

**From Essential Learnings to Tasmania's Curriculum: Will this  
Change improve Curriculum Reform?**

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## **Preface**

The inspiration to write this paper arose from an earlier study on Tasmania's Essential Learnings curriculum. In 2006, the author published a paper on this topic under the title, *Looking at Curriculum Change in Tasmania: Is the Essential Learnings Framework promoting Successful Curriculum Reform?* The state election held in March 2006, the appointment of a new Minister for Education in April 2006, and the unveiling of a set of initiatives to review the curriculum, assessment and reporting system during 2006 provided substance for critical analysis. Using a similar format to the earlier paper, the present study was researched, and the paper written during the latter part of 2006 and the first half of 2007.

The author wishes to acknowledge the contributions made by the following people with regard to particular aspects in the paper referring to Tasmania. Department of Education officials, Penny Andersen and Ruth Radford reviewed parts of the earlier paper included in this paper. Jean Walker, president, Jeff Garsed, research officer, and Rose Parker, Northern field officer of the Tasmanian branch of the Australian Education Union supplied a collection of newspaper articles, reviewed the draft of the paper, and gave permission to publish the results of the survey conducted by the Australian Education Union. John Williamson, professor, Kim Beswick and Gregory Cairnduff, coordinators of the Bachelor of Education and Bachelor of Teaching, Faculty of Education in the University of Tasmania, provided information on these programs.

The author wishes to acknowledge the contributions made by the following people with regard to particular aspects in the paper referring to California. Brian Edwards, Senior Policy Analyst, EdSource, Mountain View, California, identified research studies on standards-based education in California. Scott Hill, Assistant Secretary for the Office of the Secretary of Education, California, and formerly Executive Director of the Commission for the Establishment of Academic Content and Performance Standards offered advice on the work of the Commission.

The author wishes to acknowledge the contributions made by the following people in reviewing this paper. Katherine Schoo, Executive Director of the Australian Curriculum Studies Association arranged for a peer review of the draft paper. Members of a panel, who reviewed the draft paper, made valuable contributions to the final revision. Tasmanian educator, Helena Chester, Victorian educator, Margaret Scott, and Western Australian educator, David Healy met the demanding task in this regard.

## **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. He currently works as an education consultant.

# **From Essential Learnings to Tasmania's Curriculum: Will this Change improve Curriculum Reform?**

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper was to evaluate initiatives the state government announced in 2006 to review the curriculum and assessments, and enhance capacity building and accountability. The methodology for reviewing states' systemic reform policies devised by Achieve, an organisation based in Washington, DC, was applied to identify issues and challenges confronting these initiatives, and determine whether they improve capacity building, accountability, and public leadership. The results indicated that the initiatives took account of surveys conducted by the Australian Education Union and Tasmanian State School Parents and Friends, and the Reporting to Parents Taskforce. Comparisons with standards-based reforms in California, Indiana and Massachusetts identified that some factors leading to success in these states were absent in Tasmania. Potential for improving capacity building and accountability has been met by an 18-month plan. David Bartlett, the new Minister for Education, has restored credible leadership following controversy over the Essential Learnings curriculum in 2005, but absence of a cross-sectoral group to provide strong leadership limits the likelihood of successful reform. Comparison with the controversy over the Profile of Learning in Minnesota revealed similarities to challenges faced in Tasmania. A set of recommendations is presented to meet challenges faced by curriculum reform in Tasmania.

## **From Essential Learnings to Tasmania's Curriculum: Will this Change improve Curriculum 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 USA. Following the Premier's consultations with community interest groups, a 24-member Community Leaders' Group was appointed in May 1999 to consult 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 monitor and benchmark and the other to promote coalitions. The former collected information on six goals requiring further benchmarking, completed a process for developing, reviewing and refining benchmarks, and published progress reports in 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2006, followed by reports every two years thereafter. The latter developed an information program including forums

and a newsletter, established a partners' program with businesses and community organisations in 2003, and formed coalitions of interest with stakeholders to explore innovative approaches for issues related to the Tasmania Together benchmarks.

The Board conducted the first five-year review of the 20-year plan between August and December of 2005. Input from the community was sought about important issues over the next 10 to 15 years, changes over the past five years, other desirable changes, and the most important aspects to be reported. Advertised in the press, on radio and television and launched by the Governor in Launceston, the review led the Board to visit 90 cities, towns and villages across Tasmania to consult more than 10,000 people. As a consequence, 1,555 people returned written questionnaires, 740 people responded electronically, 73 people participated in an on-line forum, 35 forums were held across Tasmania, and 90 submissions were received from organisations and individuals. Analysis of the responses indicated people raised many issues already reported. Some existing areas, such as lifestyle, physical and mental health, literacy, training opportunities, environmental issues and climate change, needed to be extended. New areas of concern, such as community connection, participation by people with disabilities, issues relating to an ageing population, recreation and leisure pursuits, housing costs and availability, waiting lists for medical treatment, road safety, innovation in industry, and primary industries, needed to be included. A summary report on the analysis provided the basis for revising the vision, goals and benchmarks for *Tasmania Together*. To review the goals, the Board identified those issues important to the community, and then considered how these issues related to the existing 24 goals. The number of goals was reduced to 12 by identifying those that had a narrow focus, a limited number of measurable benchmarks, or overlapped with other goals. Then, the benchmarking committee developed new benchmarks and modified existing benchmarks. Following approval by Parliament, the Tasmania Together Progress Board (2006) released a new vision, 12 goals and 143 benchmarks for *Tasmania Together*. The goals were given headline indicators: cost of living; feeling safe; literacy and numeracy; avoidable mortality; urban-regional population; attendance at cultural heritage sites; cultural interpretation at visitor centres; local government elections; workforce participation rate; investment growth; land protection; and greenhouse gas emissions. Each benchmark listed under the goals consists of a standard, an indicator with baseline data, and targets set out at five-year intervals.

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, *Learning Together*, was intended to complement *Tasmania Together*. It presents 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, is supported by five goals. Goal 1 states that responsive and continually improving services ensure all Tasmanians develop knowledge, skills, and confidence they need. Goal 2 states that enriching and fulfilling learning opportunities enable people to work effectively and participate in society. Goal 3 states that safe and inclusive learning environments encourage and support participation in learning throughout all of life. Goal 4 states that an information-rich community with access to global and local resources so everyone has the opportunity to participate in, and contribute to, a healthy democracy and a prosperous society. Goal 5 states that a valued and supported education workforce reflects the importance of teaching as a profession and is held in high esteem by the community.

Appointed in June 2001, the 13-member Learning Together Council is responsible for monitoring implementation of the 46 strategies consisting of 139 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 February 2003, a paper outlining the scope and purpose of a strategy for post-compulsory education was released for public comment. The Department of Education then disseminated a set of nine issues' papers to facilitate discussion about learners' needs at a series of regional and stakeholder forums. A project steering committee, supported by several reference groups, drew on submissions made by community members at the forums to design the strategy, which was released in December by the Tasmania Department of Education (2003a). The statement on the strategy, known as *Tasmania: A State of Learning*, presented a vision, purposes and values to guide post-compulsory education, and set out outcomes to be achieved through a range of initiatives organised under four tracks: guaranteeing futures; ensuring essential literacies; enhancing adult learning; and building learning communities.

