

**Looking at Curriculum Change in Tasmania: Will Essential
Learnings Promote Successful Reform?**

Michael G. Watt

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Author: Michael G. Watt

Address: 316 Churchill Avenue, Sandy Bay, Tasmania 7005, Australia

Phone: 61 3 6225 1335

E-mail: michaelgwatt@bigpond.com

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Preface

This paper was written and refined on several occasions over a five-year period. The first version was presented at the conference of the Australian Curriculum Studies Association held at the Australian National University in Canberra, Australian Capital Territory, in September 2001. The paper was revised, extended and updated in 2005, and presented at the conference of the Australian Curriculum Studies Association held at the University of the Sunshine Coast in Mooloolaba, Queensland, in September 2005. Subsequently, the paper was revised and extended to produce a final draft. Reviewed by a panel of officials, curriculum consultants and practitioners, the final draft was then revised to produce the final version of the paper.

The author wishes to acknowledge the contributions made by the following people in developing this paper. Hon. Michael Aird, Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council, provided information on *Tasmania Together*. Hon. Paula Wriedt, the Minister for Education, provided information on the consultation for *Learning Together*. Hon. Rene Hidding provided a statement on the Liberal Party's position concerning the Essential Learnings curriculum and assessments. Paul O'Halloran provided a statement on the Tasmanian Greens' position concerning the Essential Learnings curriculum and assessments. Former and current officials of the Department of Education provided information on particular aspects. Tim Doe and Larry Scott provided assistance in completing the section on Implementing the National Statements and Profiles. Alison Jacob provided assistance in completing the section on Setting Directions for Education. Jean Walker, President of the Tasmanian branch of the Australian Education Union, provided copies of the survey and polls conducted by the Australian Education Union, and supplied a collection of articles published in newspapers. Margot Boardman, senior lecturer in the Faculty of Education at the University of Tasmania, provided information about the extent to which the Faculty's courses provide pre-service teachers with the knowledge and skills to teach the curriculum.

Members of the panel, who reviewed the final draft, made valuable contributions to the final revision of the paper. Jean Slattery, Achieve's Director of Benchmarking, provided advice on the methodology used by Achieve. Alan Reid, Professor of Education at the University of South Australia and Kevin Donnelly, Executive Director of Education Strategies, offered valuable comments from differing perspectives. Department of Education officials, Penny Andersen and Ruth Radford, Jean Walker, Rose Parker, a former assistant principal, Sallyann Geale, a primary teacher, and Ivan Webb, a retired principal and doctoral student at the University of Tasmania provided useful responses.

Biographical note

Michael Watt taught in several secondary schools in Tasmania, and worked as an education officer in the Tasmania Department of Education. He holds masters' degrees in educational studies and education from the University of Tasmania, and a doctorate in education from the University of Canberra.

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Abstract

The release of the Labor government's policy statement, *Learning Together*, in December 2000 initiated a long-term systemic reform strategy, which included the first attempt in Tasmania to formulate a new curriculum, the *Essential Learnings Framework*. The purpose of this paper is to trace the historical pattern of change in the curriculum in Tasmania's education system, and to recount the main activities involved in developing and implementing the *Essential Learnings Framework* and the associated assessment system. The process for reviewing states' systemic reform policies devised by Achieve, an education organisation based in Washington, DC, is applied to identify the key issues and challenges confronting the curriculum reform. The analysis focused on identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the new curriculum and assessments, and determining the extent to which Tasmania's education system provides capacity building and teacher development, accountability, and public leadership to mount successful curriculum reform. The paper concludes by presenting a set of recommendations to meet these challenges.

Looking at Curriculum Change in Tasmania: Will Essential Learnings promote Successful Reform?

In February 1999, Premier Jim Bacon initiated *Tasmania Together*, a strategy intended to develop a 20-year social, environmental and economic plan for Australia's island state, the nation's first planning exercise applying a process of community consultation derived from Oregon Shines in the United States of America. Following the Premier's consultations with community interest groups, a 24-member Community Leaders' Group was appointed in May 1999 to consult with the people of Tasmania, and to facilitate the development of a vision statement and goals. In June 1999, the Community Leaders' Group, together with 60 other people representing all sectors of the Tasmanian community, met at a three-day conference in Hobart to determine the major issues confronting Tasmania, and the directions that needed to be taken to move forward. The outcome of the conference was the release of an initial draft vision document in December 1999, which formed the basis for a statewide review. From February to May of 2000, the Community Leaders' Group held 60 forums in cities and towns across Tasmania to hear citizens' views about social, environmental and economic issues, and consulted more than 100 community organisations. In response to the consultation, 160 written submissions were obtained from groups and organisations, 4,000 comment sheets were returned in response to the initial draft vision document, and 2,500 postcard responses were received. From the analysis of this information, the Community Leaders' Group wrote the second draft vision statement and 24 goals relating to society and the community, the economy, the environment, and the system of government. Released in October 2000, the second draft was refined following a one-month public review. In December 2000, representatives from community groups, state government agencies and the Community Leaders' Group were appointed to benchmarking committees representing six areas: Community Well Being; Employment and Economy; Sustainable Development; Arts, Culture and Heritage; and Open and Inclusive Government. The benchmarking process, which involved the committees identifying issues relating to the goals, standards presenting measurable statements reflecting the issues, indicators showing what is being measured, and targets, was largely completed during 2001.

In September, the Community Leaders Group (2001) released the vision, goals and benchmarks for *Tasmania Together*. This document set out 24 goals containing 212 benchmarks, which were organised under five categories: Our Community; Our Culture; Our Democracy; Our Economy; and Our Environment. In October 2001, the nine-member Tasmania Together Progress Board was appointed to monitor and report to the state parliament on progress made towards achieving the benchmarks, encourage community organisations to adopt the benchmarks, and oversee five-year reviews of *Tasmania Together*. The Board set up two working groups, one to promote coalitions and the other to monitor and benchmark. These groups collected information on six goals requiring further benchmarking, developed an information program including forums and a newsletter, published progress reports in 2002, 2003 and 2004, completed a process for developing,

reviewing and refining benchmarks, and initiated the first five-year review of the 20-year plan in August 2005.

In mid-1999, the Minister for Education, Paula Wriedt, held a series of meetings with Department of Education officials and representatives from principals' associations, teacher and public sector unions, and parent associations at which issues of concern were raised. Draft proposals for education, training and information provision, developed as an outcome of these discussions, were released for a two-month public review in February 2000. More than 160 responses to the public review were analysed to identify common themes. Five goal-based working groups used the themes to establish concrete actions and strategies to achieve the goals. The work of each group was then consolidated, and five goals were formulated and incorporated into a policy statement, which was released by Minister Wriedt in December 2000.

Published by the Tasmania Department of Education (2000), the policy statement was intended to complement *Tasmania Together*. It presented a long-term plan for transforming Tasmania's education system by providing lifelong learning across child-care, primary and secondary schooling, secondary college education, and library and information services. The vision for a world-class education, training and information system, based on valuing people, achievement, flexibility and innovation, organisation and planning, and a 'fair go' presented in the statement, was supported by five goals.

Goal 1, responsive and continually improving services that ensure all Tasmanians develop knowledge, skills, and confidence, is facilitated by five initiatives. The Learning Together Council will be established to monitor the implementation of the *Learning Together* initiatives, and information technology will be used to increase interactions between policy makers and the community. Support and assistance will be provided to beginning teachers, professional development will be extended to increase teachers' knowledge and skills, and professional learning will be provided to administrative and clerical staff. The Tasmanian Educational Leaders' Institute will be established to provide a professional voice for teachers, and the diversity of leaders will be broadened. Partnerships between schools and local communities will be fostered, community use of school facilities will be encouraged, and an information base about partnerships will be established. The Department of Education will provide accountability through quality management, benchmarking performance, identifying priorities for research and development, and disseminating accountability outcomes on the Internet.

Goal 2, enriching and fulfilling learning opportunities that enable people to work effectively and participate in society, is facilitated by five initiatives. A review will be conducted to develop a school curriculum for the twenty-first century, student achievement will be monitored and reported, and child-care programs will be linked to the school curriculum. The Office of Post-Compulsory Education and Training will be established to coordinate policy, the Tasmanian Qualifications Authority will be established to ensure that standards are maintained, and a range of strategies will be provided to engage young people in post-compulsory learning. Lifelong learning will be

encouraged by providing alternative entry points, and current and practical information on learning opportunities. Post-compulsory training will be linked through statewide and local projects supporting training leading to increased employment, assisting students identify career options, and increasing opportunities for young people by forming community learning advancement networks. The Institute of TAFE Tasmania will be established to promote greater participation.

Goal 3, safe and inclusive learning environments that encourage and support participation in learning throughout all of life, is facilitated by four initiatives. The Behaviour Support Team will be formed to provide effective behaviour support programs, and pilot projects to promote best practice will be established in each district. Strategies will be implemented to increase school attendance, and the participation of 'at-risk' students in post-compulsory education. A literacy intervention program will be developed and strategies to promote literacy and numeracy will be targeted at students with learning difficulties. The skills and confidence of staff working with disabled children will be raised by professional development, children from disadvantaged groups will be provided with access to information services, and gifted children will be provided with opportunities for extension.

Goal 4, an information-rich community with access to global and local resources so that everyone has the opportunity to participate in, and contribute to, a healthy democracy and a prosperous society, is facilitated by four initiatives. The Centre for Excellence in On-line Learning will be established to facilitate on-line learning in schools and form partnerships with local information technology companies. Tasmania's culture and history will be promoted to schools and organisations in other states and countries through electronic and digital resources, and preserved and made accessible. A database of information on cultural resources relating to Tasmania's heritage will be provided, and the public library network will become a key centre for accessing information resources. A partnership will be developed between the state's library services and adult education.

Goal 5, a valued and supported education workforce that reflects the importance of teaching as a profession and is held in high esteem by the community, is facilitated by two initiatives. Exemplary aspects of education will be show-cased in an international conference, outstanding teachers will be acknowledged in an annual education week, a process of registration will be established to protect the professional status of teachers, and a strategy to recruit young people into the teaching profession will be implemented. A program will be instituted to communicate and consult with the education community about changes to the education system, information technology will be applied to provide an on-line management system, and the Department of Education's web site will be used to publicise information about activities and to provide forums.

Appointed in June 2001, the 13-member Learning Together Council is responsible for monitoring implementation of the 46 strategies consisting of 134 initiatives matched to the five goals outlined in *Learning Together*. The Department of Education's Office for Educational Review and Office of Post-Compulsory Education and Training developed a range of methods and tools

to establish baseline data on access to programs, participation in learning throughout life, student achievement, and satisfaction with services. Assessments against these data are conducted on an annual basis. The Learning Together Council reports progress on the implementation of the strategies in the Department of Education's annual report.

In an authoritative history of education in Tasmania, a key theme intimated by Phillips (1985) was the persistent problem of marshalling limited human and physical resources to improve the education system to meet the needs of a small community living on an isolated island. This historical study showed that whilst change occurred in the education system over alternating periods of inertia and activity, change was usually stimulated by external influences. The initial question motivating the author to examine the initiative to develop a school curriculum arose from curiosity about why policy makers in Tasmania had not defined it at an earlier time. This concern raised a query about whether the limited resources that Tasmania's education system could engage in an effort at curriculum reform would be adequate to achieve the change. As the study progressed, the additional issue of whether unconventional aspects of the new curriculum would impede its successful implementation became an important question. The purpose of this paper is to assess the key issues and challenges confronting curriculum reform by analysing the extent to which Tasmania's education system provides capacity building and teacher development, accountability, and public leadership needed to mount successful development and implementation of the *Essential Learnings Framework*. The importance of providing answers to these issues and challenges lies in presenting state and local policy makers, curriculum developers, teachers, parents, students and community members with information to improve their understanding of the curriculum reform, and to guide policy making about the curriculum.

Methodology

In the United States of America, Achieve collaborated in 1998 with the now defunct Council for Basic Education and the Learning Research and Development Center in the University of Pittsburgh to develop a benchmarking process. After three years, Achieve examined the benchmarking studies conducted in 10 states for the purpose of presenting a series of forums. A paper, presented at the annual conference of the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing in Los Angeles, was later published. A report, published by Editorial Projects in Education (2001), the publisher of the weekly newspaper, *Education Week*, and the monthly journal, *Teacher Magazine*, in its Quality Counts series of annual reports on the condition of education in the states, presented an analysis of the studies. Since piloting the benchmarking process in two studies conducted in Michigan and North Carolina, Achieve has published 28 reports on benchmarking studies conducted in 16 states.

