
NATIONAL DECLARATION ON EDUCATIONAL GOALS FOR YOUNG AUSTRALIANS – DRAFT

This is a draft of the National Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, which has been released for consultation with stakeholders and the community.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. PREAMBLE.....	3
2. OUR EDUCATIONAL GOALS FOR YOUNG AUSTRALIANS.....	5
SUCCESSFUL LEARNERS.....	5
CONFIDENT INDIVIDUALS.....	5
ACTIVE AND INFORMED CITIZENS.....	6
PROMOTING EQUITY: A FOUNDATION FOR ACHIEVING OUR GOALS	6
3. A COMMITMENT TO ACTION: COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY FOR PERSONALISED LEARNING..	7
A. DEVELOPING STRONGER PARTNERSHIPS WITH PARENTS, THE COMMUNITY AND BUSINESS.....	8
B. STRENGTHENING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION.....	8
C. SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE TRANSITIONS: FROM EARLY CHILDHOOD TO MIDDLE YEARS DEVELOPMENT AND PATHWAYS BEYOND.....	8
D. IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP.....	9
E. DEVELOPING WORLD-CLASS CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT	10
F. IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES FOR DISADVANTAGED YOUNG AUSTRALIANS, ESPECIALLY THOSE FROM INDIGENOUS AND LOW SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS	11
G. INCREASING ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY	12
4. OPPORTUNITIES FOR INPUT	13

1. Preamble

In the 1989 Hobart Declaration and the 1999 Adelaide Declaration, the State, Territory and Commonwealth Education Ministers committed to working together to ensure high quality schooling for all young Australians. In this 2008 declaration, this commitment is taken to a new level.

Twenty years have passed since the Hobart declaration. In that time major changes have altered the way the citizens of the world interact with each other:

- Increasing global integration and interdependence, as well as increased mobility and migration, are driving the need for greater religious tolerance, an appreciation of cultural diversity and a sense of global citizenship and commitment to peaceful conflict resolution among all Australians. Successful and equitable societies – at local, national and global levels - have the skills and desire to benefit from and build on cultural, religious, intellectual and social diversities.
- India, China and other Asia-Pacific nations are growing and strengthening their impact on the world, representing a huge shift in geopolitical power and sparking the need for all Australians to become ‘Asia literate’.
- Globalisation and technological change also place an ever increasing premium on successful education and skill development, so that opportunities for fulfilling and rewarding lives for young people who do not complete secondary education, and also proceed into further training or education, are becoming few and far between.
- Increasingly complex environmental pressures that extend beyond national borders – such as climate change – pose unprecedented challenges, requiring countries with different priorities to work together in ways never before achieved. They also demand all Australians engage with science and approach problem-solving in new and creative ways.
- Rapid and continuing advances in information and communication technologies (ICT) are changing the way we share, use, develop and process information and technology, and there has been a massive shift in power – to consumers in general, and to learners specifically. In this digital age, young people generally need to be highly literate in ICT and increasingly expect to be able to use such technologies in their learning. While there is some knowledge about how to effectively embed these technologies in learning in schools, we need to make a quantum leap in this effectiveness over the next decade.

While Australia is highly ranked in international benchmarking of educational outcomes for fifteen year olds (eg. the PISA program of educational research undertaken by the OECD), there are several dimensions on which Australian school education does not compare so favourably. First, by comparison with the world’s very highest performing school systems, Australian students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are under-represented amongst high achievers and over-represented amongst low achievers. Second, by international standards Australia’s rate of completion of year 12 or equivalent is quite low.

Too many of our young people leave education without even basic literacy, numeracy and other life skills, and this is a situation that we can no longer afford to ignore. More than ever before, the successful learning and development of young people to at least year 12 or equivalent is for almost all young Australians a prerequisite for a healthy, productive, rewarding and fulfilling life.

In addition, the gap between educational outcomes for Indigenous students and other students is very large. It must be a major national priority to close the gap.

Australia's capacity to provide a high quality of life for all will depend on our ability to compete on knowledge and innovation. In such a world, we have no inherent advantage – except through the quality of education. In this radically evolving and uncertain context, education represents a universal constant for knowledge sharing, communication and cooperation across and within boundaries.

The world of the 21st century is a harder place for young people to grow up in than ever before, particularly for those who are disengaged or disadvantaged. For all Australians education provides a crucial foundation for intellectual, physical, social, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and well-being. Effective education extends beyond the school gate, helping build young people's sense of self-worth, enthusiasm for learning and optimism for the future.

This new declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians is updated for a new century.

This new declaration recognises fundamental changes in how students learn – driven by technology and drawing on better information about how learners learn. It acknowledges that the skills of critical, cross-disciplinary thinking are vital in all 21st century occupations and are already occurring beyond the school gate in the way young people are networked into online communities. It acknowledges that these sophisticated skills are built upon the achievement of basic literacy, numeracy, social and digital media skills. It also acknowledges the important role of parents as the first educators of their children, the crucial importance of early childhood development and the central role of teachers in the learning process.

