

Education

Investigation into Resource Allocation in NSW
Public and Private Schools

Committee Investigating Education

Investigation into Resource Allocation in NSW Public and Private Schools

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The Hon. Yuki Wang, Refuting Youth MLC

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Terms of Reference

That the Committee Investigating Education inquire into and refer to:

1. The ongoing teacher shortage in both sectors of the NSW education system;
2. Wellbeing resources within NSW public and private sector schools;
3. Facilities to accommodate to LGBTQIA+ People; and
4. Access to Student Support Services within NSW public and private sector schools.

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Chairperson's foreword

Madam/Mr President,

Rick Riordan, an American author from the State of Texas once said “Fairness does not mean everyone gets the same, Fairness means everyone gets what they need”.

Children begin their journey of formal education in New South Wales as early as the age of four and finish as late as eighteen. It is pivotal that in their thirteen years of schooling, a positive difference has been made.

I am pleased to present to this chamber The Education Committee Report into Resource Allocation in NSW Public and Private Schools to the 2022 Youth Legislative Council for consideration.

Madam/Mr President there's a problem; teachers feel as if they are no longer teachers and students feel that the system has neglected them.

The facts are clear, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) released a report at the end of 2019 outlining the positions each state was in, in terms of meeting the minimum standard. New South Wales' rank dropped in all three assessed areas, reading, science and maths. We are ranked sixth in the country, and without the necessary reform we could be heading for eighth place.

The Education Committee understands that each student brings with them different talents and interests, we also understand that it is our system failing them. But not only are we failing our students, but our teachers too. More than anyone, our teachers, particularly over the past two and a half years, have been through the brunt of it all. Disruption, isolation, remote learning and what seems to be the never ending pile of administrative work. Teachers across our state have struck three times in just the past twelve months, that itself is a sign that more needs to be done.

Students have a right to come to school, they have a right to feel safe when they do, and they have a right to feel welcome when they do. It is embarrassing to stand here today and say that many schools across our state lack the necessary support services for our students. How can we expect our students to be at their best if we can't even be the best?

The recommendations from our report will ensure that our schools have the necessary infrastructure and services to accommodate for the differences of each student, regardless of their gender, race or sexual orientation.

On behalf of my Committee I would like to extend profound gratitude to all organisations, educators, principals, and people who helped us with our investigation by contributing information, materials, and insightful expertise. I also want to express my gratitude to the committee's members for their devotion to offering thoughtful analysis and workable proposals to make this great state, the education state.

I hereby commend this Report to the House and to the floor.

The Honourable Pedram Ali, Youth MLC
Youth Minister for Education

Introduction

The Education Committee is investigating Resource Allocation in NSW Public and Private Schools.

Data released by the OECD through their Programme for International Student Assessment, showed that over the past twenty years, the educational ranking of New South Wales has plummeted to an all-time low of sixth place in the country. The details of this report expose the reasons as to why this has occurred and measures that must be immediately taken to ensure we get back on track.

The Education Committee has sought out teachers, principals, unions and different organisations to present findings based on real-world experience. The authenticity of the report has been maintained and the committee seeks to ensure that the implementations of the final recommendations are ones that work to the benefit of students, educators (including principals) and parents.

The investigation into Resource Allocation in NSW Public and Private Schools addresses the different areas that need immediate attention, these include:

- Teacher Shortages;
- Student Support Services;
- And, Wellbeing Resources.

Background

Students spend, on average, thirteen years of their developmental stages in the primary and secondary education system. The effectiveness of this, however, has been in dispute over the last few years with the forced transition to online learning.

Teachers are the most overworked and underpaid profession in modern society (Mishel, 2012), and a pay rise has first been debated since 2004. The Gallop Inquiry exposes the fundamental flaws within the current New South Wales Education System and the much needed areas that are in dire need of reform. Over 1,000 submissions were made to the Teachers Federation of New South Wales, a union group with 67,000+ members, who helped facilitate the inquiry. The inquiry made a series of recommendations on the role the Government needs to play and the necessary actions it needs to take.

When people, such as teachers, are not happy with the working environment, they put less effort into the activities that are required of them, which lowers educational outcomes and, more broadly, lowers student performance and potential ((Steven Barnett, n.d.). According to data from the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), educational achievement in New South Wales is at its lowest point since the turn of the century. Reading, maths, and science test scores have been falling precipitously, and the situation is just getting worse. It is clear that something is wrong and that something has to be done because our state's ranking is lower than both the average for the country and the average for the OECD.

