

LINK 7: Educational priorities in Tasmania: Policy documents and policy maker interviews

Bill Mulford and Bill Edmunds (University of Tasmania)

1. Introduction

Given the forces impacting upon Australian schools and their implications for schools and their leaders, what are Tasmania's educational priorities? In seeking an answer to this question, this chapter examines and contrasts recent Tasmanian educational policy documents and interviews.

2. Policy Documents

2.1 Introduction

Tasmania has a number of recent policy documents with implications for the public purposes of education and their enactment. These documents start at the state level with *Tasmania Together* and then move to the educational level with, chronologically, *Learning Together* and the *Essential Learnings, Supportive School Communities, Essential Learnings for All, the Tasmanian Curriculum, and Reporting to Parents*. In what follows, each policy document is briefly outlined. More detailed summaries can be found at the web sites provided and the next chapter in the section (4.2) on the changing context within which schools operate in Tasmania. We conclude with a summary of the implications of recent Tasmanian government or educational policy documents for the public purposes of education and their enactment.

2.2 Tasmania Together

A 20 year social, environmental and economic plan for Tasmania has provided the overarching policy framework for Tasmanian education since the year 2000 (www.tasmaniattogether.tas.gov.au). The vision developed during the *Tasmania Together* process was:

Tasmania is an island community, unique for its natural and cultural environment, where people enjoy a prosperous lifestyle based on quality, creativity and opportunity.

Director of the *Tasmania Together* Progress Board, Phillip Hoysted, said that the Progress Board recognised the value of involving the next generation of young people in developing and working on our goals for the future.

"Students are interested in the world they live in – and are concerned about issues like education standards, healthy living and the environment,"

"Our students are our future citizens and leaders, and it's important that they learn about their community and become involved in civic processes and citizenship activity."

Public purposes of Tasmanian education as identified in *Tasmania Together* include providing:

- High quality education and training for lifelong learning and a skilled workforce
- Support for preschool children to give them an early start
- Improved levels of community literacy
- Recognition of, promote share and celebrate aboriginal culture and heritage

- Opportunities for all Tasmanians (students) to participate in decisions that affect their lives
- Opportunities for young people to participate in decision-making processes.

Goal 3 Standard 2, Support improved levels of community literacy, looks at the performance of students in years three, five and seven in reading, writing and numeracy and compares student performance against national literacy and numeracy benchmarks. Tasmania Together considers literacy and numeracy to be fundamental to all areas of learning and that the capacity to learn and to continue to be involved in learning throughout life depends upon proficiency in literacy.

2.3 Learning Together and the Essential Learnings

In mid 1999 a separate, but complementary process to *Tasmania Together* was begun by the Minister for Education following which future directions for education in Tasmania were identified and the *Essential Learnings Curriculum* (ELs) developed and implemented (http://www.education.tas.gov.au/school/educators/curriculum/el_standards/essential_learning.pdf). The Values and Purposes expressed in the ELs documentation embody many public purposes of education.

Public purposes of education as identified in *Learning Together* include the provision of:

- Services that ensure all Tasmanians develop the knowledge, skills and confidence they need
- Opportunities that enable people to work effectively and participate in society
- Safe and inclusive learning environments that encourage and support participation in learning through out life
- Access to global and local information resources so that everyone has the opportunity to participate in, and contribute to, a healthy democracy and a prosperous society
- A guiding set of core values; connectedness, resilience, achievement, creativity, integrity, responsibility and equity
- Shared purposes of ensuring students and children are; Learning to relate, participate and care, Learning to live full and healthy lives, Learning to create purposeful futures, Learning to act ethically, Learning to learn and Learning to think, know and understand.
- Essential Learnings that include a focus on the key elements of:
 - Thinking (inquiry and reflective thinking),
 - Communicating (being literate, being numerate, being information literate and being arts literate),
 - Personal futures (building and maintaining identity and relationships, maintaining wellbeing, being ethical, creating and pursuing goals)
 - Social responsibility (building social capital, valuing diversity,
 - Acting democratically,
 - Understanding the past and creating shared futures), and
 - World futures (investigating the natural and constructed world, understanding systems, designing and evaluating technological solutions and creating sustainable futures).

