

# **Public Education the Next Generation**

**Australian Education Union  
(Victorian Branch)  
Submission**

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## **PUBLIC EDUCATION THE NEXT GENERATION**

### **AEU RESPONSE**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The AEU is committed to the following Statement of Principles for Public Education and believes that they should underpin the outcomes of PENG.

#### **Why is Public Education essential?**

Because it

- is vital to the future economic, social, cultural and intellectual development of our nation and all its citizens
- is for everyone
- provides everyone with the opportunity to shape their own future
- enriches and strengthens our local communities
- is the basis of an informed, active, fair and democratic society
- draws people together, and creates greater tolerance and appreciation of differences
- values our shared experience and our common good.

#### **What sort of Public Education do we want?**

One which

- is free
- provides the best possible education for all
- includes and values everyone irrespective of difference in race, religion, class, ability, gender or geographic location
- bridges the gap in advantage and provides students of all ages with a fair share of resources
- is adequately and fully funded by State and Commonwealth governments at a level which reflects the value we place on every child and young person in our society
- is available locally and relates to the life of local communities
- provides for life-long learning and for second chance learning
- promotes tolerance and inclusiveness
- respects inherited values while instilling a desire for new solutions
- has teachers and education workers who are well trained, well paid, respected and secure in their employment
- is given priority as an essential responsibility of governments
- will be here for future generations.

The quality of life in any society is inextricably bound up with its system of education. Education shapes the life chances of individuals and helps to define what sort of society they will live in. Children entering the Victorian school system in 2001 will be young adults hopefully completing their final year of schooling in the year 2014. The quality of their lives at that time will have been significantly influenced by the quality of education they received. Decisions about education become decisions about our shared future.

Victoria should aspire to have an education system which will enhance the quality of life of all of its people. It should be an essential building block of a society characterised by its creativity, democracy, equity, tolerance, productivity and environmental sustainability. It should ensure that all (not just some) Victorians have access to rewarding lives as individuals, citizens and workers. As over two thirds of all students are in government schools, this means it needs a highly valued public education system which is championed by governments and supported by the community.

In times of uncertainty, instability and change, the importance of education for all young people is magnified. This is particularly true at present. The idea that we are moving towards a knowledge-based global society is not empty rhetoric, but a fact we face daily. At the same time we are confronting a swiftly rising disparity in resources between groups in our society, a division which is having a serious impact on the opportunities and quality of life for a significant proportion of the population. It is not just the wealthy few who should have access to the necessary ongoing opportunities that education provides, but every young person.

The past seven years have seen a series of radical changes of unparalleled scale to public education in Victoria, promoted under the guise of being the 'way of the future' - a deeply divided and unequal future. Whatever value these changes may have had has been undercut by three factors.

1. A market-based view of education. Education is not an open market place. Success for one institution or one group of students should never come at the expense of another institution or group of students. Education cannot afford failure. Pockets of striking institutional and student success are not enough. All the components of the enterprise of education must be strong. Opportunities, improvement and progress must be for all. This is not just a matter of fairness, but of quality and cost effectiveness.
2. Oppressive and unresponsive central control. There is a near universal view that there is more bureaucratic interference in schools than ever before. Schools have been left with the 'house-work', while the centre issues edicts and demands which are frequently out of touch with the realities of the challenges schools face. Schools have to shoulder responsibility for matters over which they have no control. Similarly in pre schools, the previous Government left parent management committees to shoulder the responsibility of both administrative and financial management in a climate of increasing central control and declining resource base.

Education institutions rely to a great extent on the good will and generosity of those who work in them for their quality and buoyancy. These qualities, still very much in evidence from staff, were not returned. The impact on morale has been profound.

3. Drastic cuts to resources. The changes made under the Kennett Government were coupled with the largest reduction in resources ever to occur in the history of Australian systemic education. Kindergartens, schools and TAFE Institutes alike, to use the words of the ex-Premier when criticising the Federal Government's stand on health, were contracted to undertake a task for which they were not resourced. During the same period that the previous Government shut 371 public schools and removed 8000 positions from the government teaching service, it increased the level of funding to private education.

The three competitive advantages which systemic education enjoys - the capacity to offer good teachers secure employment, productive cooperative relationships between institutions, and high quality off-site curriculum and student support services - have all been under sustained attack. The new Labor Government has begun to repair the damage but there is much more to do.

The AEU believes that the major priority of the present Government should be the restoration of a high quality system of public education. A system which:

- is fully and adequately funded and provides all Victorian students with equitable access to a quality education, irrespective of capacity to pay;
- guarantees a comprehensive and inclusive curriculum;
- has access, equity and the active redress of disadvantage as the underlying principles of education structures and resource allocation;
- is committed to a cooperative model of education provision which rejects the market-based model and all forms of corporatisation and privatisation;
- achieves an appropriate and agreed balance between system, district and local responsibilities;
- restores democratic and participatory decision-making to all levels of the system;
- has a regulated system of fair and reasonable working conditions for teachers and other education workers, based upon system-wide industrial awards and agreements;
- recognises and builds upon the Government's primary obligation to the maintenance and improvement of a public system of education.

## 1. **THE STRUCTURE OF THE PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM**

- 1.1 The AEU is committed to a public system of education which fosters collaborative effort between public education providers. Over the past seven years public education has been subject to an officially sponsored culture of competition. Individual schools and colleges have been encouraged to compete for market share using the rationale that choice between institutions will lead to quality. This approach is ideological rather than based on any factual evidence. It has led to failure and waste - for every winner there was a loser and scarce funds were diverted away from the core business of teaching and learning.

This is an inappropriate and ineffective means of promoting quality in a public education system. The state system was established to provide equitable access to the best possible education for all Victorian students. This purpose should inform the structure and culture of the system.

Public education should play to its strengths. One of these strengths is its scale and the fact that it can maintain a level of diversity of approach and responsiveness to local needs. Another is the collaborative advantage arising from shared needs and a common public framework within which to operate.

The AEU proposes a structure which takes account of these strengths by being responsive to local needs (without breaking up the system into a plethora of self-governing units) while developing support arrangements which foster cooperation between schools and between schools and other educational and community institutions.

The basic model proposed by the AEU is:

- 1.2 The Local School:

The AEU believes that, as a general principle, decisions that affect the operation of a school should best be made at the local level, with all groups participating in the decision-making process. Under the previous Government the rhetoric of decentralisation masked a covert bias towards centralised control. Administrative responsibility was shifted to the local school while educational authority was more tightly controlled by the centre. We want a reversal of this policy approach,

The local school should retain its existing powers except that it should be relieved of onerous administrative responsibilities such as HRMS and PRMS and much of the paper work and administration linked to WorkCover. These administrative tasks are far better carried out by the centre. There should be a general review and audit of the administrative burden of schools to see what elements could be better carried out by the centre so that schools are able to concentrate on their core task of teaching and learning.

At the same time, the school should be given greater flexibility and decision-making responsibilities in relation to the curriculum and, in cooperation with their district cluster, a greater say in the mix of student services they can access. We believe that the existing legislative framework provides sufficient flexibility to meet other local needs. The AEU does not support student services money going directly into individual schools' global budgets because it will disadvantage smaller schools and sacrifice the advantages of systemic membership eg cooperative provision, economies of scale. The employment powers must remain with the centre.

### 1.3 The District Cluster

The key support structure for schools should be the district cluster. This would replace the existing Regional model. The district cluster would be composed of schools, early childhood centres and TAFE Institutes within a defined regional locality. The cluster would also be able to develop linkages with local community organisations, services, business groups and local government authorities. The districts would be smaller, more numerous and more accessible than the existing Regions. We envisage that there would be around 50 clusters across Victoria.

