Blueprint for Government Schools: Future Directions for Education in the Victorian Government School System

Victoria. Department of Education and Training, 2003

Overview of the document

37 page document that sets out the future directions for government schools in Victoria.

Keywords

Essential learnings; learning outcomes; increasingly sophisticated economy; rapidly changing society; personal development; teaching-learning relationship; effective partnerships; student learning; learning capacity; diverse student needs; performance and development culture; school improvement; self-managing schools; diversity; community involvement; authentic learning experiences; best practice.

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GROWING VICTORIA TOGETHER – PRIORITY ACTIONS

Summary of Contents

MINISTER'S FOREWORD
➢ Notes that "the Government has made education its number one priority." (p. 2)
➢ Notes the educational improvements since Labor came to office in 1999 (including reduced class sizes, rising retention and improvements in numeracy literacy) but acknowledges that there continue to be students who have poor levels of literacy, numeracy and basic skills and that there is disparity in achievements between classes, between schools and in different locations.
➢ States "Education and training underpin the development of a highly skilled, innovative workforce as a critical enabling factor for economic growth in Australia." (p. 2)

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS
➢ Identifies Seven Flagship Strategies organised around the following three principles:
  o Recognising and Responding to Diverse Student Needs
  o Building the Skills of the Education Workforce to Enhance the Teaching–Learning Relationship
  o Continuously Improving Schools (p. 5)

RECOGNISING AND RESPONDING TO DIVERSE STUDENT NEEDS
Flagship Strategy 1: Student Learning
➢ Notes that the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority will identify and develop a broad framework of 'essential learnings' for all Victorian students.
➢ Notes that the Government will develop new curriculum and reporting guidelines to assist government schools in deciding on curriculum development, improved teaching methods, assessment and reporting.
➢ Notes that improved reporting on student achievement will be provided for parents and employers through the development of defined assessment measures of student progress.
➢ Notes that principles of learning and teaching from Prep to Year 12 will be developed to support teachers' professional development and provide advice in areas such as diversity of learning and thinking styles, student-teacher relationships and productive learning experiences.
➢ Notes that the Government will develop a knowledge bank that documents and ensures best practice is shared across the system. (p. 5)

Flagship Strategy 2: Developing a New Resource Allocation Model
  ➢ Notes that a new resource allocation model that is less complex and more transparent than the existing one, and which is flexible, equitable, efficient and student focused will be developed and implemented.

BUILDING THE SKILLS OF THE EDUCATION WORKFORCE TO ENHANCE THE TEACHING–LEARNING RELATIONSHIP

Flagship Strategy 3: Building Leadership Capacity
  ➢ Notes that an improved principal selection process will be developed that includes increasing principal representation on selection panels, tailoring selection criteria to reflect the school's needs, and encouraging contact between candidates and the employing school.
  ➢ Notes that the Government will establish a mentoring program for first time principals and a coaching support program for experienced principals to develop principals' leadership capabilities. (p. 5)
  ➢ Notes that the Government will introduce a "balanced scorecard" approach to improve the performance management of principals, which will link principal performance assessment to overall school performance. (p. 6)
  ➢ Notes that the Government will implement an accelerated development program for high potential leaders, whereby participants will benefit from exposure to leadership responsibilities, tailored professional development, and mentoring.
  ➢ Notes that the Government will also implement a development program for high performing principals that includes tailored professional development, placements in challenging schools, and mentoring other principals and aspiring principals.
  ➢ Notes that the Government will expand local administrative bureaus for networks of small schools to help alleviate the administrative workload of small schools.

Flagship Strategy 4: Creating and Supporting a Performance and Development Culture
  ➢ Notes that an accreditation scheme for performance and development culture schools will be introduced. Accredited schools will improve teacher effectiveness and therefore student outcomes.

Flagship Strategy 5: Teacher Professional Development
  ➢ Note that the Government will invest $5m each year to enable 460 teachers to undertake focused teacher professional leave, ranging from four to ten weeks. Argues that this will enhance teachers' classroom practice.
  ➢ Notes that the Government will expand the induction program for beginning teachers and continue mentoring programs to ensure good induction and mentoring processes are spread across the school system.

CONTINUOUSLY IMPROVING SCHOOLS

Flagship Strategy 6: School Improvement
  ➢ Notes that the Government will implement a differential model of school review to reflect schools' different stages of development and to better target support and assistance.
  ➢ Notes that clear and widely understood performance triggers will be developed to drive systemic intervention in under-performing schools to ensure that the best possible improvements are made and that cycles of under-performance are addressed early.

