
MELBOURNE DECLARATION SUBMISSION

Submission to the Education Council on the Review of the
Melbourne Declaration Discussion Paper



JUNE 2019
AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL STATE SCHOOL ORGANISATIONS LTD



Australian Council of State School Organisations Limited

One voice for every child in public education

Submission to the Education Council on the Review of the Melbourne Declaration Discussion paper

June 2019

Introduction

Australian Council of State Schools Organisations Ltd (ACSSO) welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the discussion about the review of the Melbourne Declaration.

About us

ACSSO represent the interests of the families and communities of more than 2.53 million children attending government schools in Australia. We are one of the oldest continuously operating parent organisations in Australia and possibly the world. We were formed in 1947 to bring together various state and territory parent groups to develop national policies reflecting the way families wanted public education to be offered for their children. ACSSO is managed by a board consisting of member directors and externally appointed directors. The Board elects from itself a Chair / President for a period of 12 months. ACSSO employs a Chief Executive Officer who implements the decisions of the board. The CEO is supported by a part time administration officer and a communications officer.

Over time there have been some changes in the way our members in states and territory peak parent groups have approached national issues, so membership has occasionally varied. Currently we have four (4) members, however, as methods of communication have changed ACSSO gains views to inform the "voice" are gathered from a variety of mediums.

Policy

We believe that the primary obligation of governments, both Federal and State, is to establish and maintain government systems of education which:

- will be of the highest standard and open to all, irrespective of race, gender, religion, social-economic status, geographic location, disability (physical or intellectual);
- can respond to changing circumstances and can develop the flexible and diverse programs necessary to meet individual needs;
- discriminate in favour of those schools and individual students facing disadvantage and/or disability;
- provide for participation by parents and community at all levels of education decision making.
- acknowledge that families are the first and continuing educators of their child and engage with them to ensure that

ACSSO believes a national statement for education goals for young Australians must promote school education as one that is supportive, inclusive and engaging for all participants.

This submission

Using the Melbourne Declaration discussion paper submission template, ACSSO has provided a response to the pertinent questions or areas for action below.

Question 1

What are your expectations of a national aspirational declaration on Australian Education?

We would expect that the national aspirational declaration on Australian Education would

- reflect the agreed aspirations of those who have a vested interest in education – stakeholders
- value the contribution that education makes not only to the individual but to society as a whole – for the common good
- value and promote learning as lifelong recognising the traditions behind it and the contemporary context it is developed in
- provide access and opportunity for all learners to be innovative, collaborative, critical thinkers and problem solvers

We see the goals as a way of defining universal goals and provide direction for policy developers, governments, education system, teachers, families and community.

Reflecting on the current goals we note, as was discussed at the National Forum, that they should actually achieve rather than aspire

The current goal 1 states "Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence" – rather than "promote" it should be "achieve"

The current goal 2 states "All young students become..." rather than "All young students are..."

Question 2

Who should the national declaration inspire and / or guide?

The national declaration should guide / inspire those who develop and drive education policy and education stakeholders

It should drive, inspire and guide the education of the of the whole child focussing not only the academic outcomes but physical development, cultural awareness and well being

Question 3

How has the Melbourne Declaration impacted or influenced you?

ACSSO sees the Melbourne Declaration as a point of reference for the development of policy with relation to education in Australia. It is used in tertiary education as a primary document for future teachers in their own education and training. The Declaration provides a valuable foundation as a reference for advocacy and lobbying particularly in our work around family engagement, early childhood and transitions. As a national commitment it exemplifies ACSSO that it advocates the need for every child and their family to have a voice in education.

Question 4

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

Economic

- National funding model that is Fair, Simple and Transparent – meeting the needs of all students to gain access and opportunity
- Investment in the early years of education
- Investment in ensuring that all students have access to innovative approaches in education delivery including support to access the appropriate technologies

Social

- Support for the development of the whole child – creativity, intellectually, physically, emotionally and culturally
- Family School partnerships that are engaging in order to enhance student learning and whole school community well being
- Acknowledgement and recognition of learning being life long – there is a learning continuum

Technological

- Equity of opportunity to access technologies
- Utilising the latest technologies in a safe and sustainable manner

Question 5

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

ACSSO strongly supports the concept of lifelong learning. A national declaration should reflect this by promoting learning as a lifetime pursuit.

Engaging with and acknowledging the importance of the learning (educational) continuum from birth to post compulsory and beyond is key – highlighting and recognising the learning that occurs early years is essential for promotion of life-long learning

The declaration should recognise and encourage all educators, including families who are the first and continuing educators, of the child are lifelong learners

Question 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?

