. This confusion needs to be resolved in the National Plan.

Delivering system wide improvements and catalysing innovation in Australian education requires engaging all stakeholders. As the central stakeholders in education, students are an untapped resource in education policy, and need to be embraced as partners in educational improvement, rather than passive recipients of reform. They should be consulted in the development of the National Plan. The Bill should also acknowledge the role of non-government organisations alongside parents, teachers, and employers in delivering educational excellence and equity. In the 21st century schools and teachers can't do it alone – everyone has a role in preparing our biggest asset – our young people – for Australia's future.

Recommendations

1. The objects of the Bill in Section 3 need to define excellence and equity in 21st Century terms:
 - a. **Excellence** means delivering the range of skills, knowledge and capabilities that prepare students for their future in life and work. These skills have been outlined in the Melbourne Declaration.
 - b. **Equity** means all students, regardless of their background or what school they attend, receive an excellent education that prepares them for their future life and work. **School funding that uses loadings based on student need is an important first step towards delivering educational equity.**
2. The focus on international rankings in literacy, numeracy and science in Section 3 (b) (iii) of the Bill implies a narrow definition of an excellent education. **This goal should be combined with a wider range of educational outcomes, or removed from the objects of the Bill.**
3. The accountability framework in the National Plan should:
 - a. **Clarify the roles of different stakeholders**, particularly the state and federal governments, by balancing autonomy and accountability in order to deliver educational excellence and equity
 - b. **Create accountability for equity** through the use of disaggregated data, focussed on subgroup performance
 - c. **Include a range of indicators of educational excellence and equity** in 21st century terms.
4. The Bill should:
 - a. **Recognise students as partners in educational improvement**, who should be consulted in the implementation of the National Plan.
 - b. **Acknowledge the role of non-government organisations** alongside parents, teachers and employers in delivering educational excellence and equity.

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The Centre for New Public Education would be pleased to speak to this submission or elaborate on our research to assist the Parliament in its important work.

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