

South Australian Association of School Parent Communities

Policy statements

SAASPC aims to support and promote in every way that it can a public education system in South Australia that provides each individual with the opportunities and skills needed for full personal development. It believes that this system should nurture and support all students in its care and will work towards this end.

Public education

It is the fundamental right of all Australian children to have equal access to a public education of the highest quality and it is the responsibility of governments to provide resources to enable students to enter educational programs according to their needs.

Funding

It is the responsibility of governments to completely fund a free, universal and public system of education of the highest standard which will ensure that all students, irrespective of age, race, culture religion, gender, socioeconomic status, intellectual capacity, physical ability and geographic location will reach their full potential. Access to the system should not be dependent on capacity or willingness to make a financial contribution

All funds at the school/preschool level should be administered by a governing/school council/preschool management committee elected by the community of parents, staff, students and the wider community.

It is not the responsibility of governments to fund private schools or persons using private schools; that responsibility rests with the private individual or the private institution. When governments do fund nongovernment schools, that aid should only be granted if funding is based on the criteria of need and not on a per capita basis; the school agrees to fulfill the obligations incumbent on government schools in the public system; public funds are not used for any religious or political indoctrination; the school accepts responsibility for meeting the full range of educational needs of students

Affiliated committees/parent groups

A parent group may take many different forms depending on the needs and wishes of its school community. It should be accessible to all parents and any other interested members of the community. It must develop a constitution which should be sent to the school's Education Director for Ministerial approval. It is an independent, affiliated body of the Governing council not a committee of the council, required by its constitution to elect annually a member to represent it on the council and entitled to operate its own bank account. It may elect annually a member to represent it on the school finance advisory committee if it is part of a governing school council's consolidated account.

Governance of schools and preschools

School and preschool governance should be based upon participatory decision making structures. Governments should provide sufficient resources to ensure that all members of the school and preschool community have access to information and training to enable them to become effective in educational decision making.

The ability to be involved, represented and heard must be equally available throughout the school community. Involvement must be actively encouraged and supported.

Voluntary fees should be decided annually by the governing/school council/preschool management committee in consultation with other affiliated organisations; they should be levied in a manner that acknowledges the differing ability to pay which may be present in that school/preschool community

Sponsorship and links with external bodies

It is recognised that commercial sponsorship and resources provided by industry and service clubs, as well as by individuals, teacher/industry exchange programs, assistance with work experience programs for students, and the provision of awards for students and schools, may enhance the quality of education and resources. Cooperation with individual corporate sponsors resulting in the sharing of educational and training enterprises at senior secondary level, if appropriately planned and supervised, may result in increased opportunities for those students.

Sponsorship should not influence the curriculum in any way and should not take the place of central funding provided from government sources

Schools

The purpose of schooling is to educate and prepare children to enter society as responsible, independent individuals. Neighbourhood coeducational government schools, which provide a full range of educational opportunities within democratic decision making frameworks, are the most desirable setting for most students. Students should have the right to attend their neighbourhood school.

Governments should encourage diversity within and among government schools to ensure that the needs of each school community are met.

In each school, curriculum options and teaching strategies which meet the needs of the students should be developed jointly by teachers, parents and students within statewide curriculum frameworks and educational policies.

Schools should, wherever practicable, cooperate with each other to share resources, staff and facilities to enrich the curriculum experienced by students.

Flexible structuring of schools, staffing, administration and timetabling within and between schools should be considered to facilitate greater curriculum choice and educational opportunities. Full consultation and broad agreement with all school communities affected should occur before changes are implemented and continue afterwards.

New schools

The location of public schools is an integral part of overall urban planning. Planning for a new school and the subsequent construction of that school should be achieved prior to a significant number of people being located in the suburb. Schools should be thought of as both educational and community facilities and designed to avoid obsolescence.

Any proposal for establishing a new school, government or nongovernment, should take into account the impact the new school will have on existing schools within a specific catchment area.

No new nongovernment school should be established unless the combination of its private resources and income, as determined by an independent statutory body, enables it to operate, from the beginning, at government school resource standards

Governments should not assist in the establishment and funding of new nongovernment schools.