In response to question 6, in relation to equity, excellence and attributes for young Australians, ACSSO provides the following specific recommendations to the preamble section of the Declaration

- ACSSO recommends the role of education be given a broader scope as rather than merely 'equipping' students, it also supports young people with knowledge, skills and values.
- This discussion on the role of schools also needs further development. There is a need to foreground the role of authentic and respectful parent-school partnerships. Given the empirical evidence of how strong and robust relationships between school, teacher and family significantly improves the education and wellbeing of our children this should be at the forefront of the document
- Given the current focus on global citizenship, ACSSO recommends removing the paragraph regarding 'Asia literate discussion'. This unnecessarily limits the scope of the need to build relationships with many other countries around the globe.
- There is a need to broaden the discussion beyond the scope of skilled jobs as dominating jobs growth. Instead, some discussion needs to centre around skills of collaboration, critical thinking, confidence, communication and creativity in order for our young people to actively participate in and contribute to future work opportunities.
- In the time since the inception of this document, it is arguable the role of technology has played a transformative role in the education landscape. As such, the focus of this document should centre around it being used constructively, purposefully and creatively within the educational landscape. ACSSO recommends that dedicated research on digital technologies in schools is carried out to ensure evidence based policy-making in this area.
- ACSSO recommends a revision of the data pertaining to the education rankings against the OECD and to remove the wording regarding Australia becoming 'second to none'. This should simply read as world leaders in school systems.

- This document highlights issues of equity and excellence and it reports on the need to support Indigenous students and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. ACSSO is committed to access for public education excellence for all students and as such recommends the inclusion of support for students with additional needs.
- In relation to equity, although the Melbourne Declaration states that education should be free from discrimination on numerous grounds, including sexual orientation, the particular challenges faced by LGBTI young people have in the past received insufficient attention, resulting in widespread discrimination, bullying and mental health issues.¹ This must be identified as a focus area in the Declaration.
- This document discusses the legacy of schools to students including national values of democracy, equity and justice. We recommend a revision that incorporates reference to a legacy of student well-being in addition to their personal values of honesty, resilience and respect for others.
- In response to question 6, in relation to equity, excellence and attributes for young Australians, ACSSO provides the following specific recommendations the Goals of the Melbourne Declaration.

Goal 1:

- ACSSO recommends revisions of Goal 1 in its current form. The lack of equity cited in the proposed goal is noted in the Education Council Discussion Paper. A targeted goal that supports funding for every student to be utilised in constructive and purposeful support is recommended.

Goal 2:

- ACSSO recommends revision of the current phrasing of Goal 2. Rather than engaging with successful learners as its primary goal, this needs to be rooted in the well-being of young people thus enabling them to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens. This goal will not be realised if a child or young person is not mentally and physically well-balanced.

¹ For a summary of the relevant statistics and literature, see: National LGBTI Health Alliance. Available at: <https://lgbtihealth.org.au/statistics/>.

- In referring to successful learners, ACSSO recommends revisions of this to incorporate reference to application of learning through knowledge and skills to complex real-world issues and situations.
- When discussing the aspects of a confident and creative individual reference to the use of technology constructively in order to facilitate opportunities for critically aware societal use should be included. Give the digital native perspective of young Australians it is crucial this is underpinned in Goal 2.
- In relation to active and informed citizens ACSSO recommends removing the specific reference to Asia. Globalisation means this focus on communication of cultures should have broad scope as well.
- An area of growing concern to young people internationally, as well as in Australia, is the question of climate change. This should be addressed in the review. On the one hand, being informed about climate change and means of responding to it, fits well with the 'active and informed citizens' and 'confident and creative individuals' the declaration aspires to. However, more explicit mention should be made of environmental issues. Furthermore, recent research suggests there is a conclusive link between climate change and young people feeling anxious, depressed and disempowered.² Dealing with the difficult topic of climate change in a way that does not undermine the declaration's aspiration for individuals who 'have a sense of optimism about their lives and the future' is therefore required.

Questions:

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?

This response examines the 8 areas of the Melbourne Declaration and provides recommendations for discussion.

1. Developing stronger partnerships

² Aaron Chiw & Hong Shen Ling, Young People of Australia and Climate Change: Perceptions and Concerns: A Brief Report (Millennium Kids Inc. 2019). Available at: <https://www.millenniumkids.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Young-People-and-Climate-Change.pdf>

This section acknowledges the role of parents, carers and families in a child's life. This section is reported as an action section. It is noteworthy while there is reference to the Australian Government commitment to work with school sectors this is only in reference to the child as a learner and citizen. This should occur at significant transition points and across the learning journey more generally. This partnership strengthening would also facilitate the wellbeing of students on a personal and educational scale.

