



WACSSO

Western Australian Council of State School Organisations Inc

Submission to the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee

Inquiry into Primary Schools for the Twenty First Century

Authorised by:

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Background and Rationale for Submission

The Western Australian Council of State School Organisations Inc. (WACSSO) was founded in 1921 as the representative voice of parents, citizens and students associated with government schools in Western Australia. WACSSO is a non-party political and non-sectarian body. There are currently over 770 government schools throughout the State with approximately 660 active P&Cs currently affiliated with WACSSO. WACSSO is therefore well placed to offer comments, feedback and suggestions for future developments relating to public education and training matters.

WACSSO has a mandate to influence the direction of education for the benefit of all students. Underpinning the workings of WACSSO are values and beliefs about children and young people and the importance of education. The following statements indicate the philosophical basis for this WACSSO submission and reflect our commitment based on informed appreciation and understanding about the place of public education for the future of all Australians.

WACSSO is committed to a public education system available to all young people irrespective of their age, socio-economic status, culture, gender, level of ability or where they live.

The philosophy underlying WACSSO policy centres on the principles of equality, excellence, and participatory democracy and recognises that all human beings depend on each other and so the future well-being of individuals is dependent on the future well-being of all.

All persons attending government schools have the right to an unrestricted and effective education of the highest quality to allow them to develop their full potential as individuals. As empowered citizens, these students can take every advantage of social, political, and economic opportunity; obtain fulfilment of their reasonable aspirations within the range of their abilities; contribute their skills and knowledge for the betterment of Australia; and be able to participate harmoniously in all aspects of society.

WACSSO believes that these tenets form an essential statement of principles for guidance in its practical activities toward achieving an excellent, empowering, public education system for all.

WACSSO knowledge and information pertinent to government schools and community development approaches in public education are relevant to the inquiry's terms of reference. The focus of our submission will be on the responsibility of parents and schools in particular, as WACSSO believes partnerships to be the heart and soul of a local community and the most important government investment in the future of the country. Any and all, negotiations by governments that affect the nature and wellbeing of our school communities are of concern to WACSSO.

Matters Considered:

a. *Consideration of the Federal Government's Primary Schools for the 21st Century program, with particular reference to:*

i. The conditions and criteria for project funding

The public of Western Australia expect a high level of accountability and transparency within the school system. With the exceptionally tight time frames involved, it was difficult for full consultation to be employed. Rushed time frames also meant decisions as to what

buildings and the locations of the buildings were not given the due consideration they deserved nor did these timeframes meet the standard government procedures for tendering, approvals, etc.

Choice of type of building was too narrow. Schools were encouraged to apply for buildings they did not necessarily need or did not require. Due consideration was not extended to the decision making processes of the school community. School communities in most circumstances have an excellent knowledge of the requirements of their school and what is required to take the school forward. The criteria also failed to check that funding would be delivered to schools that had a genuine need of the buildings and resources without the consideration that schools that had no real need would also apply and be successful and this point is noting that there are both public and private schools in this situation. Schools were given no option in how much funding they were to apply for. This could mean that schools were receiving unnecessary funding which would be better allocated to enable a broader delivery of funding across the spectrum.

In a climate conscious community the criteria lacked consideration of energy efficiencies. For the government to be truly serious about this issue then it would have been expected that state wide contracts would have been entered into as part of the criteria regarding solar, water power efficiencies and emissions.

In some cases, at a local level, where questions were raised, feedback has been 'you will get what you are given' and no consultation or consideration is given to the individual schools wishes

ii. *The use of local and non-local contractors*

Western Australia is a state that has many small towns many hundreds of kilometres apart. This causes costs in many of our country areas to be far greater than would be in the city. It also adds difficulty and increased costs in that contractors must often be sourced from non local areas. Time frames for actual building times are often extended by months due to these issues.

iii. *The role of state governments*

School communities experienced confusion over the lack of clear definition of roles as to who was responsible for what aspect of the program. Was it Federal, State, or local based community?

iv. *Timing and budget issues, including duplication*

WACSSO and its affiliates have been constantly confused by different expectations of project management /administration costs. Figures given have ranged from 1.5% to 15%. For future projects a clear statement by the project commissioners is required so as to provide school communities with a transparent and accountable process.

v. *Requirements for school signs and plaques*

Confusion was extended over the school sign and plaque program. Many affiliates perceived this requirement as an advertising program for the government. It was felt funding could have been better spent elsewhere and that the signs could possibly detract from the community spirit of the school. Whilst WACSSO acknowledges the right of the

Government to advertise its projects the perception was that the funding for this was excessive.

vi. The management of the program

Roles are not clearly defined eg. What the principal, P&C, School Council, Central office etc is responsible for. This lead to duplication and/or confusion of task management.

b. Other related matters

Schools are catering for and funding the ceremonies that the schools must have at the completion of the project. Surely this money could be better used to fit-out the new building. Painting isn't included in the BER funding, so the ceremony is going to be celebrating bricks and mortar, not a completed project. Schools are already struggling with funding; now an additional cost is to be incurred.

An excessive amount of work and responsibility was placed on the individual state/territory government departments to enact this project. As far as we are aware, no additional funding has been provided to the state/territory education departments to cover the administrative functions to implement the project.

Too many things are trying to be covered in this initiative without a reasonable timeframe:

- Financial Stimulus
- Improvement to the education infrastructure (in some cases where it is not needed/wanted)
- Up skilling of apprentices and trainees (10% of labour for the project)

Limited consultation occurred at an individual school level, however, apart from an initial briefing as to what to expect, no communication has occurred at a state level regarding progress. In some cases the individual school project coordinator has not obtained relevant government approvals/comments.

It is disappointing to not see any reporting requirements to the general community. In all the reporting documentation available publicly that we are aware of, nowhere does it state that there is a requirement for schools/states/territories/Federal government to report to the school community and general community.

Summary

Whilst WACSSO supports all Government initiatives that allow our schools and affiliates to receive funding for the purpose of improving the educational outcomes for students, it would like to see future projects have more accountability and transparency, with improved community consultation and clear role statements and expectations for delivery. It also needs to be recognized that school communities have clear ideas of what is needed to benefit their school.