A report, published by Watt (2006), evaluating the development and implementation of the Essential Learnings curriculum, a strategy of Goal 2 in *Learning Together*, identified the following strengths and weaknesses. The outcomes and standards in the *Essential Learnings Framework* and the associated assessments were aligned. However, promising initiatives put in place to provide capacity building and teacher development, were

compromised by difficulties implementing a new organisational structure, accountability was weak, and controversy over the curriculum arose in 2005, because unified public leadership was lacking. In response to these problems, the newly re-elected Labor government announced a range of initiatives in 2006 to review the curriculum, assessment and reporting system, and enhance capacity building and accountability. The purpose of this paper is to evaluate these initiatives. This study assesses 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 refine and implement Tasmania's curriculum successfully. 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 USA, 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 ten 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 32 reports on benchmarking studies conducted in 17 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 of education, 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 strategy in *Learning Together* to develop a curriculum and monitor student achievement 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 in terms of capacity building, accountability and public leadership. Second, documents on curriculum and assessment, associated with both the Essential Learnings curriculum and its refinement, were examined. Reports on surveys, taskforces and focus groups, and papers on refining the curriculum were reviewed.

Finally, the report of an important benchmarking study on standards-based reforms in the USA was examined to identify key findings that may illuminate the educational and policy contexts in Tasmania. Study of this report led to a decision to develop case studies on standards-based reforms in four states, identified as either successful or controversial. Searches of the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) database, Editorial Projects in Education's web site and EdSource Online, the web site of EdSource, an organisation providing information on education in California, were conducted to identify research literature and news reports on standards-based reforms in the four states.

Analysis involved reading all relevant documents, making judgments, and preparing a draft report. Following preparation of the draft report, it was referred to key stakeholders and a panel of 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. It was decided to use this technique to gain a more accurate picture of the extent to which programs in teacher preparation at the University of Tasmania provide pre-service teachers with the knowledge and skills to present the curriculum. The programs' coordinators elaborated on an overview of the University's programs provided by a professor of education. Additional insights of this type would enhance judgments that can be made about the effectiveness of the curriculum review, and policies and practices relating to 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.

## **Developing the Curriculum and Assessments**

## ***Essential Learnings Framework***

### *Development and Implementation*

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 Values and Purposes Statement formed the basis for developing 'emerging' essential learnings. Responses collected from a review were used 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 Values and Purposes Statement, five essential learnings, culminating outcomes, and 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 outcomes and standards. In March, the Tasmania Department of Education (2003b) released *Essential Learnings Framework 2* consisting of three components. Introduction to the Outcomes and Standards outlines the structure of the framework, and describes reporting procedures and support available to assist teachers. Outcomes and Standards organise the key element outcomes and standards by the key elements of the five essential learnings. Learners and Learning Provision discusses some key advances in the understanding of how learning occurs, and what is known about 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, describes effective teaching, assessing, planning, professional learning, transforming schools, working with parents and community, and presents a specific focus on different levels of schooling and essential learnings. The *Learning, Teaching and Assessment Guide* is designed to be dynamic, and undergo refinement and expansion on the Internet.

The intention was to phase implementation of the Essential Learnings curriculum in public, Catholic and some independent schools 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 curriculum. *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 21<sup>st</sup> 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*.

### *Research Study*

In an effort to inform professional debate on curriculum reform, the Australian Education Union surveyed its members in the teaching force on their attitudes about the Essential Learnings curriculum, and assessing and reporting student performances. A draft questionnaire, designed in consultation with the Department of Education and the University of Tasmania, was piloted with the Australian Education Union's school representatives in June 2006 and then revised. The questionnaire consisted of four sections. The first section reported subjects' demographic characteristics. The second section, consisting of a set of items organised as five-point Likert-type scales, reported subjects' attitudes about issues associated with the Essential Learnings curriculum. The third section, consisting of a set of items organised as five-point Likert-type scales, reported subjects' attitudes about issues associated with assessing and reporting student performances. The fourth section presented an open-ended item for subjects to comment on the Essential Learnings curriculum, and assessing and reporting processes and requirements. Distributed in mid July 2006 to the Australian Education Union's school representatives, the questionnaire was disseminated to members for completion by the end of July 2006. The data on the demographic characteristics of the statistical population from the sample were analysed by Department of Education personnel, whilst data on five key themes identified in the questionnaire were analysed by Australian Education Union personnel.

The Australian Education Union (n.d.) reported that responses were received from 2,635 teachers, representing 58.1 percent of the 4,539 teachers working in Tasmania's public schools. The distribution of the respondents by gender, indicating 73.6 percent were female and 24.7 were male, reflected the distribution of the population of teachers working in Tasmania's public schools. The distribution of the respondents by years of teaching showed that 31.5 percent had taught from one to ten years, 24.4 percent from 11 to 20 years, 36 percent from 21 to 30 years, 7.7 percent from 31 to 40 years, and 0.4 percent for 41 years or longer. The average number of years of teaching of teachers working in Tasmania's public schools is 18 years. The distribution of the respondents by promotion status, indicating 78.4 percent were classroom teachers, 11.9 percent were advanced skills' teachers, 2.9

percent were assistant principals and 5 percent were principals, showed that respondents of high promotion status were over-represented, whilst teachers were under-represented. Of the population of teachers working in Tasmania's public schools, classroom teachers make up 87 percent, advanced skills' teachers make up 7 percent and assistant principals and principals make up 6 percent. The distribution of the respondents by school sector indicated 63.1 percent taught in primary schools, 27.2 percent taught in secondary schools, 5.9 percent taught in combined schools, 0.3 percent taught in special schools, and 1.5 percent worked in non-school positions. Whilst teachers in primary schools were over-represented, teachers in secondary and combined schools were under-represented among respondents. The population of teachers working in Tasmania's public schools consists of 56 percent teaching in primary schools, 29 percent teaching in secondary schools and 14 percent teaching in combined schools. It was not possible to compare the distributions of the sample and the population by cluster, because the distribution of the population by cluster was not known. However, it was possible to report data on the distribution of the respondents by cluster. The eight clusters of Central Coast, East Tamar, Eastern Clarence, Eastern Launceston, Glenorchy, Hobart, Southern Launceston and West Tamar in suburban and commuter zones provided 5 percent or more respondents each. The two clusters of Channel and Rose Bay Geilston Bay in suburban and commuter zones provided from 4 to 5 percent of respondents each. The eight clusters of Burnie, Devonport, Huon, Midlands South, North East, Northern Midlands, Taroona and Tasman East Coast in suburban, commuter and rural zones provided from 3 to 4 percent of respondents each. The five clusters of East Coast, Jordan River, Latrobe Kentish, Mersey and Waratah Wynyard in suburban, commuter and rural zones provided from 2 to 3 percent of respondents each. The four clusters of Circular Head, Derwent Valley, Meander Valley and West Coast in commuter and rural zones provided from 1 to 2 percent of respondents each.