This new declaration holds that values as well as skills must form part of a school's legacy to young people. Without pretending to a monolithic Australian national identity, this 21st century declaration maintains that students should hold values of resilience, ingenuity and tolerance, and that behaviours and learning must model these values consistently and persistently.

As signatories to this declaration, we commit to achieve unprecedented collaboration across all levels of government. We commit to achieve new levels of engagement with parents, communities, businesses and, most importantly, students.

2. Our educational goals for young Australians

We believe that each generation of young people in Australia should finish school with more prospects of success than the generation before.

We know that improving educational attainment for all young people is central to our nation's social and economic prosperity and will position our young people to live satisfying, productive and responsible lives.

We therefore place young Australians at the centre of our National Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians. In doing so we commit to a new level of collaboration between all Australian Governments and schooling sectors to strive for the best possible educational outcomes.

In making this commitment we recognise and respect Indigenous cultures and the unique place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as a valued part of Australia's heritage and its future.

We believe that this commitment is a collective responsibility that belongs not just to governments, school systems and individual schools, but also to parents, children, young people, families, communities and business.

We commit to supporting all young Australians to become successful learners, confident individuals and active and informed citizens.

Successful learners...

- have the essential skills in literacy and numeracy as a foundation for success in all learning areas
- are creative and resourceful and are able to think critically, analyse information and solve problems
- are able to learn and plan activities independently, collaborate and communicate ideas
- are motivated to reach their full potential
- have the capacity to make sense of their world and think about how things became the way they are
- are on a pathway towards further education, training or employment, and acquire the skills that support this, including an appetite for life-long learning

Confident individuals...

- have a sense of optimism, self-esteem and are able to manage their emotional, mental and physical wellbeing
- have a sense of respect for others, control over their lives and are well prepared for their potential life roles as family, community and workforce members
- value their culture and place in Australia and have a strong sense of identity
- are creative and productive users of technologies, particularly information and communication technologies
- have the knowledge, skills and attitudes to establish and maintain healthy, satisfying lifestyles
- are able to embrace opportunities, make rational and informed decisions about their own lives, and accept responsibility for their own actions

Active and informed citizens...

- have the capacity and inclination to act with moral and ethical integrity
- have an understanding of Australia's system of government and civic life and appreciate its diversity of culture and history, including the special place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures
- are able to relate and communicate across cultures, especially in relation to cultures and countries of the Asia-Pacific
- have a desire and capacity to work for the common good, including stewardship of the natural environment
- are responsible global and local citizens

Promoting equity: a foundation for achieving our goals

In order to achieve these goals, Australian Governments in collaboration with school sectors must address inequities and promote expectations of excellence for all children and young people.

To achieve these goals we must:

- provide all students with equality of opportunity to access and participate in high-quality schooling that is free from discrimination based on gender, language, sexual orientation, pregnancy, culture, ethnicity, religion or disability, and differences arising from students' socioeconomic background or geographic location;
- ensure the learning outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and other educationally disadvantaged students improve to match those of other students;
- ensure that schooling contributes to a socially cohesive society that respects and appreciates cultural, social and religious diversity.

With support and hard work – from children and young people and their parents, from schools, teachers and communities – we can provide all children and young people with the opportunity to reach their full potential.

We hope you share our enthusiasm about these goals and your role in helping shape them. We invite you to work with us to realise these goals for all young Australians.

3. A commitment to action: collective responsibility for personalised learning

We can make real progress towards our educational goals for young Australians because we already know a lot about what works.

We know that policy and services need to reflect community aspirations – and that high aspirations motivate children and young people to perform better.

We know that more than ever before, students, parents, teachers, community organisations and business are ready to take collective responsibility for the education of young Australians.

We know that by taking a personalised approach to learning and giving every young Australian the educational support they require, whatever their needs, abilities, background or circumstances, we can achieve high-quality educational outcomes for all our young people.

We know that by working together we can realise our educational goals for young Australians.

Together, State, Territory and Commonwealth Governments commit to working with all school sectors and other stakeholders to promote our educational goals for young Australians.

We commit to a new level of collaboration in seven important areas:

- Developing stronger partnerships with parents, the community and business;
- Strengthening early childhood education and care;
- Supporting effective transitions: from early childhood to middle years development and pathways beyond;
- Improving the quality of teaching and school leadership;
- Developing world-class curriculum and assessment;
- Improving educational outcomes for disadvantaged young Australians, especially those from Indigenous and low socioeconomic backgrounds; and
- Increasing accountability and transparency.

