



SUBMISSION

TO

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE

ON

EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS

INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION OF BOYS

On behalf of member schools

**South Australian
Independent Schools
Board Incorporated
301 Unley Road
MALVERN SA 5061**

August 2000

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1 INTRODUCTION - BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- 1.1 The South Australian Independent Schools Board (SAISB) represents 86 independent primary and secondary non-government schools, and within that group the interests and needs of over 32,000 students, of which 50.8% were boys in 1999. At primary level, boys comprised 51.5% of students and at secondary level, boys comprised 50.0% of students.
- 1.2 SAISB is a peak body in the sense that it has representatives from the key interest groups within the sector on all major Committees and the Council. These interest groups include the Anglican Schools Commission of South Australia, SA Department For Education, Lutheran Church of Australia, Christian Community Schools Ltd, Parent Controlled Christian Schools, unaligned Christian schools, Seventh Day Adventist School, Jewish School, Islamic School, Greek Orthodox School, Uniting Church Schools, Montessori Schools, and non-denominational schools.
- 1.3 The key strategic strengths of the SAISB in representing such a diverse sector are that it provides various forums where the views and beliefs of the interest groups can be debated and it can present both the common and different views of these deliberations. It can also provide a focal point for consultation with governments, for instance, in collating and presenting submissions such as this.
- 1.4 The key principles that underpin the SAISB policies are:
 - ◇ **equity** – all children have the right to receive high quality education
 - ◇ **choice and diversity** – the primary responsibility for the choice of education rests with parents whether it is in government or non-government schools. Parents in South Australia who enrol their children at independent schools contribute on average 57% of the operating costs of their school
 - ◇ **entitlement** – all young people are entitled to public funding and the use of government services that enhance their access to school education, and their choice of school, government or non-government
 - ◇ **partnership** – parents have the primary responsibility for the education of their children in partnership with governments,

schools, community service agencies and private organisations. These groups should co-operate to contribute significantly to the education of young people.

2 PROCESS USED TO DEVELOP THE SUBMISSION

- 2.1 This submission was prepared on the basis of information obtained via a written survey of a selection of member schools and a series of face to face interviews of staff from a sample of member schools.
- 2.2 The survey and interview responses were used to identify the main issues in relation to the education of boys and the recommendations presented by the SAISB in this submission.
- 2.3 A draft paper was prepared and circulated to respondents for comment.

3 SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

The following issues, strategies and recommendations were identified in relation to boys education, through the interview and survey findings.

3.1 SOCIAL FACTORS AFFECTING BOYS EDUCATION

- 3.1.1 Many respondents describe the breakdown of the traditional **family structure and relationships** as a significant societal factor that affects the educational outcomes for boys. In particular, it is the lack of a male role model and father figure in families that is seen as a critical issue. However, at the same time, societal stereotyping of the roles of parents, and the valuing of the traditional family structure model above all others, are not seen as useful in assisting boys from non-traditional family structures.
- 3.1.2 The **role of parents** in influencing the outcomes for their sons should not be underestimated as well. Over protection and high expectations of boys from parents can have serious consequences. Some parents have stereotyped expectations of what their sons should do, and be.
- 3.1.3 The **father - son relationship**, and the trust, care and the modelling of behaviour that develops through this relationship, is identified as very important. Access to this type of relationship is not available for some boys.
- 3.1.4 All respondents note the significance of **peer pressure** as an issue influencing outcomes for boys. The “tall poppy syndrome” is also critical in that some boys perceive that it is “not cool” to be seen to be doing your best or excelling academically at school. The issue of **gangs** and **gang mentality** are seen to be the consequences of peer pressure. Gangs are also identified as a cultural activity that can provide connectedness for some groups of boys.
- 3.1.5 Respondents mention the **changing role of women in society, and the redefinition of masculinity** in different ways and, at times, with conflicting views. Several respondents indicated that schools have become feminised places and that as a result boys have difficulty in connecting with schools. Others described a situation in which there has been a loss of an identifiable definition and model of masculinity with nothing to replace it. Whilst new models and values about masculinity are emerging in society boys have been left without strong

direction in relation to the question “**What does it mean to be a man in the 21st century?**”

3.1.6 Respondents described a range of strategies and programs they used to address these societal factors. These include

- ◇ *Access to male role models* (Section 3.3);
- ◇ *Access to School/Student Counsellors* (Section 3.8);
- ◇ *Curriculum Initiatives* (Section 3.4);
- ◇ *Methodology* (Section 3.5).