The second section, which consisted of 11 items, included four items each containing three sub-units. Whilst 36 percent of 2,659 respondents agreed that the *Essential Learnings Framework* was useful for curriculum planning and implementation, 32 percent were undecided and 32 percent disagreed. Whilst 31 percent of 2,659 respondents agreed that they were better able to engage learners using the Essential Learnings curriculum, 31 percent were undecided and 38 percent disagreed. Three sub-units covered the adequacy of subjects' access to resources for the Essential Learnings curriculum. Almost half, 48 percent of 2,657 respondents, agreed that they had adequate access to support materials, but 31 percent were undecided and 21 percent disagreed. Less than one-third, 30 percent of 2,651 respondents, agreed that they had adequate access to Department of Education support staff, but 35 percent were undecided and 35 percent disagreed. Whilst 38 percent of 2,641 respondents agreed that they had adequate access to professional learning, 34 percent were undecided and 27 percent disagreed. Whilst 22 percent of 2,649 respondents agreed that their involvement in professional learning for purposes other than the Essential Learnings curriculum had not diminished, 22 percent were undecided and 56 percent disagreed. About one-third, 35 percent of 2,631 respondents agreed that they could use the Essential Learnings curriculum to select academic disciplines, but 35 percent were undecided and 30 percent disagreed. Three sub-units covered the

adequacy to which the *Essential Learnings Framework* and support documents provided by the Department of Education specified and sequenced content and advised on teaching methods. Only 15 percent of 2,653 respondents agreed that they offered sufficient guidance on what content to teach, whilst 23 percent were undecided and 62 percent disagreed. Only 19 percent of 2,656 respondents agreed that they offered sufficient guidance on how to sequence content for students, whilst 26 percent were undecided and 55 percent disagreed. Only 19 percent of 2,651 respondents agreed that they offered sufficient guidance on methods of teaching, whilst 29 percent were undecided and 52 percent disagreed. Only 13 percent of 2,640 respondents agreed that the emphasis in the Essential Learnings curriculum on cross-curricular learning made effective use of specialist teachers, whilst 29 percent were undecided and 59 percent disagreed. Three sub-units covered the appropriateness in which concepts were organised within three key elements for facilitating effective student learning. Almost one-third, 32 percent of 2,634 respondents agreed that the organisation of curriculum provisions under Being Literate facilitated effective student learning, but 35 percent were undecided and 33 percent disagreed. Almost one-third, 32 percent of 2,631 respondents agreed that the organisation of curriculum provisions under Being Numerate facilitated effective student learning, but 36 percent were undecided and 31 percent disagreed. Whilst 29 percent of 2,632 respondents agreed that the organisation of curriculum provisions under Maintaining Wellbeing facilitated effective student learning, 36 percent were undecided and 35 percent disagreed. Three sub-units covered aspects relating to the use of collegial approaches for implementing the Essential Learnings curriculum. Only 18 percent of 2,659 respondents agreed they had sufficient time for collegial work, whilst 18 percent were undecided and 63 percent disagreed. On the other hand, 63 percent of 2,654 respondents agreed that collegial work resulted in better learning outcomes, although 21 percent were undecided and 16 percent disagreed. However, 40 percent of 2,648 respondents agreed that collegial work had been promoted effectively for implementing the Essential Learnings curriculum, whilst 32 percent were undecided and 29 percent disagreed. Only 12 percent of 2,634 respondents agreed that the policy for integrating students with high or additional needs had improved their learning provisions, whilst 28 percent were undecided and 61 percent disagreed. Almost one-third, 29 percent of 2,659 respondents agreed that the Essential Learnings curriculum had been a positive change for education in Tasmania, but 25 percent were undecided and 46 percent disagreed.

The third section contained six items. Only 12 percent of 2,598 respondents agreed that reporting on nine key elements was a reasonable expectation, whilst 17 percent were undecided and 72 percent disagreed. Similarly, 13 percent of 2,653 respondents agreed that a reporting system based on five standards and three performance levels was effective, but 16 percent were undecided and 72 percent disagreed. On the other hand, 58 percent of 2,644 respondents preferred more gradations for effective reporting, whilst 19 percent were undecided and 24 percent disagreed. Only 9 percent of 2,654 respondents agreed that the standards were sufficiently clear and unambiguous to assist their teaching, whilst 16 percent were undecided and 75 percent disagreed. Almost one-third, 28 percent of 2,645 respondents agreed that the format of written comments used in the Student Assessment

and Reporting Information System was sufficient to cover learning experiences in their classrooms, whilst 31 percent were undecided and 42 percent disagreed. Only 10 percent of 2,640 respondents agreed that their workload was reasonable since the Essential Learnings assessment and reporting system had been implemented, whilst 18 percent were undecided and 73 percent disagreed.

The data were analysed in greater depth in relation to five key themes. Almost three-quarters of the respondents agreed that assessment and reporting requirements had increased workload unreasonably. Almost two-thirds of the respondents agreed there was insufficient time for collegial work and the same proportion valued collegial work, but less than half agreed that collegial work was promoted effectively by the Essential Learnings curriculum. About half of the respondents agreed reporting on nine key element outcomes was unreasonable, a system of five standards and three performance levels was ineffective for reporting student progress, and the standards were insufficiently clear and unambiguous. About one-third of the respondents preferred more gradations, and more than one-third disagreed that the format of written comments used in the Student Assessment and Reporting Information System was sufficient to cover learning experiences in their classrooms. Analysis of the data for 25 of 27 clusters identified varying levels of support on three central issues relating to curriculum reform. A high proportion of respondents from Circular Head agreed that the *Essential Learnings Framework* was useful for curriculum planning and implementation, they were better able to engage learners using the Essential Learnings curriculum, and the Essential Learnings curriculum had been a positive change for education in Tasmania. A high proportion of respondents from Channel and Midlands South agreed that the *Essential Learnings Framework* was useful for curriculum planning and implementation, and they were better able to engage learners using the Essential Learnings curriculum. A high proportion of respondents from Mersey agreed that the *Essential Learnings Framework* was useful for curriculum planning and implementation. A high proportion of respondents from West Coast agreed that they were better able to engage learners using the Essential Learnings curriculum. A high proportion of respondents from Derwent Valley agreed that the Essential Learnings curriculum had been a positive change for education in Tasmania. On the other hand, a high proportion of respondents from Devonport and Hobart disagreed that they were better able to engage learners using the Essential Learnings curriculum. A high proportion of respondents from Burnie, Devonport and Northern Midlands disagreed that the Essential Learnings curriculum had been a positive change for education in Tasmania. Data from 222 teachers, who identified that they were specialists, were analysed to identify whether the Essential Learnings curriculum marginalised this group. Whilst the level of agreement among this group that the emphasis in the Essential Learnings curriculum on cross-curricular learning made effective use of specialist teachers was consistent with that of the statistical population, this group was more likely to disagree than was the statistical population. Among this group, fewer respondents agreed and more disagreed than the statistical population that the Essential Learnings curriculum had been a positive change for education in Tasmania. Analysis of the data from all respondents by cluster showed that a high proportion of respondents from Circular Head agreed that the emphasis in the Essential

Learnings curriculum on cross-curricular learning made effective use of specialist teachers. However, a high proportion of respondents from Devonport, Eastern Clarence, Northern Midlands, Rose Bay Geilston Bay and Taroona disagreed with this proposition. Analysis of responses from principals and classroom teachers showed that a high proportion of principals, but a low proportion of classroom teachers, agreed that they were better able to engage learners using the Essential Learnings curriculum. Similarly, a high proportion of principals and a low proportion of classroom teachers agreed that the Essential Learnings curriculum had been a positive change for education in Tasmania. On the other hand, the proportion of classroom teachers, who disagreed that their workload was reasonable since the Essential Learnings assessment and reporting system had been implemented, was higher than for principals.

