

THE NATIONAL SCHOOL REFORM AGREEMENT

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The National School Reform Agreement (NSRA) is a five-year agreement between the Federal Government and all states and territories. It details three Reform Directions and eight National Policy Initiatives (NPIs) that school systems must comply with to access Commonwealth funding. This link between the Reform Directions, NPIs and funding is counterproductive in that the agreement itself limits the ability of public schools to ensure ongoing staffing and resources for the delivery of intensive learning and support programs for students and the delivery of the reforms and directions demanded by the agreement itself.

TEACHERS MUST BE AT THE HEART OF EDUCATION POLICY SETTING

The current 2019-2023 NSRA and its Reform Directions and NPIs were developed and implemented by governments without consulting the teaching profession. The most important change that could be made during the development of the next NSRA would be to ask teachers what is needed to best support them in their work. Teachers must be involved at all stages of transformative policy projects and must not have systemic mandates passed down without consultation.

It is imperative that any education policy making must have a genuine resource commitment to educational equity as its priority. In fact, the preamble statement to the Productivity Commission's ongoing review of the NSRA reminds us:

The objective of the NSRA is that Australian schooling provides a high quality and equitable education for all students. The NSRA sets out long-term national

outcomes for school education in Australia and national targets and sub-outcomes to track progress.

Despite this, Australia has a policy architecture that denies this principle and in fact diminishes educational equity. Currently, the emphasis of the NPIs within the NSRA drive a narrow agenda on the collection and analysis of individual student achievement, school and system level data.

To improve and thrive, systems need to be guided by a supportive, ambitious, inclusive and rich set of educational goals devised with leading input from the teaching profession via their union.

HOW CAN THE NEXT NSRA ENSURE EQUITY?

Excellence in education cannot be separated from equity, both in opportunity and outcomes. From the Hobart Declaration in 1998, through to the Mparntwe Declaration in 2019 - equity has been the foremost priority of Australia's education goals. Yet the NPIs are not orientated towards equity, but instead are driven by a narrow agenda focused on the collection and analysis of individual student achievement, school and system level data. The overriding impact of the NPIs on schools has been negative, unnecessary, and harmful to the purpose of education. Australia's education goals cannot be realised whilst entrenched underfunding of public schools remains. To ensure equity, public schools must be fully resourced so that all schools reach a minimum of 100% of the SRS in the next NSRA.

Negotiations between the Federal Government and states and territories will begin by the end of 2022. The design of the next agreement must place educational equity at its centre and must include system accountability for the conditions of educational equity: social equity and adequate education as its priority. Subsequently, the data collection, analysis and reporting on the Reform Directions and NPIs must shift to measuring equity, including analytic assessment of funding and its impact on increasing or reducing equity.

National education policy should involve collaboration between state, territory and federal governments and exist within a framework that enables schools and teachers to exercise their professional judgement and the flexibility to find the most appropriate solutions at the school level.

This should not detract from the capacity for innovation in curriculum and assessment at the system and school levels nor lead to over standardisation. This must be led by the teaching profession, as the experts with the content knowledge and experience, and responsibility for implementation.

SYSTEMIC CHANGE



The AEU has identified a range of core areas central to improving the capacity of this country's education system and attaining positive social outcomes in education that should be explicit in the next NSRA:

- ✓ **Quality teaching:** including fully qualified teachers; systemic support for teachers; continuous professional development; teachers having control over their profession; student centred teaching; and sustainable workloads
- ✓ **Quality learning:** including a broad, engaging and inclusive curriculum; targeted support for students with additional needs; professional control over student assessment; student centred learning; teaching and learning being at the heart of leadership; needs based funding; and fully resourced schools.
- ✓ **Safe and inclusive schools:** employers taking systemic responsibility for teaching and learning conditions to ensure safe and inclusive schools; comprehensive strategies and staffing to ensure student wellbeing; comprehensive strategies and staffing to ensure teacher wellbeing; and structured connections with community agencies and programs.
- ✓ **Workforce planning (addressing supply and demand):** a workforce that is diverse and reflective of the community; systemic workforce planning; secure employment; attraction and retention strategies; and minimum qualification standards for employees.
- ✓ **Initial Teacher Education:** 2-year postgraduate degree following 3-year initial degree; capping total enrolments; minimum entry standards; and strengthening and raising the status of the practicum component.
- ✓ **Effective systemic direction and support:** strong systemic support for schools, school leaders, teachers and educational support; employers' responsibility for the provision of high-quality professional learning; state and territory registration bodies; and a substantial and qualified non-school based teaching force to support schools through a head office and associated regional structures.



For more information visit www.everyschooleverychild.org.au
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