The cluster would have a management committee composed of the educational institutions which are part of it. There would be a separate allocation of funds to the cluster. It would be supported by an adequate administrative infrastructure responsible to the management committee. The cluster would provide a range of support for schools and other education providers including various consultative services, student support services, determination of facilities grants, a special CRT fund and, possibly, a district CRT agency, support and coordination roles for early childhood education staff, support to school councils, curriculum support and professional development.

Cluster participants could develop many different forms of cooperation based on local interests and needs. These could range from cooperative transition processes; district provision of post-compulsory education and training; shared facilities; expertise and ideas; and the resolution of issues of mutual concern. The district clusters could also work with local government authorities and business groups to seek and implement ideas for the advancement of public education.

Special consideration and support would be given within this structure to meet the needs of schools in rural and remote areas.

The existing Regional administrative structure would cease to exist. Some of its functions would be brought closer to schools and be managed by schools through the district clusters while others would be taken over by the centre.

### 1.4 The Centre

The major change at the centre would be a cultural shift. The centre would become more accessible and transparent in its operations and functions. Accountability would not just be a one-way responsibility from the local level to the centre – there would be joint accountability in both directions. The impetus for improvement and change would also be shared between the school, the district cluster and the centre rather than the local level constantly being inundated with central policy edicts.

The existing functions of the centre should continue except that it should take over some of the administrative responsibilities of schools such as HRMS, PRMS and some of the time-consuming WorkCover administrative arrangements. It should also be responsible for some of the administrative responsibilities of Regions in their transition to district clusters.

The curriculum area of the centre needs to be reviewed due to overlap eg the role of the Board of Studies and DEET School Programs and the introduction of district clusters which would have a significant curriculum support function for schools. Both curriculum and professional development areas in the centre need to be far more responsive to the needs of teachers and schools in the development and implementation of policy.

The responsibility of preschools should be transferred from the Department of Human Services to DEET, consistent with DEET's responsibility for other parts of the education continuum and the situation in other states. The AEU believes that universal preschool education, systematically linked to schools, provides the necessary continuum for successful learning outcomes for all students. Additional information on the implications of this transfer are contained in the section on preschools.

A review should be undertaken to see whether some parts of the central function eg the Teacher Leave and Payroll section could be geographically re-located outside of the metropolitan area. This re-location could act as an employment initiative in a depressed regional area such as Gippsland.

## **2. RESOURCING AND THE SCHOOL GLOBAL BUDGET**

- 2.1 Victorian schools are recovering from seven lean years under the Kennett Government where the infrastructure of public education was deliberately run down as Victoria dropped to the bottom of the states' league table for spending on public education. The School Global Budget was the mechanism used to translate the macro funding cuts into the provision of education at the local level. Whatever the SOTF rhetoric of self management and the principles articulated by the Department to underpin the SGB, at the school level it was a case of being asked to do more with less. The rhetoric of increased school-based decision-making provokes cynicism when the context is one of resource reductions where the odium of cost-cutting is conveniently passed from the centre to the school.

The first need in any review of the SGB is a commitment to improve the funding levels of schools. The previous Minister for Education outraged the government school community when he announced that schools were "awash with money" and proceeded to publish figures purporting to support that statement. DEET has also published material attempting to show that schools hold significantly greater cash and investments now as compared to 1990. Both of these statements omit as much as they say. The context in 1990 was completely different to that in 1999, there were no global budgets in 1990 and the level of school holdings reflect that fact. A context of cutbacks, dire warnings from DEET, new administrative responsibilities and insecurities, the necessity to raise funds locally and the lack of administrative resources and training provided to those who have to manage the SGB all mean that the holding of cash reserves and a cautious planning approach become a prudent and even necessary budgeting process. To imply that schools are financially better off today than they were in 1990 lacks any credibility.

The Victorian Government itself placed on record in its 1997-8 Budget Papers that in 1991-2 government school expenditure in the state was 8% above the national average. By 1998, again according to the Victorian Government (in the Report on Government Services 1998 p.68), the state had the lowest per capita expenditure for primary and secondary education, at 95% and 96% respectively of the Australian average and the second lowest per capita out-of-school costs, at 75% of the Australian average.

- 2.2 The AEU rejects the arguments for an "averages in actuals out" model being argued by DEET and some ex-Self Governing Schools. The argument that such a model will release funds from above average schools to below average schools is specious. The number of staff in a school is determined by statewide parameters such as class sizes and workload. Unless there is an overall increase in the budget for schools the "equities" desired by DEET can only be achieved by forced transfer or the young in-old out strategy of the former Self Governing Schools program.

The AEU supports an "averages in averages out" model with a special needs component as compensation for disadvantaged schools.

- 2.3 The AEU supports the Government's commitment to resourcing schools on a needs basis so that no parent or student can be threatened with compulsory fees. In 1998 local fund-raising by Victorian government schools amounted to an extraordinary \$271 million (*PENG Funding Paper p.12*) which translates into \$520 per student. In 1996 local fund-raising was estimated by Victoria's Auditor-General at 16.9% of school operating revenue net of teacher salaries (*Report on Ministerial Portfolios 1997*). The Auditor-General commented that given the level of local fund-raising, schools had become reliant on this form of funding to supplement government funding.

The anecdotal evidence from schools is that the resource squeeze over the past seven years has meant that fund-raising at the school level is no longer an optional activity used for add-on programs but is seen by many schools as a necessity to supplement core areas such as staffing and classroom materials. For example, the AEU has evidence that small schools have used credit to

cash conversion and voluntary levies to employ staff and to supplement the clearly inadequate Teaching Support element in the SGB. Schemes such as the Department of Education's information technology funding program which requires schools to raise their own funds to become eligible for grants, also necessitate concerted local fund-raising.

The burden of local fund-raising has led to school fee rises and created pressure to convert "voluntary" fees into some form of compulsory levy. The AEU is completely opposed to this proposition as it undermines the very nature of a public schooling system accessible to all regardless of financial circumstances. The pressures towards a more user-pays view of public schools raises questions about the strength of the systemic commitment to equitable outcomes for all students. Schools which (because of the nature of their student population) had a greater dependence on the previous systemic support and equity structures available to government schools, had their disadvantage exacerbated when these structures were watered down or eliminated. Similarly, the cutbacks in staffing had a relatively greater effect in these schools because of their reliance on smaller classes to meet the particular needs of their students. Because of their limited fund-raising capacity, schools in low income areas have been further disadvantaged by the SOTF emphasis on schools generating their own income to meet program costs.

- 2.4 The AEU is particularly concerned about the plight of small schools. Students should not be disadvantaged because of the locality they live in or the size of the school they attend. The per capita funding model disadvantages small schools. There should be a guaranteed base resource allocation in relation to the core infrastructure needed by all schools as well as a base staffing level. DEET initiatives eg the Early Years program should also have a base allocation rather than a purely per capita approach.
- 2.5 The AEU supports further movement towards the goal of parity between primary and secondary funding. This development requires an overall increase in the resources available to schools and must occur within a context where the identified needs of secondary school funding are also addressed.
- 2.6 The AEU does not support student services money going directly into individual schools' global budgets because it will disadvantage smaller schools and sacrifice the advantages of systemic membership eg flexibility and economies of scale. The school should have a greater say in the mix of student services they can access through cooperating with other local schools as part of their district cluster
- 2.7 The budget allocation to schools for professional development should be substantially increased. The whole profession is presently embarked upon a long term program of skill development related to the rapidly expanding role of information technology within the context of an evolving globalised knowledge economy. The per teacher allocation for professional development in the School Global Budget should be raised from \$263 to at least \$500 and a per SSO allocation should be added.