Teacher Shortage

Over the past 36 months, teachers from right across New South Wales in both the public and private sectors have been struck by an unprecedented teacher shortage affecting the education of students in every corner of the state. It has become increasingly evident that the only thing that is increasing is the teacher's workload and not their salary. Teachers from Western Sydney, one of the hardest hit areas in last year's delta lockdown have labelled themselves as “supervisors” and “sitting ducks” who have been rundown by extra workloads and fallen trapped to bureaucratic decisions made by those in higher ranks with little to no consultation with the people down below.

When individuals, like teachers, are not satisfied with the conditions of their workplace they place less effort into the tasks they are prescribed to do, this results in a decline in educational outcomes and generally speaking a decline in student performance and capability. Data from the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) reveals that New South Wales educational performance is at its lowest it has been since the beginning of the century. Results in reading, maths and science have been on a sharp decline and things are only getting more grim. Our state's ranking is below the national average and the OECD average, only adding to the fact that something is wrong and action must be taken.

Teachers from a heavily government funded school in Western Sydney have made the following statements:

“I spend my free periods supervising classes meaning most of my work cannot be done at school, therefore there is less time to spend with my family”

“I once supervised a class of 60 students with no support”

“I am expected to go beyond my limits to simply make sure I can keep this job”

“My colleagues are drowning in an endless pile of paperwork set by the Catholic Education Department”

There has been syllabus change after syllabus change, however the syllabus is not the problem. Teachers in New South Wales are overworked and underpaid. In 2004, the Gallop Inquiry called for a 15 percent increase to teacher salaries and that teachers should spend more time teaching, than doing administrative work. A syllabus change would only call for more training, forcing teachers out of the classroom and leaving students in the dark. Nearly two decades on, we have still not implemented the changes that were recommended, instead educators are pushed beyond their limits and have been flushed with enormous amounts of responsibility with no real payrise.

Prior to the commencement of this century, New South Wales had world-ranking positions for educational outcomes, the future of our state depends on our teachers, they shape, change and enhance the mind of an individual, individuals who happen to be the future of our state.

The outcome of LSLD has highlighted the need to free up time in schools so that they may concentrate on teaching, learning, and leadership. A new focus of the School Success Model is said to "balance enhanced support for schools to make evidence-based decisions with clearer responsibility for performance objectives." This aims to enhance aspects including school attendance, reading, and numeracy while addressing underperforming schools through a variety of "ambitious yet fair objectives.

It's challenging to determine what this signifies in real life. It seems to support what Michael Fullan refers to as "the wrong drivers" in Australian educational policy, such as the pursuit of piecemeal rather than fundamental improvements and an emphasis on accountability rather than capacity building. It is also obvious that this does not offer the radical, systemic change that many have called for. Recent analysis of our system's structural and systemic issues by the Gonski Institute for Education points to the need for significant state and federal reform. The School Success Model may go in the same manner as its forerunner, LSLD, if the bigger systemic issues go unaddressed.

Wellbeing Resources

Schools in New South Wales have increasingly been identified as key institutional and relational settings for promoting children and young people's social and emotional wellbeing

(Graham et al. 2016; Noble et al. 2008; Thomas et al. 2016, Urbis 2011). Such an expectation makes sense, on one level, since children and young people spend so much of their childhoods in this context. (Anderson and Graham 2016), however the effectiveness of wellbeing in the current education system must be questioned.

Students are now facing a world 'that demands discerning engagement with sophisticated information about complex societal and environmental challenges' (Spectator, 2021). The allocation of wellbeing resources in New South Wales is one of intense scrutiny. The past decade has seen a variety of reforms to student wellbeing, including the development of a ministry for mental health in 2011 in the O'Farrell ministry.

Principals identified that teachers need more time. One catholic school principal on the Central Coast stated "I would love to reduce the teaching load of teachers so that their teaching load had a wellbeing component allocated to spending time with students one on one, because I think that is probably the one thing that could have the biggest impact in a school."

Students felt uncomfortable to discuss their wellbeing to teachers for a variety of reasons. One student explained, "I feel comfortable about talking about my wellbeing sometimes because I feel my voice won't be heard." Principals also identified that there is almost no time to develop relationships between students and teachers. This results in students not having adequate rapport to discuss wellbeing concerns with a teacher.