## ***Assessment and Reporting System***

### *Development and Implementation*

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 calibrated the standards in the *Essential Learnings Framework* progressively. 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. Teams of teachers wrote sets of items, which were administered to random samples of students to ensure that they described a sequenced continuum of student achievement accurately. From the analysis of the calibration and samples of student responses, a set of progression statements were written to describe the lower, middle and upper levels of student performance within the standards.

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*, was implemented in separate rounds commencing in 2005 for the calibrated key element outcomes by following a sequence of four steps. First, consensus moderation involves teachers in each cluster working together to consider student work against the two calibrated key element outcomes being implemented. Second, teachers and curriculum and assessment consultants develop guiding assessment tasks to assist teachers establish consistency in making judgments for student assessments against the two calibrated key element outcomes. The guiding assessment tasks are trialed with students in years 6 and 10 by trained markers before they used to compare schools' ratings with the markers' ratings. Third, teachers submit work samples produced by students with their assessments against tasks provided by the Office for Educational Review. On submission, each work sample is assigned a standard and progression by the markers using the Essential Learnings Assessment Protocol, adapted from the tuning protocol used by



the Coalition of Essential Schools. Following assignment, each work sample is included in a database of work samples on the *Learning, Teaching and Assessment Guide*. Fourth, teachers are provided with the ratings assigned to the work samples by the markers. Teachers in each school use the ratings to moderate their assessment judgments. At the conclusion of the process, each school is required to provide information about the moderation process to the Office for Educational Review.

Commencing in 2002, the Office for Educational Review designed the Student Assessment and Reporting Information System to enable schools to record student assessments and report performances to parents. Existing assessment methods and reporting requirements were identified from input provided by schools and secondary colleges. Then, functional specifications were developed for recording student assessment and reporting performances to parents in consultation with schools and secondary colleges. 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. By the time mid-year reports were issued in 2006, these problems had been ameliorated by establishing two help centres, extending training in using the Student Assessment and Reporting Information System to more than 6,000 teachers, and providing refresher training.

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. Issued for the first time in 2005, the Tasmanian Year 10 Certificate shows student assessments against

calibrated key element outcomes of the *Essential Learnings Framework*. Teacher assessments are based on the Quality Moderation of Assessment Process consisting of consensus moderation, cohort and sample guiding assessment tasks, and statistical monitoring.

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, Being Numerate, Maintaining Wellbeing, Inquiry, Acting Democratically and Being Information Literate were published in June 2006.

### *Research Study*

Criticisms raised by parents about convoluted language contained in brochures disseminated to them in August 2005 to explain the Essential Learnings Report led Tasmanian State School Parents and Friends' president, Jenny Branch, to meet Minister Wriedt in October 2005 to outline parents' concerns about the report. Minister Wriedt adopted suggestions for clarifying the format of the reports, such as re-positioning markers and adding measurement bars, and improving their dissemination, such as sending letters to parents of students in kindergarten and year 10. At the same time, Tasmanian State School Parents and Friends announced that parents would be surveyed after the conclusion of the reporting process for 2005 to ensure they understood the Essential Learnings Report.

Tasmanian State School Parents and Friends developed a questionnaire in consultation with the Department of Education to survey parents on their attitudes towards the Essential Learnings Report and the A-E Report. Following a pilot study, the questionnaire was administered to a sample of 800 parents in March 2006. The questionnaire presented 14 statements referring to the Essential Learnings Report and three statements referring to the A-E Report. Responses were received from 35 percent of the sample. At the same time, Tasmanian State School Parents and Friends distributed a questionnaire, based on criteria identified by the Australian Council for Educational Research as essential elements for a good report, to all parents of children enrolled in public schools. Responses to this poll were received from 1,200 parents.

Tasmanian State School Parents and Friends (n.d.) reported that subjects' responses about the design of the Essential Learnings Report were generally positive. Of 285 respondents, 57.9 percent stated that the report was easy to understand, and 64.2 percent stated that it was presented in a clear format.

However, only 49.6 percent of 274 respondents indicated that the report showed clearly what their child was able to do, although 57.7 percent of 267 respondents stated that the report showed what was expected of a student in a particular year. Of 293 respondents, 69.3 percent stated that the meaning of the 'grey bar' was clear. The subjects' responses about the appropriateness of information provided in the Essential Learnings Report were mixed. Of 259 respondents, 56 percent stated that the report provided more information than just about subject areas. Of 279 respondents, 63.1 percent stated that the report provided clear information about their child's behaviour, attitudes and social skills. Of 265 respondents, 47.5 percent stated that the report indicated areas in which their child needed help. However, only 29.7 percent of 263 respondents stated that the report suggested how they could support their child's learning. The subjects' responses about specific aspects of assessment provided in the Essential Learnings Report were positive. Of 286 respondents, 83.6 percent stated that the language used by teachers in their comments was clear and easy to understand. Of 257 respondents, 60.7 percent stated that the report provided clear information about the learning activities undertaken by their child. Of 281 respondents, 70.1 percent indicated that they could interpret how their child performed against the standards. The subjects' responses about access to information on the Essential Learnings Report were positive. Of 281 respondents, 63 percent stated that they received sufficient information on the report to understand it. Of 277 respondents, 63.5 percent indicated that they knew how to gain further information about their child's progress. The subjects' responses about the value of the A-E Report were positive. Of 247 respondents, 62.8 percent found that it was helpful for their child to be awarded a grade. Of 261 respondents, 71.6 percent stated that 'position in the year' was easy to understand. Of 230 respondents, 67.8 percent indicated that the question-and-answer sheet received with the report assisted in its understanding.

The results of the poll were consistent with the findings of the survey of the random sample of parents. Of 1,193 respondents, 60.1 percent found that the Essential Learnings Report was easy to understand. Of 1,194 respondents, 52.8 percent indicated that the report clearly showed what their child was able to do. Of 1,190 respondents, 64.2 percent stated that the report showed what was expected of a student in a particular year. Of 1,186 respondents, 57.3 percent stated that the report was informative about their child's progress. Of 1,177 respondents, 57.2 percent stated that the report provided more information than just about subject areas. Of 1,168 respondents, 32.2 percent stated that the report suggested how they could support their child's learning.

Since the survey and poll highlighted several aspects in which reports could be improved, Tasmanian State School Parents and Friends formulated a set of six recommendations. First, Tasmanian State School Parents and Friends should continue to represent parents in negotiations about reporting student performances to parents. Second, schools should be required to involve school communities in developing reporting requirements through the Assessment, Monitoring and Reporting Policy. Third, reports should indicate clearly areas where students need help and suggest ways parents can assist in their child's learning. Fourth, reports should present sufficient information

for parents to understand what their child is able to do. Fifth, the Essential Learnings Report and the A-E Report should be combined into a single report presented to parents twice a year. Sixth, all schools should use the same reporting format. The recommendations formed the main input presented by Tasmanian State School Parents and Friends to the Reporting to Parents Taskforce formed by Minister Bartlett in May 2006.