- 2.8 The AEU recommends stricter financial accountability requirements for schools in relation to special purpose/initiative funds to ensure that they are being spent on their intended educational purpose and that the initiatives are actually being implemented.
- 2.9 The union rejects the navigator school model of concentrating substantial funds in a few schools. This approach has little effect on the other 1600 schools and entrenches inequities. Navigator schools have been used as a PR showcase for interstate and overseas visitors, while masking the real levels of government IT resourcing. The AEU is strongly of the opinion that schools which are beneficiaries of such special resourcing deals, using public money, should be required to send to DEET any financial advantage they have gained through the use of these resources in any form of money-making or business activities. DEET would then be responsible for equitably distributing the funds generated by this process to schools which were not similarly advantaged.

### **3. STAFFING**

- 3.1 DEET schools should be staffed according to a needs-based staffing approach. Such a policy will:

- Ensure greater stability of staffing relative to enrolment changes;
- Ensure the development and maintenance of special programs;
- Facilitate more effective school-based curriculum decisions to meet the curriculum needs of students;
- Lead to the diminution of excess transfers.

To implement needs-based staffing the following process should be followed:

- Each school will determine its staffing level each year on the basis of need. This determination will be undertaken jointly by the AEU sub-branch and school administration after appropriate consultation with the wider school community
  - The determination shall include a base level staff component sufficient to cover the required pupil instruction time within agreed class size and workload limits and allowing for the performance of administration, library, careers, student welfare, AEU representation, equal opportunity, OH&S and other relevant work functions.
  - The basis of allocation of staff shall be agreed between the AEU and DEET with priority being given to program needs in areas of greatest disadvantage according to an index of disadvantage established by DEET and the AEU.
- 3.2 The standard mode of employment in DEET should be ongoing except where the position is genuinely of a fixed-term nature. In this regard, the AEU

supports the terms of the March 2000 Staffing Agreement between DEET and the AEU.

- 3.3 All teachers and SSOs working in schools and other DEET settings should be DEET employees.
- 3.4 There should be an immediate increase in the numbers of support staff in schools. Victorian teachers and schools have the lowest levels of support staff within Australia. This is despite the fact that Victorian schools face the greatest local administrative burden. The FTE support staff to student ratios in government schools in 1999 was: Vic-1:65.57; NSW-1:64.86; ACT-1:60.53; Tas-1:49.02; WA-1:47.71; SA-1:47.10; Qland-1:43.89; NT-1:37.43 (Source: ABS Schools Australia 2000)

The changes brought about by the 'Schools of the Future' procedures meant a massive increase in schools' administrative loads. This burden has fallen very heavily on principals and those working as bursars and in other administrative capacities. Some wealthier schools have been able to accommodate this problem by spending a higher proportion of their global budgets on additional staff. This is not a widely available option, however. If schools are to have a higher level of self management they must be provided with the capacity to allow it to happen.

There is also an urgent need for additional support staff to relieve aspects of teacher workload. For a decade or more much has been made of the idea of complementing teachers' work roles with a variety of support staff who can assist them with clerical and administrative tasks and who can provide a higher level of individual support for students. This promised revolution in the mix of staff and staff roles has not occurred in Victoria because of the absence of resources to allow it to happen. There is distinct promise in this idea, but to enable it to be realised, resources must be made available.

As a first step, to bring Victoria to around the middle of the league table of states and territories, resources should be made available for an additional 2,500 EFT support staff for government schools. The mix of administrative and teaching support should be determined within statewide guidelines at the school level.

- 3.5 Selection of staff - either by way of initial appointment or by assignment of special duties or higher duties - should be by peer-based (and gender inclusive) panels. It must use the principles of merit-based selection meaning selection on the basis of relative ability, knowledge and skills in fair and open competition.
- 3.6 The AEU recognises the key role played by principals in developing schools of the highest quality. It is therefore important to ensure that new principals are as effective as possible in taking up such a crucial and demanding position. While we strongly support the local appointment of principals on merit we believe that the quality of this process can be further improved by insisting on the formal training and accreditation for intending applicants for principal

positions This training should emphasise the necessity for a team approach and the value of a participatory model of administration.

- 3.7 The proportion of women in senior management and school leadership positions declined significantly under the previous government. Women make up the majority of the teaching work force and through merit selection procedures have consistently demonstrated their competence in leadership roles. Previously there were measures in place to encourage and support female applicants. These have been abandoned. They must be restored.
- 3.8 District support roles should be established for early childhood education. This proposal has two purposes. The first is to provide support and coordination functions for increasingly isolated early childhood education staff, to share useful knowledge and to provide points of reference for development and improvements. The second is to provide another possibility for career development of those working in early childhood education.
- 3.9 A growing concern for schools throughout Victoria is the supply of relief teachers. This has become acute in some regional areas. At present many schools contract private agencies to service their needs. This process is less than satisfactory because the teacher has to pay the agency when they are hired by a school (in almost all other industries the employer pays) and because the reach of the agencies is limited in many hard-to-staff areas. The AEU proposes that DEET investigate the setting up of its own unit to locate relief teachers for schools. The unit could be set up along the lines of the successful Queensland Teacher Relief and Contract Employment Register (TRACER) and trialed in a hard-to-staff regional area.
- 3.10 A major concern for the AEU is the teacher supply and demand problem now facing all schools. Victoria is presently experiencing a teacher shortage which will become significantly worse over the next 5 years. Teacher supply and demand figures from the Deans of Education indicate that some Victorian schools will face a major staffing crisis within two or three years. Graduating teachers from all of Victoria's universities will fill only 81% of the demand for primary teachers and 68% for secondary teachers in 2001. By 2005 the figure for primary will be just 61% and for secondary an even more disastrous 53%. Already schools are reporting shortages in a range of subject areas with an increasing number of classes being taken by teachers outside their area of expertise. In harder to staff schools, there is evidence that CRT availability is now restricting access of teachers to professional development opportunities.

The international and national teacher shortfall precludes any quick-fix solutions through interstate or overseas recruitment as happened in the 1960s during the last such crisis. The only possible solution is to recruit and train Victorians as teachers.

The AEU believes that urgent and comprehensive action must be taken to address the emerging shortage of qualified teachers. Our concern is that there will be a return to a situation where many students had their progress jeopardised through the use of unqualified teachers Any proposals must have at

their centre security of employment and professional status and contain effective measures to attract young people into the teaching profession.

The AEU recommends that the following action should be taken to meet the emerging crisis.

1. The payment of HECS fees and the provision of studentships and other incentives to attract young people into teaching in targeted priority areas;
2. Offers of ongoing employment to graduate students by June of their final year of study, subject to satisfactory completion of their qualification, including the offer of subsidised rental assistance in defined isolated areas;
3. The expansion of the number of EFT places in teacher education courses in universities;
4. Resource support for teacher training placements in rural and remote schools;
5. An ongoing advertising campaign to promote teaching as a career;
6. A campaign to recruit those people living in Victoria with teaching qualifications who are not presently teaching;
7. DEET to pay for or reimburse successful applicants for police and medical checks;
8. The provision of an induction program in schools which includes a mentor program and a reduction in face to face teaching in the first year of employment;
9. Ensuring that the normal mode of employment is ongoing and that the only contracts that exist are restricted to genuine short-term vacancies;
10. Providing meaningful incentives to teachers to undertake further studies such as the payment of HECS fees for all post graduate study and the provision of study leave in priority areas;
11. Improvements in salaries and conditions to make Victorian government schools competitive with interstate and overseas schools;
12. The establishment of the Victorian Institute of Teaching. The AEU believes that this gives recognition to the importance of teachers' work and should protect the professional and ethical standards of the teaching profession at pre-service and post graduate levels.