3.2 CULTURAL FACTORS AFFECTING BOYS EDUCATION.

3.2.1 Respondents identified the differences between cultures in relation to the role, status and expectations of men and women, as significant in effecting educational aspirations and outcomes for boys.

3.2.2 The lack of a positive male role model in some families in terms of **employment** was seen as significant. In some families there is no history or tradition of employment or regular work.

3.2.3 The **mono-cultural nature of the community** is perpetuated through the media, and as such the cultures, experiences and values of some boys are excluded.

3.2.4 The **media** presents stereotyped male role models most often associated with sport. This places pressure on boys to be tough and sporty and promotes the detached/blasé approach to life, that is, the “she’ll be right mentality”. There a few or no professional male role models promoted through the media.

3.2.5 Indigenous boys are seen by some respondents as the most marginalised group in terms of their educational outcomes. The educational needs of indigenous boys requires continued close examination and research.

3.2.6 Respondents described the following strategies as useful in addressing these cultural factors.

- ◇ *Male role models* – ensuring there a range of male role models in the school (Section 3.3).
- ◇ *Supportive and encouraging teachers* (Section 3.6).
- ◇ *Working closely with families.*

- ◇ *Creating a positive school culture that values success and achievement* (Section 3.7).
- ◇ *Social skills lessons and programs* (Section 3.4).
- ◇ *Cultural Studies as part of the curriculum.*

3.3 ACCESS TO MALE ROLE MODELS

- 3.3.1 All respondents commented on the need for more male role models in the early and junior primary years, and in non-traditional curriculum areas.
- 3.3.2 Respondents noted that boys need access to a range of role models, from different cultures, and both male and female role models.
- 3.3.3 Respondents expressed concern about the small numbers of males entering the teaching profession, and undertaking teacher training especially in the junior primary years. Several respondents attempted to explain this through the lack of status of the teaching profession, the lack of a career path within the teaching profession, and society's attitudes (eg the perceptions that to teach junior primary classes is not an appropriate profession for a man).
- 3.3.4 The importance of involving fathers in school activities was also stressed.

Recommendation

The SAISB recommends that

- ◇ Government resources are allocated to identify and implement strategies that will attract appropriately skilled males to the teaching profession.
- ◇ Schools/communities share strategies to increase the access of boys to an appropriate range of role models.

3.4 CURRICULUM

- 3.4.1 Many comments referred to the need for appropriate curriculum, as a significant factor in ensuring positive educational outcomes for boys.
- 3.4.2 Respondents described the success of **co-curricula activities** in providing connectedness for boys.

- 3.4.3 **Explicit teaching** about appropriate social behaviour, and of appropriate social skills was highlighted.
- 3.4.4 The **avoidance of gender stereotyping** in teaching is critical.
- 3.4.5 A curriculum that is dynamic and explicit in its teaching of the **skills** of problem solving, conflict resolution, organisation, collaboration and emotional intelligence was considered essential.
- 3.4.6 Opportunities within the curriculum for boys to develop leadership skills, contribute to the school, participate in the community, and identify, explore and express their emotions were recommended.
- 3.4.7 Respondents indicated the importance of curriculum initiatives that focus on developing **self-esteem and confidence**.
- 3.4.8 Several comments were put forward in relation to the orientation of **curriculum and assessment in the senior years**. A concern was expressed about the “academic – ization” of the curriculum. This comment is linked to the perception that the current senior secondary curriculum is directed towards a minority of the senior school students.
- 3.4.9 Further comments explored the high level literacy and organisational skills now required to successfully meet assessment requirements in senior schooling certificates. This is perceived to have militated against boys’ success, and has resulted in their academic progress deteriorating.
- 3.4.10 Senior secondary assessment practices need to **recognise the learning that takes place outside the school**. This is particularly relevant for boys at risk and/or re-entering secondary education.
- 3.4.11 The need to **value boys' participation and achievement** in the full range of learning areas were emphasised, as opposed to valuing some learning areas more than others (eg "hierarchy of subjects" approach).