### *Reporting to Parents Taskforce*

Minister Bartlett's consultations with the education community about the Essential Learnings curriculum and assessments identified that school reports were a key issue. Early in May 2006, Minister Bartlett appointed the eight-member Reporting to Parents Taskforce assisted by a special adviser, Don Watson, to recommend best practice in reporting student performance to parents, and discussed this initiative with teachers and parents on an on-line forum. The Taskforce sought submissions by advertising in three regional newspapers in August 2006, contacted organisations with a direct involvement in reporting student performance, held regional meetings with focus groups of parents, and met on four occasions to complete its work.

In its report, the Reporting to Parents Taskforce (2006) examined three key issues about which parents seek answers from student reports, and developed recommendations referring to each of these issues. The extent to which reports convey information about individual progress, attitudes and behaviour constituted the first issue. The Taskforce believed that reporting student performance should be a continuous process throughout the year consisting of written reports, portfolios of work, formal meetings, and phone-home contacts. Written reports should consist of a short progress statement issued from five to eight weeks into the school year, a comprehensive mid-year report, and a summary report issued at least ten days before the end of the school year. A common format should be used from the preparatory year to year 10, but a different report should be issued for children in kindergarten. A supplementary report should be issued on request to year 10 students taking up vocational education and training or employment. Reports for children with special needs should be negotiated as part of each child's individual education program. The short progress statement should focus on the attitude, effort and behaviour of the student, whilst the mid-year report and end-of-year summary report should comment on the student's work habits as well as progress. Reports should be issued in all curriculum areas covered in the *Tasmanian Curriculum Framework*. Instead of a lower, middle and upper performance level for each of the five standards, progress should be measured across 15 steps, each with a lower and upper performance level.

The extent to which reports are consistent and reliable assessment standards across Tasmania's public schools constituted the second issue. Written reports should indicate the state standard for a particular year group, rather than the standard achieved by the 50 percent of students in the middle of the range. Written reports should also indicate the student's results from previous years. The Taskforce recommended that the Department of Education should ask the Australian Government to recognise information

provided in reports instead of requiring A-E ratings. Alternatively, A-E ratings should be incorporated into the mid-year and end-of-year reports using descriptive terminology, if the Australian Government refused the request.

The extent to which teachers and parents communicate to promote student learning constituted the third issue. Mid-year reports should be presented at meetings between the teacher, parents and the student, by phone-home programs, or at meetings away from school premises. Parents should be invited to meet with their child's teacher when other reports are given. The mid-year report should include a future focus section describing practical ways to improve a student's performance. Teachers and principals should be provided with professional development on report writing, schools should establish an editorial process for report writing, and the University of Tasmania should provide courses on report writing for pre-service teachers.

The Taskforce suggested that those recommendations adopted by Minister Bartlett should be implemented in the 2008 school year, and a time frame developed to inform schools. The recommendations implemented should be evaluated through parent surveys, and reporting student performance to parents reviewed in 2011 for relevance and effectiveness in meeting parents' needs.

### ***Tasmania's Curriculum and Assessments***

Following appointment, Minister Bartlett spent the first 100 days in office consulting the education community about contentious issues by visiting more than 80 schools to listen to the views of principals, teachers, parents and students. As a consequence of this consultation, Minister Bartlett directed Secretary Smyth to form a committee of principals to set a plan for refining, improving and clarifying the curriculum and assessments. Late in June 2006, Minister Bartlett announced at budget estimates hearings that the Essential Learnings curriculum would be refined and renamed Tasmania's curriculum. At the same time, he criticised his predecessor, the Minister for Tourism, Arts and the Environment, Paula Wriedt, for defending the Essential Learnings curriculum against strong opposition from teachers, parents, education experts and the business sector. Liberal Shadow Minister for Education, Peter Gutwein, supported Minister Bartlett's commitment to refine the curriculum and reporting process, but called for standards to be set at the end of each year. On release of the Australian Education Union's survey results in August 2006, Minister Bartlett indicated that the findings would provide a direction for refining the curriculum. At the same time, Shadow Minister Gutwein criticised Minister Bartlett for failing to release the results of the Australian Education Union's survey for public scrutiny.

Late in August 2006, the committee of principals released the plan, which proposed simplifying the curriculum framework and incorporating plain language, supporting the curriculum framework with scope and sequence statements, and using a simpler assessment and reporting system. The Values and Purposes Statement, and the learning, teaching and assessment principles would continue to provide the cornerstone for the curriculum. The *Tasmanian Curriculum Framework* would consist of six curriculum areas: the

Arts; English Literacy; Mathematics Numeracy; Personal Development; Science and Technology; and Society and History. A seventh cross-curricular area, Information and Communications Technology would be incorporated into each of the six curriculum areas. The teaching of thinking would continue to be central within the *Tasmanian Curriculum Framework*. A simplified assessment system, which would differentiate between the primary and secondary levels, would be developed. English Literacy, Mathematics Numeracy, Science and Technology, and Society and History would be moderated against state standards at the primary level with the Arts and Personal Development assessed by teacher judgements. The Arts, English Literacy, Mathematics Numeracy, Science and Technology, and Society and History would be moderated against state standards at the secondary level with Personal Development assessed by teacher judgements. Information and Communications Technology would be assessed in year 10 by a 'skills check'. Languages other than English would continue to be assessed using the language proficiency outcomes. The standards would be reduced in number, and revised to make them clearer and simpler for teachers to use. More gradations for assessment would be included to allow teachers to judge whether students have attained 'emerging' or 'well-established' understandings of a given progression. Support materials would be developed to assist teachers to plan assessment tasks that place students' performances against particular standards.

In September and October of 2006, focus groups of teachers and principals, who had been selected randomly by the Department of Education, verified the likely acceptance of this proposal among practitioners. The focus groups supported retention of the Values and Purposes Statement, and the teaching of thinking as central to the refined curriculum. There was strong support for developing scope and sequence statements to provide consistency across schools without being prescriptive about content. A numeracy package, which was under development, was considered as providing a suitable model for developing the scope and sequence statements. Whilst the focus groups supported the concepts embodied in the *Essential Learnings Framework*, they raised concerns about its complexity and the inclusion of jargon. Focus groups believed there was a need to develop a time frame for implementing the refined curriculum, and agreed that teachers should be involved in developing the scope and sequence statements. Focus groups believed teachers needed to gain a better understanding of criteria for student assessments. They were divided about whether the proposal to define 'emerging' and 'well-established' understandings of a progression was a satisfactory solution. Instead, many participants believed the description of standards needed to be clearer and more specific, and support documents should be developed to provide guidance. Focus groups also raised concerns about the value of the Tasmanian Year 10 Certificate. They valued the Quality Moderation of Assessment Process, especially those activities, which increased consistency between schools. Focus groups believed Health and Wellbeing was a more appropriate title for the curriculum area, Personal Development, and they supported assessment against state standards in this area. Most participants supported more frequent assessment in Information and Communications Technology. Focus groups also raised the issues of separating performing and visual forms of the Arts, the placement of Languages other than English within an appropriate

curriculum area, and the need to balance reinvigorating science education without prejudicing technology.

In February 2007, the Department of Education released a revised plan based on responses provided by the focus groups. The *Tasmanian Curriculum Framework* would consist of eight curriculum areas: the Arts; English Literacy; Information and Communications Technology; Health and Wellbeing; Mathematics Numeracy; Science; Society and History; and Vocational and Applied Learning. English Literacy, Mathematics Numeracy, Science, and Society and History would be moderated against state standards at the primary level with the Arts, and Health and Wellbeing assessed by teacher judgements. The Arts, English Literacy, Health and Wellbeing, Mathematics Numeracy, Science, and Society and History would be moderated against state standards at the secondary level with Vocational and Applied Learning assessed by teacher judgements. Information and Communications Technology would be assessed by a 'skills check' at years 6 and 10.