The AEU calls upon the Government to develop a comprehensive common system of professional teacher registration across all sectors of

education – preschools, schools, TAFE, AMES and Disability Services which:

- establishes policy that controls standards and entry into the teaching profession in all sectors
- establishes policy and appropriate processes which uphold the standards of the teaching profession and protects the public and the profession by the implementation of sanctions, including deregistration.
- recognises the rights and responsibilities of principals and teachers
- enhances professional development for principals and teachers
- promotes a better understanding of the work of the profession by those outside the profession
- advises Government on teacher supply issues and trends.

To this end, the AEU calls upon the Ministers for Education, Post Compulsory Education, Training and Employment and Community Services to co-operatively sponsor one teacher registration authority.

#### **4. THE CURRICULUM**

4.1 The curriculum policies and initiatives of the State Government during the Kennett years acted to contract rather than maintain or expand the professional nature of teachers' work. There is a general feeling amongst teachers that there has been a growing centralisation of curriculum decision-making and that most DEET and Board of Studies curriculum initiatives are measurement-driven. Curriculum change is now largely viewed as central office policy with little input from classroom teachers, little implementation support from the Department and locked into place by Executive Memoranda.

The AEU believes that this approach stifles innovation and excellence and discounts the professional knowledge and expertise of teachers. It also makes it far more difficult for a school to develop curriculum initiatives which cater for individual differences and the learning needs of their specific student population.

There is a need to move the impetus for curriculum development away from the centre towards district clusters, networks and schools. Conscious efforts should be made by DEET and the Board of Studies to increase flexibility at the local level in all of their curriculum initiatives. Measuring performance is not the same as improving it. Scarce resources should be used strategically; on improvement strategies rather than accountability requirements. The core task must remain effectively accommodating and addressing the needs of all students and facilitating their learning progress to achieve socially just outcomes. The justification for any measurement strategy is the value of its contribution to this task.

4.2 The implementation of curriculum change is another area of major concern for teachers and schools. The CSF and the Revised VCE are examples of poorly thought-out implementation processes. As a minimum, all curriculum initiatives require:

- The involvement of the profession in the development of implementation strategies
- timely, clear and consistent communication,
- a reasonable implementation time-line,
- adequate support materials provided before implementation occurs,
- a well-resourced and effective professional development program,
- an adequate CRT budget and, where necessary, resourcing for travel,
- pupil-free days (for any major change) and
- measures to address any increase in the volume and complexity of work.

#### 4.3 *The Early Years*

The importance of the early years of education to later success is acknowledged in the rhetoric of governments, in the views of the wider community and is solidly confirmed by educational research. To minimise subsequent problems in schooling, every possible effort should be made to develop foundation skills in literacy, numeracy and social behaviour.

Smaller class sizes are a necessary, but not sufficient condition for improvement in the levels of performance. Data from the National School English Literacy Survey (1997) and other wide scale research conducted in Victoria suggest that there is a persistent under-performing group of about 20 per cent of the student population in which boys are proportionately over represented. Other recent research suggests that considerable proportion of this group appear to make limited progress after Year 4. This is a problem which must be tackled head on.

The AEU calls for: programs such as Reading Recovery, Success For All and Making a Difference being properly funded on a state-wide basis, a process of diagnostic entry level analysis to clarify the needs of students and establish relevant and useful base-line data, sufficient time being made available for teachers to re-design teaching programs both in terms of their content and structure, a common and educationally sound process of monitoring achievement and user-friendly and effective support materials and professional development.

If literacy and numeracy are to be priorities, and we believe they must be, one of the major impediments is the crowding of the primary curriculum. This

crowding comes from two sources. The first is *ad hoc* initiatives whereby schools are supposed to drop whatever it is they are doing and turn their attention to a current newsworthy social problem. The second is the arrangement of the curriculum under the Curriculum and Standards Framework which, despite improvements in CSF II, still imposes a subject-based secondary model on what has conventionally been an integrated program with some specialisations.

Primary schools do their best under these constraints. However, if literacy and numeracy are to become matters of the highest priority as we have suggested, they must be allowed to be accorded that priority in practice. The other urgent demand is for the development of skills in information technology. Schools should be required to devote substantial blocks of uninterrupted time to the development of skills in literacy and numeracy, and to teach information technology skills as a separate process and as a tool for use in other areas of learning.

The Curriculum and Standards Framework will continue to provide general guidance for other areas of the curriculum. Science, Studies of Society and the Environment, the Arts and so on, will also find their place in a rich curriculum both as separate subject studies and as components of study integrated with other knowledge and skills.

4.4 Specific concerns of the AEU in relation to existing mandated curriculum include AIM tests, CSF II and the Revised VCE.

4.4.1 AIM universal testing program

This should be replaced by comprehensive school-based assessment and systemic sample testing. Our concerns about universal testing are longstanding, research-based and relate to their educational value, their impact on the curriculum, their accuracy, their devaluation of teachers' professional judgements, their cost and the way they are used. The following is a summary of our position:

*Universal testing has little educational value.*

- Universal statewide testing does **not** provide additional, relevant, high quality, teaching and learning information for parents, teachers and students to act upon. The tests are not diagnostic, nor are they related to schools' curriculum programs.
- Because of large variations in test preparation and administration, across schools and from one class to another, the validity and reliability of AIM tests are highly questionable.
- AIM tests will be disruptive and time-consuming for schools. They will further crowd the curriculum.
- Every year of the LAP there were serious problems with the design and implementation of the tests. There is no reason to expect that the AIM will be any different.
- Universal testing provides only a one day snapshot of student performance and this frequently gives children and parents the

wrong idea about the real level of achievement. A more accurate and appropriate indication is gained through the school's existing assessment and reporting processes.

- Unconstructive and sometimes damaging "typing" of students as dumb and smart occurs, as some parents and students parade and compare test results.
- By focussing on limited student outcomes, AIM will militate against, and devalue the importance of: co-operative learning; integrated curriculum; sensitivity to cultural difference and pluralism; the key link between physical and emotional development and the process of learning.
- Parents trust and value teachers' judgements about student progress more than they do universal testing.
- Many parents did not discuss the LAP report with their child and their teachers.
- Completed LAP test papers were not made available for teachers' use or for discussion with parents.
- The three month gap between LAP test administration and the reporting of results made a mockery of any idea that students could learn from this test. There is no indication that this will change with AIM.

*Universal testing undermines teachers and schools.*

- Universal statewide testing devalues and belittles locally-based assessment practices, along with the associated parent and teacher inputs.
- Universal statewide testing undermines the professional role of the teacher in the learning and assessment process. It demonstrates the government's lack of trust in teachers.

*Universal testing is an expensive political exercise.*

- Universal statewide testing satisfies political needs only, appearing to meet the electorate's reported clamour for accountability.
- LAP reports were expensive, public relations and political marketing documents.
- The Board of Studies budgeted for more than \$2 million per annum for the LAP testing program and has indicated that AIM will cost around the same. If teachers' and principals' time is also factored in, another \$2 million was conservatively added to the annual cost. This diverted funds from declining education budgets.
- Sample testing and school-based assessment, which will provide "close and regular monitoring" (Board of Studies) for SOSE/Science, should also be used for any additional information needed for literacy and numeracy.

The National School English Literacy Survey is a good example of how accurate student achievement data can be collected in educationally

sound ways. The AEU was an active participant in the survey. The data generated was reliable and helpful, providing an informative national picture of the state of literacy skills and directions for what needed to be done to improve with various target groups. Secondly, the instruments and procedures used were strictly related to conventional teaching processes and to teachers' goals. The sample of students involved would have found their participation consistent with their educational experience. This survey provides a sound model for replacing the AIM tests.