There is now in excess of fifty years of research that concludes where families and schools work in partnership students will be more successful.

The three-peak parent organisations (ACSSO, Australian Parents Council and Catholic Schools Parents Australia along with ARACY have worked tirelessly in this area. Family engagement was a key element in the Federal Governments Students *First agenda* and also appeared in the Federal Governments Quality Schools, Quality Outcomes paper. It also is highlighted in both of David Gonks's papers – "Review into School Funding" and "Through Growth to Achievement Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools" however it still is seen as an "add on" or part of the "too hard" in most Australian Schools

ARACY acknowledges in its work with the Family School and Community Partnerships Bureau key elements to support family engagement require systemic change. Family engagement should be embedded in school planning. This does require building the capacity of school staff to better engage with families through more effective elements embedded in pre-service training and ongoing professional learning.

In addition, reference could be made to ways to meaningfully engage and inform parents from diverse cultures and traditions in order for them to engage in their child's education across all key stages.

2. Supporting quality teaching and school leadership.

The Declaration makes reference to support for school leaders and pre-service teachers. Discussion should encompass support and engagement of classroom teachers who form the bedrock of children's education. Given that classroom teachers encompass the main responsibility for the wellbeing and education of children, the document should make specific reference to ensuring relevant and authentic professional development is provided for teachers across all stages of their career trajectory framework to enable them to maintain a positive capacity for teaching. This would help to support Goal 1 and Goal 2.

3. Strengthening early childhood education

ACSSO recognises the importance of early childhood education and notes that research has identified a strong benefit to disadvantaged children when they have high quality early childhood education.

However, it has also been identified that poor-quality early childhood education has a very detrimental impact on this same cohort. As such, we argue that the current focus with regard to early childhood education needs to be on *quality*, not just availability.

The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care provides a national approach to regulation, assessment and quality improvement for early childhood education and care across Australia. This has strengthened the provision of early childhood services and the opportunity to increase accountability and engage in bespoke improvements in ECS environments.

4. Enhancing middle years development

The middle years are a risky age in terms of wellbeing and behaviour, but they are also a time of opportunity. Programs to help students become resilient and cope with stress can prepare them for the challenges of adulthood.

5. Supporting senior years of schooling and youth transitions.

There have been substantial improvements in this field since the inception of the Melbourne Declaration. There are now multiple pathways available to students as they transition to upper school and outside the workplace.

Ongoing Career Education

The Federal Government Quality Schools developed a National Career Education Strategy, to prepare students for life beyond school and for the jobs of the future.

Future Ready: A student focused National Career Education Strategy was developed in collaboration with a national group that brought together the voices of education, business and industry, parents and carers, career practitioners and youth including ACSSO.

The vision of *Future Ready* is that every student in every school has access to high-quality career education to help them make a successful transition from school to further education, training, work or a combination of these.

The strategy focuses on improving career education in schools by:

- building teacher and school leader capability
- supporting parents and carers in their important role in these conversations
- encouraging collaboration between industry and schools.

6. Promoting world class curriculum and assessment.

There is growing evidence of the importance of play-based learning, particularly in early childhood and primary education.³ Unfortunately, this is not currently well supported in the curriculum, nor are teachers well supported to foster play-based learning as a valid and valuable pedagogical tool. Similarly, there is evidence of the importance of nature-based play and learning and of risk-taking. Nature play and play-based learning are important not only for children's creativity, physical development and higher order thinking skills but have also been shown to promote against anxiety and build resilience – an issue discussed elsewhere in our submission.

7. Improving educational outcomes for Indigenous youth and disadvantaged young Australians especially those from low socioeconomic backgrounds

1. Although the Declaration makes brief mention of various groups, including children with disabilities, more focus is required in this area. In particular, many States and Territories have seen funding cuts for supports for those children with additional needs, including children with disabilities and children with English as an additional Language. For example, earlier this year, the Australian Education Union (AEU) 2018 State of our School survey reported that 88% of principals say they use funds from other areas of the school budget to assist students with disability.⁴ Funding cuts for students with additional needs have a significant impact – on the child and their family, on their peers, on the teaching staff and overall school system.
2. It is of concern that children in detention in certain states do not have access to public education. These children are typically from disadvantaged backgrounds and do not have access to bespoke, targeted literacy and numeracy interventions. The Declaration should state rather than “provide targeted support” should state “ensure targeted support” and this should be provided through state education authorities rather than corrective services facilities.
 - Recent threatened cuts to Schools of the Air was a concern for many parents,⁵ and schooling for children in remote and rural Australia must be addressed in the review. In Western Australia, the imposition of mandatory fees of \$4000 for public education on skilled migrants (457 visa)⁶ causes hardship for many migrant families. In addition,

³ See, for example, Robinson, C., Treasure, T., O'Connor, D., Neylon, G., Harrison, C. & Wynne, S. (2018). *Learning through play: creating a play-based approach within early childhood contexts*. (2018 Oxford University Press).