## **Providing Capacity Building and Teacher Development**

### ***Existing Organisational Structure and External Support***

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 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 established 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. Added in 2006, the Student Freeway, a service for students in years 3 to 12, provides a collection of digital resources.

The professional learning program played an important role in providing 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 was offered in 2006. In addition, a centrally based professional learning team assisted clusters and schools. A cluster-based professional learning program was also offered to facilitate school improvement.

The four-year Bachelor of Education degree offered by the University of Tasmania's Faculty of Education at the Launceston and Burnie campuses provides pre-service teachers with some knowledge and skills to teach Tasmanian-based curriculum in early childhood and primary school education. Pre-service teachers are also introduced to curricula used in other Australian states and territories, since only a minority is employed in Tasmania. In the first year, students are introduced to particular topics in literacy and numeracy, and each student plans a simple teaching activity related to his or her topic. They may be introduced to curriculum documents that provide support at the level of appropriate content. They participate in a supervised school experience session observing teachers, and teach in the final stage. In the second year, students extend work in literacy and numeracy, plan lessons to teach particular concepts in health and physical education, music, the arts and studies of society and environment. They participate in a supervised school experience session, in which they undertake small group and whole class teaching activities. In the third year, students extend work in literacy by examining reading instruction and the teaching of English as a second language and the application of mathematics pedagogy to topics. Each student selects a specific study relevant to Tasmanian curriculum initiatives, undertakes an investigation in the curriculum selected from a set of modules, and examines how educational technology is embedded in the classroom. They participate in a supervised school experience session, in which they undertake an increasing level of responsibility for classroom teaching. In the fourth year, students extend work in literacy, numeracy and other learning areas focusing on issues of classroom planning. Each student undertakes an in-depth study in a specified curriculum area that is linked to classroom practice, conducts an independent curriculum investigation, and examines curriculum inquiry in topics related to professional practice. They complete two school experience sessions culminating in a one-month internship. The two-year Bachelor of Teaching degree available to graduates at the Hobart and Launceston campuses provides pre-service teachers with some knowledge and skills to teach Tasmanian-based curriculum. In the first year, students participate in professional studies containing three modules on students and learning, curriculum, assessment and teaching, and the practice of teaching. They undertake cross-curricular studies in literacy, numeracy, quantitative literacy, information literacy and multi-media studies relating to curricula used in the Australian states and territories. In curriculum and method studies, they examine curriculum documents, approaches to teaching, and evaluation procedures in each of the eight learning areas covered in primary and middle school education. Those intending to become secondary teachers focus on two areas of specialisation. They participate in a supervised school experience session observing teachers, and teach in the final stage. In the

second year, students extend work in the three modules of professional studies. They continue curriculum and method studies in primary and middle school education, or secondary specialisation by examining curriculum documents, approaches to teaching, and evaluation procedures in each of the eight learning areas. They complete two school experience sessions culminating in a one-month internship. Aspects of Tasmanian-based curriculum and assessments are incorporated into post-graduate courses offered to practising teachers at the Hobart and Launceston campuses. In 2007, the University of Tasmania seconded two teachers from the Department of Education, one based at the Hobart campus and the other at the Launceston campus, to provide greater relevancy in Tasmanian-based curriculum to pre-service teachers.

### ***Organisational Restructure***

In July 2006, Minister Bartlett released an 18-month plan to improve capacity building and accountability by restructuring the education agency to create an organisation, which would promote support networks and planning for school improvement. Shadow Minister Gutwein welcomed the plan, but raised concerns about its potential to exacerbate problems arising from refinement of the curriculum. The Australian Education Union supported the plan, but raised concerns about the use of confusing language to explain the plan in the document, a view supported by Shadow Minister Gutwein. Following Minister Bartlett's defence of the plan, Tasmanian State School Parents and Friends added its support by declaring the proposal in the plan would reduce the increasing administrative workloads for principals and provide greater opportunities for professional development to occur in schools.

Released by the Tasmania Department of Education (2006), the plan provides a new structure consisting of four learning services units in the north-western, northern, southern and south-eastern regions of the state and a central Learning Support Unit. Led by a general manager, each learning services group, consisting of two principal leaders and a learning team, provides schools with technical assistance across the curriculum, teaching and learning approaches, assessment procedures, human resources, financial and facilities support, service coordination and improvement, and intervention in schools at risk of failure. A school improvement board, consisting of five principals and two members with expertise in business management and community relationships, governs each learning services unit. The principals were appointed in April 2007, and the business and community members were appointed in June 2007. Initially, each board negotiated a service agreement with the learning services group and monitored results against the agreement, but later each board assumed a greater role in determining the profile of its learning services. The learning services units acquired administrative responsibilities from coordinating principals in the clusters, thereby allowing these principals to play a greater role in school leadership. Led by a general manager and three senior managers, the Learning Support Unit operates as a hub for schools' needs in policy direction and resource development as well as manages service functions, strategic governmental initiatives and research activities. A

detailed implementation plan was developed in consultation with stakeholders to implement the new organisational structure.

## **Designing the Accountability System**

### ***Existing Accountability System***

The policy statement, *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 Liberal Government's policy for creating an outcomes-based system released in April 1997. 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 employed a four-year cycle, involved conducting a review in the first year, and then implementing a school improvement plan over the subsequent three-year period. Each year, schools were required to report to their communities and the Department of Education against outcome targets in their partnership agreements. Using an annual report template, schools reported progress made in relation to literacy, numeracy, quality teaching, leadership, professional learning, equity, and meeting school community needs, together with 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 (2004) examined the issue of

accountability, identifying that considerable work was being undertaken to develop outcome targets that related directly to the *Essential Learnings Framework*, which would strengthen accountability. By 2008, the Department of Education expected to have available outcome data on some key elements of each of the five essential learnings. At the time of the review, the Department of Education was not in a position, where there was 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 School Improvement Review cycle was terminated in 2004 and interim arrangements were put in place for 2005 and 2006. Schools extending review cycles from 2004 or commencing new review cycles in 2005 and 2006 were required to extend their current partnership agreements, and collect baseline data through the conduct of the Organisational Health Survey and the Parent Opinion Survey. A policy framework for schools to respond to the needs and aspirations of their communities and to support and include diverse groups within their communities, released by the Tasmania Department of Education (2003c), led to schools being required to audit these elements in their schools and communities.

### ***New Accountability System***

Development of a new review process in 2005 and 2006 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. Each cluster identified the demographic, cultural and economic environment of each school and its local community so that the context of the cluster was known before the new review process was implemented.

In July 2006, Minister Bartlett released an 18-month plan to improve capacity building and accountability by restructuring the education agency to create an organisation, which would promote support networks and planning for school improvement. Released by the Tasmania Department of Education (2006), the plan requires the Office for Educational Review, renamed Educational Performance Services in 2007, to develop an accountability framework providing corporate benchmarking, school support and targeted intervention. Key performance indicators, included in the accountability framework, would be directed to educating students to the highest possible standards and supporting schools and colleges to be high performing. Achievement against the Essential Learnings standards at years 3, 7 and 10, national assessment program standards, year 12 pathways and early childhood participation will be considered for inclusion in the former category. Levels of attendance and

supervision, student and parent survey outcomes, school and staff performance will be considered for inclusion in the latter category.