The AEU is also concerned about some current material within DEET which seeks to justify the retention of universal statewide testing by questioning the accuracy of the professional judgements of teachers. The material contrasts the greater spread of the LAP test results with teacher-judged assessment arising from the CSF. This argument is invalid and displays a lack of understanding of the differences between a one-off test designed to create a spread of achievement in relation to a set of test items and the criterion-based Levels within the CSF which are constructed in such a way that teachers can only realistically choose between three categories (beginning, consolidating and established) in one CSF Level when they report student achievement in the School Annual Reports.

The universal test results should be contrasted for their accuracy, scope and reliability with the year long judgements made by teachers using an array of assessment instruments, including diagnostic testing, which are reported outside of the straitjacket of the CSF categories and Levels. The Annual Report CSF data is a comment on the flawed nature of the CSF reporting format rather than the accuracy and professionalism of the way teachers assess. The DEET argument is another example of the narrowly measurement-driven agenda of the centre.

#### 4.4.2 CSF II

The AEU has a range of concerns about the P-10 Curriculum and Standards Framework. They include:

*The CSF II's alignment of Year Levels and CSF Levels.*

The retention of this linkage creates bad educational practice in schools, particularly when the DOE requires reporting against these Levels. The CSF II acknowledges in its Overview what all teachers know from their classroom experience - students develop at different rates and not according to a rigid time-table. The combination of DOE-imposed reporting restrictions and the Year Level-CSF Level linkage sends out exactly the opposite message; to the detriment of many of the young people involved.

There is also evidence emerging that the CSF structure actually lowers expectations in schools. Some schools have attempted to introduce their own rules to cope with the Year Level link (eg students can only be "consolidating" in the first year and "established" in the second year for each CSF Level). The reality is that with the CSF system students

cannot be at CSF Level 4 in Grade 4. Therefore parents, and students themselves, are given a distorted picture of student achievement levels. Yet one of the rationales for the CSF Level-Year Level link is that it will help to clarify achievement information in reporting to parents.

These problems are compounded for content-based KLAs like Science. Students are unable to reach the next CSF Level before the rest of the class, as the content has not yet been taught. In addition, some students never reach an "established" CSF Level. They are "beginning" or "consolidating" at Level 4 and when they proceed to the next Year Level the content changes so that they move to "beginning" at Level 5 without any opportunity to "establish" themselves at Level 4. This has major implications for student self-esteem and parental understanding of the CSF as an achievement monitor.

One part of the CSF Level-Year Level relationship which is not referred to in the Overview to the CSF II is resourcing levels. Resourcing levels are a key factor in the inclusiveness of the CSF. Some students are capable of reaching "established" CSF Levels at the designated Year Levels if they are given additional assistance in small class sizes. The research is quite clear about the impact of staffing levels and class sizes on student progress. Desirable resourcing levels to make the CSF Levels accessible to as many students as possible at each Year Level need to be added to any link made between the CSF Levels and Year Levels.

#### *Assessment and Reporting*

A report should be a means of conveying meaningful and accessible information to parents (and students) and providing the basis for a constructive dialogue with the teacher. How this can be done with CSF-based reports is unclear. The existing CSF reporting system may make sense as a means of collecting statistics for DEET, and may work as theory within the educational outcomes movement, but it holds little attraction for the end users. The general comment from parents about CSF reporting formats is that the technicalities of the new framework overwhelm the message. Parents are offered lots of information but gain little understanding of their child's learning progress.

Parents have shown little interest in reports based upon the CSF Levels. This is despite attempts by schools to communicate the meaning of CSF reporting and the different Levels. The CSF boxes on reports have created confusion and misunderstanding. The use of Beginning, Consolidating and Established, combined with a CSF level, has proved a bar to communication.

Parents have indicated confusion about how the CSF Levels relate to Year Levels ('Why do you say she's only a 4 when she's in Grade 6?') and are generally perplexed by the 1-3 scaling ('Consolidating?'). Messages about student progress often seem negative rather than positive and exclude important things which parents want to know.

Added to this, there has been virtually no community education program about the CSF from either the DEET or the Board of Studies. Individual schools and teachers cannot be left to explain to the community a new mandatory statewide curriculum system.

Parents indicate they want reports which have written comments in language they can understand and, in secondary schools, many of them want to keep letter grades. They ask for clear explanations about the academic and social development of their child; emphasising progress rather than measurement. Reports based upon the CSF must be able to achieve this outcome.

The dilemma for teachers is how to carry out the Department's CSF assessment and reporting instructions in an educationally sound way which balances student learning needs, parental understanding, teacher workload, classroom organisation, professional judgement, the potential for complaint and litigation, curriculum integrity and available resources.

Teachers indicate that they are spending additional time on CSF recording, assessment and reporting above and beyond that spent on the same activities prior to the arrival of the CSF. This is a matter of considerable concern, as it means that either student learning time is reduced and/or teacher workload is increased. CSF reporting processes, for example, involve significant additional work. The boxing and cataloguing process is done in most schools despite its marginal contribution to learning development strategies. Teachers are being required to work out 'the standard to put in the box' (knowing that this will mean little to parents) as well as a more relevant and valued layer of reporting. Time is being wasted in what amounts to double reporting.

Teachers also indicate that assessment of CSF standards can be onerous, professionally compromising and 'a complex task'. It is difficult to make definitive statements about where students are in terms of the CSF levels. The precision implied by the written CSF outcomes does not translate into authentic and practical classroom assessment. Teachers are unprofessionally encouraged by DEET requirements to 'guess' and believe it's safest to put students 'in the middle'.

The AEU believes that CSF assessment and reporting issues will best be resolved by greater flexibility at the school level. Schools operating within the CSF statewide curriculum framework can determine the particular learning needs of their own students and the appropriate means for facilitating, assessing and reporting their progress. The CSF standards may act as a useful guide and reference in those processes. Their role should not be extended beyond that function.

#### 4.4.3 Revised VCE

The VCE was introduced in the belief that reforms could be made to senior secondary education to make it sufficiently flexible and engaging to productively accommodate the vast majority of students. The four alternative streams ('Group 2' subjects, Schools Year 12 and Tertiary Entrance Certificate (STC), Technical Year 12 (T-12), and TAFE Tertiary Entrance and Vocational Entrance Programs (TOP/VOP)) which at the time enrolled more than 30 per cent of Year 12 students, were incorporated into the new arrangements on that understanding.

Whether or not the original VCE arrangements were able to deliver on that promise is moot. But they no longer exist. Changes made over the past seven years have progressively tightened the academic focus and the intensity and constancy of assessment and reduced the flexibility needed to accommodate the whole range of students. The original objective has been largely lost sight of, with the result that groups of young people feel their needs are not being met within the present structure and operation of the VCE.

The 1997 VCE Review was largely motivated by concerns about "cheating" and whether the Certificate process was rigorous enough for university selection. The changes which were introduced:

- increased the level of prescription, diminishing the opportunities for teachers to provide effectively for the whole group of students at Years 11 and 12;
- narrowed the range of assessment;
- increased the amount of external assessment and diminished the effective role of the teacher in this process; and
- made the VCE effectively a university entrance test.

The more difficult question of how to balance the needs of a minority of students (around 35%) going on to tertiary study with the needs of the majority who have different post-school destinations, was barely addressed. As a consequence, the revised VCE is less inclusive than its predecessor and does nothing to retain those many young people who find it difficult to complete their schooling.

Under the Terms of Reference of the Post-Compulsory Review into Education and Training Pathways the structure and operation of the VCE cannot be touched. The Interim Report of the Review however, indicated the Revised VCE is seen to be failing large groups of young people due to a severe lack of flexibility in the curriculum.

In these circumstances the AEU calls for:

- An urgent evaluation of the recent changes to the VCE. The evaluation should include the impact of the changes on the post-compulsory pathways for all young people and their impact on student and teacher workload.