The findings of Achieve's benchmarking studies indicate that those states making greatest progress in standards-based education employ reform strategies that meet four challenges. First, all students are exposed to a curriculum aligned to standards with additional support given to low-achieving students. Second, teachers are offered professional development to provide

the knowledge and skills to teach the curriculum, and schools are supported in becoming high performance organisations focused on improving student learning. Achieve identified that issues of capacity building form the greatest challenge facing states as they move from developing curricula and assessments to implementation in classrooms. Third, an accountability system is designed to provide incentives and rewards, and to support failing schools. Achieve identified six elements essential for a comprehensive accountability system. Achievement and other data about individual schools need to be provided. Schools should be rated on their performances. Assistance should be provided to low-performing schools to improve performance. Rewards should be given to highly successful schools. Chronically failing schools should be provided with school improvement strategies. Incentives should be offered to students in the form of graduation examinations and scholarships tied to performance. Fourth, leadership by either an individual, such as an education-minded politician or a highly respected official, or a coalition of political, business and education leaders provides forceful advocacy for reform, thereby building sufficient public understanding and will to sustain support for the reform during its implementation. Achieve identified that states, making most progress in raising student achievement, have had broad-based, sustained political leadership for reform.

Three approaches are applied in Achieve's benchmarking studies to serve different purposes. In the first approach, state standards are benchmarked through brief or in-depth reviews. The brief review provides basic feedback on the content of standards as part of the developmental process. The standards' strengths and weaknesses are identified, and action steps are offered to states for improvement. The in-depth review involves thorough evaluation based on comparisons with exemplary standards from other states and countries, focusing on clarity, specificity, coherence, progression, and rigour. A set of guiding questions customised to the particular state's needs and a comparison of the state's standards to Achieve's benchmarks are prepared to ensure that the most important aspects are evaluated. Detailed feedback and recommendations for improvement follow the review.

In the second approach, Achieve's alignment protocol is applied to analyse the alignment between a state's standards and the assessments a state administers to students. The alignment protocol incorporates the four dimensions of content centrality, performance centrality, challenge, and balance and range considered central in determining the degree of alignment. Rothman et al. (2002) reported on the process of applying the alignment protocol in the three stages of examining the match of the assessment to standards item-by-item, the challenge posed by the assessment, and the balance and range of the assessment. Following these analyses, judgments are made about whether the state is measuring what it expects of students by looking at the assessment as a whole and then across year levels.

In the third approach, comprehensive reviews of systemic reform policies are provided for states. This approach involves a team of prominent experts reviewing various aspects of a state's education system, state policies and practices, interviewing stakeholders, and making recommendations to build on the reform strategy by applying three strategies. First, the review team

examines documents available from the state education agency, state board, universities and task forces, as well as training materials, curriculum frameworks supporting standards, scoring criteria, external studies of education reform, news articles, and web sites. Second, the review team interviews stakeholders involved in the reform effort. Third, the review team considers the information in the documents and that obtained from the interviews in drafting the report. Staff from the sponsoring organisation is given an opportunity to review the draft before the final report is produced.

The analysis of the document, *Learning Together*, indicated that it presents a policy statement on systemic reform. Therefore, the approach applied to review systemic reform policies was seen to be appropriate in this case. As it was considered impracticable for an independent researcher to interview a wide range of stakeholders, the approach applied in this study depended mainly on the review of documents. As the main emphasis of the review lay in determining policy issues relating to curriculum reform, the review focused on two aspects. First, policies arising from the implementation of the strategies in *Learning Together*, associated with capacity building and professional development, accountability, and public leadership, were scrutinised. Reports of studies on education, articles published by the news media, and documents published on web sites were examined to determine the historical context and policy directions of the curriculum reform. Second, the *Essential Learnings Framework*, and supporting resources, together with the assessment system were examined. The *Essential Learnings Framework* was analysed to determine its structure and organisation, and to assess the progression, importance, specificity, and balance of the stated outcomes and standards. The supporting resources, the web-based *Learning, Teaching and Assessment Guide*, the guide to assist child-carers, modules to support professional development, and the booklets to assist teachers plan more effectively, were also examined. Analysis involved reading all relevant documents, making judgments, and preparing a draft report. At this point, the reports on the six reviews of systemic reform policies conducted by Achieve for the states of Illinois, Maryland, Minnesota, Ohio, Oklahoma and Texas were examined to ensure that the analysis followed the procedures of the methodology. Once the draft report had been prepared, it was referred to a panel of officials, curriculum consultants and practitioners for review and comment. The draft report was then revised on the basis of responses to produce the final version of the paper.

The main limitation of this study pertained to the methodology. The content analysis of documents revealed many of the essential features of the current curriculum reform and associated policy issues in Tasmania. However, the conduct of formal interviews to collect data from a wide range of stakeholders involved in the reform effort would have disclosed further insights. A taste of the power of this technique for uncovering other features of the curriculum reform was experienced during the review of the final draft of the paper by the panel of officials, curriculum consultants and practitioners. Several of six panel members, who performed various roles in Tasmania's education system, disclosed additional information that provided different perspectives and deeper insights into interactions between officials in the central bureaucracy, administrators in clusters and schools, teachers, parents, and students. Additional insights of this type would enhance judgments that can

be made about the effectiveness of the new curriculum, and the policies and practices involving capacity building and teacher development, accountability, and public leadership supporting its implementation. The conduct of structured interviews would seem to be an appropriate technique to apply for further research to advance understanding about the key issues and challenges confronting curriculum reform in Tasmania.

Historical Context

Introducing the First School Curriculum

The history of curriculum change in Tasmania's education system has been documented comprehensively in two sources (Hughes, 1969; Phillips, 1985). Hughes identified that its development passed through four stages defined in a classification proposed by Beeby (1966).

As no statutory provisions were made for education following British settlement of Tasmania in 1803 to forestall French occupation and to provide a penal establishment for convicted criminals transported from Britain, the education system reflected the dame school stage. Some 24 schools catering for 785 pupils were established during this period, following the foundation of the first school in Hobart in 1807 under the charge of an emancipated convict. The schools operated independently with no educational program beyond reading, writing and arithmetic delivered by practice and drill methods. The main issue, the provision of a common system of education for all religious denominations, remained unresolved at the close of this period.

The second period, characterised by transition to the stage of formalism, began with the creation by Governor John Franklin in 1839 of the first Board of Education, which provided a common curriculum based on that used by the British and Foreign School Society. The Board's Course of Instruction was limited to reading and writing, supplemented by arithmetic for boys, and needlework and knitting for girls. Teachers could extend the curriculum to include drawing, geography, grammar, mathematics, and natural philosophy.

The third period, characterised as the stage of formalism, commenced in 1865 when the Standard of Instruction for reading, writing and arithmetic with minimum standards of attainment for six grades was issued. The proclamation of the Public Schools Act of 1868 led to the establishment of local school boards to regulate compulsory education for all 7- to 14-year-old children. A select committee, appointed in 1882 to report on the system of education, led to the Education Act of 1885 changing the role of local school boards to local boards of advice, and replacing the Central Board of Education and the inspectorate with an Education Department. However, this change ushered in a period of two decades lacking in innovation.

The fourth period, characterised as moving to the stage of transition, was initiated by an invitation in 1904 to William L. Neale of South Australia to report on primary education in Tasmania. Appointed Director in 1905, Neale endeavoured to reform the education system, but his controversial attempt to introduce the principles of Progressive or New Education by recruiting

teachers from South Australia led to his dismissal in 1909. His successor, William T. McCoy introduced a Course of Instruction in September 1910, based on a version of New Education proposed by Peter Board, the Director of the New South Wales Department of Public Instruction (Selleck et al., 1983). The Course of Instruction covered English, mathematics, scriptural history and moral lessons, history, geography, nature study and elementary science, drawing, manual work, music, and physical culture for seven grades. The Course of Instruction was revised, at first by inspectors in 1919, but under the policy of devolving decision making fostered by George V. Brooks, the long-serving Director from 1920 to 1945, committees of teachers undertook revisions in 1921, 1924, 1929, 1934 and 1942.

The fifth period, characterised by completion of the stage of transition and continuation into the stage of meaning, began with the appointment in August 1942 of the Committee on Educational Extension. Enactment of the Education Act of 1942, which raised the leaving age from 14 years to 16 years, led to a need for a committee to advise on provisions for older pupils to be catered for outside the existing selective high schools, which had been introduced in 1913. Developed in line with recommendations in the Committee's report, which was published by the Education Department of Tasmania (1943), a course of study for modern schools presenting a broadened curriculum aimed at developing individual capabilities instead of attaining academic proficiency, was implemented in 1947. Appointed in 1943, the Committee on Educational Aims in the Primary School initiated a similar shift in the primary curriculum. In its report published by the Education Department of Tasmania (1946), the Committee defined aims for physical health, discovering aptitude, evolving a pattern of abilities, developing abilities, developing social qualities, establishing a regard for truth, developing aesthetic values, appreciating moral values, establishing norms of living, and forming desirable habits. Following revision of the Primary Course in 1948, a new procedure for reviewing the curriculum was adopted in 1949 with the formation of the Primary School Curriculum Standing Committee, which appointed subject-based coordinating sub-committees to undertake revisions. The gradual replacement of modern schools from 1956 by comprehensive high schools led to the advent of a general curriculum across the same subject areas for the primary level and the first four years of the secondary level. Dufty (1971) reported that a national plan agreed at a conference held in Burwood, Victoria, in 1967 was influential in developing, trialing and implementing the Social Sciences syllabus between 1968 and 1976. It represented the most ambitious effort undertaken during this period to apply the research, development and diffusion model for the sequential development of ideas and the integration of disciplines across both the primary and secondary levels.

Setting the Stage for Systemic Reform

Two influential reports, one released in 1968 and the other in 1978, aimed at introducing new developments from external sources into the education system. Commencing in July 1967, the 26-member Committee set up to investigate the Role of the School in Society held hearings with interest groups and citizens in Hobart, Launceston and Burnie. In its report published by the Education Department of Tasmania (1968), the Committee presented

a set of recommendations referring to the organisation of schools, educational programs, teaching and teachers, and the provision of facilities and services. With reference to the curriculum, the Committee recommended that all students in the primary level and the first four years of the secondary level should follow general courses. However, the dual functions of preparing students for higher or vocational education should be followed at the senior secondary level. The program of studies to be followed by all students should consist of arts and crafts, English, mathematics, natural science, physical education, religious education, and social sciences. At the secondary level, students should be introduced to additional subjects, including technical subjects, home arts, personal and human relationships, typing, commercial subjects, and foreign languages. In view of the range of these subjects, provision should be made to offer them as short courses, but also for study in depth during the last two years. In a case study on relationships between different levels of the organisational hierarchy in the education system at that time, Pusey (1976) argued that its centralised, bureaucratic structure stifled many recommendations through paralysis wrought by internal forces. However, the report's recommendations led to significant rearrangements of the school curriculum, as well as establishing new services and expanding existing services for schools.

In November 1976, the Minister for Education appointed the six-member Tasmanian Education Next Decade Committee to review the relationship between schools and their local communities, and evaluate the education system's capacity to meet particular needs. The Committee held public hearings in Hobart, Launceston, Scottsdale, Burnie, Smithton and Queenstown, conducted two workshops on specific topics, met with education and community groups, visited 51 schools, secondary colleges and institutions of higher education, and collected 213 written submissions from citizens, teachers, and professional, parent and community groups. In its report published by the Education Department of Tasmania (1978a), the Committee presented recommendations referring to general priorities, curriculum, organisation of the education system, school and the local community, teachers and teacher education, rural education, and innovation. With reference to the curriculum, the Committee concluded that five issues required resolution in order to adjust curriculum planning to recent innovations. First, guidelines for school-based curriculum development should be implemented and supported by pre-service and in-service training of teachers in curriculum development, provision of resource consultants, and the evaluation of school-based curricula. Second, the content of a core curriculum based on the elements of communicating, thinking and valuing should be defined. Third, schools should become more involved in teaching moral, religious and aesthetic values. Fourth, state-level assessment, professional development of teachers, and additional remedial teachers should be used to raise literacy and numeracy skills of students. Fifth, high schools should become more involved in issuing their own certificates to replace the School Certificate, and secondary colleges should be responsible for developing their own courses and certificates.

Defining a School Curriculum

The adjustments arising from these attempts at systemic reform gave way to separate efforts to effect changes in the curriculum for the primary and secondary levels during the 1980s. Although both efforts began by taking account of the recommendations of these reports, the potent influence of school-based curriculum development precluded more than competencies or capabilities, and areas within a core curriculum being identified.