The plan also recommended improving corporate services to provide information sought by schools, remove administrative burdens and meet customers' needs through three measures. Managers need to provide employees with formal performance feedback at least once a year. Data collection and analysis for information management systems need to be rationalised to report information that is relevant and timely for school leaders. Performance needs to be demonstrated and achievement promoted to nurture networks across the Tasmanian community.

### **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 489,000 is evenly distributed across the settled areas of the island with the urban centres of Hobart in the south, and Launceston, Devonport and Burnie in the north. Tasmania's small public education system caters for about 67,000 pupils taught in 215 schools, consisting of 139 primary schools, 27 combined schools, 31 high schools, eight secondary colleges, and 10 special schools.

An important factor affecting the quality of governance has been the reduction of the House of Assembly from 35 to 25 members and the Legislative Council from 25 to 15 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 limited the numbers of suitable members available for cabinet positions. The current 25-member House of Assembly, elected in March 2006, 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.

### ***Political Context promoting the Essential Learnings Curriculum***

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, 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, have resulted as a consequence of momentous environmental or economic issues. The flooding of Lake Pedder in south-western Tasmania in 1972 and the dissipation of Tasmania's cheap energy advantage, reflected in the findings of the Callaghan report in 1977, ushered in a period of confrontation. The Liberal Government and the Green political movement clashed over the

proposed Gordon-below-Franklin power scheme, which was eventually halted through federal intervention in 1983. Compensation as a result of this decision was offset by a substantial reduction in Tasmania's funding from the Commonwealth, which resulted in a growing state debt leading the Labor Government to introduce a debt reduction strategy in the early 1990s. This policy was continued by the subsequent Liberal Government, which focused development on attracting small- and medium-size businesses through the Tasmanian Development Authority. Further environmental debate over forest management practices, which emerged following the successful Green campaign to block the proposed Wesley Vale pulp mill in 1989, led to the Regional Forest Agreement in 1997. In 1998, the Liberal Government went to the polls promising to eliminate the state's debt by selling the Hydroelectric Commission. Having opposed this sale, Labor came to office in 1998 with a looming financial crisis, but the growing boom in the national economy flowed through to Tasmania. After re-election in 2002, the Labor Government established a strong leadership team in Premier Jim Bacon's affable media style, Deputy Premier Paul Lennon's tough political skills and Treasurer David Crean's financial expertise. Early in 2004, both Treasurer Crean and Premier Bacon retired through serious ill health with the latter dying of lung cancer in June 2004. The rise in the Green vote in 2002 suggested that increasing numbers of voters were concerned about how the Labor Government was dealing with the forestry issue. As a strong proponent of the existing forestry policy, the accession of Premier Lennon in March 2004 led to a continuing environmental debate over forest management practices and the construction of the proposed Bell Bay pulp mill. Allegations of favouring big business and agreeing to backroom deals, which dogged Premier Lennon's leadership, were compounded by controversies surrounding the resignations of Governor Richard Butler in August 2004 over an inappropriate approach to the governor's office, and Ken Bacon, the Minister for Tourism, in April 2005 over poor performance.

Elected to the House of Assembly in February 1996, Paula Wriedt was a forceful advocate for reforming Tasmania's education system following appointment as Minister for Education in September 1998. In 2000, Minister Wriedt launched the long-term plan, *Learning Together*, to transform the state's education system, and initiated development of the Essential Learnings curriculum. In 2001, she held the first annual Tasmanian Education Week to recognise the contribution made by teachers and the first international conference to showcase aspects of education in Tasmania. In 2003, Minister Wriedt released the strategy, *Tasmania: A State of Learning*, to guide post-compulsory education. In 2004, Minister Wriedt commissioned Atelier Learning Solutions to report on provisions for children with special needs. In 2005, a second international conference was convened to examine policy initiatives associated with the *Essential Learnings Framework*, *Essential Learnings for All*, and *Tasmania: A State of Learning*. In 2002, she was appointed Minister for Women, and following Ken Bacon's resignation, she assumed responsibility for tourism, arts and heritage.

However, Minister Wriedt's increasing intransigence during a public controversy arising in September 2005 over the Essential Learnings curriculum and assessments undermined the unified leadership of policy makers, appointed officials and representatives of interest groups. 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 Essential Learnings curriculum and assessments. 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. University of Tasmania professor of education, Roslyn Arnold, contended that the Essential Learnings 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*. Tasmanian author, Richard Flanagan, labelled the Essential Learnings curriculum a 'lamentable experiment'. Launceston teacher and local government candidate, Kim Corbett, criticised the Essential Learnings 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 Essential Learnings curriculum.

Department of Education officials and Minister Wriedt attempted to quell the criticisms. Acting Secretary, Alison Jacob, acknowledged that the Department of Education could have improved the clarity of language used to explain the Essential Learnings curriculum and assessments 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 Labor Government launched a six-week campaign to promote the Essential Learnings curriculum and assessments to parents through advertisements on commercial television channels. In spite of this public relations campaign, Minister Wriedt's credibility with the community was damaged by the controversy. At the state election held in March 2006, her personal vote declined substantially, and she narrowly escaped losing her seat to Liberal candidate, Vanessa Goodwin. At the declaration of the poll, she attributed her poor showing to the controversy surrounding the Essential Learnings curriculum and assessments. Following the election, she lost the education portfolio, assuming responsibility for tourism, arts and the environment.

Political bipartisanship with the opposition parties did not emerge on some education issues, including the Essential Learnings curriculum and assessments. Elected to the House of Assembly in July 2002, Liberal Party

member, Peter Gutwein was a leading critic, after being appointed Shadow Minister for Education in April 2004. In reflecting the Liberal Party's position, this criticism 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. Liberal Party members 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 supported the change to the Essential Learnings curriculum and assessment system, whilst being critical of some aspects. The Tasmanian Greens perceived that the Essential Learnings curriculum was based on what we do and why, how we do it, and provided assessment procedures for improving learning. However, their reservations about the Essential Learnings curriculum and assessments related 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 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 Essential Learnings curriculum came from senior officials, together with branch managers and principal leaders appointed as a result of the organisational restructure introduced in 2005. Whilst many teachers supported the Essential Learnings curriculum, a minority criticised the educational philosophy underpinning the curriculum and its inconsistent implementation in schools, or the requirement to use an assessment system before understanding it fully.

Representatives of other interest groups were prominent through the news media in influencing public opinion about the Essential Learnings curriculum and assessments, 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, supported some aspects of the education reform agenda, but criticised the hasty implementation of the assessment and reporting system and the increasing workloads for teachers. Tasmanian State School Parents and Friends president, Jennifer Branch, supported the Essential Learnings



curriculum and assessments, but recognised parents' concerns about brochures designed to inform them about the 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 Certificate 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 Essential Learnings curriculum and assessments reduced their influence.