2.4 Supportive School Communities Framework 2003-2007

A *Supportive School Communities Policy Framework 2003-2007* was developed to refocus the Supportive School Environments policy that was released in 1989. While the initial intention had been to develop a revised policy, it became clear that a framework was needed to bring together the numerous related departmental policies, statements, guidelines, programs and services which had been developed in the intervening years

(www.education.tas.gov.au/school/educators/support/supportiveschoolcommunities/policieslegislation). Specific goals to which schools needed to respond were:

Tasmania Together

- Goal 2 *Have a community where people feel safe and are safe in all aspects of their lives.*
- Goal 4 *Create a culture that encourages people to learn and develop new skills, including life skills, throughout their lives.*
- Goal 5 *Develop an approach to health and wellbeing that focuses on preventing poor health and encouraging healthy lifestyles.*
- Goal 9 *Foster an inclusive society that acknowledges and respects our multicultural heritage, values diversity and treats everyone with compassion and respect.*

Learning Together

- Goal 3.1 *Ensure that all childcare services, schools and training institutions are supportive and safe places.*
- Goal 3.2 *Ensure that students who are “at risk” have the opportunity to participate.*
- Goal 3.4 *Ensure that all learning organisations successfully include all students.*

The Public purposes of Tasmanian education as identified in *The Supportive School Communities Policy Framework 2003-2007* include being:

- Responsive to the needs and aspirations of the school community
- Supportive and inclusive of the diverse groups that comprise the community
- A central component in the continuum of provision for lifelong learning that includes childcare at one end and a range of adult and community education provisions at the other
- Engaged in the quest for continual improvement of outcomes for students
- Key contributors to social and community strength, through access, participation and achievement in order to maximise the learning outcomes of all students.

2.5 Essential Learnings for All

A Review of Services for Students with Special and/or Additional Education Needs (*Essential Learnings for All* or *Atelier Report*; 2004 - <http://www.education.tas.gov.au/school/educators/curriculum/elscurriculum>) endorses the Tasmanian Education Department’s strong commitment to inclusion as a core value of public education. The report was implemented at the beginning of 2005, resulting in major changes to the way schools operated. Schools were grouped into 27 clusters with resources to support the inclusion of students, previously dispersed through the five Education District student support centres, now being allocated by principals within each cluster of schools.

Public purposes of Tasmanian education as identified in *Essential Learnings for All* included providing:

- A strong social justice and equity component as its values base
- A strong commitment to inclusion as a core value
- Equity of access to ensure students with special and/or additional needs have
- Resources for inclusive learning approaches and programs.

The Tasmanian Department of Education mandated the reporting of student progress in the ELs during 2005 despite the varying levels of teacher confidence in their understanding of

and capacity to implement the ELs curriculum. When coupled with the inappropriate use of language by the Department of Education in student reports and the pressure applied by the Federal Minister for Education, through the media, on Tasmania to conform to Federal requirements, the future of ELs was placed at risk.

2.6 The Tasmanian Curriculum

In fact the *Tasmanian Curriculum* replaced the ELs curriculum following a great deal of controversy over ELs (see the next chapter) and the appointment of a new Tasmanian Minister for Education after the 2006 State elections. The values, purposes and goals of the *Tasmanian Curriculum* support the vision expressed in *Tasmania Together* (<http://www.education.tas.gov.au/school/educators/curriculum/tasmanian-curriculum>). The following chart indicates how the goals and indicators of *Tasmania Together* can be linked to the *Tasmanian Curriculum*.

<i>Tasmanian Curriculum</i> Area	<i>Tasmania Together</i> : Examples of relevant Goals / Headline Indicators
English - Literacy	Goal 3: High quality education and training for lifelong learning and a skilled workforce: <i>Literacy and Numeracy</i>
Mathematics - Numeracy	Goal 3: High quality education and training for lifelong learning and a skilled workforce: <i>Literacy and Numeracy</i>
Health and Wellbeing	Goal 4: Active, healthy Tasmanians with access to quality and affordable health care services: <i>Avoidable Mortality</i>
Society and History	Goal 8: Open and accountable government that listens and plans for a shared future: <i>Local Government Elections</i>
Science	Goal 12: Sustainable management of our natural resources: <i>Greenhouse Gas Emissions</i>
Vocational and Applied Learning	Goal 9: Increased work opportunities for all Tasmanians: <i>Workforce Participation Rate</i>
The Arts	Goal 6: Dynamic, creative and internationally recognised arts community and culture: <i>attendance at cultural heritage sites</i>

Accompanying the change from ELs to the *Tasmania Curriculum* was another restructuring of the Department of Education into four Learning Communities and the abandonment of the clusters of schools. The decentralised distribution of Department of Education resources to schools would now be made by each Learning Community.