Many schools use a range of strategies to support student wellbeing, including classroom practices, curriculum, wellbeing staff, and department-based resources and initiatives. Schools may also choose to implement other programs to support specific wellbeing needs. Principals debated the effectiveness of these programs.

The Department of Education engaged with Monash University to examine evidence-based programs available to schools, and identify the features of effective and sustainable programs. This was turned into resources for schools.

Further, the NSW Wellbeing Framework for schools is a statement of what is valued as excellence in student wellbeing in NSW public schools. It supports schools to create a planned approach to wellbeing using evidenced-based strategies that are strengths based, preventative and focus on early intervention. This includes strengthening students' cognitive, physical, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing domains of development. Schools will achieve this through planning and decision-making at the local level to meet the needs of their students. This determines the resources allocated to schools.

In terms of resource allocation, the Student Wellbeing Hub contains a wealth of Australian Curriculum aligned information and resources for educators, parents, and students on strategies to build and sustain the wellbeing of the whole school community. The Hub is underpinned by the Australian Student Wellbeing Framework. Resources include professional learning modules with videos, support materials, podcasts and practical strategies and a school audit survey tool where schools can assess the effectiveness of their policies and procedures in relation to student wellbeing (DESE, 2018).

The NSW Department of Education have recently released the Inclusive, Engaging and Respectful Schools package. The NSW Department of Education is “committed to building a more inclusive education system. An education system where every student is known, valued and cared for and all students are learning to their fullest capability.” (NSW Department of Education). The Inclusive Education policy for students with disability and the Student Behaviour Policy and Procedures will come into effect at the start of Term 3 2022, and the Restrictive Practices Framework and Restrictive Practices Education and Elimination Policy and Procedures will come into effect at the start of Term 1 2023. This package will shift resources away from behavioural issues, moving towards safe, inclusive schools. The package aims to reduce the length of suspensions, support students with a disability accessing the curriculum more and moving towards early intervention and targeted support for vulnerable student groups.

There are many student wellbeing improvement measures including Tell Them From Me (TTFM) survey results, school based data from Positive Behaviour for Learning, the Personal and Social Capability learning continuum (ACARA), attendance data, referral data, learning and support team meeting records and the provision of individual learning and behaviour programs.

Wellbeing and learning are inextricably linked and research shows that effective, evidence-based wellbeing initiatives and strategies enhance student learning.

Student Support Services

Brief introduction of SSS

Student services contribute to the quality of students' learning experiences and academic success. The composition of the student group, as well as the knowledge and beliefs of academic and administrative staff, influence the manner and responsibility with which student programmes and services are delivered. Student support services refer to the different types of professional support and resources to a range of problems that students have access to.

Support services have many different forms, for instance, school counsellors or online support networks. These are important for students to have the assistance to navigate through the struggles that they come to face as they progress forward through life. However, the current systems for student support are lacking the desirable amount of proper engagement, which may lead to further issues and struggle for students in the future. Support services should better accompany the education services provided to allow a more robust system of personal improvement and development of students.

Current Issues with SSS

Adolescents have difficulty in seeking professional help for problems that they face with their social and emotional wellbeing. A large body of research indicates that fewer than half of adolescent students will pursue help from healthcare professionals for many different emotional issues (Boldero & Fallon, 1995; Chandra & Minkovitz, 2006; Rughani et al., 2011). A study undertaken on 1013 adolescents in Australia (Boldero and Fallon, 1995) reported that respondents are more likely to seek help from friends (40%) or parents (36%) than professional support services such as doctors or counsellors (12.7%). The low engagement with professional people highlight the failures of simply implementing more school psychologists on school grounds, and new solutions will need to be developed.

This become more problematic as adolescents have the highest level of suicidal ideation and typically face the greatest mental struggle out of all other ages, and hence are greater in need of professional support, yet are least likely to seek the help from either professional or informal sources of supportive information. The lower engagement conjures further issues on their social and emotional wellbeing, having repercussions on their academic abilities in an already problematic education system.

The reasons behind lower engagement in student support services are often due to a desire for self-reliance and preferring to manage problems on their own. However, students often overestimate their ability to manage their emotional issues on their own and fail to realise the better ways to overcome their struggles. The barriers to professional help are exacerbated with stigmatisation around seeking help from others as well as a lack of trust or understanding into professionals such as counsellors maintaining confidentiality.