The 14-member Committee on Secondary Education was appointed to review the existing provisions and desirable lines for future development of the educational program and operation of secondary schools. Commencing its work in February 1976, the Committee surveyed 70 schools to establish an information base, commissioned three external consultants to work with a group of principals to produce papers on specific topics, and accepted submissions from educators and citizens. In its report published by the Education Department of Tasmania (1977), the Committee presented recommendations referring to relationships and responsibilities within the community, the educational program, the organisation of schools, and the provision of resources to schools. With reference to the curriculum, the Committee identified the six broad areas of activity of language, mathematics, the investigation of the physical environment, the investigation of the social and cultural environment, arts and crafts, and problems of concern to adolescents. Although unrelated to these areas of activity, physical education was recognised as an essential part of the educational program. The Committee believed, however, that schools should be given flexibility to organise these areas of activity in different ways, such as through subject disciplines, integrated approaches, and the study of major topics.

With a view to implementing the report's recommendations, the Education Department formed the seven-member Curriculum Task Force in 1977 to identify key issues relating to the school curriculum. Separate forms of a questionnaire were administered in 1977 to 1,824 teachers, 1,289 secondary students, and 3,334 parents to identify their perceptions about school-based curriculum development, a core curriculum, school-based curriculum evaluation, resources and support services, and community involvement. Reported by the Education Department of Tasmania (1978b), the findings of the survey identified that a significant number of schools had developed school-based curricula in most subjects, which were often evaluated in schools. More than two-thirds of the respondents believed all students should undertake a core curriculum, almost nine-tenths believed a core curriculum should include the core subjects, but only a little over a half believed an external authority should set a core curriculum. Curriculum guidelines and syllabuses produced in Tasmania, and commercially produced curriculum materials were the most frequently used resources in schools. Almost nine-tenths of the respondents believed collecting and disseminating ideas and materials to schools should form the main function of a curriculum centre.

Meeting between June 1978 and March 1980, an 11-member Study Group produced a draft paper for a core curriculum, which was reviewed by several teachers. Taking into account the teachers' comments, a Writing Party revised the paper in April 1980 to produce a discussion paper, which outlined four major requirements for a core curriculum (Education Department of

Tasmania, 1980a). First, the curriculum should spring from students' needs. Second, it should assist each student to learn about himself or herself, the world, and the people in it. Third, it should contain a strong thread of usefulness in the form of essential learning, basic competencies, and enabling capabilities. Fourth, it should highlight the purposes of communicating, valuing and thinking to which all teachers subscribe.

In October 1977, the 24-member Committee on Primary Education was appointed to review existing provisions and desirable lines for future development of the educational program and the operation of primary schools. In its report published by the Education Department of Tasmania (1980b), the Committee viewed the constituents for the core curriculum to be an overriding concern for children, something in the minds of teachers and ways of doing them, and enabling capabilities. The Committee supported the continuation of curriculum development and review by subject-based policy and planning committees, responsible for developing curriculum guidelines for use in primary schools. The application of the social interaction model by the Primary Language Committee, appointed in July 1977, to develop curriculum guidelines for English led to the dissemination between 1982 and 1985 of six booklets forming the guidelines, which showed a significant shift in the process of curriculum development over previous decades.

To commemorate its foundation, the Education Department convened the Centenary Conference on Secondary Education in September 1985. Held in Hobart, the Centenary Conference brought together 240 delegates, who heard presentations on current developments in education, and participated in group discussions about a range of issues relating to secondary education identified by three regional groups prior to the conference. The suggestions raised by the delegates were then taken into account in drafting a paper on secondary education, which was released in March 1986 for a statewide review. Following information conferences, comments submitted by teachers, parents, students and community members were used to revise the paper to form a policy statement on secondary education. Published by the Education Department of Tasmania (1987), the policy statement presented a set of principles on provisions for secondary education, the curriculum, students, teachers, parents and the community to guide secondary education in the future. The policy statement indicated that programs should be based on developing competencies and characteristics. Acquiring and conveying information, applying logical processes, undertaking practical tasks as an individual and a member of a group, making judgments and decisions, and working creatively and solving problems formed important competencies. Acting automatically, acting responsibly, showing care and concern for other people, and being concerned about values and beliefs formed important characteristics. These competencies and characteristics should be developed in six fields of knowledge and experience: languages; the sciences and mathematics; the arts; the social sciences; the study of work and daily life; and health, physical education, and recreation.

Drawing on the work of 27 working groups consisting of educators, parents and community members from across Tasmania, the Department of Education and the Arts produced a policy statement consisting of a five-part series of booklets intended as guides for developing educational programs in

primary schools. In the third booklet, the Tasmania Department of Education and the Arts (1991) defined essential learnings to be personal, linguistic, rational, creative, and kinaesthetic capabilities within seven fields of inquiry: language; mathematics; health and personal development; sciences; social education; the arts; and technology.

Implementing the National Statements and Profiles

Pullen (1997) presented a comprehensive documentation of the implementation of the national statements and profiles in Tasmania's education system. At the time of their dissemination, policy statements presenting four key reference points for curriculum planning in schools and providing direction to teachers to incorporate the national statements and profiles through continuing reviews, and a professional development material, used to provide in-service training in schools, were released. Guidelines for kindergarten to year 8 were prepared for each learning area, and published during 1995 and 1996.

A cycle was determined for the implementation period concluding in 2000, and particular learning areas were identified as priorities. Priority was given to Studies of Society and Environment between 1995 and 1997, English between 1996 and 1998, the Arts between 1997 and 1999, and Health and Physical Education between 1998 and 2000, whilst Languages other than English was a priority learning area throughout the implementation period. Each learning area received specific support from a team of curriculum implementation officers drawn from the six districts. Schools were required to review, develop and implement their educational programs according to this cycle. Resources were allocated to each priority learning area according to the cycle, which led to particular curriculum development activities occurring in each learning area. A curriculum guide for kindergarten to year 8 was developed for Studies of Society and Environment. A web site incorporating curriculum guidelines and resources was developed for English. An emphasis was placed on professional development of teachers in the Arts. A curriculum framework for kindergarten to year 10 was developed for Health and Physical Education. A strategic plan was developed to introduce Languages other than English, especially French, German, Indonesian and Japanese into primary schools between 1996 and 2003, and high schools between 2000 and 2007.

Establishing priorities among particular learning areas led to the conduct of several projects. A perception that the national statements and profiles related more to the secondary level led the Department of Education and the Arts to collaborate with the Curriculum Corporation on the Primary Project. An integrate, one-year program of 52 units, using commonly presented topics in primary classrooms, was developed and published in three volumes by the Curriculum Corporation (1996). Two projects on literacy and numeracy led to the development of sets of key intended literacy and numeracy outcomes.

Setting Directions for Education

In April 1997, Premier Anthony Rundle released the Liberal Government's *Directions Statement*, containing sets of directions for education, vocational

education, information technology and advanced telecommunications, electricity and gas, primary industry, aquaculture, forestry, mining and mineral processing, tourism, the Hydro Electricity Commission, and governance. The six *Directions for Education* were intended to establish an outcomes-based system for measuring, monitoring and reporting learning outcomes. Schools and local communities would determine the learning outcomes they would deliver through formal agreements with the Tasmanian Government. These agreements would be supported by devolving decision making to schools, improving leadership in schools by accrediting principals, offering teachers greater opportunities for professional development, and providing schools with computers to facilitate learning.

A six-member Implementation Taskforce was established with individual members being responsible for providing leadership for each *Direction for Education*, whilst a two-member Implementation Taskforce was formed to coordinate implementation by convening forums in each district. Responses collected from 1,900 participants involved in the forums were considered in revising the *Directions for Education*. At the same time, members of the Implementation Taskforce formed working parties to undertake various initiatives relating to learning outcomes, partnership agreements, local decision making, principal accreditation, professional development, and information technology. Important activities were accomplished during 1997 and 1998. Tests were developed and administered to assess learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy for years 3 and 7. The Assisted School Self-Review process for accrediting partnership agreements was trialed and implemented. The first partnership agreements were signed. A process was designed for longitudinal accreditation of principals. Competency standards were developed for teachers. One school in each district was cabled and equipped with computers to act as a lighthouse school to demonstrate how the *Directions for Education* should work in schools. A good practice network was established for using information technology. A video was produced to demonstrate the use of computers in enhancing learning. Computers were purchased to connect all schools to the Internet. Over 1,000 teachers were trained to use information and communication technology. A school community officer, supported by parent contacts, was appointed. Various documents were produced to support the *Directions for Education*.

Developing the Curriculum and Assessments

Essential Learnings Framework

Following the release of the draft proposals for education, training and information provision in February 2000, a nine-member Consultation Team was appointed to conduct a three-year project to develop a curriculum, consisting of three phases: clarifying values and purposes; specifying content; and developing teaching and assessment practices. Beginning in June 2000, district reference groups led more than 6,900 teachers, child-care professionals, business people, community members and students at meetings focusing on clarifying the values and purposes of public education. The report on the consultation, released in October 2000, led to the publication of a statement in December 2000 identifying seven values and six purposes as important.

The statement of values and purposes formed the basis for developing an initial draft of 'emerging' essential learnings, organised into four categories of working organisers. Responses collected from a review were used to revise the initial draft to produce 'working' essential learnings consisting of five categories, each containing a description and several key elements. Selected in November 2000, 20 partnership schools worked with the Consultation Team to refine the 'working' essential learnings, determine outcomes and standards to describe knowledge, skills and competencies, and identify teaching and assessment practices consistent with the values and purposes. In March, the Tasmania Department of Education (2002) released *Essential Learnings Framework 1*, presenting the statement of values and purposes, descriptions and key elements of the essential learnings, culminating outcomes for the essential learnings, and a set of learning, teaching and assessment principles.

Teachers from more than 40 schools worked with the Consultation Team during 2002 to specify sets of expectations for students at different levels to provide the basis for the statement of outcomes and standards. In March, the Tasmania Department of Education (2003) released *Essential Learnings Framework 2*, consisting of three components. The Introduction to Outcomes and Standards outlines the structure of the framework and describes support available to assist teachers. Outcomes and Standards organise the key element outcomes and standards by the key elements of the essential learnings. The Learners and Learning Provision Statement discusses some key advances in the understanding of how learning occurs, and what is known about the distinctive features of learners at different stages in their development. Developed by the Consultation Team and 53 partnership schools, the *Learning, Teaching and Assessment Guide*, released on the Internet in April 2003, presents guidelines for effective teaching, assessing, planning, professional learning, transforming schools, parents and community, and a specific focus for different levels of schooling and the essential learnings. The *Learning, Teaching and Assessment Guide* is designed to be dynamic, and undergo refinement and expansion on the Internet.

The Tasmania Department of Education (n.d.) reported that the involvement of the wider community in defining the values and purposes of public education, and the education community in conceptualising the new curriculum through a process, termed 'co-construction', formed an important feature of the developmental process. The process of co-constructing the essential learnings, and outcomes and standards over separate rounds involved providing each school, which had been selected to participate in the process, with a project officer, who facilitated exchanges between the school's teachers and the Consultation Team, and provided professional learning. During the course of each round, the project officers met on several occasions at statewide and regional meetings to work on particular aspects of curriculum design. A team of teachers in each project school drafted and trialed curriculum documents, and produced materials for inclusion in the *Learning, Teaching and Assessment Guide*. Principals of the project schools met regularly, and played a key role in ensuring the importance of the project in their schools. District superintendents communicated information to

schools, which were not involved in the project, and coordinated the activities of district reference groups. The Consultation Team designed the project, planned budgets, consulted stakeholders, facilitated meetings with principals and project officers, disseminated research findings, and drafted curriculum documents. The process of co-construction emphasised four traits. First, the opinions of all participants were recognised. Second, ambiguity and uncertainty were overcome by building trust and tolerance between participants. Third, advocacy for particular constructs of the new curriculum was built among the participants by encouraging leadership. Fourth, the realities of meeting deadlines, managing disaffection, accepting the limitations of participants' expertise, and reaching consensus were acknowledged.

Implementation of the *Essential Learnings Framework* in public, Catholic and some independent schools is being phased in over five years commencing in 2004 with full implementation in 2009. In 2004, the Department of Education released several resources to support implementation of the *Essential Learnings Framework*. *Essential Connections: A Guide to Young Children's Learning* provides a detailed explanation of learning for young children from birth to age five, produced to assist child-carers and early childhood teachers design programs related to the *Essential Learnings Framework* (Connor, 2004). *Guiding Learning Communities* presents sets of modules organised around eight topics to support school leaders in providing professional training for implementing the *Essential Learnings Framework*. A booklet and CD-ROM, *Planning Learning Sequences*, supports individual and collaborative planning by teachers in using the *Essential Learnings Framework*. A video CD-ROM, *A Curriculum for the 21st Century*, informs parents about the *Essential Learnings Framework*. Other resources released to support implementation of the *Essential Learnings Framework* include *Unlocking Literacy*, *Mental Computation*, *Numeracy is Everywhere*, and *Research into Action*.