Recommendation

The SAISB recommends that

- ◇ The Commonwealth allocates funds to conduct research in relation to the impact of current senior secondary school certificate requirements on boys’ participation, retention and achievement, particularly boys at risk.

- ◇ A range of assessment methods is used, including some assessment tools that are not highly literacy dependent.

3.5 METHODOLOGY

- 3.5.1 An awareness of the **range of learning styles** in teaching boys was highlighted. Some respondents described their use of small group work and structured tasks to develop cooperative skills. Making expectations clear to boys was seen as essential. Role plays, “buddying” younger classes with older classes and the avoidance of gender categories in early years classroom organisation were noted as other successful methodologies in the early years.
- 3.5.2 The use of **single sex methodology** is being explored by a number of co-educational schools. Schools use single sex methodology when appropriate to the learning activity and the students. For example, some schools have used the single sex approach to create an environment in which boys can share their experiences and feelings and learn how to talk through issues. Other schools have implemented single sex methods for Health and Physical Education classes.
- 3.5.3 Respondents described the importance of methods that respond to the need boys have to be **active and involved** in the learning process.
- 3.5.4 Respondents noted that **boys are not a homogeneous group**. Emphasis is placed on teachers requiring an understanding of the range of learning styles in teaching boys, and therefore, using varied teaching methods that take account of the diverse ways of learning - from active to reflective learning, from practical to intellectual learning.
- 3.5.5 Comment was also made about the growing evidence that boys exhibit **particular learning styles**.
- 3.5.6 Overall, respondents described successful methodology for boys as involving boys, focussing on their interests, extending them, using their language and encouraging them.

3.6 QUALITY LEARNING RELATIONSHIPS AND CONNECTEDNESS

- 3.6.1. Many comments from schools highlight the critical need for boys to have **learning relationships with their teachers** that foster trust, openness and provide opportunities for genuine interaction and personal development.

3.6.2 Respondents observed that, for boys to share their emotions and feelings, teachers need to show interest in them and give them time.

3.6.3 The importance of **appropriate class sizes and groupings** that allow the development of genuine teacher-student learning relationships is seen as a critical factor in boys' education and learning.

3.7 A SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE

3.7.1 In all years of schooling boys need an environment in which they **feel safe** and that is **free from harassment, bullying and violence**. In this environment boys need to be able to begin to explore the needs of others and develop a sense of community and group skills. The learning environment must provide boys with the freedom to show emotion and make mistakes, and to develop a sense of accomplishment and self worth.

3.7.2 The secondary school environment must recognise the needs of adolescent boys, provide clear expectations, and acknowledge success in different ways (ie academically, through sport...).

3.7.3 Within schools it is seen as very important to develop **a culture which accepts and celebrates differences** and that it is seen as "okay to be different".

3.8 ACCESS TO COUNSELLORS

3.8.1 Respondents strongly support the provision of access for boys to school counsellors (teachers with qualifications in counselling).

3.8.2 Support also exists for increasing the basic counselling skills of all teachers.

3.8.3 However, it is seen as critical that there is access for schools and student counsellors to external agencies and referral services to support them in their work with boys, particularly those at risk.

3.8.4 The role of teachers and school counsellors needs to be clearly delineated from that of Health Agencies and Youth Workers.

3.8.5 Greater access by schools to Health Agency resources and support is required if the needs of boys at risk are to be met.

Recommendation

The SAISB recommends that

- ◇ Commonwealth and State government funds are allocated to ensuring there are sufficient resources and personnel within Health agencies to respond to school referrals for boys at risk.
- ◇ Schools develop and implement policies and procedures for dealing with boys at risk of self-harm.

3.9 MIDDLE SCHOOL APPROACH

- 3.9.1 Several respondents identified the middle school approach as supportive of the educational needs of boys.
- 3.9.2 Middle schools that provide a range of positive role models, appropriate dynamic curriculum offerings and teaching practices and methods that meet the range of student learning needs are deemed more likely to meet the educational needs of boys than traditional school structures and approaches (eg structures based on status and hierarchy).