2.7 Reporting to Parents

One of the factors contributing to the demise of ELs related to reporting to parents. The new Minister for Education set up a taskforce in this area. The *Reporting to Parents* Taskforce reported on 30 November 2006 (www.education.tas.gov.au/dept/about/visions/Reportingtoparents). In their concluding remarks they stated that they believed that more attention to communicating with parents would bring more support from them. While recognising the demands on teachers, the Taskforce thought that the rewards for children, schools, teachers and parents are worth the investment (of time and effort spent by teachers on the reporting process). An analysis of the report prepared by the Taskforce, with particular focus on the student attributes to be reported upon, showed that the following public purposes of education were evident or implied:

- Developing appropriate work-habits, attitudes, effort and behaviour;
- Engaging in consistent and reliable assessment standards across the state system;

- Tracking a child/student's progress from year to year and recording this in annual reports to parents;
- Advising parents/guardians on how the progress of their child might be improved.

2.8 Summary and Conclusion

In summary, the public purposes of Tasmanian education, as identified in recent Department of Education policy documents, includes the provision of:

Essential learnings that include a focus on the key elements of:

- Thinking (inquiry and reflective thinking)
- Communicating (being literate, being numerate, being information literate and being arts literate)
- Personal futures (building and maintaining identity and relationships, maintaining wellbeing, being ethical, creating and pursuing goals)
- Social responsibility (building social capital, valuing diversity)
- Acting democratically
- Understanding the past and creating shared futures)
- World futures (investigating the natural and constructed world, understanding systems, designing and evaluating technological solutions and creating sustainable futures)

that have:

- A guiding set of core values: connectedness, resilience, achievement, creativity, integrity, responsibility and equity
- Shared purposes to ensure students and children are learning to: relate, participate and care; live full and healthy lives; create purposeful futures; act ethically; learn and think, know and understand

and are:

- Responsive to the needs and aspirations of the school community
- Supportive and inclusive of the diverse groups that comprise the community
- A provider of lifelong learning that includes childcare at one end and a range of adult and community education provisions at the other
- Engaged in the quest for continual improvement of outcomes for students
- Key contributors to social and community strength, through access, participation and achievement in order to maximise the learning outcomes of all students
- A central component in the continuum of provision for lifelong learning that includes childcare at one end and a range of adult and community education provisions at the other

whilst:

- Providing safe and inclusive learning environments that encourage and support participation in learning through out life
- Initiating support for preschool children to give them an early start
- Giving access to global and local information resources so that everyone has the opportunity to participate in, and contribute to, a healthy democracy and a prosperous society
- Recognising, promoting, sharing and celebrating aboriginal culture and heritage
- Developing appropriate work-habits, attitudes, effort and behaviour
- Providing opportunities for the participation of young people in decision-making
- Enabling people to work effectively and participate in society
- Engaging in consistent and reliable assessment standards across the state system

- Tracking a child/student's progress from year to year and recording this in annual reports to parents
- Advising parents/guardians on how the progress of their child might be improved

resulting in:

- Improved levels of community literacy
- Services that ensure all Tasmanians develop the knowledge, skills and confidence they need
- High quality education and training for lifelong learning and a skilled workforce.

Despite this long policy list, including many public purposes and the means of their enactment, when it comes to the “crunch” the public purposes do not seem to be given high priority. Three recent pieces of evidence support this assertion. The first relates to the speed with which ELs was dropped even though the media led attack on them related only to the reporting process and its use of plain English (see Chapter 4). The second relates to the emphasis in the evaluation of progress with *Tasmania Together* goals and standards. Report cards (<http://www.tasmaniatogether.tas.gov.au> – Snapshot of Progress) only report on a very narrow set of outcomes using literacy and numeracy scores. The third revolves around the recent (November, 2008) placing of data about each government school on the Tasmanian Department of Education website. This publically available information while it does expand outcome measures of school improvement to include once-a-year surveys of general staff, parent and student satisfaction and a measures of early years readiness for school and indigenous equity, still gives the dominant emphasis to what is thought to be most easily measured, such as student literacy, numeracy and student and staff attendance.

