

President's message: September 2017

Spring holidays

The noticeable lengthening of the days, especially down here in Tassie, mixed with wattles in flower, leads us into the hope of spacious days of a not too distant summer. With some of our schools already out for the spring holiday and others soon to follow it's a great time to reconnect with our families before we get into the last term of the year, the term which if you have children in Year 11/12 has the inevitable exam and assessment period. Schools are highly astute in helping students to manage stress and pre-exam study and increasingly recognise the role of parents as natural supporters of their children. If you have any concerns don't hesitate to contact your child's school and/or teachers as all are usually delighted to help and assist.

Gonski 2.0

The Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools (more popularly known as Gonski 2.0) is underway and due to report next March. The review panel has been appointed with its own Secretariat and base that's separate from the Federal Department of Education and Training. As a call to action an issues paper has been released and submissions invited. The issues paper is interesting in its brevity suggesting a number of themes to consider without an expansive supporting discussion paper. One can hope the intention is to draw fresh thinking in a field that is already crowded with a whole variety of initiatives, ideas and favoured programmes.

The review does give hope to determining what education initiatives have true value and can be allowed to flourish, whilst culling what is ineffective. Perhaps the review can act as a sophisticated selective weedkiller by identifying what doesn't work, leaving that with real potential to thrive in our school communities and beyond. The issues paper and supporting documents are available here. Closing date for submissions is the 13th October, so please take a look and if you have time please discuss it with your school's parent body and pass on your thoughts to your State or Territory organisation.

Reading, phonics, numeracy, check

The review to explore the proposed National Year 1 check has released its report, with the Education Council having first sight at its meeting in Adelaide last week. What seems to be catching the media's attention in this is how children learn to read, with talk of testing and all that can be attached to the term. The methodology in question is phonics; a concept that everyone has an opinion of whilst at the same time one that masks a variety of techniques and bespoke methodologies – it could be said that not all are consistent with best practice.

What has been proposed is a nationally consistent development check on the capabilities of year one students. Put simply, a tool that a teacher can use in their professional practice in helping children to be the best that they can be in their individual reading and numeracy skills. It is to be acknowledged that many jurisdictions have processes already in place to ensure no child falls behind in their

reading and numeracy skills development – many of which incorporate phonetic principles. In this case the recommendation is to trial the introduction of a nationally consistent tool that can be used by educators across our nation. The report does go on to recommend that additional resources must be available to support teachers in this, and additional interventions to help students that are identified as needing support

Phonics could be said to be the scientific method behind the intuitive way that parents help their children grasp the essential skills of reading. When we read with our children we naturally use letter sounds - both singly and grouped - to help our children break down and sound-out the words that make up the complex English language. Apparently, it is one of the most complicated languages to learn if you are not a natural-born speaker.

This initiative has the potential to help young school-age students master the essential skill of reading. The check is just the means of identifying a student's abilities, one that is designed to identify those children that might need additional help. If reading is the key that unlocks learning then anything that can improve and enhance a young person's opportunity to acquire essential reading and numeracy skills is to be welcomed. As a new initiative, a trial is a pragmatic move that will allow a sensible and measured evaluation of the process and any specific adaptations for an Australian context.

It must be recognised that many states and territories already have strategies and tools in place and as we are a federation of independent nation states each jurisdiction takes its own approach. The trial may yet identify the best elements of these that can be incorporated in a nationwide check. In a world where families are increasingly mobile a growing sense of continuity across all jurisdictions, as already demonstrated by the Australian Curriculum, can hopefully offer our families a more consistent educational journey. Is it too much to hope for a nationally consistent Year 11/12 curriculum?

The full report and its supporting documents can be found [here](#).

Three score years and ten

I don't know what happened in 1947 but whatever it was it saw the establishment of a number of parent bodies. These included what are now known as P&C's QLD and TASSO, and also ACSSO itself. In terms of parent advocacy and a strong and independent voice for public education there is much to accomplish and this is based on the legacy of hard work, freely volunteered time and passionate interest at all levels – the most important of which is in our proud public schools across the nation. Our state and territory parent bodies amplify the grass roots message within their jurisdictions, with ACSSO being the national voice for public school parents and their communities. With the number of ongoing reforms and initiatives, the need for a strong national voice has never been greater.

ACSSO will be taking the opportunity to acknowledge the huge contribution made by its members and those that have been part of ACSSO's work over the years at a dinner to be held in Canberra on Saturday 11th November. If you would like to be part of this occasion, please contact Bec Ashford-Wykes: mail@acsso.org.au

Public education is the foundation of our proud nation's success in the world and will always be so. What makes it unique in the world is the place of parents as recognised partners with teachers and their schools. We all seek the best opportunities for the children in our care and this together with the Aussie spirit of a fair go for all will always see public education as the first choice for all our children's future.