Recommendation

The SAISB recommends that

- ◇ Schools, school authorities and universities are encouraged to research and compare the effectiveness of middle schooling processes and structures with other schooling structures in meeting the educational needs of boys.

3.10 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS

- 3.10.1 The need for professional development of teachers, both male and female, in relation to meeting the educational needs of boys is emphasised.
- 3.10.2 Respondents strongly support the need for increased emphasis on issues effecting the education of boys, and on strategies to address these issues, in teacher professional development programs.

Recommendation

The SAISB recommends that

- ◇ Governments and school authorities allocate funds to develop and implement a professional development program that focuses on the educational needs of boys.

3.11 TEACHER CHARACTERISTICS AND BEHAVIOUR

3.11.1 A number of respondents made comment about their informal observations of the characteristics of teachers who are successful in teaching boys, in establishing meaningful teaching and learning relationships, and in meeting the educational needs of boys.

3.11.2 Teachers who are approachable, kind, show personal interest and have time for talking with their students are some of the characteristics used to describe a successful teacher of boys in the early years.

3.11.3 It was stressed that it is important to have both male and female teachers in all years of schooling, so that boys have access to a range of appropriately skilled role models.

Recommendation

The SAISB recommends that

- ◇ Schools, school authorities and universities are encouraged to investigate teacher characteristics and behaviour that engages boys in learning.

3.12 RECRUITMENT AND PRE-SERVICE TRAINING

3.12.1 Discussions with schools indicate the need for recruiting and attracting a greater number of appropriately skilled males to early years and junior primary pre-service teacher training.

Recommendation

The SAISB recommends that

- ◇ The MCEETYA Teacher Preparation, Recruitment and Training Taskforce includes the following in its Terms of Reference
 - teacher preparation and pre-service training aimed at improving the quality and standards of teaching and learning for boys
 - the development of recruitment strategies and projects aimed at attracting more appropriately skilled males to the teaching profession.

3.13 RESEARCH

3.13.1 Respondents indicated the need for more research in relation to boys' education in order to identify educational practices that will lead to increased resiliency in boys, and improved educational outcomes for boys.

Recommendation

The SAISB recommends that

- ◇ more research is undertaken by a range of appropriate groups (eg governments, schooling authorities, schools, and universities) into
 - learning styles of boys;
 - teacher behaviour and characteristics that facilitate boys' learning;
 - school structures eg middle schooling;
 - the literacy needs of particular groups of boys – indigenous boys, boys from rural areas, and boys who have English as their second language;
 - senior secondary school certificate requirements and their impact on boys' participation, retention and achievement.

3.14 LITERACY

3.14.1 Schools have a range of strategies in place to improve boys' literacy skills including

- ◇ *Male role models* – the importance of male role models is stressed.

- ◇ *Appropriate texts* – reading material that engages and interests boys is critical.
- ◇ *Single sex methodology* – the use of single sex methodology when appropriate.
- ◇ *Smaller class sizes*
- ◇ *Multi-media approaches*
- ◇ *Involvement of the family and home in reading programs*
- ◇ *Whole school approach to literacy* - programs that include early intervention, teach grammar explicitly, are integrated, rigorous and monitored.
- ◇ *Methodology* - that involves boys, focuses on their interests, extends them, uses their language and encourages them

3.14.2 Respondents also noted that the boys' literacy issue is compounded for boys who have English as their second language, for boys from rural areas, and for indigenous boys.

3.14.3 Respondents noted the need for continued action by governments, school authorities, and schools to improve boys' literacy skills.

Recommendation

The SAISB recommends that

- ◇ The Commonwealth identifies the development and implementation of literacy strategies for boys at risk, in particular boys who have English as their second language, for boys from rural areas, and for indigenous boys as a priority within the Targeted Programs/Strategic Initiatives projects.

3.15 PEER PRESSURE AND RISK TAKING BEHAVIOUR

3.15.1 Respondents note the significance of peer pressure as a factor influencing educational outcomes for boys.

3.15.2 Risk taking behaviour can result; (eg, experimentation with drugs, binge drinking,). (The positive outcomes of peer pressure are also acknowledged.)