Staff and staffing

The quality of schooling is closely related to the quality of teachers. The selection of potential teachers, their training, further development and professional attitudes and standing are vital factors in the quality of school education. The contribution of teachers in developing a collaborative school community is a key aspect of effective schooling.

Admission to teaching should be offered on completion of an approved tertiary course taking into consideration not only academic excellence, but also vocational aptitude and personal qualities. It should be available to a wide variety of persons qualified by reason of their particular discipline,

skills, diverse experience outside teaching, academic studies and education, personal experience in areas of particular need, in a balanced range of ages and of both sexes; and to people from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

The organisation and structure of an education service, including individual schools, should provide adequate opportunities for teachers to move from one type or level of school to another within the education service and for the recognition of additional responsibilities to be exercised by individual teachers, on condition that those responsibilities are not detrimental to the quality of their teaching work.

The preparation of persons for principals and other educational management positions should reinforce their role as educational leaders and should emphasise good interpersonal skills and processes of shared decision making. Consideration of these qualities should be an integral part of the selection and evaluation of persons for and in these positions.

Professional development

Effective teaching requires ongoing professional development and training to reflect changes in pedagogy and in the content and social context of education. Education authorities and schools must accept the responsibility for provision of a continuing program of inservice professional development for teachers. As professionals, teachers must accept their professional responsibilities including the need for ongoing development.

Ancillary staff

Education systems must provide adequate ancillary staff and support services so that teachers may perform their professional roles. It should be the responsibility of the school to select and deploy ancillary staff.

Guidance officers/Speech pathologists

The services of trained personnel in these and other specialist areas should be accessible to all students requiring such assistance.

School counsellors

All secondary school students and parents should have access to advice about education and career choice from appropriately trained counsellors.

School counsellors working in the area of career counselling should have access through the education system to relevant and up-to-date knowledge of all aspects of further education and career opportunities.

Where a need exists in primary schools, student counsellors should be provided.

Principal and Director selection

The school/preschool community through the governing council/preschool management committee has the right to elect a parent representative to the panel to select the principal/director for the school/preschool. The representative should be elected following advice by the governing council/preschool management committee to all parents that a panel is to be formed. An open meeting should be called to enable the school/preschool community to discuss the context statement and job and person specifications.

All representatives elected to the panel should have the opportunity, and be encouraged, to attend a principal/director selection panel training session.

Preservice education

All preservice teacher education should include compulsory components to enable all teachers to be adequately prepared in the acquisition of language development, literacy and numeracy skills; courses which prepare all teachers to detect at an early stage and to cater for the learning needs of all children; the study of the educational value, including the positive effects on student learning, of the participation of parents and the community in schools and in educational decision making; and practice in teaching in metropolitan and rural areas and in conducting extra curricula activities under the guidance of fully qualified teachers.

Students

All students have the right to access the highest standards of education and to institutional understanding of and specific support for special needs, cultural practice, economic disadvantage, gender, aboriginality, academic ability and other recognition of individual diversity.

Governments have an obligation to ensure equitable access and participation in learning for all students regardless of background, ethnicity, gender, ability, disability, religion, class or location.

Governments must provide adequate grants and allowances to students or their families to enable all students to complete their senior secondary schooling.

Adequate counselling and careers guidance services must be available to students and parents to enable them to evaluate the desirability of continuing secondary education up to and/or beyond the statutory leaving age.

Student representative participation must be encouraged and properly resourced.

No child should be barred from school activities or punished in any other way for being out of school uniform unless health or safety requirements are ignored.

Student wellbeing and safety

A safe and healthy school environment is conducive to effective learning and is important to the wellbeing of students and staff.

Student wellbeing and safety policies and appropriate emergency action/crisis management policy guidelines, including procedures for the provision of emergency first aid and incident reporting to parents and education authorities should be developed in consultation with the parents, teachers, students and other education and health professionals.

Access to diagnostic, medical, paramedical, specialist teaching and other support services should be available to all children with impairments and/or disabilities to meet their additional educational requirements in special or regular schools.

Discipline within school

All students have the right to be treated with dignity.