3. Policy Maker Interviews

3.1 Introduction

What do the major Tasmanian educational policy makers have to say about the public purposes of education and their enactment and the factors that can act as barriers or facilitators to enactment? In what follows, the agreed transcripts of 90 minute interviews with the Tasmanian Minister for Education (and subsequently also Premier), David Bartlett, Secretary of the Department of Education, John Smyth, and President of the Tasmanian and Australian Council of State School Organisations, Jenny Branch, are summarised. The interview schedule asked what are public purposes, how are they enacted, including the areas that can best be carried out centrally by an education system, and the barriers and facilitators to successful implementation (see Appendix 2). After these summaries we highlight similarities and differences across the interviews.

3.2 Minister of Education (now subsequently also Premier) - David Bartlett

What are public purposes?

“Equity, prosperity and democracy.”

“I think public education has been significantly weakened in this country over the last 10 years by a parent exodus, Federal Government policy and by a media approach by particular outlets ... by running shock-horror stories all the time.”

“[W]hat I'll be really interested in out of this research is [how we translate the] pretty lofty ideals of equity, prosperity and democracy [into practice]. How do you translate that into how school operate, what they do on a daily basis? ... That's really hard stuff.”

Enactment

Equity – “adjust formula to fund higher need schools much better”

But, for example, “just adding equitable distribution of technology doesn't actually mean that you've got equity in terms of the opportunity that comes from it in any way, shape or form.

... [S]o while Rudd's is talking about ... no child will live without a computer, what does a child do when they go home and ... they don't have the funds to be connected?"

Prosperity – “education is obviously a fundamental of achieving and improving [state/national] prosperity, and it is linked to ... inequity”.

“We have ... 9,500 kids in Tasmania ... 18-20 year olds ... who are not participating in any form of training or education” [At the same time] “we've got not only a skill shortage, we've got a labour shortage as well, and we have the most significant participation problems in the labour force of any state in Australia.”

Democracy – “... public education is the cornerstone of democracy.”

“The less engaged the community is in their democracy the less effective it is”

If all the community, “not just the chattering class”, “come to learn that engagement with a system like a school can have positive impacts on their lives, that might result in them [becoming] ... lifelong learners, being more engaged in their community and being more engaged in their democracy.” “[E]ducation and getting them engaged in their schools is a great and fundamental start to that.”

“How do you get them more engaged? You offer them ... more decision making, and a more visible impact ... my intention is to empower school communities to have more say over their individual school... .”

“I'm not an educator, I don't have a real understanding in each individual kid's life and each classroom”

“I've got a standard media release ... [w]henver another politician puts out a media release that ‘Bartlett should be doing this in schools’ ... my standard statement is ‘These are decisions that individual schools and their communities’”

“I'm not sure I can measure [democracy] ... and it's such a long term measure”

What areas best carried out centrally?

“There's a real separation between the department and the schools, and it's ... 10 paces apart daggers drawn” However, there some areas best undertaken centrally such as IT, finance and HR practice.

IT – Although he believes that “it's not about the technology itself, ... it's about what you do with the technology and how you engage in that technology, and whether it's going to be used for good or not”

Finance – although he believes that “You can double the budget and not make any difference to attaining public ... purposes.”

“[T]he names of departments are actually great indicators of where the strength in public policy lies and where the interest is We should be creating a department of education, children and their families ... particularly for our high-needs communities for the interface between education, health and human services It's an argument that I think is worth having a community debate about.”

But “[t]here are things that belong in [a] next [middle] layer, the learning services layer, because they should be there to serve the schools ... [and lessen] administrivia ... that we don't want to burden schools with Schools should be places of teaching and learning” “[T]aking it back one level still allows principals, in a strategic sense, to control the policy, ... have a say over how resources are best distributed on their behalf, but this doesn't mean that they have to do the actual distributing themselves” “[W]hat I genuinely want to see is the learning services serving, having a culture of service not a culture of directing. We're not here to tell schools what to do, we're here to serve schools and their needs.”