3.15.3 Schools strongly identify the use of drugs and substance abuse as negatively influencing the educational outcomes for boys.

Recommendation

The SAISB recommends that

- ◇ Commonwealth and State governments allocate public funds to continue work in drug education programs across all school sectors including parents and the wider school community.

3.16 DEFICIT MODEL

- 3.16.1 Concern was expressed by a number of respondents about a perceived deficit approach to the education of boys, that portrays a view that boys are deficient or lacking in a number of ways (eg how level literacy skills, lack of organisation skills,).
- 3.16.2 Caution needs to be exerted in describing the educational needs of boys so as not to present a deficit model.
- 3.16.3 In addition time should be spent on celebrating and identifying what boys excel in, and are good at. Boys' achievements in non-traditional areas (eg Music, Dance) are to be celebrated equally with the traditional achievements (eg sport). Differences are to be celebrated.

Recommendation

The SAISB recommends that

- ◇ The Commonwealth, in discussing and implementing the findings of this Inquiry, is sensitive in its description of the educational needs of boys, and issues surrounding their education, so not as to present a deficit view.
- ◇ The Commonwealth, in discussing and sharing the findings of this Inquiry, identifies and celebrates the positive qualities and attributes of boys.

4 RECOMMENDATIONS AS IDENTIFIED IN THE TEXT

The SAISB recommends that

- ◇ Government resources are allocated to identify and implement strategies that will attract more males to the teaching profession.
- ◇ Schools/communities share strategies to increase the access of boys to an appropriate range of role models.

The SAISB recommends that

- ◇ The Commonwealth allocates funds to conduct research in relation to the impact of current senior secondary school certificate requirements on boys' participation, retention and achievement, particularly boys at risk.
- ◇ A range of assessment methods are used, including some assessment tools that are not highly literacy dependent.

The SAISB recommends that

- ◇ Commonwealth and State government funds are allocated to ensuring there are sufficient resources and personnel within Health agencies to respond to school referrals for boys at risk.
- ◇ Schools develop and implement policies and procedures for dealing with boys at risk of self-harm.

The SAISB recommends that

- ◇ Schools, school authorities and universities are encouraged to research and compare the effectiveness of middle schooling processes and structures with other schooling structures in meeting the educational needs of boys.

The SAISB recommends that

- ◇ Governments and school authorities allocate funds to develop and implement a professional development program that focuses on the educational needs of boys.

The SAISB recommends that

- ◇ Schools, school authorities and universities are encouraged to investigate teacher characteristics and behaviour that engages boys in learning.

The SAISB recommends that

- ◇ The MCEETYA Teacher Preparation, Recruitment and Training Taskforce includes the following in its Terms of Reference
 - teacher preparation and pre-service training aimed at improving the quality and standards of teaching and learning for boys
 - the development of recruitment strategies and projects aimed at attracting more appropriately skilled males to the teaching profession.

The SAISB recommends that

- ◇ more research is undertaken by a range of appropriate groups (ie government, schooling authorities, schools, universities) into
 - learning styles of boys;
 - teacher behaviour and characteristics that facilitate boys' learning;
 - school structures eg middle schooling;
 - the literacy needs of particular groups of boys – indigenous boys, boys from rural areas, and boys who have English as their second language;
 - senior secondary school certificate requirements and their impact on boys' participation, retention and achievement.

The SAISB recommends that

- ◇ The Commonwealth identifies the development and implementation of literacy strategies for boys at risk, in particular boys who have English as their second language, for boys from rural areas, and for indigenous boys as a priority within the Targeted Programs/Strategic Initiatives projects.

The SAISB recommends that

- ◇ Commonwealth and State governments allocate public funds to continue work in drug education programs across all school sectors including parents and the wider school community.

The SAISB recommends that

- ◇ The Commonwealth, in discussing and implementing the findings of this Inquiry, is sensitive in its description of the educational needs of boys, and issues surrounding their education, so not as to present a deficit view.
- ◇ The Commonwealth, in discussing and sharing the findings of this Inquiry, identifies and celebrates the positive qualities and attributes of boys.