If children are excluded, the education system has an obligation to offer a safe, caring and responsible educational environment more conducive to the educational needs of the child.

Policies about appropriate behaviour which conform to education department regulations and broad guidelines need to be developed by the whole school community in order for the school to function as an effective learning environment and in ways which respect the rights of all those who are a part of that school community.

Corporal punishment in all its forms is totally unacceptable.

Parents

Parents have a fundamental right to send their child to a government school system which is open, free, secular and appropriate to the child's needs.

Parents are partners in schooling by virtue of their role as the central provider and carer and the role they play in their children's learning and development. Parent participation is a democratic right which contributes to better outcomes for all students; enables the school system and individual schools to respond more effectively to community values, aspirations and needs; and enhances the strength and vibrancy of the public education system.

The impact of the relationship between home and school on student learning makes it imperative for professional development to be made available for the whole school community.

Parents should have access to information about their children's performance at the school level, but should also be provided with broader information about the school, including the school's ethos and unique culture; the ways in which the school supports its students; how receptive the school is to the concerns and interests of the student's parents; how responsive the school is to the diverse needs of the school's community; and the range of curriculum offerings and other school based activities.

Parental permission should be sought before physiological, psychiatric, or medical assessment and/or treatment of the child is undertaken.

Parents have the right to withdraw their child from optional curricula activities and be advised of the supervision facilities available and to expect that the child will be provided with an educationally sound alternative during this time.

Parents have responsibility to recognise and protect the rights, privacy, health and wellbeing of children; to seek information as needed and exercise the right to participate in education at home and at school whenever possible; to respect the right of all students, staff and school community members to learn and work in an environment free from aggression.

Volunteers

Volunteers from both the parent and the broader community should be encouraged to be part of the school community and receive appropriate training and support.

Early childhood

Early childhood education covers the care and education, formal and informal, of all children from birth to 8 years of age. These years are the most critical for children because they establish the foundation for future learning. Childcare, preschool and the first years of schooling should contain a range of experiences which acknowledge learning as a continuous experience. Parents must be involved in the educational processes and decision making about their individual children and about the design and delivery of all services for this age group.

Governments must ensure that all child care facilities and centres are licensed and regularly inspected so that they meet all desirable standards and contribute where necessary to the funding of childcare programs and facilities to cater for school age children before and after school and provide adequate vacation care.

All childcare workers in licensed childcare centres must have qualifications appropriate to their level of appointment, and where employees are providing preschool programs they must have teaching qualifications.

Governments must ensure that there is an adequate supply of trained teachers and other personnel for the early childhood education and should recommend and provide training programs which address the special nature and needs of children in the early years

Free preschool education should be available to all children for at least twelve months prior to the commencement of school.

Beyond school

The young people of Australia are entitled to the benefits of an educational system and a society which prepares them for the responsibilities and rights of adulthood and provides them with the skills, attitudes and knowledge which will enable them to live meaningful and productive lives in a democratic society according to their individual aptitudes values and tastes.

There should be a guarantee of either work, education, or training, or a combination of the three for all young people 15-19 years old. A living wage / allowance should be paid to those young people and to those who, on exemption, who legally leave school prior to the age of 15 years.

Government should fund universities and TAFE to a level that ensures world's best practice. Places should be fully funded by the federal government, and none should be offered to Australian students as a result of payment of fees. All full-fee paying places for overseas students should be offered on a full-cost rather than marginal-cost recovery basis

Positive incentives should be provided for employer, trade union and other community organisations to provide training positions which will encourage youth to participate actively.

Curriculum

Curriculum is the totality of learning activities students engage in through schooling. The content of courses, staffing policy, facilities and resources, teaching and learning styles, school organisation and assessment and reporting procedures impact on student learning and so are a necessary part of curriculum considerations.

A national curriculum framework is not prescribed content or rigidly implemented programs, nor should it be driven by outcome statements but is a broad expression of skills, generalisations and understandings that will provide one element of what is necessary to provide a minimum guarantee of curriculum quality. Nationally developed frameworks should consist of a set of principles and goals for broad areas of learning, suggestions for enhancing learning, teaching and evaluation, and the scope of appropriate curriculum encompassing all the years of schooling.

