



Where was education?

The Federal election has come and gone, and I suspect the thought I shared in my pre-election message has sadly been realised: education was not front and centre of the issues being canvassed.

Questions of the economy and the environment deserve to be central to any political debate, but the quality of the education of our children is also critical to any future that we hope to build for the nation. This remains our work.

Moving forward

On behalf of the board and members of ACSSO I congratulate the incoming government on their victory. We look forward to working closely with the new Education Minister, Dan Tehan, in our continued advocacy for public education.

I will restate our demands:

- for a fair, simple and transparent funding model to apply to all schools
- for serious consideration to be given to the question of early childhood education
- and for a vigorous pursuit of a real approach to family engagement.

The wholistic solution

As parents and caregivers we are understandably concerned to read in the media that schools are not receiving family support, and that teachers are sometimes the target of inappropriate adult behaviours.

The answer to this issue is patently obvious and is confirmed by research. Where meaningful family engagement is supported, funded and practised, student outcomes are improved, and schools are happier and more productive communities.

I was reminded of this powerful imperative this last week when visiting two schools that are being funded by a great Gonski initiative, the Fair Funding program, which is auspiced by Schools Plus.

But first, some background: one of the Gonski recommendations was to link philanthropy more easily to the needs of students in our poorer schools. With the help of benefactors and outstanding leadership from CEO Rosemary Conn and her team, we now have dozens of schools across the nation receiving financial assistance for creative initiatives, particularly in schools and regions where this might not otherwise have been possible.

One such program featured in my recent school visits. It is an imaginative approach to the preservation and teaching of indigenous language, which has brought a rural community and its state school together with a common purpose and resolve. The sense of excitement in that school community is palpable and speaks to the meaning of harmony. I say this in the knowledge that I am writing this message during [National Reconciliation Week.](#)

Curriculum updates

ACSSO's CEO Di Giblin and I were fortunate to meet recently with ACARA and to contribute to discussions around the further development and refinement of the Australian Curriculum.

It was interesting to hear how closely attuned the curricula of British Columbia and New Zealand are to the history of their first peoples and the lessons that might be learned from this.

ACARA is now ten years old and its leadership is keen to see that the Australian Curriculum remains of international quality. Along with annual monitoring and seeking regular advice from the states and territories, ACARA has also embarked on

a research curriculum project which involves comparative international studies using British Columbia, Finland, Singapore and New Zealand as case studies.

ACARA's learning in this project is at an early stage, but it would seem that the overarching goals of these comparison curricula are not dissimilar.

The real variations lie in curriculum design, levels of prescription and the level of support that is being provided to schools for implementation. The latter is something that parents and the teaching profession in Australia are certainly keen to see extended.

NAPLAN 2019 concerns

And finally - NAPLAN. Issues with NAPLAN online this year led to disrupted tests for some 30,000 students. This is a cause for significant parental concern and we hope that ACARA and Education Services Australia will be able to provide answers and solutions to take to the next Education Council meeting.

Similarly, we look forward with considerable interest to the report of Professor Bill Loudon on the use and presentation of NAPLAN data, which has been commissioned by the Education Council. Professor Loudon has consulted widely with parent groups across the nation, including with ACSSO, and his findings should assist significantly in informing the way forward.

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