Assessment and Reporting System

The school-based, teacher-led assessment and reporting system, which is aligned to the *Essential Learnings Framework*, consists of five components.

The Office for Educational Review is calibrating the standards in the *Essential Learnings Framework* using teams of teachers to write sets of items, which are administered to random samples of students to ensure that they describe accurately a sequenced continuum of student achievement. Maintaining Wellbeing from Personal Futures and Inquiry from Thinking were calibrated in 2003 and 2004. Being Literate and Being Numerate from Communicating were calibrated in 2004 and 2005. Acting Democratically from Social Responsibility, Reflective Thinking from Thinking, and Being Information Literate from Communicating were calibrated in 2005 and 2006. Being Arts Literate from Communicating, and Investigating the Natural and Constructed World from World Futures will be calibrated over the following two years.

The Quality Moderation of Assessment Process, designed to ensure consistency of teachers' judgments in assessing student achievement against the key element outcomes in the *Essential Learnings Framework*, consists of three elements. Consensus moderation, the process of attaining comparability in the assessment of student achievement using collaborative assessment protocols, involves teachers working together to consider student work. Guiding assessment tasks are used to compare schools' ratings with ratings by markers. In July 2005, students in years 6 and 10 completed guiding assessment tasks to assist teachers establish consistency in making judgments for student assessments against the key element outcomes and standards for Inquiry and Maintaining Wellbeing. Statistical monitoring applied by the Cross-Sectoral Assessment Group to establish comparability between assessments of students will be used for the first time in 2006.

The Office for Educational Review designed the Student Assessment and Reporting Information System to enable schools to meet requirements for reporting student performances to parents. Trialed in 2004, the Student Assessment and Reporting Information System was launched in March 2005 on the Department of Education's web site in a partial form consisting of a summative module and a training database. In its full form, the Student Assessment and Reporting Information System provides summative assessment recording and report printing, formative assessment recording, and links to the student digital portfolio for referencing examples of student work. In spite of more than 3,000 teachers being trained in using the Student Assessment and Reporting Information System during 2005, teachers in four high schools in Hobart experienced problems inputting data, which led to modifications being made to the system. Following a trial in 30 schools, a user's guide was written and distributed to schools to forestall such problems.

Each school is required to reach an agreement with parents about reporting students' progress based on guidelines specified in the Assessment, Monitoring and Reporting Policy, which was developed by the Assessment, Monitoring and Reporting Reference Group in consultation with the education community and parent representatives. Agreements provide information about the number, timing, type and style of reports, how students' progress

against outcomes will be reported, and how students' results from school- and system-level monitoring programs will be shared with parents.

The reporting of student assessments to parents, involving substantial changes to prevailing practices, led to the issuing of two reports in 2005. The Essential Learnings Report uses a standardised format for reporting student achievement from kindergarten to year 10 in the key element outcomes in the *Essential Learnings Framework* against three performance levels for each of the five standards. Schools also provide written comments on student performances, which have been agreed by the education community through the Assessment, Monitoring and Reporting Policy. In August 2005, the Tasmanian Government reached an agreement with the Australian Government to use the A-E Report Card for reporting student achievement against quartiles and five bands in plain language. Replacing the Tasmanian Certificate of Education in 2005, the Tasmanian Year 10 Assessment Report was issued for the first time in December 2005. It shows assessments for school leavers against Being Literate, Being Numerate, Inquiry, and Maintaining Wellbeing in 2005, with Being Information Literate being added by 2009, when each of these key element outcomes will be reported.

The Department of Education released several resources to support implementation of the assessment and reporting system. In 2005, the Department of Education published the *Essential Learnings Assessing Guide* to provide teachers with a reference to plan and conduct effective student assessments. In addition, the *Essential Learnings Assessing CD-ROM* provides a companion resource containing materials to support the guide. *Directions in Assessment and Reporting* is a series of publications to inform principals, teachers and school management teams about the Assessment, Monitoring and Reporting Policy. A series of materials to support teachers assess and report on the calibrated key element outcomes and standards include snapshots of learners, changing emphases in progression statements, work samples, additional examples and glossaries. Materials for Being Literate and Being Numerate were released in July 2005, Maintaining Wellbeing in October 2005, Inquiry in December 2005, and Acting Democratically and Being Information Literate in February 2006.

Research Findings

Data on the implementation of the *Essential Learnings Framework*, and the assessment and reporting system were collected by the Tasmanian Branch of the Australian Education Union in consultation with the Department of Education. The Australian Education Union (2004) reported the findings of a survey conducted to identify the extent to which teachers were ready to plan, assess and report using the *Essential Learnings Framework*. A questionnaire, mailed in May 2004 to Australian Education Union representatives in all primary, high, district high, special and support schools, was distributed to all members. Responses were received from 1,334 teachers representing 45.6 percent of Australian Education Union members. The respondents were representative of Tasmania's teacher population in terms of age distribution, basis of employment and status, but teachers working in district high, special and support schools were under-represented in the sample.

The reported findings focused on the five issues of knowledge and understanding of the *Essential Learnings Framework*, using the *Essential Learnings Framework* for planning and teaching, reporting, professional learning, and collaborative planning time. With 98 percent of the respondents having used the *Essential Learnings Framework* for periods up to greater than three years, more than 99 percent reported having some understanding of it, but only 38 percent had a good or thorough understanding. On the other hand, 85 percent knew how to assess student work using the *Essential Learnings Framework*, but less than nine percent had a good or thorough understanding of how to assess student work. Most respondents reported that their understanding of assessment using the *Essential Learnings Framework* came from other teachers, principals and senior teachers. Although three-quarters of the respondents were using the *Essential Learnings Framework* for planning, there was a marked difference between levels with 82 percent of primary school teachers, but only 64 percent of high school teachers, using the *Essential Learnings Framework*. Fewer teachers used the *Essential Learnings Framework* for planning generative topics than for general planning. However, this aspect was more marked between levels with only 64 percent of high school teachers in contrast to 89 percent of primary school teachers using it for this purpose. Although less than half of the respondents believed they could report on the key element outcomes in 2005, the extent varied between different key elements. About 50 percent of the respondents stated they could report against Being Literate, 40 percent against Being Numerate, 34 percent against Inquiry, and 29 percent against Maintaining Wellbeing. Only 42 percent of the respondents stated that they would be ready to report to parents against key element outcomes in the *Essential Learnings Framework* in 2005. Most respondents reported that they had participated in sufficient school-based professional learning, and most had participated in some district- or cluster-based, and centrally based professional learning. Overall, the respondents rated school-based professional learning to be more useful than either district- or cluster-based, and centrally based professional learning. More than four-fifths of the respondents indicated a need for more professional learning on assessment and reporting, a little over half on lesson planning, about one-third on powerful pedagogies, and about one-tenth on the content and structure of the *Essential Learnings Framework*. Two-thirds of the respondents reported that collaborative planning time was conducted at meetings after school, a little over two-fifths on pupil-free and professional activity days, about one-third on half-days for professional learning and non-contact times, and about one-tenth in reduced teaching time or other options.

On the basis of these findings, the Australian Education Union presented 15 recommendations. First, the school week should be reorganised to enable teachers to plan collaboratively during the school day. Second, the time frame for assessment and reporting should be extended to commence after 2005. Third, teachers should be provided with high quality district and centrally provided professional learning. Fourth, practical advice, models, procedures and materials should be provided on assessment, moderation and reporting. Fifth, adequate resources should be applied to bring the knowledge and understanding of all teachers to the same level. Sixth, implementation of the new curriculum should reduce teachers' workloads.

Seventh, parents should be familiarised with assessment and reporting issues and forms. Eighth, more pupil-free days should be provided for professional learning. Ninth, opportunities should be provided for schools to share ideas and strategies. Tenth, teachers' application of essential learnings should be acknowledged. Eleventh, other curriculum initiatives should not be introduced whilst knowledge and practice of essential learnings were being consolidated. Twelfth, issues about direction, consistency of approach and longevity of essential learnings should be addressed. Thirteenth, forums for teachers to debate issues openly about essential learnings should be offered. Fourteenth, the value of sequential and in-depth learning across all levels should be acknowledged. Fifteenth, plans and approaches should be developed for students with special needs.

Subsequently, the Australian Education Union polled members on two occasions about their readiness to report students' progress against the *Essential Learnings Framework*. The need for the polls arose from a perception that the time frame set by the Department of Education for implementing the assessment and reporting system was unrealistic. Of 2,838 members, who responded to the first poll conducted in May 2005, only 17 percent indicated that they were ready to report on students' progress. However, the second poll conducted in August 2005 identified that 62 percent of the respondents believed they were ready to report on students' progress. Informants' explanations varied about factors responsible for the marked differences between respondents' preferences in the two polls. Two informants reported that principals had influenced their preferences, since a vote showing inadequate readiness would have delayed the process of reporting student assessments to parents. Another informant reported observing that teachers' readiness had increased markedly between two moderation sessions conducted in March and October of 2005.

Providing Capacity Building and Teacher Development

The Department of Education undertook several initiatives to support schools develop the capacity to become high performance organisations focused on improving student learning and to provide practising teachers with the knowledge and skills to teach the new curriculum. The Faculty of Education in the University of Tasmania provides pre-service teachers with the knowledge and skills to teach the new curriculum through two graduate degrees.

Several teams were formed in the initial stage of moving from developing the *Essential Learnings Framework* and assessments to implementing them in classrooms. The Curriculum Support Group coordinated planning and assessment activities. The Resource Support Team coordinated the development of comprehensive support materials for schools. The Professional Learning Group planned and facilitated a professional learning program. The Leadership and School Transformation Team coordinated work on school organisation, community liaison, transformation and leadership. A team of three regional principal leaders supported principals in implementing the *Essential Learnings Framework*. District leaders supported district superintendents in curriculum, pedagogical and assessment innovation.

In December 2003, the Department of Education commissioned Atelier Learning Solutions, a consulting group based in Sydney, to review services provided by Tasmania's education system for students with special or additional needs. Information was collected from principals, teachers, support service staff and other stakeholders, and 12 case studies were conducted to gain an understanding of existing practices. Highlighting inconsistent practices relating to the inclusion of students with special or additional needs, the report of the study released by Atelier Learning Solutions (2004), recommended replacing the Department of Education's organisational structure to improve the allocation of resources, extend capacity building in schools, and improve accountability for these students. Following release of the report in July 2004, the Department of Education created a new organisational structure, which was implemented at the beginning of 2005. Three operational branches were formed to replace the six districts. Local administrative units were created with the formation of 27 clusters of schools operated by boards of principals and serviced by support teams. In addition, eight principal leaders were appointed to support the clusters in designing plans detailing the range of services to be provided by each cluster, and to lead professional development for principals.

Two organisations were founded to build capacity in schools to meet the needs of students with special or additional needs. In September 2004, the Department of Education founded the Centre for Extended Learning Opportunities to support schools, teachers, and parents improve the learning outcomes for gifted students with opportunities through essential learnings. The Centre for Extended Learning Opportunities assists schools and teachers identify gifted students, implements the Department of Education's policy for gifted students, and provides a range of services relating to gifted children. An information resource centre provides a collection of print and non-print resources relating to gifted children. A partnership between the Department of Education and the University of Tasmania led to the establishment in June 2005 of the Institute for Inclusive Learning Communities to offer teachers the professional learning required to provide learning for students with special needs.

The eCentre for Teachers was developed as part of the Learning Architecture Project, a collaborative initiative of the Department of Education and Instructional Management Systems Australia to design a framework of portal applications. Launched on the Internet in 2005, the eCentre for Teachers provides a collection of resources and services. Essential Planner allows teachers to prepare and disseminate lesson plans individually or collaboratively by means of a resource repository. The Activity Centre presents learning objects produced by the Essential Planner. Curriculum Explore allows users to search and navigate the *Essential Learnings Framework* and the *Learning, Teaching and Assessment Guide*. The Collaboration and Communications Gateway enables teachers to communicate and collaborate in on-line events, projects and learning communities. The Student Assessment and Reporting Information Service allows teachers to record student assessments. Profiles provide school administrators and teachers with data about individual students. The Student Freeway, a service for students in years 3 to 12, provides a collection of digital resources added in 2006.

The professional learning program played an important role in providing practising teachers with the knowledge and skills to teach the new curriculum. The Essential Learnings Regional Professional Learning Program, consisting of four components on curriculum planning, powerful pedagogies, assessment and moderation, and leading learning, was initiated in 2003. A professional learning program on assessing for learning, curriculum design and pedagogy for essential learnings, and essentials for all was offered in 2005. In addition, six-day workshops on thinking at the heart of the essentials, being literate, and being numerate were offered, and later compiled into modules for teachers to conduct workshops in their schools. At the same time, a resource development program was provided to assist teachers develop resources for publication on the *Learning, Teaching and Assessment Guide*. A professional learning program on thinking, communicating, personal futures, social responsibility, and learners and learning is being offered in 2006. In addition, a centrally based professional learning team assists clusters and schools. A cluster-based professional learning program is also offered to facilitate school improvement.