Barriers/Facilitators

“[T]he Australian Education Union needs to work out whether it's about improving the profession of teaching its it's a ... industrial union in the style of the BLF. ... can it be both of these things? Maybe, but it doesn't do enough to increase the status of the profession of teaching and therefore attract over time ... better and better people to it”

“A strong, well educated, continuously learning teaching force is fundamental to achieving public purposes”

“ ... I see school principals as the embodiment of a school community [W]e need to distribute power to them, empower them to represent their school communities’ aspirations better. ... You need to change the culture to be one of empowering principals genuinely to make decisions about the resources available to the system as a whole and directing that resource ... strategically in the system as a whole. They are the people ... who have the collective wisdom to make better decisions ... rather than me and my bureaucracy making decisions for them.” “[P]rincipals for ages have been saying ‘ You’re making the wrong decisions’. Well now I want them to make those decisions. They don’t like it and perhaps they never will, but it’s still, I believe, a better way of making decisions.”

However “we use the word ‘autonomy’ about principals [but] ... I don’t think autonomy exists [especially] ... in any public sector organisation that I’ve ever worked in In this sense ... autonomy is a rubbish word”

“We need to invest more in leadership skills, [especially] the large “next cohort coming through”

Transparent evidence – “[T]he books are open ... all the school improvement boards are seeing the data and the financial data, and the school-based data, for all the schools in their area, and this is pretty challenging sort of stuff because for the first time there’s genuine transparency”

3.2 Secretary of Department of Education – John Smyth

What are public purposes?

In order to answer this question, “I need to go for guidance to the Minister”, “Tasmania Together Benchmarks”, “the Federalist paper, and “the change of context”. “I [then] look at the outcomes of our education system and say ‘How well can Tasmanians participate in a democracy, [be] citizens, [and] how inclusive these are. ... It’s a fine community and I love living in it, but I’m concerned that 50% of Tasmanian adults are functionally illiterate, and I’m not sure that if you’re functionally illiterate that you can totally participate in that breadth of public purpose. ... [W]hen you look at the PISA results ... you see just how long our tail is. ... A lot of our kids aren’t on the runway. .. I’m concerned that 67% of 18-29 year-olds aren’t learning, either in education or training, and don’t have a capacity to participate in ... increasingly more technical and more demanding work. ... [They’re] in jobs that aren’t going to lead anywhere in the next 20 years. ... [H]aving employment and a disposable income at some stage in your life actually enables you to make more life choices. ... [Also,] I’m not convinced that the harmony is ... constructive, an active engagement ... in these [public purposes] value systems.”

BUT “I shouldn’t even be the one who determines what the public purpose is. ... [I]t’s got to be for [Learning Services Boards of six principals and two outsiders] to work with their school communities.”

“I can’t quite see how you disconnect [public and private purposes]. ... I don’t believe you can have one without the other.”

Enactment?

“I’ve come to remember just how conservative in terms of change the education [and general] community is.”

“ [N]ot all our schools are democratic in purpose.

- Not all our staff meetings have all the staff in them. Sometimes staff meet and it’s only teachers. ... We don’t actually live [public purposes] in schools. ... [When talking] to 16 groups of teachers randomly chosen ... you came away with ... how passionate they were to actually contribute more. ...
- “... the education community doesn’t think strongly about [the 67% of young people].

“It’s just very dark between where our good schools are and where our less good schools are.” More broadly “[I]t’s barely rated a mention in the media ... and ... putting it in front of the ... general community hasn’t stirred up a real issue.”

“A great demonstration of [public purposes] not being enacted [is] ... why it has evolved .. that 60% of young people do not continue [in education] when everything in our society says they need to?”

“Now is the time to be focussing on [leadership] because a lot of that conservatism is an opportunity with the retirement rates to do something about it. If we wait too long then the kind of people who are going to end up in the position are going to be in the same mould.”

