

February 2014

Submission of the Independent Education Union Victoria Tasmania

Inquiry into the Approaches to Homework in Victorian Schools Education and Training Committee Parliament of Victoria

1 Preamble

- 1.1 The Independent Education Union Victoria Tasmania (IEU) is pleased to make a submission to the inquiry into approaches to homework in Victorian schools. The IEU represents members in non-government schools industrially and professionally. The union's membership includes teachers, principals and Education Support staff in both Catholic and independent schools.

2 Government and School Policy

- 2.1 The IEU believes that it is necessary that education systems and individual schools have clear homework policy and guidelines. Central to the development of these is the consultation and involvement of teachers and parents at a number of levels.
- 2.2 The IEU generally endorses the current policy of the Victorian Department of Education and Training which outlines very general Homework Guidelines and Homework Expectations. These guidelines and expectations should be followed generally by schools from all sectors. However, the development, implementation and support for specific homework policies and practices need very much to take place at the school level, involving members of that school community.

The department policy currently provides very general Guidelines which advise schools that they should:

- Advise parents of homework expectation and provide them with a copy of the homework policy;
- Follow up with parents if a student regularly fails to complete homework;
- Work with parents to establish good homework patterns from early primary school; and
- Ensure that upper primary and secondary school students use homework to provide regular communication with the school.

The policy outlines very general Expectations that homework should be:

- Appropriate to the students level and age;
- Purposeful, meaningful and relevant to curriculum;
- Interesting and challenging and when appropriate open ended;
- Assessed by teachers with feedback and support provided;
- Balanced with a range of recreational, family and cultural activities.

The policy also outlines a very general guide to year level (prep to year 4, year 5 to 9, year 10 to 12) appropriate focus and hours of homework. It also outlines in brief dot point form a number of ways parents and teachers can help students with their homework.

The IEU believes these all to be appropriate.

3 Strengthening Policy and Practice

While many schools have comprehensive and integrated homework policies and practices, there are a number of areas that the IEU believes should be strengthened in system and school policy and practice. These are as follows:

3.1 Clearer integration of homework into the holistic planning and delivery of learning programs.

This will ensure that homework:

- is relevant and necessary to the learning process and unit of work being studied;
- is planned and part of the overall program of work;
- is essentially used to reinforce the learning and skill development occurring in the classroom;
- takes into account all aspects of the student's study workload and in secondary schooling in particular, the timing and workload of assignments across the subjects studied;
- is co-ordinated to a greater degree across study/subject areas on more than a term or unit basis. This will help to ensure that students are not being required to undertake nightly or weekly hours of homework in excess of the general guidelines.

3.2 Addressing socio-economic and other disadvantage

The IEU believes that it is essential that systems and schools are mindful of and undertake resourced approaches to addressing student disadvantage, particularly socio-economic related disadvantage in their homework policies and practices.

If homework is, as it should be, a relevant, integrated and important part of the student learning process, then systems and schools need to be resourced to assist students whose home circumstances and/or financial constraints mean that they are unable to access or undertake the essential activities and learning opportunities for which the homework is designed.

The kinds of support that may need to be afforded these students could include:

- access to technology and other resources not available in the home, such as through the borrowing of a laptop/ iPad; and
- access to additional learning support, including homework clubs, tutoring opportunities, community support services.

3.3 Assisting greater participation of parents in the learning partnership

While ensuring effective communication channels between school and parents is important, the IEU believes that schools need to be resourced to ensure that parent participation is more than simply “encouraged”. Nationally and internationally, projects which have involved providing parents with genuine and engaging learning opportunities themselves to understand how their children learn, have resulted in increased learning gains for the students. Students need time management skills, and if parents are to assist in this, they may themselves need assistance in understanding what this means in a learning context. Parent classes and other opportunities which focus on parental skilling and knowledge need to be resourced in a systematic way. While it is important that parent skilling is relevant to their child and their child’s school, individual schools need to have targeted additional resourcing and other support to work with parents in this way.

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