The four-year Bachelor of Education degree offered by the Faculty of Education in the University of Tasmania at the Launceston campus and the two-year Bachelor of Teaching degree available to graduates at the Hobart and Launceston campuses provide pre-service teachers with the knowledge and skills to teach the new curriculum. Aspects of essential learnings are introduced to pre-service teachers in the Bachelor of Education course. In the first year, students are provided with an overview of essential learnings as part of an introduction to curriculum concepts, and they plan a simple lesson on literacy or numeracy applying essential learnings. In the second year, students examine how essential learnings relate to each learning area, and plan lessons applying essential learnings, which are presented in classrooms during school experience sessions. In the third year, students examine aspects relating to assessment using essential learnings, as well as the national benchmarking assessments for literacy and numeracy. They also plan lessons on literacy and numeracy through a group process. In the fourth year, students concentrate on issues relating to essential learnings for Thinking, student assessment, and the Essential Learnings Report. Since only about 30 percent of pre-service teachers are employed in Tasmania, they are also introduced to curricula used in other Australian states and territories. Aspects of the new curriculum and assessments are incorporated into post-graduate courses offered to practising teachers at the Hobart and Launceston campuses.

Designing the Accountability System

Learning Together sets out strategies and initiatives for establishing an accountability system to collect and report data against benchmarks and targets for the achievement of the five stated goals, and for monitoring and reporting data on student achievement

An incentive for designing an accountability system to collect and report data against benchmarks and targets in *Learning Together* arose from the need to rationalise copious assessment, monitoring and reporting requirements, which lacked coordination and cohesion in meeting accountability requirements. In May 2003, the Department of Education adopted a report card model for designing an accountability system to report data against indicators matched to the goals in *Learning Together*. On this basis, data are collected in the four areas of innovation, continuous improvement and strategic development, efficient and effective use of resources, development of a high performing and supported workforce, and increasing community involvement in and satisfaction with the performance of the Department of Education.

The need for monitoring and reporting data on student achievement to parents, various levels of schooling in an annual school report, and for tracking progress over time was recognised in *Learning Together*. The Assisted School Self-Review process for accrediting partnership agreements was trialed and implemented in 1997 as part of the *Directions for Education*. The process required school communities to collect and analyse data on their performance before determining priorities for the next three years. These priorities were formalised in school partnership agreements. At the end of each year, schools reported their progress towards achievement of their targets in an annual school report. In 2000, the Assisted School Self-Review was replaced by the School Improvement Review, which provided greater flexibility for schools to negotiate their review process, whilst ensuring some mandatory reporting is undertaken by all schools. The School Improvement Review process, which employs a four-year cycle, involves conducting a review in the first year, and then implementing the school improvement plan over the subsequent three-year period. Each year, schools are required to report to their communities and the Department of Education against outcome targets in their partnership agreements. Using an annual report template, schools report progress made in relation to literacy, numeracy, quality teaching, leadership, professional learning, equity, and meeting school community needs, and data on student achievement, participation, and access.

As part of its review of services provided for students with special or additional needs, Atelier Learning Solutions examined the issue of accountability, identifying that considerable work is being undertaken to develop outcome targets that relate directly to the *Essential Learnings Framework*, which will strengthen accountability. By 2008, the Department of Education expects to have available outcome data on some key elements of each of the five essential learnings. At present, the Department of Education is not yet in a position where there is a level of outcome data to enable informed conclusions to be made about educational outcomes for students.

However, the review identified that data collection was being compromised by variable approaches used in districts to manage and use data, the failure of some schools to provide required data, and a poor culture concerning school accountability among district and school leaders. The review concluded that approaches to accountability and practices in accountability needed to be strengthened across the education system.

As a consequence of the findings of the review and the implementation of the new organisational structure, the current School Improvement Review cycle was terminated in 2004 and interim arrangements were put in place for 2005. Development of a new review process in 2005 focused on determining a new schedule, identifying the roles of branch and cluster leaders in the review process, evaluating, trialing and validating the review tools, and working with principals to ensure understanding of the new accountability requirements. New review processes to ensure accountability at both system and school levels, taking into account changes made in the organisational structure, will be implemented in 2006.

Ensuring Public Leadership

Tasmania's isolated location lying 240 kilometres south of the southeastern corner of mainland Australia has hindered the island's development, which is reflected in the state's low achievement on many indicators of economic and social performance. With an area of 68,300 square kilometres, its population of 485,000 is evenly distributed across the settled areas of the island with the urban centres of Hobart in the south, and Launceston, Devonport and Burnie on the northern coast. Tasmania's small public education system caters for about 70,000 pupils taught in 217 schools, consisting of 140 primary schools, 26 combined schools, 31 high schools, eight secondary colleges, and 12 special schools.

Tasmanians have shown shifting political allegiances since the end in 1982 of an almost 50-year period when successive Australian Labor Party governments occupied the state's parliament. Alternate periods of conservative Liberal and progressive Labor governments have been elected to office over the succeeding period with a third force, the Tasmanian Greens, playing an increasingly important role in state politics from the late 1980s. The current 25-member House of Assembly, elected in July 2002, consists of 14 Labor, seven Liberal, and four Green members. The long-standing tradition of the 15-member Legislative Council, consisting of five Labor and 10 independent members, forming a non-party house ensures that it cannot be relied upon to pass any government bill. An important factor affecting the quality of governance has been the reduction in the number of members of the House of Assembly from 35 members and the Legislative Council from 25 members. Initiated in 1998 by the Labor and Liberal parties, partly to effect budgetary restraints and partly to reduce the growing influence of the Tasmanian Greens, the change is now viewed as having restricted the numbers of suitable members available for cabinet positions.

Elected to the House of Assembly in February 1996, the current Minister for Education, Paula Wriedt, has been a forceful advocate for reform of Tasmania's education system since appointment to this office in September

1998. The policy statement on systemic reform, *Learning Together*, released in 2000 has provided Minister Wriedt with a means to promote education as an important priority for the Labor government through several high profile initiatives.

First held in 2001, an annual Tasmanian Education Week recognises the contribution made by teachers. Schools and communities are encouraged to celebrate Tasmanian Education Week in a manner suited to their local needs through professional sharing with other teachers, school-based activities and celebrations, or networking with neighbouring schools for a special purpose. Part of the annual Tasmanian Education Week, the Learning Together Awards for Educational Excellence recognise and celebrate outstanding programs, projects and initiatives, as well as groups and individuals, who have demonstrated excellence. A state panel, chaired by Minister Wriedt, selects recipients recommended by panels in each branch of the Department of Education, TAFE Tasmania, child-care services, libraries and on-line access centres. First awarded in 2001, the Learning Together Awards for Educational Excellence are presented at a public ceremony held annually.

Two international conferences have provided forums to showcase aspects of education in Tasmania. A survey of schools across Tasmania in September 2001 led to 50 schools responding with suggested topics or issues for the first international conference, whilst three regional committees considered the best ways to organise the conference to ensure representation of presentations across Tasmania. Convened in Hobart, Launceston and Burnie over 10 days in July 2002, the Leading Learning conference hosted keynote speakers from Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, including a representative from Harvard University's Project Zero, who introduced participants to the features of the project. In addition, over 80 schools opened their doors to hold more than 100 workshops to share innovative and successful programs with more than 5,000 participants. These presentations focused on a range of issues concerning the curriculum consultation and the vision for schools of the future.

A second international conference was convened in 2005 to examine policy initiatives associated with the *Essential Learnings Framework*, *Essential Learnings for All*, and *Tasmania: A State of Learning*. Convened in Hobart, Launceston and Burnie over 10 days in July 2005, the Leading Lifelong Learning conference hosted keynote speakers from Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. The conference program included a one-day component in each region focusing on building better learning communities, innovation and change in Tasmania, and early childhood. In addition, schools, secondary colleges and lifelong learning centres opened their doors for one day in each region for delegates to examine the implementation of the *Essential Learnings Framework*, *Essential Learnings for All*, and *Tasmania: A State of Learning*.

In spite of Minister Wriedt's energetic advocacy of the education reform agenda, political bipartisanship with the opposition parties has not emerged on some education issues, including the new curriculum and assessment system. Elected to the House of Assembly in July 2002, Liberal Party member, Peter Gutwein has been a leading critic, since being appointed

education spokesman in April 2004. In reflecting the Liberal Party's position, this criticism has focused on the failure of curriculum and assessment documents to be presented in plain language, the lack of explicit standards set for particular year levels, and the excessive workloads imposed on teachers to report on essential learnings in 2005. Therefore, Liberal Party members have called for curriculum and assessment documents to be rewritten in plain language, as well as reviewing the Tasmanian Government's requirements to report on more elements of essential learnings in 2006 by consulting teachers and parents. Also elected to the House of Assembly in July 2002, Tasmanian Greens' education spokesman, Tim Morris has supported the change to the new curriculum and assessment system, whilst being critical of some aspects. The Tasmanian Greens perceive that the new curriculum and assessment system is based on what we do and why, how we do it, and provides assessment procedures for improving learning. However, their reservations about the new curriculum and assessment system relate to unrealistic time frames for development and more particularly implementation, insufficient consultation with stakeholders, inappropriate language used in documents and inadequate resources and professional learning provided to teachers.

The bureaucratic style of Department of Education officials has failed to produce the leadership needed to arouse sufficient public engagement in developing practical policies to support the education reform agenda. Appointed Secretary of the Department of Education in 1997, Dr Martyn Forrest, a health professional, played an important role in a range of educational initiatives at the national and state levels, but never became visible as a strong advocate of the education reform agenda in Tasmania. Following Dr Forrest's appointment as Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services in August 2005, the Chief Executive Officer of TAFE Tasmania, John Smyth, was appointed Secretary in November 2005. Emigrating from Ireland in 1974, John Smyth taught in communications and business, trained new teachers, administered four TAFE institutes and the Northern Territory's Department of Employment and Training, before being appointed chief executive officer of TAFE Tasmania on its creation in 1998. The strongest advocacy for the new curriculum has come from senior officials, as well as branch managers and principal leaders appointed as a result of the organisational restructure introduced in 2005. Whilst many teachers support the new curriculum, a minority has criticised the educational philosophy underpinning the new curriculum and its inconsistent implementation in schools, or the requirement to use an assessment system before understanding it fully.

Representatives of other interest groups have been prominent through the news media in influencing public opinion about the new curriculum and assessment system, whilst at the same time serving their constituents. As a consequence of surveying and polling teachers on curriculum and assessment issues, Australian Education Union Tasmanian President, Jean Walker, has supported some aspects of the education reform agenda, but criticised the hasty implementation of the assessment system and the increasing workloads for teachers. Tasmanian State School Parents and Friends President, Jennifer Branch, has supported the new curriculum and assessment system, but recognised parents' concerns about brochures

designed to inform them about the new curriculum, and the suitability of the Essential Learnings Report. Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry's Chief Executive, Damon Thomas, criticised the failure of the Tasmanian Year 10 Assessment Report to provide employers with appropriate information they require for selecting prospective employees. Furthermore, some stakeholders reported that over-representation by Department of Education officials on committees formed to discuss policy issues associated with the new curriculum and assessments has reduced their influence.

The failure of policy makers, appointed officials and representatives of interest groups to provide unified leadership led to public controversy arising in September 2005 over the new curriculum and assessment system (Geale, 2005a; Geale, 2005b; Geale, 2005c; Geale, 2005d; Geale, 2005e). The controversy emerged over criticisms raised by parents about convoluted language contained in brochures disseminated to them in August 2005 to explain the *Essential Learnings Framework* and the Essential Learnings Report. A publication, referred to as a 'jargon buster', which the Department of Education released on its web site to explain this language, also drew criticism. These actions provided substance for an adversarial debate in the news media between supporters and detractors of the new curriculum and assessment system. Victorian writer and language commentator, Don Watson, characterised the jargon as 'Stalinist language'. Queensland professor of applied language studies, Roly Sussex, criticised the uncommunicative language used in the 'jargon buster'. David Owen, editor of the Tasmanian magazine, *Island*, stated that the terms needed to be defined more simply. A group of student delegates at a Youth Parliament voted to abolish the *Essential Learnings Framework* in favour of the curriculum it replaced. Tasmanian professor of education, Roslyn Arnold, contended that the new curriculum would encourage people to move to Tasmania to participate in its renowned education system. Australian Government Minister for Education, Science and Training, Dr Brendan Nelson, criticised the incorporation of jargon and non-traditional subjects in the *Essential Learnings Framework*. A group of graduating pre-service teachers at the University of Tasmania reported implementing successfully lesson plans based on the *Essential Learnings Framework*. Tasmanian author, Richard Flanagan, labelled the new curriculum a 'lamentable experiment'. Launceston teacher and local government candidate, Kim Corbett, criticised the new curriculum for neglecting basic skills, and commented on difficulties teachers faced grading students consistently using the Quality Moderation of Assessment Process. Australian Education Union Tasmanian President, Jean Walker, reported that teachers across a broad spectrum of age ranges were critical of the new curriculum.