“Our challenge as a system is how to support ... the work that principals do. ... [I]f you actually trust people, give them the resources and capacity, they do things that far exceed anything you could ‘manage’ them to do. How do you add value to what the very best principals in the very best schools and the very best school communities are trying to do? That presupposes that you’ve got the leadership that’s right, that it’s not chieftains, that it is in fact embedding much of the public purpose in the way school runs and the way the school functions, and the way the school works, and the way the school is or the being of the school – we’re a fair way from this in all of our schools.”

What are best areas carried out centrally?

“There’s ... a very significant resource in four learning services accountable to a Board of six principals and two outside people. I don’t control that money. They haven’t worked out they do actually control it, ... or, if they’ve worked it out I’m not sure they want ... the responsibility. ... I guess what I lead is some process that says ‘I’m prepared to trust six principals with a quarter of the Department’s resource. ... But the don’t believe it. ... [I]n three years if the still don’t believe it, I’ll be ... bitterly disappointed. But the opportunity is there for them... ”

“The best and most successful relationship is a relationship between teachers and the kids. It’s the teachers who will make the biggest difference in what kids achieve in public purposes ... and my job is to get out of the way of that, but to add value in whatever way I can to make that possible, but to give signals to school communities about what they can do and how they can build.”

“[W]hat are the accountabilities? ... [C]learly you’re going to jump to the literacy and numeracy national benchmarks. ... [B]ut if you don’t have a portfolio of stories, if you don’t have a narrative about ... your public purposes and your public purpose achievements, ... you’re not telling the whole story about your school. ... [I]t’s a damned sight more than a set of numbers. ... [Y]ou say to the kids and parents ‘We are really pleased that 80% of our kids got the literacy benchmark ... [and] we’re pleased that this and/or that student ... gave something back to this community’.”

Barriers/Facilitators?

Barriers:

“Equity is a huge challenge.”

“[E]ducation is isolated from the rest of the community. We tend to engage well with parents. I think we need a stronger engagement with the university, with business, with groups in the community.”

“Shockingly competitive principals ... [We need principals with] less cynicism, ... able to manage with teams of people, ... [and] truly able to network. ... [E]verything that you see in good communities today ... is about networking and partnership and partnerships, and about moving forward in a way that really builds value between relationships.”

“If the general community doesn’t have the capacity to act with public purpose, Tasmania Together isn’t as effective in what it does, and the place that comes from is the education system ... building up from the bottom, through real democracy, through real citizenship, through real engagement, consultation, collaboration, participation. I suppose that to me would be the richest sort of education system that could be.”

Facilitators:

“Select the very best teachers ... develop them very, very well in their schools and ... focus on the kids who are not achieving. ... But we’re not as strongly focused on these as we should.”

“I wouldn’t put the *Mercury* [newspaper] in the classroom.”

3.3 President of the Australia Council of State School Organisations (ACSSOS) – Jenny Branch

What are public purposes?

“Public education ... [is] under threat of being diminished down to a sub-standard education system that would be of little use for any Australian child. We have been in a time where we’ve been given this word ‘choice’ ... but unfortunately in the real world we don’t all have choice. Some of us only have one avenue that we can pursue to educate our child, and that is the public education system. So, it’s my organisation’s job and my personal passion to ensure we have the best public education system in this country, for all children.”

“I don’t think we’ve managed to [put into practice] all the lessons we’ve learnt ... about the need to balance ... literacy, numeracy, social skills, ... and thinking and being. ... [For example,] one of the things we’ve really been struggling with at the moment at a national level is languages. ... I don’t think we can narrow the curriculum down without doing some damage to our children, because this is a fast-moving world. In the area of technology [this change] can be overnight.”

Enactment?

“[O]ne of the things governments have to learn to do is to take parents on the journey with them, and often they don’t. They give top-down decisions that then they expect people to take off and run with joy because ‘this must be the right thing to do’. ... [U]nless you take them on the journey you’re often going to fail with these programs.”

“I think a lot of state schools around Australia ... probably think they’ve been in a really competitive surfing competition, and they’ve been riding so many waves that are going up and down that they don’t really know where they are. ... [T]eachers are really committed to producing the best outcome they can, but how can they in such a sea of turbulence? We need to settle down ... and ... not change the goal posts every time they go 50 metres.”

“[W]e need to start putting ourselves into a global context.”

What are best areas carried out centrally?