This Commitment to Action will be supported by an Action Plan that outlines the activities and initiatives we will undertake to support the achievement of these educational goals for young Australians. The Action Plan will be reviewed and renewed regularly, to ensure that it continues to remain relevant and appropriate to the Australian context and to the achievement of the goals.

a. Developing stronger partnerships with parents, the community and business

Parents are the first and most important influence in a child's life. They play a lead role in instilling the attitudes and values that will later support their children to participate in school and contribute to the social and economic life of the nation and the globe.

Partnerships between parents, the community, business and schools bring mutual benefits and provide the opportunity to maximise student attendance, engagement and achievement.

In particular, the development of genuine partnerships, based on the principles of cross-cultural respect between schools and Indigenous communities, remains the primary platform to achieving highly effective schooling for Indigenous students.

We commit to working with all school sectors to ensure that each school will:

- engage parents in planning and supporting their child's progress through school; and
- engage partners from business and community to provide rich learning and citizenship opportunities for students and enhance the capacity of the future workforce.

b. Strengthening early childhood education

The period from birth through to eight, and especially the first three years, sets the foundation for future social, physical, emotional and cognitive development. Early childhood development provides a basis for life and learning, both inside and outside the home environment, and is supported by healthy, safe and stimulating environments.

Governments have important roles to play, both in supporting parents and in ensuring that children receive quality early childhood care and education. In this declaration we commit to the importance of having high quality learning experiences for children from birth to eight years of age, including at home, in childcare and pre-school settings, as well as in primary schools.

We commit to supporting the development and strengthening of early childhood learning, to ensure that every child has the best start in life.

c. Supporting effective transitions: from early childhood to middle years development and pathways beyond

Transitions to and from schooling are critical and risky times for children and young people and require targeted attention.

Building on the foundations of early childhood development, the early years of schooling build the fundamental knowledge, skills and behaviours in literacy, numeracy and other areas including physical and social capacities that support all future learning.

The middle years of schooling require a distinctive and developmentally appropriate educational program to meet young adolescents' cognitive, physical, emotional, and social needs whilst continuing to build their development.

The post-compulsory years must offer a range of pathways into further study and/or employment to meet the diverse needs of all young Australians. This requires effective partnerships with other education and training providers, employers and communities.

Successful education systems provide all students with high quality learning and development, and support through key transition points: from early childhood into schooling; through the school years; and from schooling into further study and/or employment.

We commit to supporting schools to:

- work with families and the early childhood services sector to ensure every child has every chance of success at school and later in life;
- ensure programs are responsive to middle years developmental needs; and
- facilitate effective transitions into and through the school years and into further study and/or work.

d. Improving the quality of teaching and school leadership

Improving the quality of teaching and school leadership is critical to achieving our educational goals for young Australians. Quality teaching is a critical variable affecting student outcomes, second only to factors such as student socioeconomic background.

High-quality teaching links knowledge and skills to the values and needs of the learner. Quality teachers use an array of teaching strategies that support intellectual engagement, connectedness to the wider world, supportive classroom environments, and recognition of difference. School leadership plays a vital role in supporting and fostering quality teaching. Effective school leaders develop and support quality teachers by promoting a culture of high expectations and striving for continuous improvement.

We know that the best school systems have three factors in common:

- getting the right people to become teachers;
- developing them into effective instructors; and
- ensuring that the system is able to deliver the best possible instruction for every child.

All Australian governments, school systems and individual schools have a responsibility to attract, develop and reward high-quality professionals in the teaching workforce.

We commit to recruiting high calibre applicants to the teaching profession, and providing for teachers and school leaders:

- clear and appropriate expectations and standards that focus on the components of effective teaching and development of student performance;
- improved pre-service teacher education, with an emphasis on effective practicum experience;
- robust and credible national registration, accreditation and professional standards;
- targeted professional development that focuses on the tools and skills required to improve student, classroom and/or school performance, including maximising the use of the latest technology to enhance teaching and learning;
- performance review and management processes that focus on improved student, classroom and/or school performance; and
- career opportunities, acknowledgement and incentives to reward high-quality performance.

e. Developing world-class curriculum and assessment

All young Australians should have access to a broad and comprehensive curriculum that details the knowledge, understandings, skills and values to be achieved, encourages students' curiosity about the world and cultivates a positive attitude to learning.

State, Territory and Commonwealth Governments commit to working together with all school sectors to develop world-class curriculum in Australia that enables every student to develop:

- **a solid foundation in skills and knowledge on which further learning and adult life can be built**

The curriculum must include a strong focus on literacy and numeracy skills. It should also enable students to develop competence in a range of other areas, such as developing an understanding of history and culture and the key principles of science; knowledge of spiritual, moral and aesthetic dimensions of life; and competence in and appreciation of the creative arts.