- The development of school-based and other alternative programs of study for students in Years 11 and 12 whose needs are not presently being met by the VCE or VET. These programs should be focused on general education, skill and confidence building, with some element of work experience. They should be formally accredited through an expanded (and more flexible) VCE structure or other appropriate credentialling. These programs need not be linked to an ENTER score but must lead to other alternative forms of continuing education which may in turn lead to tertiary entrance.
  - The assessment of VET courses to be based on student achievement of the competency standards built into each course. The provision of funding for schools to enable students to undertake, where appropriate, Entry level/Certificate I VET courses and Certificate courses in General Education and Workplace Education as part of a revised VCE structure.
  - A review of selection processes into tertiary and TAFE courses with a view to lessening the negative impact of the existing ENTER system on individual students, schools and the post-compulsory curriculum.
  - VCE results, and any information about student and school achievement derived from those results, to be regarded as confidential to the student and the VCE provider and not made available to any persons, organisations or the media to use for the purposes of publicly comparing students and/or schools.
  - A review of the continuation of the General Achievement Test (GAT) in the light of the changes to VCE assessment procedures, including the introduction of statistical moderation and SACs. The AEU is particularly concerned at the decision of the Board of Studies to provide the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre with student GAT Results for the purpose of tertiary selection. This decision contradicts Board assurances at the time of the introduction of the GAT that it would not be used for this purpose.
- 4.5 Concern about curriculum developments over the past seven years has been exacerbated by the lack of any formal teacher representation in the State's principal education forums, such as the Board of Studies. The AEU believes such representation is both a professional right and a necessary guarantee of quality and professional confidence in the decisions made by these forums.

## 5. **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

- 5.1 The AEU believes that professional development is a key element in improving teacher quality in Victorian schools. It acts as both a catalyst for professional renewal and as a means of supporting teachers who find themselves in the centre of curriculum, organisational and career change. The AEU contends, and this is supported in the academic research, that the most effective professional development for teachers is that where they learn from each other. Collective professional learning enables the good ideas, the innovative practice, the knowledge about what really works, to pass from individual teachers and individual schools to the system as a whole. It is important that the resources put into professional development recognise this reality.
- 5.2 It is the AEU view that:
- 5.2.1 The focus of resource allocation should be shifted away from central DEET initiatives to the PD plans of teachers. The central contribution to professional development should be largely driven by school needs rather than by policy initiatives and plans developed within the centre.
- 5.2.2 The budget allocation to schools for professional development should be substantially increased. The whole profession is presently embarked upon a long term program of skill development related to the rapidly expanding role of information technology within the context of an evolving globalised knowledge economy. The per teacher allocation for professional development in the School Global Budget should be raised from \$263 to at least \$500 and a per SSO allocation should be added.
- 5.2.3 The fundamental requirement for effective professional learning by teachers is the provision of time. The AEU believes that in addition to six student-free days which are used for planning and administration, curriculum development, assessment and reporting and professional development each individual teacher should be entitled to be released for up to two days per year for professional development purposes. Two additional student-free days should be allocated for new curriculum initiatives during a time of unprecedented social and technological change where schools are at the forefront of a new globalised knowledge economy.
- 5.2.4 DEET resources and materials should encourage cooperative team-based approaches to professional development, not only because of their effectiveness, but to seek to restore the collaborative learning culture within schools after the previous government's heavy-handed system of individualised performance review. Cooperative professional learning, involving all staff, is the most effective means of fostering whole school improvement strategies.
- 5.2.5 Beyond the school, district clusters and networks should be properly resourced to provide support and programs for teachers on

a district basis.

- 5.2.6 The AEU strongly supports an expansion of the highly successful Teacher Release to Industry Program (TRIP). The existing program has produced major benefits for the teachers involved, their students, the professional status of teachers and the quality of the public system of education. The general program should be increased from its present 50 placements per year and a more specialised VET component, aimed at increasing the number of VET teachers in schools, should be introduced. The VET component would provide a range of paid industry release places for qualified teachers to gain recent industry experience in order to qualify to teach VET courses in schools.
- 5.2.7 The model of professional development provision which has been most successful in the past has been one where all of the major stakeholders work together. The National Professional Development Program was the best example of this during the 1990s. It is important that professional development structures represent all major stakeholders within the public sector and cooperative provision of programs is encouraged.
- 5.2.8 One of the important roles of the Victorian Institute of Teaching should be to develop overall PD guidelines and policies for the teaching profession.

## **6. STUDENT WELFARE**

- 6.1 The AEU is committed to a public education system which accepts responsibility for the participation and outcomes of all young people in our society. There is no excuse for the system to accept poor and unequal outcomes and do little to address failure, truancy, drop-out rates and levels of disaffection.

Student Welfare is integral to all aspects of school life and schools must aim to ensure that a safe and supportive environment and culture is created and maintained so that the experience of teaching and learning is enhanced for all students.

The provision of welfare is essential to students' sense of self worth and the development of their identity and in the achievement of the goals of the school. It fosters the personal and social development of the individual and it is a pre-requisite for students to be in an effective learning situation. Students who have achieved a sense of belonging and acceptance are well placed to apply themselves to the learning task.

The AEU supports a welfare model which identifies all teachers as exerting an influence on the welfare of students and one which clearly recognises the need for school-based resources as well as specialist support services from outside the school.

Budget cuts to government schooling on an unprecedented scale reduced schools' capacity and willingness to cope with less able, and less willing, students both directly and indirectly: directly, by cuts to services and programs for such students; and, indirectly, through the increased workloads and pressure on staff and schools. These burdens fell heaviest on areas with the highest concentration of students of this type through the withdrawal of supplementary funding. Teacher morale, and consequent willingness to take on 'tougher' cases, has been badly damaged.

- 6.2 Many issues in student welfare gain their greatest urgency in the middle years of schooling. The most pressing issue around the transitional point between primary and secondary education is the loss of engaged students. This can occur passively through loss of interest and motivation, actively through self-abusive and/or anti-social behaviour or simply by walking away from schooling. It is caused by factors as conventional as adolescent rebellion, but it is compounded by increasing levels of family and social dislocation.

In the past decade people working in schools have experienced the direct impact of the rising division of our society into two groups - the information, resource and opportunity rich, and those who are poor in the same commodities. This process was deliberately accelerated by the previous government's policies. Among those hardest hit have been those in provincial cities and rural towns and outlying areas. We also note the extraordinarily rates of unemployment and decline in the availability of supportive social infrastructure in parts of the metropolitan area.

Government schools currently enrol more homeless children than ever before. We see more cases of abuse and of prospective delinquency. Principals in secondary schools report increased rates of absence, suspension and exclusion. The majority of these cases appear in the early years of secondary schooling. The specialised services to assist these children to become constructive members of society have been decimated.

It is important to distinguish what education and educators can and cannot do about these problems. Many problems can be nipped in the bud through vigilance and firm warnings. Others require more systematic efforts by schools. But there are still other cases which require more intensive attention and more structured care and supervision.

Many government secondary schools in Victoria as elsewhere in Australia have made changes to the way in which they are organised to increase the level of student engagement - by reducing the number of teachers with whom students have contact, by blocking subjects together, by developing collaborative teams of teachers with specific pastoral responsibility for groups of students ('sub-schooling') and by revising their teaching and learning practices.

In many cases these steps have been manifestly successful. However the breakdown of systemic interest in educational issues and increased competition between schools has meant minimal circulation of the results of such research-in-practice. If this issue is to be tackled head on and if, as we believe, there are

changes to school work practices and curriculum programs which provide solutions, they must be supported and promoted on a state-wide basis.

As noted above, there are students whose domestic and social lives are so dislocated that schools working on substantial staff-student ratios simply cannot cope with them alone. Expert assistance and additional support is required. Several hundred positions have been cut from specialist support areas and access to additional support for students who are at risk because of serious social and behavioural problems is minimal.

