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Submission into the Senate Inquiry into Teaching and Learning

The Tasmanian State School Parents and Friends Inc (TASSP&F) thanks the Senate Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations for the opportunity to comment on teaching and learning and maximising our investment in Australian schools.

TASSP&F was established in 1947 as an independent not-for-profit organisation that represents the parents of children participating in state school education in Tasmania. Our affiliates include parents and friends organisations and school associations.

Our submission is entirely related to point (c) in the Inquiry's Terms of Reference:

(c) the influence of family members in supporting the rights of children to receive a quality education;

TASSP&F believes that in the provision of the opportunities and the skills needed for personal development of school students, educators have a major, but not sole, responsibility. The society as a whole—its institutions, structures and practices—provides a social environment which can either contribute to or obstruct the social objective of full personal development for each individual.

The best learning outcomes are achieved when formal learning (school-based learning) and informal learning, much of which occurs in the home, are integrated. This is best achieved through parent engagement. TASSP&F believes that organisations that represent school communities are best placed to encourage and facilitate this engagement, and need to be adequately resourced to perform this role.

Learning happens everywhere

The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Young People (ARACY) parent engagement presentation at the National Parent Engagement Seminar 2012, highlighted that learning takes place everywhere and the research they have collated suggests most learning takes place outside of school in an informal setting. Past research found formal learning in

schools was 20-40%, but recent research suggests it may be 8-15%. This information was used to underline the importance of the home as being an important learning environment.

Families' role as early years educators

There is a growing awareness of the pivotal role families play in not only supporting the physical, psychological and social development of young children but also as educators in the development and acquisition of early literacy and numeracy skills. Families have the ability to contribute to, and influence the possible educational success of their children.

The Tasmanian Government resourced universal child and parent sessions in all state schools through the Launching into Learning Program for families with children 1 to 4 years old. Early indicators would suggest that this initiative which has parent involvement as being central, has resulted in less absenteeism and better educational outcomes for children.

Families in disadvantaged communities are provided additional support through new community based family and child centres. Both initiatives appear to be successful by providing welcoming environments to encourage greater early developmental opportunities for children and additional support for parents to gain skills, knowledge and confidence whilst supporting positive relationships and building greater connectedness between families and their local school community.

- ARACY found that parent engagement/involvement may lead to the following academic outcomes for students:
- higher grade and test scores;
- enrolment in higher level programs and advanced classes;
- higher successful completion of classes;
- higher graduation rates; and
- a greater likelihood of commencing post secondary education.

ARACY also suggested some future considerations including:

- Better engagement of parents, carers and community in understanding Early Childhood Development.
- Raise awareness of available services and programs.
- More positive interactions between parents and children.
- Maximise early childhood outcomes (improved learning and developmental outcomes).

Families' role as advocate

All families have the opportunity to provide a foundation; an underlining structure of support to enable, encourage and empower children to develop, aspire and succeed. It is important that parents/carers are advocates for their children and are encouraged to form meaningful, honest and cooperative partnerships between home and school, to maximise the best educational outcomes. Parents/carers/educators may need to advocate strongly, to obtain

additional support for students with special, additional or cultural needs and students from disadvantaged communities or from regional or remote areas.

Supporting student aspiration / secondary/tertiary education and future career pathways

All students and their families require information and guidance to help map the appropriate educational and training opportunities to successfully navigate career pathways. Students and parents can access pathway planners in high schools in Tasmania to help assist in identifying a student's interests and making career pathway plans. Parental expectations for students have been identified as an important factor in a student's success.

Tasmanian students have one of the lowest retention rates in Australia for completion of post year 10 studies and the Tasmanian Government has implemented new initiatives with more flexible learning options, whilst also increasing the leaving age of students to 17 years to help increase retention levels.

Some students in regionalised areas are having difficulties when they are required to leave home to complete studies in larger metropolitan areas. Some students are repeating a pattern of non completion and leaving school early. Additional assistance and to further encourage a cultural change with the expectation for more families to embrace and value further study or skills training may be required.

Parent involvement toolkits for schools

One of the key findings from the Engaging Parents and Families in Learning and Schools Symposium was to move from a present deficit model, where some families are often labelled hard to reach, to a model where these families are viewed as under serviced. The hope is to encourage a cultural change within our professional educators and school communities to further examine and develop new initiatives to engage and help identify and meet needs.

Parent involvement tool kits to help develop measure and review parent involvement initiatives, within school communities were highlighted as a useful aid to plan and implement greater opportunities for parent involvement and assisting in maximising outcomes for students.

In Conclusion

TASSP&F recognise and values the role parents play in partnership with educators to maximise the learning outcomes for children.

As the representative body for state school families and communities we regularly seek feedback from our members to enable us to provide much valued feedback to government and non-government agencies when new initiatives, funding or policy is reviewed.

TASSP&F also provides representation for a number of government and community based non-government organisations and working groups. We provide up to date information and help promote greater parent involvement in education in our state schools.

One of the identified needs from our member schools in previous surveys and inquiries to our organisation, is the provision of additional information relating to funding, governance issues and association procedures from parents, some of whom are also representatives on school associations. With greater autonomy of schools being supported at both a National and State level, we have identified a need to help up-skill parent representatives, who will take on a greater role in the decision making processes at their school.

TASSP&F would like to provide additional information and training to help school parents/carers and community representatives to acquire additional skills and knowledge needed to maximise their input as school associations and groups within their schools.

TASSP&F is an organisation which is heavily reliant on the work provided by its voluntary Management Committee and our hard working office staff – one full time position and one part time. Additional resourcing for state representative bodies which have limited access to additional income may help identify and better meet the relevant, and indentify the specific, needs at a community ‘grass roots’ level.

Recently TASSP&F entered a partnership arrangement with the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPAC) and Tasmanian Lifelong Learning to provide grant writing seminars for schools and community groups. It has been a great success with over 500 people attending workshops all over the state and may help parent groups and schools access funding opportunities from governments, the corporate sector and philanthropic organisations.

Yours sincerely

Jenny Eddington

President

Tasmanian State School Parents and Friends Inc

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References

Engaging Parents and Families in Learning and School Symposium (Canberra 2012).
Presentation by ARACY (Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth).

Engaging with Parents, Carers & Families Project. (What Parents want Teachers to know.)

Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEEC):
Engaging Families in the early childhood development story

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) *Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA)* ranks geographic areas according to their level of relative disadvantage or advantage using Census data.

The 9 Tasmanian Local Government Areas (LGAs) ranked in the bottom 20% are Brighton, George Town, Break O'Day, Tasman, Derwent Valley, West Coast, Central Highlands, Glenorchy, and Devonport.