



Review of the Melbourne Declaration

Submission to the Education Council

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of New South Wales

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Introduction

Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales (P&C Federation) is thankful to Education Council for this opportunity to contribute to the Review of the Melbourne Declaration. 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 and collective success and, as a result, our greatest national resource. Under Australian legislation and international treaties such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments are obligated to ensure schooling is available to all students. It is therefore the responsibility of governments to help our students reach their full potential by ensuring equitable funding for education.

P&C Federation Feedback

1. What are your expectations of a national aspirational declaration on Australian education?

Any national aspirational declaration on Australian education should encompass the following points:

- Education is a universal human right. One of the central responsibilities of Government is therefore to ensure that education is available to all children and youth, irrespective of culture, gender, academic ability, geographic location or socio-economic status. A system that guarantees the availability of free education is the most effective means of securing this.
- In order for all students to achieve their maximum potential, any quality education system must be intellectually and academically rigorous, and foster creative inquiry. Among the most valuable gifts is the ability to continuously learn, create, inquire and critically assess.
- Education must instil and develop these skills in students, and give students the requisite foundational knowledge and tools to apply these skills as productive and contributing members of society.
- The education system must be student-centric, with a view to ensuring that the educational outcomes of each individual student is maximised and that each student has an opportunity for individualised learning plans.

¹ "Parent" refers to anyone with legal care of a child, such as a parent, carer or legal guardian

2. Who should the national declaration inspire and/or guide?

We largely concur with the goals of education laid out in the 2008 Melbourne Declaration, which are for all young Australians to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens. The goals are broadly consistent with P&C Federations view of the purpose of education and assessment, which influence all of P&C Federation's advocacy work. These goals should guide, in equal measure, every stakeholder in a student's education, including teachers, parents, the school leadership, education departments, governments and any other provider of education.

3. How has the Melbourne Declaration impacted or influenced you?

Among the Declaration's most tangible impacts has been its role as a foundation for much of the current education funding policies. The 2011 review of school funding (the Gonski report) cited the Declaration as a key basis for its proposals around education funding, and those proposals continue to shape most discussions around education funding. With that said, the core principles of the 2011 Gonski proposals have been unfulfilled by the government.

4. What do you consider are the three most important economic, social and technological changes that will shape the future of education in Australia?

5. How can a national declaration best reflect that Australians need to continue to participate in learning throughout their lifetime?

We see the following as three important factors for education:

- 1. Inequality in education.** Numerous research has indicated Australian schools are more segregated along socioeconomic status (SES) lines than comparable countries such as New Zealand, Canada or the UK.² 30% of students from the lowest SES families attend government schools, while 78% of students from the highest SES families attend non-government schools.³ The average child in a school with mostly students from low SES backgrounds may have reading scores around two years behind the average child in a school with mostly high SES backgrounds.⁴ Even when advantaged and disadvantaged students show the same level of achievement in Year 3, *“less progress is made by disadvantaged students, at disadvantaged schools, and in disadvantaged areas. This strongly suggests that equally capable students are failing to reach their potential. This holds for disadvantaged students at all ability levels in Year 3, especially bright students*

² Perry and Lubienski. 2014. Australian schools: engines of inequality. *The Conversation*. 13 March.

³ Bonnor and Shepherd. 2017. *Losing the Game: State of our Schools in 2017*. Centre for Policy Development. Figure 9.

⁴ Teese. 2011. *From opportunity to outcomes. The changing role of public schooling in Australia and national funding arrangements*. Centre for Research on Education Systems.

from poor backgrounds in disadvantaged schools.”⁵ There are other gaps in terms of factors such as geographic location and ethnic background. In New South Wales, the Rural and Remote Education Blueprint was designed to ease the educational disadvantages in non-metropolitan schools, however it remains unclear how effective its implementation has been. If current funding policies remain, we consider it unlikely that these inequalities will greatly improve.

2. **Different learning and teaching models.** We have noted increasing moves to innovate the way schools structure their learning and teaching. Lindfield Learning Village in northern Sydney is one recently opened school that has largely abandoned age-based stages, and instead advances students based on their rate of progress. The NSW Education Standards Authority is currently reviewing the NSW curriculum, and is considering new approaches to pedagogical practices and how students are advanced, including the growth of individualised learning. We expect such initiatives to result in changes to learning and teaching approaches in coming years.
3. **Growth of technology.** There is no doubt that new technology has had and will continue to have a profound impact on education. Such technology creates new possibilities in terms of personalised learning that has the potential to affect education practices.

6. How could the concepts of equity, excellence and the attributes for young Australians in the Melbourne Declaration be updated to ensure they are still contemporary over the next decade?

7. Are the eight areas for action in the Melbourne Declaration still contemporary and how well do they address the goals?

8. Are new priority areas for action needed? And are there areas that should no longer be a priority?

9. Are there better ways to measure and share progress toward achieving the declaration’s goals?

10. How can we ensure the education sector works together to achieve the goals of the Declaration?

Although the goals of the Melbourne Declaration are commendable and were accompanied by four-year action plans, the goals and action plans are generally so high-level that it is difficult to monitor their effectiveness. Any revamp of the Declaration should include concrete goals and milestones. We urge the Review Panel to consider the following points:

⁵ Goss and Sonnemann. 2016. *Widening Gaps: What NAPLAN tells us about student progress*. Grattan Institute. March. P.25

1. The Declaration should include an explicit recognition that governments are responsible for ensuring that each individual child is able to attain their full potential, and an unequivocal commitment for the Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments to implement a needs-based education funding model immediately.
2. The Declaration's goal of developing stronger partnerships with parents and other stakeholders is, in practice, often implemented in highly limited and selective ways, if at all. To make this goal more effective, there should be a commitment on all individual schools to develop specific and detailed policies for engaging with parents as genuine partners in all aspects of school life.
3. The goal of working with all school sectors to attract, develop, support and retain high-quality subject teaching and school leadership workforce in Australian schools should come with an explicit statement that educators must be subject specialists and that they are among the most important professionals. The Declaration should therefore include commitments that all teaching courses shall accept only the highest-performing applicants, and that all aspiring teachers shall undergo the highest quality training. Institutions will be held accountable for these requirements being achieved and should be linked to their funding by the government.
4. The goal of supporting the development and strengthening of early childhood education, to provide every child with the opportunity for the best start in life should come with an explicit commitment to provide out-of-hours school care to every public school with K-6 students.
5. While we broadly agree with the Declaration's goal of strengthening accountability and transparency to parents, we are concerned that the way this has been practiced under the current NAPLAN system has led to a league-table culture, in which time in schools that could be spent on teaching and learning is consumed by NAPLAN preparation, which serves mostly to bolster a school's ranking on the My School website. This goal should be amended in a way that focuses more on the progress of each individual student, as measured by classroom teachers, and less on the ranking of every school.