There should be a higher level of coordination between schools and state and non government support agencies and the chance to test the value of providing a range of social support and health services on the same site, but the most important task is to restore the previous level of student welfare services immediately.

- 6.3 A review of the curriculum, particularly at the middle school and VCE levels, is needed to ensure that some groups of students are not marginalised through the lack of constructive and engaging pathways which meet their needs.

In its submission to the Review of Post-Compulsory Education and Training Pathways, the AEU identified two groups of students who are presently marginalised and at risk in the middle school and post-compulsory years:

- i) The first group have poor academic records and histories of failure. They may be deficient in skills of literacy and numeracy, lack self-esteem and engagement and need catch-up help and higher than customary levels of support. Rigid institutional arrangements and formal relationships with their teachers and other adults do not support their learning.

They can learn successfully, but they require structure, high levels of support and contact, work (the value of which makes sense to them) and the experience of success. The pace and pressure of learning and competitiveness between individual students need to be reduced. The environments of their learning need to be less formal and they need to learn that they can have a hand in making decisions about the nature of their education.

- ii) The second group exhibit many co-occurring risk factors, including: learning disabilities and disorders; interrupted schooling; poor self esteem; lack of parental support and unstable accommodation; issues surrounding emotional/physical trauma; poor concentration skills; challenging behaviours; limited skills in dealing with conflict; substance abuse; sporadic attendance and high levels of transience.

Providing an effective response to the needs of these students is extremely difficult and complex but intensive case management has proven effective in such cases and, while still in its early stages, we

applaud the development of Full Service Schools which may go some way to meeting their needs.

- 6.4 Sufficient resources should be provided to cut class sizes so that student needs can be properly identified and met by classroom teachers. Student welfare is at the heart of teachers' attitudes to their work but if classes and teaching allotments are too big the workload becomes an impossible barrier.
- 6.5 A review of student welfare services should take place to identify needs, examine existing provision, propose ways to better coordinate and improve services and to address the resourcing implications.  
NB. It is important to point out that the cost per annum of effective work with students who are not succeeding at school does not increase on the basis of the average per annum cost of all students in schools. As the effective reach of school education increases, the cost increases exponentially.
- 6.6 One Student Welfare Coordinator who is teacher-trained and part of the teaching establishment should be provided for every secondary college for up to the first 500 students with a further Student Welfare Coordinator for every additional 500 students or part thereof. In addition, a component (adequate funds) should be provided within the School Global Budget of all primary schools for student welfare coordination. Intensive and ongoing training and professional development should be provided for student welfare coordinators.
- 6.7 School-based support for the needs of young people in schools must be supplemented by access to properly funded support services within the Department of Education, Employment and Training and funded access to appropriate external agencies.

Within DEET, alternative settings eg Teaching Units and Community Schools, play a crucial role in ensuring that public schooling is as inclusive as possible. These settings have been shown to be effective in the areas of school alienation, truancy, retention rates, skill development and generally providing positive options for students at considerable risk within a mainstream setting. DEET should indicate a long-term commitment to such settings. They should be fully and centrally funded and staffed by DEET. There should also be a review to see whether identified student needs require the extension of current settings and the establishment of additional settings.

District clusters should be used to develop close and ongoing relationships with other government services such as Health and Community Services Victoria and municipal and community welfare and support agencies.

- 6.8 Constructive participation in education must be used by DEET as a key policy indicator for performance of the system. This will be visible in rates of retention, departure and both passive and active exclusion.

Good data is one essential component of monitoring and improving what is happening both at school level and more generally. Schools already collect, analyse and publish samples of data regarding attendance. Schools should also

be encouraged to systematically monitor lateness and non-completion of required work.

One area in which there has been a clear abdication of responsibility is the refusal to collect and publish data on rates of suspension and exclusion. General aggregated data on these subjects must be reported on a system-wide basis annually. One of the grounds for systemic intervention at school level should be unusually high levels of suspension and exclusion by comparison with schools of similar socio-economic composition.

- 6.9 The existing disabilities and impairments resourcing model within DEET should be reviewed, particularly in relation to the criteria used for resourcing integration support.

## **7. ACCOUNTABILITY**

- 7.1 Schools should have rolling three-year Strategic Plans designed to improve the learning outcomes of students in Victorian education. These Plans should set clear targets for achievement over the relevant period. They should be constructed in partnership with teachers, those most actively involved in achieving these targets. Joint participation is a fundamental component of joint accountability.

To meet those targets, timelines should be established which are challenging but reasonable and with adequate resources attached.

- 7.2 There should be a review of existing central and regional demands on school administrators. This review should be conducted with the over-arching purpose of reducing bureaucratic interference in the functioning of schools.

School Charters currently define the responsibilities of schools. A government Charter should also exist which clarifies and defines their roles and rights and the roles and rights of those who work in them.

It should define core informational requirements and information gathering procedures and timelines. Trivia and repetition should be deleted. Other information should only be gathered with the agreement of the school.

- 7.3 The AEU supports constructive intervention for schools which are doing less well than others in meeting common targets.

All educational institutions must provide services of the highest quality. We acknowledge that, for a variety of reasons, there is some variability in this at present. Schools should never be allowed to get to the point of performing poorly. Warning signs are eminently visible. The current system of reporting and review allows relevant data to be collected and analysed. The next step of constructive intervention through the provision of expert advice and support is absent. This is at least partly because the function of conducting reviews has been contracted out to consultants who have no formal connection with the

Department, nor any responsibility to intervene and provide support. Thus problem situations are left unresolved.

The AEU supports a process of school review which has as an essential component, action taken to redress problems, including review and revision of management personnel, administrative procedures, programs and program provision. This should be a staged process beginning with an action plan to be followed with support to put it in place.

- 7.4 All organisations must have good data to work effectively. Because of its complexity, the multiplicity of its goals and the very significant differences in context and other background factors, education provides a difficult field for measurement. We need to be clear about what is being measured and the purposes for which it is to be used.

At present the AEU has deep reservations about some of the instruments and procedures which have been put in place. To be useful, data must be reliable, valid and related to its intended purpose. Collection procedures must be non-intrusive. The union has been deeply critical of the Learning Assessment Program (the 'LAP') since its inception on these grounds. It has been an expensive, clumsy and unreliable process, driven more by superficial political motives than by the need to provide valid and useful information to schools and parents. The only difference in the new AIM tests in literacy and numeracy at Years 3 and 5 appears to be a name change.

The AEU is also concerned about the use of CSF results in School Annual Reports. Teachers indicate that these results are less than accurate representations of student achievement due to the nature of the CSF standards and the categories into which achievement is divided. (For a more detailed critique of the AIM tests and the CSF standards see the section on Curriculum in this response.)

However, we recognise the importance of reliable information about performance to the public, the source of funding to our educational institutions, and to parents who want to know just where their children stand.

We propose work should take place on two types of wide-scale data gathering.

The first relates to school performance. We should construct measures to identify the differences that schools make to their students. Reliably constructed and wide-ranging evaluation procedures could provide useful and valid information about the value that schools have added to their students over 13 years of schooling. We need comprehensive measures capable of capturing the complexity of student achievement and the school contribution to it. Work on this matter is presently proceeding in a number of different education systems around the world. We need to tap into this research to develop evaluation procedures which provide quality information about the impact of schools on student outcomes.

The second relates to student performance. We recognise the right of parents to know how their children are performing on a comparative basis in critical areas

of their education such as literacy and numeracy. To provide this information there is no need for anything other than to conduct a statewide sample of performance, using non-intrusive procedures which are strictly related to current teaching procedures and goals. Schools can and will conduct their own comprehensive assessment programs, including testing, using similar procedures and provide information in a consistent form to parents on this basis. Where areas of need arise resources (including support and advice, the formulation of a plan for improvement and some additional resources) must be provided.

