School Reform Agreement: What does it mean?



By Pat Byrne President

A draft National School Reform Agreement (NSRA) is in the process of being prepared for consideration by state and

territory education ministers in September this year.

The NSRA is an agreement which determines the amount of federal funding each state and territory will receive; the specifics of this agreement arise from the findings and recommendations of the Review to Achieve Excellence in Australian Schools (2018), the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education (2018) and the Optimising STEM Industry – School Partnerships: Inspiring Australia's Next Generation.

The content of these three reports, if fully implemented, represents a radical overhaul of school education in Australia.

While some aspects of the reports have the potential for positive changes, there is much about which teachers should be concerned.

The pace at which the changes are to be implemented, coupled with the fact that these changes are being driven, not by education departments in consultation with the profession, but by statutory authorities – the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AiTSL) and the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (neither of which has any responsibility for the way in which curriculum is taught in classrooms or reported to parents) represents a direct attack on teachers' professional space.

A list of National Policy Initiatives, presented to state and territory ministers in June, makes it clear that the big decisions have already been made.

These include:

- The development of learning progressions and formative assessment across all Australian Curriculum (AC) learning areas and the general capabilities to support teacher assessment of student attainment against clear benchmarks.

- Monitoring individual student progress and identifying learning needs through online and on demand formative assessment tools linked to the AC learning progressions, including the alignment of digital teaching resources to the learning progressions.

- A national review of senior secondary education, including curriculum arrangements, pathways to work, further education and training, and university entry.

- The development of a national teacher workforce strategy to respond to future workforce needs and assist decision making for teacher employers and initial teacher education (ITE) providers.

- Strengthening ITE accreditation by establishing AiTSL as the national regulator.

- Enhancing the Australian Professional Standard for Principals to provide a clear understanding of the competencies required across different settings and to enable the use of the standard in principal preparation and ongoing development.

- Implementing a national unique student identifier (USI) to better understand student progression and improve the national evidence base.

- Establishing an independent national evidence institute to inform teacher practice, system improvement and policy development.

- Improving national data quality, consistency and collection to improve the national evidence base, including options for measures of school readiness, student learning gain, general capabilities, post-school destination information,

attainment, retention, wellbeing and post-school outcomes.

What is immediately obvious from this list is that the amount of data which is to be collected and stored through these initiatives, is immense.

Further it is clear that the intention is for this to be stored on a number of national databases. In other words, student assessment data which until now has been normally retained in schools will now be retained by systems and accessible nationally.

The development of learning progressions and formative assessment across the curriculum and the monitoring of individual student progress through online and on demand formative assessment tools will lock teachers into hours of assessment and recording.

If the proposed assessments resemble what has been and is currently being trialled in NSW they will introduce an unprecedented level of standardisation across the country and will significantly undermine teacher professional judgement.

The AEU (read more on page 5 of July 2018 Western Teacher) and the SSTUWA have expressed strong opposition to the proposals in their current form, as well as the lack of consultation with the profession, to all ministers nationally and to directors- general in each state and territory.

Members are advised to familiarise themselves with the contents of the three reports listed above – all are available online.

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
ABN 54 478 094 635 © 2026