



Review of Years 9-12 in Tasmania

Tasmanian Greens' Submission

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Introduction

There is a major concern voiced by teachers and students that there have been too many changes to the education system in Tasmania. These changes have made navigating the system confusing for students and teachers alike, and have led to frustration and student dis-engagement.

This has also led to a uniquely Tasmanian culture when it comes to education reform. Teachers, students and the community at large are deeply cynical about large scale changes to our education system.

The “scrap and replace” approach to education reform is not working and has no public support. Reforms to education need to -

- start with a clear articulation of goals and desired outcomes;
- be open and transparently communicated in their entirety;
- build on existing frameworks wherever possible; and
- compromise in order to build up broad support.

The reform agenda the Government has embarked on has failed to meet any of these criteria.

Student Resources and Services

There is a need to bring different services together to help students. Inter-organisation communication between student driven services would help students more easily access services, for example doctors, centreline and headspace.

A similar initiative occurred in Bendigo Secondary College with the Youth Connections Program. The program promoted inter-organisational communication between service providers (Anglicare, Bendigo TAFE, Bendigo Secondary College and District Health Services, and employment services) that previously were not in contact, this was made possible by the appointment of a Youth Connection Advisor.

This has meant that instead of a student being turned away from a particular service, they were directed to the service that could help them and they had personal contact with a person whose purpose was to assist them in gaining the necessary information and support they needed in order to create their own education pathway - either by finishing grade 12, gaining a certificate at TAFE or gaining full time employment.

Internal support structures also need to be more effectively utilised. For example, school councillors could assist with problem students by creating strategies for the student and teacher to more effectively communicate with each other.

Further flexibility needs to be available for people who have issues (educational delays, mental illness, physical disabilities). These issues need to be addressed through collaborative engagement with students, rather than over-reliance on different education streams, which tend to leave people worse off. Personal study plans could be beneficial, similar to the BIG Picture model.

The eradication of the pathway planning officer was a mistake and the attempted replacement of this position by a digital platform is not satisfactory. Having one on one contact with a person who has the specific task to assist students to plan their future is imperative, especially for students who have issues or are dis-engaged.

Navigating career choices and education pathways can be a confusing and daunting process. Not being able to talk with a person about what you want to do, how you can get there, and what sort of life you want to lead is going to be a huge impediment to progress.

All of these options would also serve as preventative measures. Not only is the proposed conciliation process too reactive, there is also a danger that there will be an over-reliance on the coercive and punitive functions of this process.

There has been no attempt to explain how the coercive function will work. It is possible that students given orders to attend school may just ignore them. The alternative option of police turning up at homes and physically forcing students into school should be unpalatable.

It also needs to be considered that while it may be possible to force students to attend class, they cannot be forced to learn or contribute constructively. If students are forced to attend against their will the sad reality is that they may just be disruptive to others.

The approach to absenteeism should be to provide motivation for attendance through tailored programs and services. There is no evidence to suggest that physically forcing a student to be present will be in any way beneficial for the student.

Curriculum

There is an issue with the amount of information in the curriculum. Teachers feel they need to get through the curriculum to schedule which means too many students are being left behind as they don't grasp the topics before they are forced to move on to the next topic.

Future curriculum developments need to ensure that courses are not overloaded. It is the Greens proposition that in contemporary society, the way in which students need to process and grasp information has changed dramatically, the technological advances has changed the way in which information is obtained and used, as information is readily available in a way it never has been.

It is imperative that Tasmanian students are educated in a way that reflects this. The curriculum needs to focus less on retention of a diverse range of information for exams, and focus more on teaching students critical thinking so they are able to process, analyse, and internalise information in a way that is more long term than our current system caters for, and which better equips them for lifelong learning.

Colleges

The roll out of year 11 and 12 in high schools is foreshadowing of broader changes to year 11 and 12 education. Despite the fact that there has been no specific move to abolish colleges, it is clear that college resources will be impacted and that changes are certain to occur.

Whilst the roll out of years 11 and 12 in communities that may not have easy access to colleges is essential, many teachers voice their concerns that extending grade 11 and 12 into the High School system would be unsuccessful, as their high schools do not have the resources to provide students with the breadth and depth of resources that are available to students in the college system.

Currently it appears that the Government is too politically afraid to make any comments about our Colleges, and this has caused unease within the College community. The Greens remain strong supporters of Tasmania's college system and believe their role can be strengthened to deliver better educational outcomes.

We propose that particular attention needs to be given to the interaction between

colleges and high schools.

There needs to be measures in place to ensure that equal opportunity is provided to students regardless of where they go for year 11 and 12. One solution could be having students who may be in years 11 or 12 in a high school to be able to study different units at colleges through a dual-enrolment system.