Department of Education officials and Minister Wriedt attempted to quell the criticisms. Acting Secretary, Alison Jacob, acknowledged that the Department of Education could improve the clarity of language used to explain the new curriculum to parents, but stumbled when asked to define a key term in plain language. In acknowledging that language used in the brochures could have been clearer, Minister Wriedt requested the Department of Education to remove the 'jargon buster' from its web site, and the controversy subsided. Late in October 2005, the Tasmanian Government

launched a six-week campaign to promote the new curriculum and assessments to parents through advertisements on commercial television channels. After consultation with Minister Wriedt, Tasmanian State School Parents and Friends, in cooperation with the Australian Education Union, proposed surveying parents during 2006 to gauge their responses to the new reporting system.

Key Issues and Challenges

Essential Learnings Framework

The historical review shows lack of a curriculum that met the needs of students in Tasmanian schools was a major shortcoming. The decision that state policy makers made in the early 1990s to implement the national statements and profiles may have been sound at the time in light of the widely held view that their use would save funds, and reduce time and work for a small state. However, the implementation of the national statements and profiles across the learning areas proved to be uneven, and lacked sufficient coherence to establish an effective curriculum. The reform strategy launched in 1997 by the Liberal Government to introduce outcomes-based education and transform the education system to world-class standing failed to provide a school curriculum. The delay in state policy makers moving sooner in the direction of using the national statements and profiles as a basis for curriculum development may be attributed to policies adopted following an external review of the Department of Education and the Arts by Cresap (1990). The review's recommendations emphasised increasing efficiency within the education system to meet budgetary restraints, and decentralising decision making responsibilities by creating smaller districts and increasing resources to schools.

The philosophical perspective presented in the *Essential Learnings Framework* may be traced back to the discussion paper presenting requirements for a core curriculum published in 1980. Further elaboration of this philosophical perspective in the policy statements on secondary education published in 1987 and primary education published in 1991 represented the curriculum as a two-tiered structure of essential learnings grounded in knowledge, skills and competencies, and particular fields of study. Based on concerns about an overcrowded curriculum, the Consultation Team decided early in the second phase of the curriculum consultation after reviewing responses from stakeholders and discussions with two focus groups of key educators to use essential learnings to organise outcomes and standards. This decision influenced the nature of the process and the attributes of the products of the curriculum consultation.

The process used to research and to develop the *Essential Learnings Framework* showed strengths and weaknesses, as well as potentially unforeseen consequences. An information base of research was accumulated on theories of child development, brain activity, and intelligence, which underpinned the emphasis placed in the constructs of the *Essential Learnings Framework* on developing higher order thinking, engaging students more deeply in learning, and supporting transfer of learning. However, the lack of an extensive body of research relating to specific disciplines in the

information base suggests limited attention was given to professional knowledge about how learning is fostered in these disciplines. Focusing on clarifying values and purposes of public education, the first phase of the developmental process provided a strong basis for establishing a curriculum that recognised community needs. The process of involving teachers from a small sample of selected schools in working with the Consultation Team in conceptualising the essential learnings, and outcomes and standards was intended to engage the education community. By eschewing the general practice of using committees based on subject expertise for this work, the practice of co-construction may have compromised the definition of outcomes based in disciplines representing bodies of knowledge and ways of thinking that have evolved over centuries. It is possible that these idiosyncrasies contributed to the development of a curriculum, which later led to public controversy over difficulties posed in its use and to theoretical considerations that govern the selection and organisation of content in unconventional ways that the wider community does not accept.

An alternative approach to national curriculum collaboration in Australia has been postulated by Alan Reid, professor of education at the University of South Australia, as part of a research fellowship instigated by the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training. Undertaken between October 2002 and September 2003, the project explored whether the notion of national curriculum collaboration is still relevant, and if so, how it might be advanced in a more educationally productive way. In the report of the study, Reid (2005) proposed a capabilities-based curriculum for Australia. Development of a capabilities-based approach could be an extension of the National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century, although capabilities play a different role. There would be two key phases of an ongoing discussion and debate in the education community. The first would focus on the nature of capabilities. The second would be a professional discussion about how to work through the content described in state and territory curricula. Initially, the Australian government would promote the first phase, whilst the second phase would occur in schools before the discussion is widened in each jurisdiction and across states and territories. Reid proposed that a set of capabilities could be common across Australia, and would become a focus of teaching and learning in each state and territory. At the same time, the states and territories would retain existing content-based curricula organised in a manner agreed within each jurisdiction. Teachers would teach through the content in order to develop the capabilities.

In analysing current curriculum initiatives in Australia, Reid concluded that the competencies developed by the committee chaired by Mayer (1992), the interdisciplinary basis for organising content in Education Queensland's New Basics Project, and the notion of essential learnings appear to break away from the dominant curriculum approach. However, they have not been theorised in terms of what they are and what role they play. In spite of appearing to break away, they have been drawn back into the dominant curriculum approach, which is based on the valued knowledge of a society organised as a product by subjects and outcomes. The approach most closely related to that proposed by Reid is the conceptualisation in the *Essential Learnings Framework* of essential learnings independent of learning areas. Referring to draft curriculum documents, Reid commented:

“Given that this is a new approach, it is not surprising that there is still some ambiguity. But it appears that the project has not yet been able to shake clear of the dominant grammars of the official curriculum. Perhaps the most obvious evidence of this is that the Essential Learnings are expressed in terms of outcomes and so have been atomised in much the same way as the knowledge-content of the dominant curriculum approach. ... The fragmentation of the Essential Learnings and the lack of clarity about the ways in which they relate to the Key Learning Areas make it difficult to see how this approach can do anything other than confirm the dominant curriculum grammars. This assertion is not intended to be negative – the Tasmanian project represents an important step forward in curriculum work in Australia. And its process of development over a long period of time, involving consultation with the community and deep discussion and trialing within the profession, presents a fine model of curriculum development. A new approach to national curriculum collaboration would do well to start with an analysis of the Tasmanian model.” (Reid, A., 2005, *Rethinking National Curriculum Collaboration: Towards an Australian Curriculum*, Canberra, ACT: Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training, 60. Copyright Commonwealth of Australia reproduced by permission.)

This analysis intimates that the *Essential Learnings Framework* occupies a transitional status in curriculum work in Australia. Its failing in accomplishing a transformation of the type envisaged by Reid could be a consequence of processes used in previous curriculum reforms in Australia being increasingly relied upon for its diffusion and adoption. Marsh (1994) asserted that the authority innovation decision-making model of curriculum change, whereby decisions are made by superordinate groups and carried out by subordinate groups was applicable to the process of developing the national statements and profiles. Marsh identified that the ministers for education, the Australian Education Council, the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training, the Curriculum Corporation, and the chief executive officers of state and territory education and accreditation agencies formed superordinate groups, which interacted through complicated relationships based on hierarchy, formal or informal contacts. Professional associations, principals and teachers formed subordinate groups, which were excluded from decision making, because they lacked the same degree of access to knowledge. Reid argued that the authority innovation decision-making model does not engage those expected to implement the curriculum in the conceptualisation phase, and fails to develop a deep constituency of support for new approaches. Lack of involvement in the conceptualisation phase leads teachers to either ignore, or shape the reform to fit existing paradigms. Limiting teachers’ involvement to time-challenged consultation processes presumes there are correct answers, and excludes challenging professional conversations about issues, problems and possibilities.

Limited evidence collected during the course of this study showed the value of involving teachers in conceptualising the curriculum in the initial phases of the developmental process. One informant reported that teachers in some project schools were involved consistently and heavily in conceptualising the new curriculum, but the involvement of teachers in other project schools was

limited. In the former case, schools were provided with adequate resources, led by visionary school leaders, supported by professional development, or provided outstanding teachers with opportunities to network with other schools. At the same time, Minister Wriedt was seen to be promoting curriculum reform, and excitement was generated among teachers about their contributions to co-constructing the essential learnings. In the latter case, schools were hindered by inexperienced or inadequate leadership, the departure of teachers experienced in essential learnings, teachers' negative attitudes about the new curriculum, inexperienced support teachers, or their small size and isolation.

The value of involving teachers in conceptualising the curriculum appeared to decrease as the scope and scale of the curriculum reform extended, and problems emerged to the point that the authority innovation decision-making model asserted a predominant position in the diffusion and adoption phases. The same informant reported that various problems increased during the course of the developmental process. Teachers' confidence decreased and their sense of direction faltered as they realised that co-construction of the new curriculum represented work in progress. Those teaching in learning areas with subject matter structured in a linear fashion, such as mathematics and languages, were not readily engaged. Pressures mounted on principals to perform created dilemmas about state demands and their responsibilities to their staffs. Teacher transfers and promotions changed the climates of schools making consistency more difficult to maintain. Some bureaucrats adopted an authoritarian stance by presenting an ideological position on essential learnings. The lack of consultation with parents led to them demanding answers from poorly informed teachers. The available resources became diluted as more schools were involved. Human errors, such as mistakes in curriculum documents, inconsistency in moderation, and computers malfunctioning, increased. Detractors of the new curriculum rallied, and negative publicity increased. By the first year of the new curriculum's implementation, some teachers reported that a culture of indoctrination about the virtues of the new curriculum and a lack of tolerance for dissenting views pervaded school environments.

The *Essential Learnings Framework* is not organised according to a traditional structure of learning areas. Instead, concepts are organised into non-disciplinary topics according to five essential learnings: Thinking; Communicating; Personal Futures; Social Responsibility; and World Futures. Within an essential learning, concepts are organised by key elements. For instance, English and mathematics outcomes are found under particular key elements in Communicating. Science outcomes are found under particular key elements in World Futures. Studies of society and environment outcomes are found under particular key elements in Personal Futures, Social Responsibility, and World Futures. Commentators justified this unconventional structure by arguing that it promotes the teaching of thinking using forms of inquiry at the heart of the disciplines, mitigates an overcrowded curriculum by providing in-depth understanding, and acknowledges the findings of research relevant to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment (Hanlon, 2004; Connor, 2005). At a more detailed level, the essential learnings include outcomes and standards for each of 18 key elements. A key element outcome, which is stated for each key element, is

translated into five standards representing specified developmental levels at the end of kindergarten and years 2, 5, 8 and 10.

An external analysis of the key element outcomes, organised in this structure, provided an unfavourable conclusion about their quality. Funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training, Education Strategies, a consulting group based in Melbourne conducted the first study in Australia to assess the quality of outcomes at the primary level in curriculum documents used in the six states and the Northern Territory. For mathematics, outcomes in Australian curriculum documents for 'multiplication and division', and 'fractions and decimals' were compared with those in documents used in Singapore, Japan and California. For science, outcomes in Australian curriculum documents for 'chemical matter' and 'physical world' were compared with those in documents used in Singapore, England and California. For English, outcomes in Australian curriculum documents for 'literature' and 'beginning reading' were compared with those in documents used in England, New Zealand and California. In the report of the study, Donnelly (2005) found that the quality of the key element outcomes specified in the *Essential Learnings Framework* rated poorly against those found in documents used in all other Australian jurisdictions as well as other countries. For mathematics, outcomes for 'multiplication and division', and 'fractions and decimals' showed limited evidence of academic rigour, detail, clarity, and ease of measurement. It was inferred that the key element outcomes for Being Numerate assessed in the study were of little assistance for detailed planning of programs for each year level and for providing clear progression of content across year levels. For science, outcomes for 'chemical matter' showed some evidence of ease of measurement, but limited evidence of academic rigour, detail and clarity, and outcomes for 'physical world' showed some evidence of academic rigour, detail, clarity, and ease of measurement. It was deduced that the key element outcomes relating to science assessed in the study provided teachers with little guidance about science concepts or understanding about what students should learn. For English, outcomes for 'literature' showed some evidence of detail and clarity, but limited evidence of academic rigour and ease of measurement, and outcomes for 'beginning reading' showed limited evidence of academic rigour, detail, clarity, and ease of measurement. It was concluded that the key element outcomes for Being Arts Literate assessed in the study failed to provide specific knowledge, understanding and skills referring to 'literature', because they were generic, relating to a range of arts' forms. Although the key element outcomes for Being Literate assessed in the study provided better direction for teachers, they were flawed in terms of definition, detail and sequence. It was inferred that the key element outcomes relating to 'beginning reading' assessed in the study placed greater emphasis on critical literacy and whole language than on phonics.