Potential reasons for their self-reliant behaviors can stem from expectations to solve their own problems. The social environment plays a crucial role in influencing the behaviors of

students, as it can reveal to individuals that working together as a team and seeking out support from each other is a better solution than self-dependency. Furthermore, the social environment can heighten the awareness that suicidal ideation and feelings of depression are relatively common in adolescents, but this realization can also be achieved through conventional means such as workshops and counseling. Social environments can be improved for better interaction and communication between parties within the household, school and community.

Student support services in the school with school counselors and psychologists currently play a passive role instead of active. This is because they rely on students to be able to ask for help, which is an assumption that is often incorrect. Furthermore, they rarely appear in voicing and addressing mental challenges which creates further barriers from seeking help from an unknown figure. Support services also often fail to supply students with applicable techniques and methods to tackle mental challenges so that they can fulfill the need to be able to solve their issues on their own. A course should be developed and provided, detailing scientific-based methods to develop mental resilience and strength which can be presented to students or be delivered digitally.

Supporting student learning support findings

According to the research, teachers and parents/caregivers are important sources of learning support. Higher levels of support are associated with better academic and wellbeing outcomes for students. Over the course of secondary school, students' perceptions of parental support deteriorate. This decline is seen in both boys and girls, as well as across all socioeconomic groups.

Teachers report that they provide more classroom support to students during critical school years (Years 5-6 and Years 10-12). Beginning in early primary school, parents report a steady decline in the frequency of their interactions centred on supporting their child's schooling. In primary school, girls report more support from teachers than boys.

In the early and middle years of secondary school, boys report receiving more support at school than girls. When compared to students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds report receiving significantly less support from both parents and teachers.

These different factors seem to all stem from the different environments that students face, as well as their own changing perception as they move towards adulthood. Hence, altering the environment to sustain stronger relationships with family, friends and teachers through and beyond the senior years of high school can garner a more inclusive and social environment where individuals can understand that they can always feel free to seek support wherever possible. This understanding will influence their appreciation of their relationships and build stronger mental resilience, whereby student support services can be better received to improve their mental health.

Safeguarding for gender- and sexuality diverse students

Every student has the right to feel safe and respected when they are at school, regardless of their Sexuality and Gender. Unfortunately, this isn't the case in many schools in NSW (Curwood, Ullman, 2014).

Numerous studies, including a study done by Western Sydney University and covered in an article by 'The Guardian' in 2021, have shown that LGBTQIA+ students suffer from higher rates of bullying, harassment, and social isolation than students who identify as heterosexual or cisgender (Visontay, 2021).

Much of this harassment amounts to disengagement of sexuality and gender-diverse students from school, and skewed social attitudes towards LGBTQIA+ young people. Homophobic expressions which have become normalised in the school environment (such as "that's so gay", among others) can deeply impact LGBTQIA+ students' self esteem and mental wellbeing (Visontay, 2021). More than 90% of LGBTQIA+ Australian high school students are subjected to homophobic language and behaviour at school. Students report that just 6% of teachers within earshot took interventionary action (Ullmen, 2021).

Schools must be a safe space where all students feel safe and accepted. It is the role of teachers and school support staff to be there for each and every student within their supervision and care. Hearing these harmful words from students and even teachers and staff destroys the feeling of safety for the students and can evoke feelings of isolation.

Isolation from peers and a school community can lead to mental illness. 63.8% of LGBTQIA+ youth between the ages of 14 and 21 have reported being diagnosed with a mental illness (Health Australia, 2021).

The current curriculum lacks LGBTQIA+ education in every subject from History to Sexual Health (Australian curriculum 9.0, 2022). Nearly 200 parents from the Sydney area participated in a survey done in 2009, and the results showed that 97% of them agreed that lessons on sexual health should cover LGBTQIA+ education (Ketchell, 2014). Many educators and wellbeing staff are unequipped to deal with the needs of LGBTQIA+ students. Representation of LGBTQIA+ people in the classroom is necessary to increase their self esteem and normalise diverse gender identity and sexuality.

School environments that are more welcoming of LGBTQIA+ youth are associated with inclusive policies that address sexual orientation and gender identity (Safe Schools, Victoria Government, n/d). The statistics and research included in this report highlight the immediate need for the allocation of resources to support the LGBTQIA+ youth of NSW in our education system. This allocation of resources, consisting of inclusive policies and curriculum for LGBTQIA+ youth would go a long way in safeguarding the right of students to feel safe on school grounds and improve inclusivity within schools.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Redistribute the amount of wellbeing time for year coordinators. Reduce the amount of face to face learning of teachers identified as key wellbeing champions in schools.