Each school has a responsibility to develop curriculum, in consultation with the whole school community, that is suited to all of its students and which builds on the needs, aspirations and cultures of that school community.

Education systems have a responsibility to develop, through a collaborative process which includes the effective representation of parent and teacher organisations, curriculum frameworks which address issues of inclusiveness and social justice.

Assessment and certification

Assessment for the purpose of evaluating individual student progress should be non-competitive and for information between teacher, student and parent. The student is entitled to recognition of success in any particular aspect of the total learning process. Certification should be by a central authority issued whenever the student leaves school and supplemented by a local school leaver statement and/or portfolio of achievement. Certification should not differentiate between classes of subjects through perceived differences in difficulty but should provide information about subject content for the benefit of potential employers.

The minimum information required for admission procedures should be released for public information, and only if the student owner of the information gives permission and is made aware of the nature and extent of the information

National and state wide testing programs negate the principle of school based curriculum development and evaluation and do not provide useful information to parents, teachers or students about the educational development of the individual.

Reporting

Reporting is a sharing of information about student progress and achievement so that parents, teachers and students can work together to improve student learning. Reporting can take various forms including displays and performances, written reports, meetings and parent/teacher/student conferences.

Reporting student programs should make clear the basis on which judgements are made and wherever possible cite the evidence; be an interactive process between parents, teachers and students; be designed to provide a basis for planning the future learning of the particular student; and recognise the complexity of student learning.

Reporting should encourage parents, students and teachers to initiate reporting processes as soon as problems relating to learning and wellbeing are observed.

School rankings and league tables

The accountability of schools should not be based on a single measure of the merits of an individual school. Schools have a responsibility to publicise information on the school's curriculum and other relevant information by utilising all available methods including development of attractive and relevant websites and open days.

Academic achievement is not the sole outcome of schooling. Learning, and a love of learning, personal development, the ability to analyse information and solve problems, the ability to work with others, and the development of independent thinkers and well-rounded confident individuals should be as important, if not more important indicators of schooling success, than the achievement of a relatively small number of final year students in a narrow range of academic disciplines.

Schools should not be publicly ranked.

Languages

Access to a curriculum that includes at least one language should be provided for every school child throughout their education and where possible and appropriate, continuity of at least one language throughout the years of compulsion.

Vocational education and training

A high quality general education is essential for all young people until the end of formal schooling and is the best way to prepare them for the process of lifelong learning and the frequent and flexible changes that will be demanded of them in the employment market.

Vocational education must move beyond narrowly specific job preparation and must include broad competencies.

VET courses need to be accredited.

Expert career advice and counselling must take place within the context of the school.

Workplace experience for students in vocational education must be the subject of rigorous monitoring, assessing and reporting to ensure that the curriculum is being delivered in a way that adds to the student's knowledge and skills.

Procedures for granting of credit transfer and recognition of prior learning must be clearly expressed, explicit, transparent, equitable and portable.

Information technology

An understanding of, and competence in, the use of information technology is essential to all its citizens and to the health and long term survival of that society.

All students must have free and appropriate access to information technology and electronic networks and they must be given the opportunity to acquire the knowledge, capabilities, skills and critical attitudes that together comprise information literacy.

Students with special needs must be provided with access to appropriate technologies which will enable them to develop skills, competence and confidence in the use of information technology.

Technology must not be used as a means of reducing the number of classroom teachers or of increasing class sizes.

Social media

Online collaboration platforms have changed the way individuals and organisations communicate and are playing an increasingly significant role in schools.

Students should be taught safe, ethical, responsible and respectful use of social media and should be aware of legal and privacy issues in its use. All schools, in conjunction with their staff, students and parents, should develop social media use guidelines for their students and staff. State/territory education departments should provide guidelines for staff in the proper, safe and ethical use of social media. Schools should offer workshops to parents to inform them about social media issues generally and the social media policies and procedures of the school in particular

Sites and buildings

It is essential that all school/preschool buildings and the sites upon which they are built, should be chosen and planned to ensure maximum comfort and efficiency is guaranteed to all students and staff. It is the responsibility of governments to fully fund the provision and maintenance of safe, attractive and energy efficient public school buildings, grounds, facilities and equipment which optimise the learning of all students, including those with special needs and conform to occupational health and safety standards

Road safety

A speed limit of 25kph should be mandatory past all schools/preschools during the times a sign/flashing lights, which can be manually operated, is indicating such speed limit

School buses

The safety of children in transit is of the utmost importance.