➢ Notes that to minimise the administrative burden on schools, a single planning and accountability document will be implemented.
➢ Notes that parent, teacher and student opinion data will be provided to all schools on a consistent basis to provide insight into school performance and information to support improvement. (p. 6)

Flagship Strategy 7: Leading Schools Fund
➢ Notes that the Government will establish the Leading Schools Fund in order to drive whole school improvement. The initiative will build on the knowledge and good practice already existing in schools and provide them with the incentive and opportunity to reach beyond their current practice and performance. It will facilitate strategic partnerships and collaboration between schools so that schools can learn from each other, assist each other and strengthen the government school system. (p. 7)

INTRODUCTION
➢ States that there is an increasing expectation for education and that young people need high quality education to be well-equipped and enable them to "keep learning in an ever-changing world". (p. 8)
➢ Notes that the Victorian Government has made education its number one priority and that an extra $3.69 billion has been invested in education and training since 1999.

The Role of Government Schooling
➢ Argues that governments have the key responsibility to ensure that schools deliver excellent education and that all students are entitled to an excellent education.

The Case for Reform
➢ States "There are still students who leave school early, with poor levels of literacy, numeracy and other core learnings. These poor student outcomes are concentrated in some schools and some regions. Data show high concentrations in some regions and schools of students who have poor outcomes in literacy and numeracy, high school absenteeism, poor VCE/Year 12 results and low school completion. There are high variations in student outcomes between classes within schools, which highlights the importance of quality teaching. Furthermore, there are many schools that achieve outstanding results, and others with similar student populations that do not." (p. 9)
➢ Notes that schools and communities need assistance to improve outcomes.

Strategies for Improvement
➢ Notes that the government has undertaken research and consultation to identify strategies for reform.
➢ Notes that research indicates three key areas in need of reform:
   o High concentration of poor outcomes in some regions.
   o High variations in outcomes between classes.
   o Variations in outcomes between schools with similar student populations.

A Core Approach for the Management of the Government School System
➢ Notes that government schools are self-managing.
➢ Notes that the previous government used this model to encourage competition between schools while "The current government has modified the approach in order to remove the worst excesses of the model." (p. 10)

➢ Welcomes competition "that focuses on striving for new approaches to improve student learning" but notes that "unfettered competition, where the drive to be the best is at the expense of students' outcomes in other schools, has adverse consequences", namely that it neglects those students who require additional support. States "Unfettered competition is also counterproductive to the development of a learning and sharing culture between schools." (p. 11)

➢ Notes that the government recognises that the learning needs of students differ.

➢ Identifies the critical objective of government schooling as: "That all students, irrespective of the school they attend, where they live or their social and economic status, have an entitlement to a high-quality school education and a genuine opportunity to succeed." (p. 11)

➢ Notes that the strategies in this document are focused around three key features of the government school system that need to be addressed:
   o the concentration of poor outcomes in some schools and some regions;
   o high variations of outcomes between classes within schools, which highlights the importance of the teaching–learning relationship; and
   o variations in outcomes between schools with similar student populations.

Priorities for Reform
➢ Identifies three priority areas for reform:
   1. Recognising and Responding to Diverse Student Needs.
   2. Building the Skills of the Education Workforce to Enhance the Teaching–learning Relationship.
   3. Continuously Improving Schools. (p. 12)

Recognizing and Responding to Diverse Student Needs
➢ Notes that improvements in learning outcomes can only be achieved if the diversity of student needs is recognised.

Flagship Strategy 1: Student Learning
➢ Notes the importance of foundational skills in reading, writing and numeracy and the importance of other skills "to operate effectively in our changing society." (p. 13)

➢ Argues that students should learn in an environment that promotes their "health, safety and wellbeing". (p. 13)

➢ Argues that students should be encouraged to become "active, life-long learners" and that to achieve this school need to help student develop:
   o A positive attitude towards learning.
   o Fundamental skills in literacy, numeracy and self-expression, which will enable them to be successful across all areas of learning.
   o High level personal, communication and social competencies to work independently and within groups.
   o Experience in innovation, creativity and problem-solving.
   o Confidence to deal with technological and cultural change.
   o Skill sets in the wider community and changing workplace.
   o Ability to access information and reflect upon it. (p. 13)

➢ Notes that the government is committed to increasing retention rates and that to achieve this "schools need to increasingly be seen as places where students want to be – where they are happy, engaged, stimulated, intellectually challenged, secure and confident". (p. 13)

- ➢ Argues that students need to be provided with multiple pathways and coherent links between programs.
- ➢ Argues that community involvement in decisions about schooling is essential.

Case Study: Essendon North Primary School
- ➢ Notes that this school uses innovative teaching methods, including structuring parent-teacher evenings as "portfolio presentations" where students explain their learning over time and the use of "learning to learn" activities "to enable students to determine their learning styles, preferences and objectives". (p. 14)
- ➢ States that "In 2004, the Government will develop principles of learning and teaching for prep-Year 12 to support teachers in areas such as diversity of learning and thinking styles, student-teacher-relationships and in authentic learning experiences." (p. 14)

Case Study: Middle Years Pedagogy Research and Development Project (MYPRAD)
- ➢ Notes that over 75 Government schools are involved in MYPRAD.
- ➢ Argues that improved reporting on student achievement is urgently needed.
- ➢ Notes that VCAA and the Department are working to identify best-practice in assessment and reporting.