- 7.5 Constructive participation in education must be used by DEET as a key policy indicator for performance of the system. This will be visible in rates of retention, departure and both passive and active exclusion. Accurate and transparent information should be publicly available on retention and drop-out rates, the destinations of students, truancy, suspension and exclusion.

## **8. SCHOOL COUNCILS**

- 8.1 Under the previous State Government a corporate view of the school emerged. Instead of the notion of a partnership between all sections of the school community, parents came to be seen as "clients" and the school council one more link in the line management chain of DEET. Any devolution of powers from the centre was filtered through the principal whose role was to "manage" the school council on behalf of DEET. The implications of this view became evident following the introduction of Self Governing Schools where, with minimal democratic processes, a number of school councils were railroaded into self governing status by eager principals and DEET officials.

The AEU does not believe that this corporate model is in the best interests of a public system of education. It serves to distance the school from its community, gives off negative signals about the value of parental involvement in education and undermines broader concepts of citizenship and democracy. The partnership between parents, staff and students must be at the core of all school councils. The need for specific types of expertise at the school level can be addressed through such means as cooption to school councils, contracting specialist advice and the use of community networks. It should not be used to undermine the notion of democratic community-based school councils. The functions of school councils should be appropriate to their resources and capacities.

- 8.2 Uncertainties exist about the boundaries of roles and responsibilities of school councils, especially in the climate of self-management. The previous government played a major part in generating these problems by promising one thing and acting out another. Because of this, there is a sense of frustration amongst many school councillors about the hollow-ness of self-management in practice. These uncertainties must be resolved.
- 8.3 The role of the school councillor is both very important and relatively complex. It is therefore essential that effective ongoing professional development be made available for all new school councillors to support them in their role. The AEU has received many reports of the inadequacy of the professional

development offered by DEET and its contracted agency over the past few years. This is an area which needs to be comprehensively reviewed.

- 8.4 One of the major roles of school councils should be the promotion of public education in its local area. This role could be undertaken by individual councils and in cooperation with other councils in their district cluster. To help councils with this task, DEET should provide support materials and training as part of a comprehensive professional development program

## **9. PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS**

- 9.1 Parents are the first educators of their children and as such have a most important role to play in their eventual success. They also have a continuing role to play. Government schools and their staffs are currently doing much good work in this area. The AEU proposes the following initiatives to strengthen the positive aspects of the home-school relationship and provide an underpinning of support to all parties in the partnership. The focus of the partnership with parents must be on involvement, collaboration and participation in their children's learning.
- 9.2 Homework is not an optional extra, but an essential part of a good education. There is clear evidence that it helps pupils reach higher standards. It allows more effective use of teaching time, improves pupils' study skills and attitudes to learning and quite simply increases learning time. Parents should know what homework their children are expected to do and the support they themselves should give.

We propose that common statewide guidelines should be established to assist schools in developing a consistent and coherent approach to this issue. These guidelines should cover such matters as: what is expected of both schools and parents, what sorts of tasks and activities make good homework, how schools can develop and implement successful homework policies, and how parents can support young people doing school work at home.

- 9.3 Some homes cannot provide conditions which allow students to do their home work effectively. It maybe that there is no access to required equipment or simply to an appropriate place in which to work. At the same time many schools are closed or unavailable to students.

It is not essential that school buildings should be the only location of study support. Local libraries and other forms of community infrastructure have provided important support in the past. Suitable accessible locations coupled with effective support and supervision are required.

We propose that separately-funded study centres be set up to service the needs of students in the most disadvantaged sections of the community and that these should be funded through the Community Support Fund, a socially constructive means of using some of the tax drawn from the operation of gambling in the State.

- 9.4 All students have a right to learn and teachers to teach in an environment free from unreasonable disruption. Thanks in large part to the skill and professionalism of teachers, most do. But if we are to establish a proper learning partnership with parents, appropriate behaviour and its achievement must be one component.

Schools have behaviour management policies and practices in place. Some are better than others. The best are clear and simple with unambiguous expectations and responsibilities, rules and a chain of well understood consequences. In best practice these are consistently applied whenever rules are broken. Best practice also requires constant positive reinforcement for doing well. These principles apply to all young people.

We propose that a common statewide framework for behaviour management policies and procedures be established, and that school practice should conform broadly with this framework. All parents will be notified of policies and procedures in operation at their child's school to help them understand and support this process. These proposals, of course, are contingent on the availability of resources in schools which will enable these steps to occur.

- 9.5 The previous Government attempted to cover the inadequacies of its funding for schools by splitting the Educational Maintenance Allowance and directing half to schools. Under various names, the EMA has a long history of providing educational necessities, such as clothing, books and materials, for the poorest members of our community. In the past it has been paid directly to families. But the Kennett Government decided that, against all notions of dignity and self respect, let alone the urgency of their need, the recipients are less able to decide how to spend the very modest allowance than school personnel. The AEU believes strongly that parents should be the recipients of the whole EMA.

## **10. PRESCHOOLS**

- 10.1 Following the 1994 cuts to an already low funding base, Victoria now spends less on pre school education per head of population than any other Australian state or territory. This has been coupled with an increased emphasis on competition leading to redistribution of funding away from community-based preschooling to other alternatives such as private 'for profit' childcare centres. This newly competitive environment undermines the capacity to provide the best mix of services to meet the needs of the local community, adds to the pressure of non-educational tasks on staff and committees, and clearly results in an increasing proportion of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, those who benefit most from participation, missing out.

We propose that the government establish targets and provide resources to ensure that all three year-olds have access to early childhood education for at least five hours per week and that all four year-olds have access to at least ten hours per week, and that group size maxima of 22 for four year-olds and 20 for three year-olds be established.

10.2 It is important to maintain the integrity of pre school programs. Pre school education differs in some important ways from school education. Learning experiences are designed by teachers based on observations and planning for individual children to develop perceptual, physical, attitudinal and social skills through play and other activities which are required as a basis for further learning. This process includes what can be accurately described as pre-literacy and pre-numeracy development, providing a foundation which is critical to the acquisition of more complex understandings and skills in schools. This is currently under challenge from some quarters.

The professional knowledge and skills of staff are being undercut by consistent demands to force children, metaphorically speaking, to walk before they have finished crawling. The backwash effect of the Curriculum and Standards Framework can be anticipated in this sector of education and must be resisted at all costs if our children are to continue learning successfully.

10.3 The AEU believes that DEET should be the single agency responsible for preschool education in Victoria and that responsibility for preschools should be transferred from the Department of Human Services. In pursuing this outcome, the AEU recognises the importance of appropriately resolving issues including that of funding; standards; industrial issues; staffing; curriculum; facilities; legal issues and parental involvement.

10.4 The following principles should be used as the basis of the transfer:

- The total cost of providing the service should be met by Government funding.
- The incorporation of preschools into the DEET should not result in any reduction of public education funding.
- Specifically trained Early Childhood teachers should be employed for the provision of preschool programs.
- Such teachers should be permanent employees of the DEET under current award entitlements.
- Preschool curriculum should continue to be based upon developmental and educational needs of individual children, and that, without loss of integrity of either sector, it be articulated into the primary curriculum.
- Operational standards for preschools, in particular those requirements which are currently specified in the Children's Services Regulations 1998, should be no less than those currently applicable.

## **11. PENG WORKING PARTY**

The AEU believes that a working party, which is broadly representative of the education community, should have an ongoing role after PENG reports to the Minister. The working party would oversee the implementation of the

recommendations of the Ministerial Paper arising from the PENG process as well as acting as an advisory forum on statewide educational issues.