



Public Education Alliance

Public Education: Opportunity, Equity, Community.

The Public Education Alliance is a coalition of educators, parents, NGOs, union, professional and community groups campaigning for a strong, vibrant and fully-funded public education system in Tasmania.

The Public Education Alliance believes the foundations of opportunity, equity, and community must be integral to the development of public education policy in Tasmanian.

Pathways for public education

The Public Education Alliance believes key policies need to be addressed for Tasmanian public education to be on a pathway to deliver the highest possible outcomes for all students.

Priority policy areas outlined in this report are ...

- Gonski Recommendations — implemented in full, as a matter of urgency
- Inclusion – improving outcomes for vulnerable students
- Class sizes — reintroduction of funding to cap primary school class sizes
- Funding additional School Psychologists
- Building school and community partnerships
- School budgets — reintroduction of indexation of school budgets

Public Education Alliance Vision:



A public education system that enhances the life chances of all students while promoting community and contributing to economic prosperity.

Public education — unlocking the future



A fully-funded, vibrant and inclusive public education system is vital to Tasmania's economic future and society. Societies with poor educational outcomes have lower wealth, lower productivity, lower levels of innovation and higher burdens on health and justice systems. Tasmania's ability to break cycles of poverty and disadvantage, in large part, rests on its ability to provide students with opportunity to achieve their full potential, regardless of their levels of advantage or disadvantage.

The Public Education Alliance's vision is for public education funded according to need for all students, including vulnerable students and those at risk of disengagement. This will include students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, non-English speaking backgrounds, low socio-economic communities and those experiencing bullying, health conditions and learning or development issues.

The vast majority of all these students are educated in the public system. Supporting and funding

1. Gonski

The Gonski Review was the most comprehensive investigation into school funding in Australia for almost 40 years. It was commissioned by the Federal Government and conducted by an expert panel headed by senior businessman David Gonski.

Gonski found Australia is investing far too little in education and, in particular, in public schools.

As a consequence, too many students are missing out on the resources they need and there are growing gaps in the achievements of students from different backgrounds.

The Gonski Review found that public schools were critically underfunded and recommended an additional \$3.8 billion each year — or around an extra \$1500 for every public school student.

Implementation of Gonski would have a major beneficial impact in Tasmania which has the highest proportion (per capita) of low socio-economic status (SES) students of all states and territories.

Tasmanian public schools would receive around an additional \$90 million each year under Gonski reforms.

That money would be invested in local schools in ways that help students learn such as:

- Smaller class sizes
- Extra specialist teachers in areas such

as literacy and numeracy

- Support, based on need, for vulnerable students, including those with disabilities, behaviour problems and mental health issues
- Support, based on need, for teachers working with students with disabilities, behaviour problems and mental health issues
- Access to additional training and classroom support for teachers

POLICY

The Tasmanian Government contributes its fair share of funding to enable the implementation of all the Gonski Recommendations, as a matter of urgency.

2. School budget indexation

In the 2010/11 state budget, the Labor/Green government removed the indexation of school budgets.

Previously, indexation had linked School Resource Packages (SRPs) to inflation to offset rises in school running costs.

In some schools, a lack of indexing of budgets has led to a reduction of available funding by as much as \$100,000 through steeply rising running costs such as electricity and water.

Any reduction in budget for a small school is significant. Shrinking budgets place pressure to narrow the curriculum, and subjects such as drama, art and music are no longer offered; school excursions and camps are now limited or have been cancelled; and library and computer equipment is not updated.

The end of the Federal Government's partnerships in education funding has placed further financial pressure on schools.

POLICY

The State Government to reintroduce indexation of School Resource Packages.

3. School psychologists

School psychologists use evidence-based strategies to work in schools with teachers and support staff to support children most at risk. Reviews have highlighted the importance of both individual client work and the systemic work done by school psychologists.

The ratio of school psychologist to students remains extremely high in Tasmania at around one to every 1800 students.

The Australian Psychological Society maintains that a ratio of one psychologist

to 500 students is necessary for adequate mental health care in schools. Mental health issues among Tasmanian students are of significant and increasing concern and schools are often the only place that our most disadvantaged students can access psychological services.

Many students do not receive the professional help they need. All students and their families should have access to an adequately staffed and well-resourced psychological service which is an integral part of their school.

POLICY

The state government funds the recruitment of 16 additional school psychologists for Tasmanian public schools.

4. Inclusion

The Public Education Alliance acknowledges and welcomes recent state and federal government initiatives to improve outcomes for students with disability in Tasmania.

However, despite goodwill and sound social policy and legislation, barriers to the successful inclusion and participation of children with disability in schools remain.

Education of children with disability should be more than simply including children in classes with their peers.

A successful approach would involve education and evidence-based interventions such as using the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) which encompasses multiple means of presentation, multiple means of engagement and multiple means of expression and assessment.

Children learn best in education environments, whether atypically or typically developing, when they experience positive relationships.