It is apparent from this evidence that the new curriculum reveals intrinsic defects. It suggests that many of the key element outcomes and standards in the *Essential Learnings Framework* do not satisfy criteria relating to quality of outcomes. Unfortunately, policy makers and Department of Education officials have been reluctant to acknowledge the findings of such research studies. For instance, the release of the study undertaken by Education Strategies in September 2005 prompted Minister Wriedt to denounce it as

biased and lacking independence. Furthermore, the public controversy over the new curriculum in 2005 highlighted similar concerns. Some primary teachers criticised the lack of attention in the new curriculum to the teaching of basic skills in literacy and numeracy. Some secondary teachers criticised the lack of academic rigour in the new curriculum. Some parents objected to jargon in brochures designed to publicise the new curriculum. Employers' groups questioned whether the new curriculum would address employers' concerns about the perceived decline in literacy and numeracy skills of school leavers. Policy makers and Department of Education officials need to acknowledge these criticisms, and address issues referring to the poor quality of key element outcomes and standards in the *Essential Learnings Framework* by modifying the new curriculum to overcome these defects.

Revision and refinement of the *Essential Learnings Framework* should proceed from the recognition that a degree of uncertainty prevails in the national context concerning a curriculum policy Australian education systems should follow. Concerns have been raised by curriculum leaders about the inadequacy of politically agreed compromises reached in the 1990s over the arbitrary placement of disciplines into learning areas. Opposition has been raised in some quarters to the dominance of outcomes-based education on curriculum reforms in Australia from a standpoint that its emphases on multi-disciplinary and constructivist approaches to learning have impaired students' academic achievement. With these key issues being highlighted at present, there seems little prospect of contending groups within the education community reaching a consensus on a direction to proceed in curriculum policy. The proposal postulated by Reid, however, may provide a new direction for future curriculum planning, but its capability for neutralising the issues underpinning divisive debates needs to be assessed, its detailed organisation requires further articulation, and its central propositions need to be disseminated more widely within the education community.

On the other hand, particular strengths of the new curriculum received little attention during the public controversy. The Department of Education has taken a bold initiative in applying information and communication technology and publishing a range of documents to support the new curriculum. The development of the Internet-based *Learning, Teaching and Assessment Guide* provides a dynamic resource that allows teachers to contribute to the implementation of the new curriculum, but also provides the capability of engaging teachers in the conceptualisation of the curriculum at the local level. The publication of a range of documents, especially *Essential Connections: A Guide to Young Children's Learning* and *Essential Learnings Assessment Guide* will serve particular audiences within the education community with resources that meet specific needs.

Assessment and Reporting System

The review showed that the initial steps have been taken to develop and implement each of the components of a school-based, teacher-led assessment and reporting system. However, the analysis of key issues relating to the assessment system shows that problems associated with its implementation were prominent among factors impeding successful implementation in 2005. Survey findings in 2004 showed that whilst most

teachers knew how to assess student work, only a small proportion had a good or thorough understanding. Furthermore, less than half the teachers surveyed believed they would be ready to report on key element outcomes of the *Essential Learnings Framework* in 2005, a finding confirmed in a poll conducted on this issue in May 2005. Although a second poll conducted in August 2005 showed a considerable increase in the number of teachers believing that they were ready to report on students' progress, it is possible that this result may be attributed in part to principals influencing teachers' preferences. Teachers' lack of readiness to report on students' progress was compounded by problems relating to the adoption of particular components of the assessment system. On several occasions, teachers experienced difficulties inputting data into the Student Assessment and Reporting Information System, although Department of Education officials attributed these difficulties to teachers using it before having received training or using it for purposes for which it was not designed. In October 2005, the Australian Education Union threatened industrial action, if teachers were placed under excessive workloads by the reporting procedure. Furthermore, principals were reported to have directed some teachers to go onto sick leave to complete the reporting procedure in time.

Development, diffusion and adoption of an assessment system consisting of five components involve making large changes in the education system consisting of many steps based on a low level of knowledge about how to effect them. At present, the components of the assessment system lie at varying stages within the process of development, diffusion and adoption. Furthermore, external factors, such as the decision to use two reports, have added to the difficulties of accomplishing adoption of the sequence of activities smoothly. Therefore, it is difficult to separate problems that constitute transitory difficulties associated with training, trialing and installing the components from possible, inherent defects in the assessment system, which may cause long-term problems in its adoption. Added to these constraints, several novel features of the school-based, teacher-led assessment and reporting system, such as the Quality Moderation of Assessment Process and the Assessment, Monitoring and Reporting Policy, make it difficult to judge how well the assessment system will perform. Consequently, it is impossible to reach conclusions about the degree of alignment between the assessments and the standards in the *Essential Learnings Framework*, a critical issue that remains unanswered.

Capacity Building and Teacher Development

The review showed that promising strategies for strengthening the organisational capacity of schools to implement the new curriculum are being initiated. The first stage of building the capacity of schools to implement the *Essential Learnings Framework* was taken by several teams of centrally based consultants. They focused on particular aspects of curriculum planning and assessment, curriculum resources, professional learning, leadership and school transformation, or on particular groups, such as superintendents and principals.

An important step with a potential to extend capacity building to support schools was taken by the formation in 2005 of three organisational branches

in the Department of Education to manage accountability and provide support to clusters, and the creation of clusters to form local administrative units. The formation of clusters represents an important step in extending the decision-making process to the local level, the first occasion in a century since administration was assumed by a centralised bureaucracy after local school boards, set up in 1868, were merged with municipal councils in 1907.

The introduction of clusters provides the education system with appropriate bodies at the local level to build the capacity of schools to implement the new curriculum successfully. The strategy of appointing principal leaders to strengthen the work of boards of principals, and support teams servicing schools presents the possibility for improving the capacity of schools to implement the new curriculum in classrooms. However, one informant reported that not all aims and objectives had been met. The formation of clusters had been fraught with difficulties in 2005, because of the short time frame for implementation and limited consultation with stakeholders. Limited opportunities for principals to meet, as they had previously done at the district level, meant that the induction of new principals, and possibilities for principals and branch directors to network to the same level as in the past could not be met. This often resulted in significant variations between clusters during the implementation process. At the cluster level, however, there was the opportunity for cohesive groups to form, but this varied across the state. Coordinating principals, responsible for operating the clusters, were sometimes compelled into the position. Many found the job untenable because of increased workloads, the tension of having two jobs, and directives from central and branch levels, which were sometimes inconsistent or impractical. Each coordinating principal chose a co-principal without recourse to a selection process. The short time frame and inadequate funds for implementing the new organisational structure had led to a serious decline in morale among principals, teachers and parents by the commencement of 2006.

However, the new organisational structure provides unanticipated and unexplored opportunities for the education community to review and revise the *Essential Learnings Framework* and the assessment system at a future time to meet changing needs. Although the new organisational structure provides scope for teachers to be involved in conceptualising the curriculum at a local level, schools are likely to require substantial funds, technical assistance and resources to support such endeavours in the future. Issues of uniformity in allocating funds, technical assistance and resources among the 27 clusters need to be addressed in any plan for their provision.

The new organisational structure came about because of a review of services provided to students with special or additional needs, demonstrating that the Department of Education has placed a high priority on developing new services and allocating resources to schools for these students. The Centre for Extended Learning Opportunities, established by the Department of Education in September 2004, will pursue this priority for improving the learning outcomes with respect to gifted students. The Institute for Inclusive Learning Communities, established at the University of Tasmania in June 2005, will take up this priority in terms of providing teachers with the knowledge and skills to teach students with special or additional needs.

A further promising step in developing the capacity of schools to become high performance organisations was taken in 2005 with the advent of the eCentre for Teachers. Enabling teachers to develop and disseminate lesson plans, search the curriculum, manage content, record student assessments, and access student information, the eCentre for Teachers offers considerable potential for creating networks among teachers for continuous sharing of curriculum content.

The Professional Learning Program plays an important role in providing practising teachers with the knowledge and skills to teach the new curriculum. Various professional learning activities offered through the Professional Learning Program have focused on assisting teachers to understand the concepts underlying the *Essential Learnings Framework*, and equipping them with a range of skills to assist students to master the concepts. Although the findings of a survey conducted in 2004 indicated that teachers most valued school-based professional learning, one respondent reported that its quality varied markedly between different schools, depending on the commitment and depth of understanding shown by school leaders and supervising teachers. Differences between schools in their levels of professional learning, compounded by some schools having been involved in this activity at later times, created tensions within the organisational structures of clusters. Although the devolvement of decision-making to clusters has the potential of allowing teachers to take greater responsibility for their own professional learning, there is a need to provide cluster-based professional learning that is relevant to meeting this need, sustain it over time, and enhance flexibility in centrally mandated requirements.

The Faculty of Education in the University of Tasmania plays an important role in providing pre-service teachers with the knowledge and skills to teach the new curriculum. The key concepts underlying the *Essential Learnings Framework* and aspects of the assessments are introduced to pre-service teachers sequentially over a four-year course. Pre-service teachers are also provided with opportunities to apply the knowledge and skills to plan lessons, which are taught in classrooms during school experience sessions. However, one respondent reported there was little anecdotal evidence indicating that pre-service teachers possess adequate knowledge and skills to teach the new curriculum on entering the teaching force.

Accountability

Tasmania's education system does not currently provide a coherent accountability system based on the six elements identified by Achieve. Instead, the accountability system established in response to *Learning Together* is based on a notion of accountability as a process for agency improvement. Whilst such a concept is useful for generating information to transform the education system to meet specific goals, the issue of school improvement has not been addressed adequately within such an accountability system.

The proposal presented in *Learning Together* to establish a curriculum also included a recommendation to monitor and report data on student

achievement. As a consequence, the development and implementation of the *Essential Learnings Framework* shifted the focus of accountability to school improvement. The need for accountability to address school improvement was met through the School Improvement Review, originally designed for accrediting partnership agreements between schools and their communities. Before its suspension in 2004, the School Improvement Review only provided one element, the collection of achievement and other data about individual schools, required to design the type of comprehensive accountability system envisaged by Achieve. The review conducted by Atelier Learning Solutions identified the existence of variable practices in data collection and poor attitudes towards accountability among some district and school leaders, suggesting that the School Improvement Review process did not provide accountability practices of high quality.

An intention on the part of the Department of Education to develop outcome targets related to the *Essential Learnings Framework* by 2008 will provide appropriate areas of measurement on which to base accountability practices of high quality. However, it is unclear whether the new review process being developed in 2005 will incorporate the six elements identified by Achieve as essential to build a comprehensive accountability system.

Public Leadership

A political agenda aimed at shifting public investment from physical infrastructure to information and communication technology drove the reform strategy initiated by the Liberal Government in 1997. The broadening of this strategy by the Labor Government, elected to office in 1998, to include social and environmental issues was facilitated by a plan formulated through community consultation. The political agenda of the Labor Government was translated in educational terms in *Learning Together*, a comprehensive strategy for systemic reform of Tasmania's education system, which included development and implementation of a school curriculum.

Learning Together provided Minister Wriedt with opportunities to demonstrate credible public leadership through high profile and well-publicised events, such as the annual Tasmanian Education Week and two international conferences. In spite of the course of the curriculum consultation proceeding without contention, controversy arising in September 2005 over specific aspects relating to the new curriculum and assessment system debilitated the credibility of this leadership. The failure to win bipartisan support from other political parties, employer, union and community groups, and the general public contributed to this situation. The major challenge facing an education-minded politician in this situation is to garner broad-based support from a coalition of political, education and business leaders, essential to build public understanding and will to sustain the reform strategy during implementation. It is evident that Minister Wriedt and supporters of the curriculum reform had retrieved their positions to some degree by the commencement of 2006, but a coalition of stakeholders that speaks with a single, unified voice had not yet emerged. It is unlikely that progress in building stronger public support for the new curriculum and assessment system will occur until such a coalition is formed.

Leadership from the education community forms an important element of such a broad-based coalition. The centralised, bureaucratic administration of the Department of Education, which accrued over a century since its foundation in 1885, has been a key factor affecting the emergence of education leaders capable of providing strong, public advocacy for reform. Following a study tour undertaken in Australia in 1954, Butts (1955), a professor of education at Teachers College, Columbia University, highlighted the detrimental effects of centralised bureaucracies on Australian education systems. They fostered uniformity in policy making, relied on inspectorates and examinations, and discouraged public involvement in decision making. A notable feature of bureaucratic structures in state education agencies since that time has been a gradual decentralisation of decision making to a wider range of participatory groups. In a later study, Sturman (1989) identified that patterns of decision making in education systems are not uniform across the Australian states and territories. Sturman inferred from available evidence that Tasmania's education system is based on a model in which professionals establish structures to satisfy the needs of school communities. This conclusion is consistent with the outcome of the consultative process used to develop the new curriculum and assessment system.