Recommendation 2

That the New South Wales Government work with unions in the implementation of a 11.5% pay rise in the next financial year, 2023/24 to accommodate the unprecedented expansion of duties and responsibilities, address labour shortages, and assist in hiring more teachers to meet the demands of rising enrolment.

Recommendation 3

That the New South Wales Government establish a better relationship with Education Unions from both the private and public sector to ensure stop work action is not the necessary step to ensure they are heard. Stop work action puts students out of school, something they have missed out on for too long, particularly with the many disruptions of the last 36 months.

Recommendation 4

To address severe shortages and student mental health difficulties, it is advised that the number of school psychologists be increased immediately. By the end of 2025, there should be at least two psychologists for every 500 pupils within both New South Wales government-funded and partially funded schools. Evidence shows that a student that is struggling at school has something going on at home, (Jacob and Ryan, 2018) and with correct intervention by a trained mental health professional the issue can be rectified increasing student ability, resilience and outcome.

Recommendation 5

Teachers deserve more time to prepare, plan and facilitate lessons and assessments. The current face-to-face teaching (RFF) loads for educators in the secondary system should be cut by a minimum of five (5) hours and a minimum of three (3) hours for primary school educators. This will ensure that teachers have adequate time to prepare for lessons and cater to individual needs maximising student ability and student outcome. Evidence collated from a series of schools in Western Sydney shows that teachers are currently overworked and often spend their dedicated time for administrative work supervising other classes.

Recommendation 6

Introduce a new “life skills subject”, with time for students to learn wellbeing skills, rapport building and essential life skills.

Recommendation 7

Ensure external facilitators are met with an introduction and follow up, to ensure that students are receiving the full benefit of these talks & workshops.

Recommendation 8

Investigate the barriers for children to seek help and possible solutions to receiving help. Challenges including stigma and self-reliance are example barriers and new solutions will need to be proposed to overcome these and be tested for their effectiveness in addressing the issue.

Recommendation 9

Review the mandatory reporting processes, and its effectiveness in helping to achieve justice to students.

Recommendation 10

Implementation of a thorough wellbeing campaign that is seriously pushed in all schools across New South Wales. A wellbeing program that accommodates both the differences of students as well as teachers.

Recommendation 11

Identify the different needs of different areas of our state, with particular emphasis on where teachers are struggling to cope the most.

Recommendation 12

Implementation of more staff development days to ensure teachers have enough time to prepare.

Recommendation 13

Ensure teachers are involved in a new process of the NSW Education Department decision-making process.

Recommendation 14

To implement a new, standards-based promotion system statewide. Along with additional types of specialist instructors, there should be a wider career framework for educators.

Recommendation 15

It is necessary to drop the government's irrational and untenable goal to implement a new curriculum for all New South Wales school children by 2024. On the premise that educators have time to work on the new curriculum, have access to professional development assistance, and have less administrative and compliance tasks.

Final recommendations

Recommendation 1

That the New South Wales Government work with unions in the implementation of a 11.5% pay rise in the next financial year, 2023/24 to accommodate the unprecedented expansion of duties and responsibilities, address labour shortages, and assist in hiring more teachers to meet the demands of rising enrolment.

Recommendation 2

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Dissenting statements

Statement 1

Students are hindered in speaking up as they feel they do not have a voice, and that their anonymity and confidentiality are not valued. Whilst this may be untrue, there have been numerous testimonials across the state of students not having a voice in their wellbeing. Whilst mandatory reporting is an important intervention strategy, we recommend for the New South Wales Government to investigate the barriers of mandatory reporting and work with stakeholders including students, Department of Communities and Justice and the Department of Education to implement efficient intervention strategies, including student autonomy and communication.

Statement 2

Increasing teachers' salary is a good first step, however it can not be created in isolation. It is well acknowledged that the increase in pay does not reduce the workload and burden of teachers. We recommend that the New South Wales Government intervene and ensure teachers have a balance between personal and professional life.

Statement 3

Increasing the level of psychologists is not completely beneficial, as there are many other intervention strategies. There are many identified barriers to accessing the school psychologist, thus solely increasing numbers of psychologists are not effective. It is more beneficial to reduce the stigma of mental health in schools through early intervention and a holistic wellbeing system. The implementation of key agents such as social workers, SSOs and community partnerships specific to a local area are more beneficial. We recommend that the New South Wales Government work with the education system to develop plans to work with community, private and public health to develop a holistic wellbeing program, including all five areas of wellbeing.