The Public Education Alliance recognises the primary relationship, "teacher to student" as essential to students developing resilience, respect, confidence and successful relationships with peers, as well as ensuring positive social inclusion outcomes.

Children seek indicators of their success from interactions with their teachers and acknowledgement of their efforts. It therefore stands to reason that, as with all children, a student with disability will feel included when their successes are acknowledged by their teacher and others assisting the teacher (e.g. teacher assistants), and in the context of the class room with their peers.



AEU member surveys (Public Education: through the eyes of educators 2012) consistently show that lack of support for students with High and Additional Needs (HAN) in schools is a key concern. In order to improve educational outcomes for all students, teachers require more hours of in-class support for HAN students. Providing teacher assistants (TAs) with the option of taking on more hours of paid employment during term time will allow them to be paid at their current rate for more weeks of the year, effectively reducing their period of unpaid stand down.

POLICY

- **Review of the qualifications and the core, or compulsory, information provided to students about disability, diversity and inclusion and participation in the Bachelor of Education.**
- **Funding provision for compulsory professional development for:**
 - all teachers and support staff about inclusion and participation of students with disability
 - all teachers in relationship building.
- **Funding provision for disability data collation in the education sector to enable accurate analysis of education sector protocols and improved planning and practice.**
- **The State Government budgets for additional support staff hours to assist with inclusion of students with High and Additional needs.**

5. School and community partnerships

School and community partnerships can assist with additional support for our schools by providing stakeholder cooperation, resources or training, which in turn helps develop a greater sense of community and an increase in social capital.

Partnerships with welfare and community support agencies will help develop and provide more efficient and coordinated interagency support for families by both government and non-government providers, where appropriate. (Approximately 45% of community welfare assistance is provided by NGOs.)

Authentic school partnerships are "respectful alliances" among educators, families and community groups that value relationship building, dialogue across difference and sharing power in pursuit of common purpose in socially just, democratic schools.



In relation to students with disability and vulnerable students, successful school, parent and community collaboration and partnerships are essential and foster relationships based on mutual respect and common goals. They enable positive outcomes for the students and mastery of the challenges faced individually and collectively. A collective empowerment model builds on the Family Partnership model, utilising and sharing skills and knowledge and empowering and strengthening a team for the purpose of reaching the desired outcome.

This model utilises the multi-disciplinary (including parent) skills in a cross disciplinary way that deepens and expands the collective skills of the team and takes planning and collaboration from the table directly to practical application with each student with disability.

This is ultimately a practical, efficient and effective (including cost) way of utilising resources.

The Department of Education currently employs a multi-disciplinary team of professionals that undertakes assessment, intervention and review, in conjunction with other service providers. Difficulties in recruitment and retention of psychologists and speech pathologists suggest the need for better resourcing and career structure for these professionals.

Social research consistently demonstrates the difficulties for families with children with disability in managing from day to day and the significant negative impact of disability on their health, finances, rela-

tionships and general family functioning. The Tasmanian Government's work in the area of maximising student outcomes is vital to improving quality of life outcomes and providing real inclusion for students with disability and their families.

The Public Education Alliance looks to the State Government to be a national leader in this area and to prioritise this work now and into the future.

POLICY

Compulsory professional development for education leaders in collaborative team building, and working in family partnership.

6. CLASS SIZES

In 2011/2012, the State Government withdrew funding (\$36.5 million over four years) allocated to funding primary classes. The purpose of this funding had been to resource schools to enable them to limit class (Prep to Grade Eight) sizes to 25 students.

Smaller classes enable students to receive the individual help and support they need. Studies clearly demonstrate the positive effects that small classes have on a student's cognitive and non-cognitive development and learning. The positive impacts were strongest in the early years of school and the benefits persisted throughout school life.

The decision to withdraw funding to limit

class sizes has negatively impacted Tasmania. In 2011 to 2012, class sizes in some primary schools rose by up to 42 per cent.

POLICY

The state government to provide resources to enable primary schools to limit class numbers to 25.

Key references

(additional links and references on the Public Education Alliance website)

Inclusion

- Forgotten Families (2007), Shut Out (2009), Who Cares (2007) and Children with Disabilities in Australia (2004)
- Turnbull, Turbiville and Turnbull in Shonkoff & Meisels, (2000) Handbook of Early Childhood Intervention . Cambridge University Press

Class Sizes

- Cook, B and Mitchell, W., (2011). The potential impact of budget cuts on education in Tasmania. Report prepared for the Australian Education Union (AEU) Tasmanian Branch. Newcastle: Centre of Full Employment and Equity

School psychologists

- ASCA (2001). Student to Counselor Ratio By State: 2009-10.
- APS (2008) Guidelines for the delivery of effective services by school psychologists



Public Education Alliance

The Public Education Alliance members are the Tasmanian Council of Social Service (TasCOSS), Tasmanian State School Parents and Friends (P&F), Association for Children with Disability Tasmania (ACD), Australian Psychological Society (APS), Australian Education Union (AEU), Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT), Tasmanian Aboriginal Corporation for Education (TACE).

www.publiceducationalliance.org.au