At present, responsibilities for decision making in Tasmania's education system appear to lie in a transitional phase, characterised by the persistence of centralised, bureaucratic rules along side new management roles for branches and clusters. For instance, Department of Education officials' suppression of teachers' dissenting views about the new curriculum and assessment system represents a harking back to anachronistic, bureaucratic rules. On the other hand, the practice of involving teachers from selected schools and the Consultation Team in conceptualising the *Essential Learnings Framework*, embraced by the same officials, represents a shift to a more open form of decision making. The key challenge facing Department of Education officials is to realise the potential that transformation to the new organisational structure offers for involving a wide range of participants in decision making concerning implementation of the new curriculum and assessment system, and their review in the future.

Conclusion

The findings of this study show that Tasmania has embarked on a very bold and ambitious reform of its education system for such a small state. The policy statement, *Learning Together*, proposed developing a school curriculum as one strategy in this ambitious plan consisting of 46 strategies and 134 initiatives. Examination of the new curriculum and assessment system, and practices involving capacity building and teacher development, accountability, and public leadership supporting the curriculum reform, identified both strengths and weaknesses, and some aspects about which it is difficult to form judgments at present concerning likely successes or failures. In summary, the standards in the *Essential Learnings Framework* and the assessments are aligned, but it is premature to pass judgment on the degree to which they are aligned. Whilst promising initiatives are being put in place to provide capacity building and teacher development to support implementation of the new curriculum, problems were encountered during 2005 in implementing the new organisational structure, a key element in

building the capacity of schools to implement the new curriculum. The accountability system, which has only one element in place, is the weakest practice supporting implementation of the new curriculum. Whilst leadership shown by an education-minded politician has been forceful, public controversy over aspects of the new curriculum and assessments arose in 2005 because unified public leadership is lacking.

The findings of this review of curriculum change in Tasmania's education system support the contention argued by Phillips that change has usually arisen in response to external influences, often displacing periods of inertia by considerable activity, when changes have been introduced. This conclusion is pertinent to the reforms arising from the release of the policy statement, *Learning Together*, especially in relation to the strategy to develop a school curriculum. Evidence was collected during the course of this study indicating that implementation of the new curriculum and assessment system is being impeded by instances of poor decision making on the part of bureaucrats, curtailed time frames, inadequate funds, inappropriate resources, and tensions between different groups in the education community. The decision to implement the new curriculum and assessment system and the new organisational structure at the same time did not take into account the capacity of schools to adopt both of these changes. The time frame for implementing the new assessment and reporting system has imposed excessive workloads on teachers. The funds to support the range of strategies in the ambitious reform plan appear to be inadequate. Some centrally provided resources no longer appear to match the changing needs of teachers. Different attitudes held by centrally based, cluster-based and school-based staff, union officials and parents, particularly over the new assessment and reporting system, are causing tensions between these groups. These issues constitute a key factor inhibiting Tasmania from reaching the high quality of the best performing education systems in other countries.

On the basis of these general conclusions, it is feasible to present a set of recommendations. The sequence in which these recommendations are presented reflects the organisation of this report, but not necessarily the order in which policy makers should consider them. The issue raised in the preceding paragraph about the limited availability of funds and resources to support the reform plan needs to be taken into account in establishing priorities among these recommendations. In view of the recent public controversy, it could be argued that recommendation 5 should take precedence. In support of this view, a case can be made that the leadership group could be established as an independent body, be funded by both public and private sources, and commence building public understanding to sustain support for the new curriculum and assessment system within a short time. Clearly, issues pertaining to the quality of the curriculum are of paramount concern to educators, parents and students. Therefore, policy makers should give priority to considering recommendation 1, noting that several procedures, suggested for revising the curriculum, provide scope for it to be initiated at different entry points in the process. The close relationship between the curriculum and assessments suggests that recommendation 2 should be considered next in order. As it is evident that the initial steps are already being taken to build capacity in the education system and to provide

teachers with professional development, recommendation 3 should be considered as continuing an ongoing initiative. Since the nature of issues relating to accountability is long term rather than immediate, recommendation 4 could be considered at a later time.

Essential Learnings Framework

The research base and the developmental process applied to construct the *Essential Learnings Framework* stress particular attributes. The research base emphasises pertinent fields of child development, brain activity and intelligence, but pays less attention to other fields. The involvement of the education community in clarifying the values and purposes of education, and teachers in conceptualising the *Essential Learnings Framework* led to an emphasis being placed on non-disciplinary topics rather than traditional academic disciplines. A consequence of the emphasis on topics, which do not reflect bodies of knowledge and ways of thinking that have evolved over centuries, is that the outcomes expressed in the *Essential Learnings Framework* fail to provide sufficient academic rigour, detail, clarity, and ease of measurement. From evidence collected during this study, it seems the process of co-construction, applied during the initial developmental phases for conceptualising the curriculum, has been replaced by the authority innovation decision-making model for implementing the new curriculum. These conclusions suggest that new knowledge and processes should be considered and applied to revise the *Essential Learnings Framework* in the future.

Recommendation 1: Whilst continuing implementation of the new curriculum, the state should examine refining the outcomes and standards in the *Essential Learnings Framework* to provide greater clarity, depth, focus, precision and rigour, and consider improving the balance of the curriculum constructs.

As an initial step, research relating to specific disciplines should be examined to broaden the research base. This step will allow the content that students should learn to be added in greater specificity, and integrated with skills and processes in the *Essential Learnings Framework*. As part of this process, the key elements of the essential learnings may need to be reorganised and integrated to give greater prominence to the core academic areas of English, mathematics and science. As refinement should focus on what students are expected to learn, the standards should be specified in year-by-year terms making it clearer to teachers what content students are expected to learn. The development of curriculum guides, which specify the content in the disciplines, may form a natural progression from this step to support the *Essential Learnings Framework*. The revision process could employ several alternative procedures, ranging from nominating a revision cycle, producing bridging documents, to infusing the concept of continuous improvement. The revision process should include an analysis of the qualities of curriculum documents used elsewhere, the identification of the best practices emerging locally, and the application of committee work and procedures. The Department of Education should identify a range of exemplary curriculum documents used in international contexts from benchmarking activities undertaken by education organisations recognised for this work to provide a

basis for the initial step. The Department of Education should collaborate with the Faculty of Education in the University of Tasmania to conduct a series of research projects in Tasmanian schools to examine teachers' experiences and students' performances with the new curriculum to provide a basis for the second step. The Department of Education should commission committees consisting of teachers recognised for their expertise in particular disciplines, together with community representatives, to refine the outcomes and standards by applying the findings of the analysis of exemplary curriculum documents and incorporating examples of best practices.

Assessment and Reporting System

Implementation of the assessment system provided a contentious issue in the public controversy over the education reform agenda. The intricacy of the assessment system has been compounded by difficulties in implementing its five components, most of which have not been fully constructed and assembled, in a logical sequence. The use of two reports, accepted for political rather than educational reasons, has the potential to become a divisive issue.

Recommendation 2: Implementation of the assessment system should be monitored closely to identify any transitory problems and possible inherent defects, and followed by an evaluation to determine the degree of alignment between the assessments and the standards in the *Essential Learnings Framework*.

In principle, the assessment and reporting system places a high level of reliance on individual teacher's assessments. Although this system has evolved from past assessment practices, it raises concerns about issues of consistency associated with the Quality Moderation of Assessment Process. The variable quality of individual teacher's activities in student assessment needs to be taken into account in the procedure applied to monitor implementation of each component of the assessment system. The complexity of this task may lead the Department of Education to commission an organisation, such as the Australian Council for Educational Research, which specialises in educational measurement and testing, to conduct this procedure. Once the assessment and reporting system has been implemented satisfactorily, the Department of Education may consider commissioning an external organisation to evaluate the degree of alignment between the assessments and the standards in the *Essential Learnings Framework*. A consequence of this study may lead the Department of Education to consider taking greater responsibility for assessing student achievement by incorporating a standardised measure into the assessment system, given that the high level of reliance on individual teacher's assessments may have a detrimental effect. The use of two reports may be politically expedient, but in the long term it is likely to be deleterious in terms of public relations with employers and parents. The Department of Education should amalgamate the different elements in both reports to produce a single report that is acceptable to federal and state authorities, and the wider community.

Capacity Building and Teacher Development

The Department of Education is initiating several promising strategies to build capacity in the education system and to provide teachers with the knowledge and skills to teach the new curriculum successfully. The new organisational structure of the Department of Education, intended to integrate students with special or additional needs, is also decentralising decision-making authority to the local level. However, evidence collected during this study identified that the short time frame and inadequate funds, provided to implement the new organisational structure, are likely to inhibit building the capacity of schools to implement the new curriculum and assessments. The eCentre for Teachers provides an Internet-based facility for creating networks among teachers. The Professional Learning Program offers a range of activities to provide teachers with the knowledge and skills to teach the new curriculum successfully. However, evidence collected during this study identified that the quality of school-based professional learning varies markedly between different schools. The Faculty of Education in the University of Tasmania provides pre-service teachers with the knowledge and skills to teach the new curriculum through two graduate degrees.

Recommendation 3: A plan should be formulated to integrate and extend the capacity building activities of the branches, clusters, support agencies and the professional learning program to provide a coordinated, statewide strategy for offering technical assistance and professional development to schools and teachers.

Although the key elements for providing capacity building and professional development are being put in place, there is a need to integrate and extend the work of the various groups involved in these activities in a coherent way. A plan, formulated for this purpose, should address a comprehensive range of key issues. An effort should be made to identify, develop and disseminate curriculum materials, which are aligned to the *Essential Learnings Framework*. Whilst teachers should be encouraged to develop materials through the eCentre for Teachers, the difficulty faced by a small state in attracting publishing companies to develop materials to support the *Essential Learnings Framework* may be ameliorated by forming a consortium with other small jurisdictions to influence publishing companies. The Department of Education and the University of Tasmania should form a partnership to design a coordinated strategy focusing on assisting pre-service and practising teachers to understand the concepts underlying the *Essential Learnings Framework*, and equipping them with a range of skills to assist students to master the concepts. The Department of Education should initiate a project to attract the most experienced principals and teachers to schools experiencing disadvantages or demonstrating under-performance.

Accountability

Atelier Learning Solutions identified poor practice in accountability occurring in districts and schools, concluding that approaches to accountability needed to be strengthened. The decision to suspend the School Improvement Review cycle in 2004 to develop a new review process in 2005 has provided an opportunity to design a comprehensive accountability system, but

available evidence suggests that the revision will focus on redesigning rather than replacing it.

Recommendation 4: A comprehensive accountability system comprising the six elements identified by Achieve should be designed, and a strategy should be developed to improve accountability practices in clusters and schools.

Although the design of a comprehensive accountability system is not an immediate priority, delay in its availability until the Department of Education has developed outcome targets related to the *Essential Learnings Framework* in 2008 could be addressed in the meantime by a feasibility study. Such a study should focus on ascertaining whether the outcome targets are appropriate measures for collecting student achievement and other data for rating schools, and identifying strategies to provide assistance to low-performing schools, rewards for successful schools, school improvement strategies for failing schools, and incentives for students.

Public Leadership

Whilst political leadership provided by Minister Wriedt appears to be forceful in supporting curriculum reform, other prominent leaders are not arrayed in support. Politicians from opposition parties have emerged as critics of various aspects of the new curriculum and assessment system, thereby undermining public leadership. Although senior officials of the Department of Education have failed to project high-profile leadership needed to arouse public engagement, the appointment of a new Secretary in John Smyth provides an opportunity to create unified public leadership based on a coalition of political, education, business, union and parent leaders. However, a determined effort has yet to be made to include representatives of other interest groups, whose primary mission is to serve their constituents, in such a coalition.

Recommendation 5: A single, cross-sectoral leadership group should be created to support curriculum reform by launching an on-going public information and communication campaign.

The leadership group should include government, education, business, union, and parent leaders, who can act as a clearinghouse for policy initiatives and an informal coordinating body. The leadership group could conduct searches to identify, and then study media strategies used by state education agencies in other Australian states and the United States of America to promote education reform. The leadership group needs to devise a media strategy capable of projecting a single message to a public audience about the necessity of changing the education system to ensure that all students attain higher levels of academic achievement. The leadership group should build on the successes of the Leading Learning and Leading Lifelong Learning conferences, and aim at providing educators, parents and the public with reliable information about the progress of curriculum reform in Tasmania. The leadership group also needs to work closely with education, business, and community representatives to develop practical policies for promoting curriculum reform, and to review and revise these policies periodically.

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