Governments should ensure that new school buses have approved safe seating and restraints and other safety features such as impact resistant sides and roofs; safety padded interiors and recessed interior fittings; dual braking systems; a fail safe stopping device fitted to operate in the

event of driver incapacity; displayed, four flashing amber lights (two at front and two at rear) to operate in conjunction with the door control.

All buses carrying school students should be limited to carrying of one person to each single seat and no one standing.

In non metropolitan areas buses should be fitted with a two way radio, with auxiliary mirrors an additional flashing light system on the front; and carry a distinctive identification clearly visible to other road users

The government should provide for the transport of students to the nearest appropriate government school at no cost to the students if they reside more than three kilometres from the school.

All education and care sites should ensure there are safe drop-off and pick up points for buses. When a new site is planned DECD and the local council should work with the Governing Council to ensure that such provision is included.

All buses, DECD and nonDECD bus, should be required to adhere to the same limitations eg distance between stops

Students with disabilities should have access to appropriate transport.

The Department for Education and Child Development should include in the curriculum for all students at schools safety procedures whilst travelling and alighting/boarding school buses and safety drill in case of an emergency eg exits through emergency windows; provide programs to encourage parents to support safe travel requirements on school buses and at school pick-up/drop-off points; provide programs to educate drivers in student behaviour management

Bus drivers should hold the appropriate bus licence, be subject to annual health checks and have a current first aid certificate; they should be responsible for the cleaning of the bus; be responsible to the principal for their own demeanour and that of the students travelling on the bus. All misconduct or breach of school, DECD or legislative requirements, must be reported to the principal.

Schools with school buses should form a Governing Council Subcommittee with representation from every bus route. The school should ensure that communication is open and honest and bus services are provided to support the teaching and learning of each school.

School bus routes

School bus routes must take into consideration preschoolers seeking transport to their nearest preschool facility and should be prominently displayed in the administration section of the school, with folders for each bus route that contain information about the route, students, drivers, parents/caregivers contact numbers and any other relevant information.

School bus routes reviews conducted by the local school and/or DECD must ensure that the parents concerned are fully consulted and that any changes are not based on financial criteria. Student's safety and wellbeing, and parent's ability to meet the changed circumstances must take priority, in any such deliberations.

School libraries

Equitable access to an appropriately funded and well resourced school library and the services of a fully qualified teacher librarian is the right of all students and schools

School libraries should provide a range of materials, resources and services in appropriate formats which are designed to support all areas of the curriculum and provide for the needs and interests of all students and teachers

The staffing of all school libraries must include a qualified teacher librarian. Where this is not possible on a full time basis there should be regular and significant access to a qualified teacher librarian.

Canteens/tuckshops

Every school has the right to establish its own canteen. The school canteen should support the health education programs of the schools and should have appropriate nutritional policies that are compatible with the cultural background of the students attending the school. Provision of food and drink on a regular basis from the canteen should not be made for the sole purpose of profit making and should be based on values of good nutrition

Out of school hours care (OSHC)

OSHC services may offer care before and after school, on pupil free days and during school holidays. All centres operating an OSHC service must be approved to operate under the requirements of the Australian government's National Quality Standard. OSHC services are regulated by the Education and Early Childhood Services Registration and Standards Board of South Australia under the requirements of the Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010. This means they are required to meet minimum quality standards concerning, for example, the ratio of educators to children; educator qualifications; the provision of an environment and program that nurtures, stimulates and guides each child's development; facilities; health and hygiene and children's safety. School governing councils and principals are required to liaise with the DECD OSHC unit and regional director before commencing an OSHC service on site. Costs to use the service should be kept at a level which enables parents to access the service.