⁴ <http://www.aeufederal.org.au/news-media/media-releases/2019/february/120219>

⁵ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-12-13/wa-government-sweeping-education-cuts-deliver-170-job-losses/9256622>

⁶ <https://migration.wa.gov.au/services/settlement-services/children-and-education/education>

8. Strengthening accountability and transparency

ACSSO acknowledges the substantial improvements in strengthening accountability and transparency by schools for parents and families since the original declaration. However, ACSSO recommends that schools (teachers and students) have access to data that is timely and meaningful for targeting student engagement and improvement across all key stages. The focus of this data should be gathered during formative and summative stages and accessible to relevant stakeholders. Teachers should be provided with relevant training to enable them to do this effectively and to help them streamline their teaching load to enable more nuanced engagement with their students. Parents should be provided with relevant and targeted support to enable them to access as well.

ACSSO also recommends that the section for parents and families incorporate that parents and families are not limited to having access to data about their child's progress or school outcomes, but equitable means of engaging with and accessing this information. Parents and families should also have access to information that provides contextual understanding of their child's individual progress at each key stage.

ACSSO notes that the community should have access to information about schools and the relevant data made available. However, we recommend a revision of the statement: "Governments will not themselves devise simplistic league tables or rankings and privacy will be protected." Given the technological advancements over the past decade and rapidly evolving nature of this, can this be stated with certainty? Student privacy must be an inherent part of education and given the ever-evolving sophistication of hacking and cyber security issues we recommend this line be removed or altered to reflect changing times.

We also note most strongly that accountability and transparency go hand in hand with strong processes of shared decision making and family school partnerships. Where schools engage families both in support of their child and governance of the schools the discussions and understandings become far more transparent. This is a key way to ensure that the work of the school and the system is accountable to its community.

Additional points:

Mental Health and Well Being

ACSSO recommends that a vital component of any revised declaration should be mental health and well-being of students. Recent reports indicate that staff, student and community well-being and mental health is on the decline and poses a threat to effective education delivery. Further discussion and development of this would be a crucial aspect of document revisions. Given the substantive work ACSSO has been involved in with beyondblue and other partners addressing young people's mental health – programs such as these (beYou) we welcome the opportunity for inclusion in discussions about effective ways to incorporate this.

Trauma informed practice is still not widely recognised in supporting students at risk. We do acknowledge that some wellbeing and mental health issues stem from trauma and require a tailored trauma informed response – this is to applied in all settings for the child but in this instance additional support is needed for it to be applied in the classroom and school setting

Digital Skills (Literacy)

A recent study, 2017, revealed that at least 90% of the jobs of the future involve employees to be competent in digital literacy. Studies also state that approximately 35-40% of young people in their mid-teens lack proficiency in digital literacy. Given the disparity of this data, ACSSO recommends educational research in this field with findings to be used to ensure digital literacy is taught to future educators and implemented across schools with relevant stakeholders.

Conclusion

ACSSO welcomes the opportunity to continue participating in the work with regard to revising the National Goals of Schooling that reflects education for today and the future.

As key partners in education ACSSO will continue to work together with other contributors to give a voice for families and communities in this essential work. Our Board welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the current discussion and will work with you on future revisions to ensure the following:

It is imperative that a national declaration on educational goals articulates and addresses:

- Action beyond commitment to equity
- Clarity and action around inclusivity for young people with additional needs
- Authentic family engagement in young people's well-being and learning
- Ability to operate effectively and productively in our digital world
- The National Career Education Strategy which acknowledges career education is ongoing and continuous from Foundation to Year 12
- Priority to quality early childhood education and greater support for transitions
- Extending general capabilities to reflect critical thinking, ability to problem solve, communication, including interpersonal skills, creativity, risk taking, entrepreneurial skills and teamwork
- The development of the whole child and building the capacity of the whole school communityⁱⁱ

We thank you once again for the opportunity

[Contact details:](#)

For further information, please contact:

ACSSO CEO Dianne Giblin AM

0418 470 604

Email: ceo@acsso.org.au

ACSSO Director Sarah Jefferson

0423 183 604

Email: extdirector3@acsso.org.au

ⁱ Family School and Community Partnerships Bureau was a Federally funded project for a period of six (6) years to which the Australian Council of State School Organisations was the lead organisation. This program examined, informed and researched Family engagement in Australia

ⁱⁱ Refers to school staff, students and families