“I want accountability to be about the right things, ... accountability that’s going to improve things for students ... and not better outcomes for government. ... [Outcomes such as] is the child happy at the end of the day, ... able to collaborate, ... [and] able to recognise difference and accept it.”

Barriers/Facilitators?

Barriers:

“Governments, funding, community preconceived ideas, ... and time to rebuild.”

“Schools are not insular groups any more like they used to be years ago.... [T]here are so many pushes and pulls on public schools ... [and] when we unpack things it’s not about what is best for the children but ... the bottom dollar. ... [We need to] look at it from the other way of where are we going to spend more, how are we going to invest because this is going to benefit our whole future and save us in other areas. Until we can turn that mindset around we are still going to be having a lot of problems with public education.”

“We’re looking at education from a lot of short-term perspectives these days ... not looking 30 or 40 years ahead where we really should be looking to sustain a really good education system.”

We’ve seen the average well-meaning parent ... thinking ‘Am I doing good enough by my child by sending them to a public school?’ There’s been a lot of negative, often incorrect information about what public schools are offering our children. ... [The] media has played a big part.”

“[S]ome of the parents just haven’t been given the support or the skills that their parents had before.”

Facilitators:

““[W]e have to get the government ... really standing up and saying ‘Public education is a good thing’, because I’m not sure that the government we’ve been under over the last few years has really had their heart and soul in public education.”

“[G]etting groups of people together ... working on a long-term plan. [S]omething I’m very strong on and the national body is committed to is family/school partnerships. ... [W]e have to learn to let other people in [schools] and start engaging them in education. ... [I]t has to take into account cross-sectional people as well ... [such as from] health. ... [I]t takes a village to bring up a child. We have to start using the village and being really committed to the child as the centre of that village. ... [I]t’s working together where we will become a greater Australia.”

“[W]e have to focus on the early years ... because that’s when they start disengaging. It’s not that they get to grade 10 and suddenly say ‘Oh, I’ve had enough of school’. ... [W]e always try to fix things along the line at the wrong point; ... we see a problem, we put a bandaid on it. Now we have to start right from the beginning, start making significant changes, and start working through so that we fix the problems from start to finish. ... [W]e play twinkle toes around the edges. We’ve been doing it for ages and we really need to get down to some of the solid stuff ... to move the agenda forward.”

“[R]eports [have] got to be timely and anything delivered at the end of the year telling how a child has gone, is not timely. [Broadening what is reported to include public purposes such as citizenship, equity and social justice is] a continuing conversation. ... We’re trying to get ... national consistency at the moment. ... I don’t think any of us, be it the parents or governments, are quite clear what direction it’s going to take or what it’s going to mean.”

3.4 Summary

The Minister had the clearest and most succinct understanding of the public purposes of education. He saw these purposes as equity, prosperity and democracy. While the Secretary mentioned the ability of all to participate in a democracy and to be citizens, he could not see the public purposes being separated from private purposes. He also believed it was not for him but those closer to schools to decide. The ACSSOS President interpreted the question as referring to public schools.

In terms of the enactment of the public purposes of education, the Minister stressed the need to adjust the funding formula to favour higher needs schools and to encourage and support community engagement in schools. He saw the latter strategy needing to be made more attractive by offering the community greater opportunities for decision making and for them to see they were having a visible impact. The Secretary was mainly concerned about the very conservative nature of the community towards change and the fact that not all schools live public purposes in the way they operated. He saw the challenge for the system being to devolve more to principals and their communities while at the same time supporting principals to add value. Investment in leadership skills, especially for the large new cohort, was seen as crucial. The ACSSOS President saw the need to give greater emphasis to taking parents on the journey and the increasingly global context but less emphasis to competition among schools and constant changes.

The Minister believed that functions such as IT, finance and HR practice were best handled centrally as well as linking education, health and human services, especially in high needs communities. But he also saw the need for learning services to be handled at a middle or regional level so that principal representatives could be involved in policy setting. The Secretary believed the centre was in a good position to send signals regarding educational priorities and how best to achieve them, as well as deciding on accountabilities. It was interesting that he saw accountabilities as needing to use broad measures (for both what and

how). The ACSSOS President also focussed on the centre's role in accountability but pointed out that it needed to be broader than was currently the case. She saw the need to broaden accountability to include happy, collaborative students who recognise and accept difference.