Flagship Strategy 2: Developing a New Resource Allocation Model
- ➢ Argues that funding needs to be more student focused and reflect the learning needs of students.
- ➢ Identifies problems with current funding model and notes that a new model will be implemented in 2005. (p. 16)

BUILDING THE SKILLS OF THE EDUCATION WORKFORCE TO ENHANCE THE TEACHING–LEARNING RELATIONSHIP
- ➢ Notes the importance of leadership and high quality workforce to student outcomes.

Flagship Strategy 3: Building Leadership Capacity
- ➢ Recognises the importance of school principals and the importance of a culture of high performance and continuous development in schools.
- ➢ Argues that the process for selecting principals must be rigorous.
- ➢ Notes that by 2005, an improved principal selection process will be developed that will focus on "modern recruitment practices" and a range of other measures.
- ➢ Notes that from 2004 Government will establish a mentoring program for first time principals as well as improved management procedures and other strategies to improve leadership.

Flagship Strategy 4: Creating and Supporting a Performance and Development Culture
- ➢ States "The pursuit of continuous improvement and learning is essential for teachers and students to reach their potential." (p. 19)
- ➢ Notes that in 2004 an accreditation system will be introduced for "performance and development culture schools". (p. 19)

Case Study: Leadership Feedback at Glen Waverley Secondary College
- ➢ Notes that this provides an example of 'world's best practice' for leadership feedback.

Flagship Strategy 5: Teacher Professional Development
> Notes that $5 million each year from 2004 will be invested to provide teachers with opportunities for "professional renewal and development" and teachers will be able to undertake professional development leave from 4 to 10 weeks duration. (p. 20)

Case Study: Mentoring of new teachers at The Grange P-12 Primary Campus
> Outlines the situation of mentoring and team-teaching for new teachers.

CONTINUOUSLY IMPROVING SCHOOLS
> Argues that strong teaching-learning relationships in the classroom must be supported by flexible, yet strong individual and system accountability arrangements.
> Notes that excellence requires greater levels of cooperation between schools and the sharing of expertise and facilities.
> States "The Government's role is to support and promote best practice and facilitate sharing across the system within a transparent, flexible and accountable framework". (p. 22)

Flagship Strategy 6: School Improvement
> Notes that school planning, accountability and review arrangements have a role in improving student outcomes and that a new approach to school improvement will be implemented through a differential model of school review.

Case Study: Springvale South Primary School
> Examines the high performance of Springvale South Primary and notes key factors in the school's success including: passionate and committed leadership, high expectations of each students, ensuring every student is engaged and school is a positive experience, teamwork and professional development.

Case Study: Orbost Secondary College
> Notes that this school faces significant challenges but has lifted and maintained performance. Notes some of the strategies that have facilitated this including: flexible learning arrangements, individual learning plans, and an extensive transition program.

Flagship Strategy 7: Leading Schools Fund
> Notes that "one size does not fit all" and innovative solutions must be sought to meet the diverse needs of students.
> Notes that a Leading Schools Fund will be implemented in 2004 providing $82m for 450 extra teachers in government secondary schools and $80m in capital for new facilities.

Conclusion
> Concludes that the government is committed to excellence in education and notes that the Blueprint "has been designed to reflect the Government's belief that every student is entitled to a quality education, and that it is the responsibility of government to establish the framework and setting which will deliver this." (p. 28)

APPENDIX 1: CONSULTATION AND RESEARCH
> Outlines the Blueprint's consultation and research process.

APPENDIX 2: THE GOALS AND TARGETS FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING
Goals

- ➢ Identifies the goals as follows:
    - o Improve the standards of literacy and numeracy in primary schooling.
    - o Increase the percentage of young people successfully completing Year 12 or its equivalent.
    - o Increase the percentage of adults taking up education and training and so increase the overall level of educational attainment and literacy levels in Victoria.
    - o Increase the level of participation and achievement in education and training in rural and regional Victoria and among groups where it is presently low.
    - o Make near-universal participation in post-school education and training the norm in our society.
- ➢ Identifies the targets as follows:
    - o By 2005, Victoria will be at or above national benchmark levels for reading, writing and numeracy as they apply to primary students.
    - o By 2010, 90 percent of young people in Victoria will successfully complete Year 12 or its equivalent.
    - o By 2005, the percentage of young people aged 15–19 years in rural and regional Victoria engaged in education and training will increase by 6 percent.
- ➢ Identifies the priority actions as follows:
    - o Improve participation and achievement in education and training.
    - o Provide better links between schools, business and communities.
    - o Expand opportunities for training and learning all through life.