- **deep knowledge and skills that will enable advanced learning and an ability to create new ideas and translate them into practical applications**

The curriculum must enable young people to develop sound knowledge in disciplines such as mathematics, science, languages, humanities and arts, to develop expertise in specific disciplines and open up new ways of thinking. This requires development of deep knowledge within a discipline that shapes the ways in which problems are represented, considered and solved, and provides a foundation for development of multidisciplinary capabilities. This enables multidisciplinary capabilities that draw on knowledge and skills from different disciplines and can be applied to new challenges, such as climate change, genetic engineering and understanding and managing cultural difference.

- **general capabilities that underpin flexible and critical thinking, a capacity to work with others and an ability to move across subject disciplines to develop new expertise**

The curriculum should support young people to develop a range of generic skills such as the ability to think flexibly, to communicate well and work collaboratively with others. They also need the capacity to think creatively and innovate, to problem solve and engage with new subject disciplines.

Learning areas

Disciplines

The curriculum must include a focus on the following learning areas, with breadth and balance across the areas of learning being appropriate to students' phases of development.

- English;
- Mathematics;
- Sciences (including physics, chemistry, biology);
- Humanities and social sciences (including history, geography, economics);
- Languages (especially Asian languages);
- The arts (performing and visual); and
- Health and physical education.

Multidisciplinary perspectives

The curriculum must also integrate multidisciplinary perspectives which both underpin these learning areas and require some specific knowledge and skills intrinsic to these perspectives. Key multidisciplinary perspectives include:

- ICT;
- design and creativity;
- civics and citizenship;
- environmental sustainability; and
- business.

Education that incorporates these perspectives is vital in supporting young Australians to rise to the challenges of the 21st century with success.

Assessment

Assessment of student, school and system progress must be rigorous, comprehensive and forward looking. It must also be closely aligned with curriculum, and draw on a combination of the professional judgement of teachers and rigorous testing (including national level testing).

To ensure that we measure student performance in a meaningful way, we commit to developing and enhancing both national and school-level assessment that focuses on:

- Assessment *for* learning – enabling teachers to use information about student progress to inform their teaching;
- Assessment *as* learning – enabling students to reflect on and monitor their own progress to inform their future learning goals; and
- Assessment *of* learning – assisting teachers to use evidence of student learning to assess student achievement against goals and standards.

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

Educational outcomes for Indigenous children and young people are substantially behind those of other students and other cohorts with similar socioeconomic profiles. Their performance against key measures such as participation, attendance, literacy, numeracy, retention and completion remains poor, and it is likely that not all school-age Indigenous children are participating in school. Indigenous children, along with their families and communities, should be encouraged to hold high expectations for their educational performance. Improving educational outcomes for Indigenous children and young people is a key component of our educational goals for young Australians, and requires additional, targeted support.

Other young Australians also experience disadvantage when it comes to education. These groups and individuals include students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds; new migrants and refugees; homeless young people; and students with disabilities, among others. Disadvantaged students typically achieve poorer educational outcomes than the rest of their cohort but we know that not all disadvantaged children do badly and where they do, we also know that actively marshalling additional resources and providing targeted support can help.

For Australian schooling to match the most successful school systems in the world, and to provide a fair go for all young Australians, we must improve the educational outcomes for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. To do this we must make a significant investment to help all young Australians achieve not only equality of opportunity but also equity of outcomes.

We commit to working with school sectors to:

- 'close the gap' for Indigenous children and young people;
- provide additional support to disadvantaged students; and
- focus on school improvement in low socioeconomic communities.

g. Increasing accountability and transparency

Parents and students should be able to track individual, school and system performance.

The broader community should also have access to information on the performance of schooling in Australia.

Reports to students and their parents should make clear what students know and are able to do, how this relates to what is expected of their age group, and what they need to work on next as they further develop their performance.

Reports on school performance should report student achievement as well as attempt to estimate the value added by a school.

Reporting requirements should also minimize the administrative burden imposed on schools and school systems.

We commit to ensuring that public reporting:

- focuses on performance and outcomes rather than inputs;
- is both locally and nationally relevant, timely, consistent and comparable; and
- draws on new technology and existing data sources where possible to minimize red tape and make information easily accessible.

4. Opportunities for Input

The purpose of this draft Declaration is to seek input from education partners, other stakeholders, and the wider community. Responses will inform the development of the new National Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians to be released later this year.

Electronic versions of the draft can be downloaded from the MCEETYA website at <http://www.mceetya.edu.au/mceetya/natgoals,24767.html>. Additional information on the consultation process, including information on how to make a submission, can also be accessed from this site.

Written submissions close 3 October 2008. All submissions will be treated as public documents.

Focus Questions:

- Do the proposed educational goals for young Australians address the right outcomes?
- Are there other educational goals we should consider?
- Do the 'Commitments to Action' address the right outcomes?
- Are there are other 'Commitments to Action' we should consider?