The Minister saw the teacher's union and its industrial rather than professional stance as hindering the achievement of the public purposes of education. On the other hand, he saw public purposes being facilitated through a well educated, continually learning teaching force, empowered principals and transparency in evidence (including budgets). He also saw the importance of developing leadership skills in school principals. The Secretary worried about education's isolation from the rest of the community and that community's lack of capacity to act with public purpose. Contributing to this situation were competitive, cynical principals who had poor relationship and networking skills and an unsympathetic media. He saw public purposes being facilitated by selecting the best teachers and developing them in their schools, especially where they focussed on non-achieving students. The ACSSOS President saw constraints on the public purposes of education as including the government, funding levels, preconceived ideas, and a lack of time to rebuild. She saw political short term thinking, the media's attack on public schools and the lack of parental support and skills as exacerbating the situation. She saw the mindset needing to change from short to long term and from the 'bottom dollar' to 'what is best for children'. In addition, she believed governments needed to publicly state that 'government education is good', that family/school relationships were valued and that early years education was a priority.

These views about what is public education how it is enacted and the hindering and facilitating forces to its enactment are summarised in the Table at the end of the chapter on the next page (an 'x' indicated a similar view).

4. Comparison of Policy Documents and Policy Maker Interviews

Comparison of Tasmanian educational policy and policy maker's views on the purposes of education and their enactment are similar in respect of promoting a strong emphasis on the public purposes such as equity and democratic citizenship. The policy documents go further than the policy makers by including related concepts such as social responsibility, justice and capital, shared and sustainable futures, wide (in terms of groups and areas) participation, and support for diversity and disadvantage.

What is striking is the number and rapidity of change in Tasmanian policy documents in recent years. There is sense that educational change can only be successfully delivered through policy pronouncements. There is also mounting evidence that while there are many educational purposes and means to enact them, there is a very limited number given priority. Only a few areas are evaluated in any detail and therefore, it could be argued, valued. Very few of these areas relate to the public purposes of education and their enactment.

The policy maker interviews do suggest greater enactment of the public purposes of education would occur with more encouragement and support for community involvement in schools (Minister) and greater devolution to and support for school and parent communities (Secretary). Public purposes would be further facilitated by investing in leadership skills, especially for the large new cohort of empowered principals and a well educated, continually learning teaching force (Minister and Secretary). However a number of forces are seen to hinder public purposes of education and their enactment including an unsympathetic media (Minister, Secretary, ACSSOS), a conservative community (Secretary, ACSSOS), competitive and cynical principals with poor networking skills (Secretary, ACSSOS), a teachers' union that is industrial rather than professional (Minister), and lack of government

support in terms of resources, time to rebuild when changes occur and public statements (ACSSOS).

The Tasmanian media is seen by policy makers and school principals (see above and Chapter 5) as being particularly unsympathetic to public education. Is there any evidence for this position? In order to explore this question the next Chapter analyses in depth the articles reported in the Hobart's *Mercury* newspaper over a seven year period about the implementation of major curriculum change (ELs) that included as a major focus the public purposes of education.

Public Purposes of Education	Minister	Secretary	ACSSOS President
What?	Equity		
	Prosperity	x	
	Democracy/Citizenship	x	
How? (Enactment)	Funding formulas		
	Encourage and support community involvement in schools	Devolution to and support for school and parent communities	x
		Schools need to live public purposes	
Hindering Forces	Union industrial rather than professional emphasis		
		Very conservative community especially regarding change	x
		Community that is unable to act on public purposes	
		Competitive, cynical principals	Competition among schools
		Principals with poor relationship and networking skills	
	Unsympathetic media	x	x
			Low government funding
			Lack of time to rebuild
			Short term thinking such as the 'bottom dollar' rather than what is best for children
			Lack of parental support and skills
Facilitating Forces	Investment in leadership skills, especially for large new cohort of principals	x	
	Empowered principals		
	Well educated, continually learning teaching force	Selecting best teachers and developing them in schools, especially for non-achieving students	
	Transparent evidence, including budgets		
			Government needs to state that public education is 'good', that family/school relationships are valued and that early years education is a priority