### ***Political Context promoting Tasmania's Curriculum***

Premier Lennon called a state election in February 2006, allowing for a month-long campaign. As polls indicated more than two-thirds of voters rated health as the main electoral issue, both the Labor and Liberal parties focused on repairing the public health system through massive expenditure. Instead, the Tasmanian Greens focused on gaining a balance of power in the parliament and curtailing the Labor Government's undue favouring of big business interests. In spite of Premier Lennon facing his first electoral test, the Labor Government was returned to office with 14 seats with the Liberal Party retaining seven seats and the Tasmanian Greens holding four seats. Soon after the election, controversy arose over the dismissal of Deputy Premier Bryan Green over a monopoly contract he awarded to the Tasmanian Compliance Corporation, part owned by a former Labor minister. Political debate continued over the Bell Bay pulp mill proposed by the hardwood forest products' company, Gunns, but opposed by the Tasmanian Greens, the Wilderness Society and a community protest group, Tasmanians Against the Pulp Mill. The assessment of the proposal by the Resource Planning and Development Commission proved contentious. Following resignations from the Pulp Mill Integrated Assessment Panel due to allegations of bias and undue political pressure, Gunns withdrew the proposal in March 2007 because of lack of certainty about whether a decision would be reached through the assessment process. Following this development, the Labor Government presented the Pulp Mill Assessment Bill to parliament presenting an alternative process for assessing the proposal. After passage of the Pulp Mill Assessment Act in March 2007, a consultancy firm, Sweco Pic based in Vantaa, Finland, was contracted in April 2007 to apply the environmental emission limit guidelines of the Resource Planning and Development Commission to assess the proposal. Following receipt of the consultant's report stating the proposal met the guidelines, the Labor Government would submit the report and a pulp mill permit, specifying conditions for the proposal to proceed, to parliament for approval by August 2007.

Elected to the House of Assembly in April 2004, David Bartlett addressed some key issues affecting Tasmania's education system following appointment as Minister for Education in April 2006. In May 2006, Minister Bartlett appointed the Reporting to Parents Taskforce to identify improvements for reporting student assessments to parents and the Engaging Our School Communities Taskforce to improve parents'

involvement in their children's education. In June 2006, Minister Bartlett announced that the curriculum would be refined and improved. In July 2006, Minister Bartlett released a plan to restructure the Department of Education. In February 2007, Minister Bartlett announced a proposal to establish a Centre of Excellence in Literacy Teaching to provide pre-service and practising teachers with professional development in literacy teaching. Held in June 2007, a Literacy Summit brought more than 100 literacy experts, teachers and industry leaders together to design a plan for improving literacy in the Tasmanian community. A communique issued by the participants recommended establishing a literacy strategy, designing teaching practices, giving a leadership role to principals, assessing student performance against literacy skills, building partnerships between schools, providing professional development, and grounding practice on research evidence. In June 2007, Minister Bartlett announced the Tasmania Tomorrow initiative to improve retention in post-compulsory education, adjust for skill shortages, and provide businesses with access to skilled employees (Government of Tasmania, 2007). Under this initiative, the eight secondary colleges and TAFE Tasmania will be merged to form three new organisations in 2009. Post-secondary students aiming to attend university will attend an academy. Post-secondary and mature aged students seeking practical and applied experience will attend a polytechnic. Trainees, apprentices and employees of businesses will be offered flexible training through a training enterprise. The Tasmania Tomorrow initiative will be facilitated by pathway planning in high schools in years 8 to 10, introduced under *Tasmania: A State of Learning*. Pathway planning officers will work with students to make choices to attend an academy or a polytechnic.

## **Key Issues and Challenges**

### ***Tasmanian Curriculum Framework***

Key strengths and weaknesses of the Essential Learnings curriculum were identified from an examination of policy reports and curriculum documents. The initial phase of the curriculum consultation, focusing on clarifying the values and purposes of public education, provided a strong foundation for basing the curriculum on community needs. Drawn from the experience of standards-based reform in Vermont, the Statement of Values and Purposes is reminiscent of the practice in the New England states of the USA of deriving state standards from common cores of learning. Distilled through processes of consensus, the common cores of learning acknowledge concerns for establishing the philosophical and moral principles underlying educational goals, which reflect the ethos of New England's puritanical and cultured heritage. Second, 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 academic disciplines in the information base suggested that limited attention were given to professional knowledge about how learning is fostered in these disciplines. Third, the process of involving teachers from selected schools in working with the

Consultation Team in conceptualising the essential learnings, and outcomes and standards was intended to engage the education community in challenging professional conversations about issues, problems and possibilities. By eschewing the general practice of using committees based on subject expertise, the practice of co-construction may have compromised the definition of outcomes that were sufficiently detailed, explicit and firmly rooted in the content of academic disciplines representing bodies of knowledge and ways of thinking that have evolved over centuries. Fourth, a bold initiative was taken in applying information and communication technology and publishing a range of resources to support the Essential Learnings curriculum. For instance, 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 conceptualising the curriculum at the local level.

An external analysis of the key element outcomes, organised in the *Essential Learnings Framework*, presented an unfavourable verdict on 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 for 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.

However, policy makers and Department of Education officials were reluctant to acknowledge the findings of this research study in spite of the results of the survey conducted by the Australian Education Union (n.d.) substantiating these findings. 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. When the results of the same study were publicised again in the press in July 2006, Minister Bartlett dismissed the findings as being politically motivated, because the author was affiliated with the Liberal Party. On the other hand, the public controversy over the Essential Learnings curriculum in September 2005 led policy makers and Department of Education officials to acknowledge these criticisms. The idiosyncratic nature of the constructs in the *Essential Learnings Framework* led to public controversy over difficulties posed in using it and theoretical considerations that govern the selection and organisation of content in unconventional ways that the wider community did not accept. Some primary teachers criticised the lack of attention given in the *Essential Learnings Framework* to the teaching of basic skills in literacy and numeracy. Some secondary teachers criticised the lack of academic rigour in the *Essential Learnings Framework*. Some parents objected to jargon in brochures designed to publicise the Essential Learnings curriculum. Employers' groups questioned whether the Essential Learnings curriculum would address employers' concerns about the perceived decline in literacy and numeracy skills of school leavers. These views led Minister Bartlett to acknowledge such criticisms in June 2006, and Department of Education officials to address such defects by incorporating curriculum areas and plain language into the curriculum framework, supporting the curriculum framework with scope and sequence statements, and using a simpler assessment and reporting system.

A key benchmarking study undertaken in the USA has found that a range of factors, affecting the decision-making process in developing state standards, influences their quality. Finn et al. (2006) identified that visionary leadership rather than consensus building, political bipartisanship, willingness to overcome contests between competing interests, real expertise in academic disciplines, and an inclination to draw on the excellent standards of pacesetting states are key factors affecting the development of rigorous state standards. They reported that these factors led to the states of California, Indiana and Massachusetts achieving perfect scores for developing rigorous standards. Case studies on decision making applied in each of these three states are reported below to illustrate the importance of these factors and their interaction in developing rigorous state standards.

California took a leading role initiating systemic education reform with the passage in 1983 of the Hughes-Hart Educational Reform Act (Senate Bill 813), containing more than eighty initiatives, which led to reforms consisting of four phases (Cuban, 1984; Odden and Marsh, 1988; Slater, 1993; Alexander,

1994; Honig, 1994). First, a vision of teaching and learning was created. Second, systemic reform was undertaken by defining a core curriculum, aligning textbooks, tests and the curriculum, implementing a comprehensive accountability system, improving teacher professionalism through staff development and a mentor teacher program, increasing the leadership skills of principals, and enhancing the role of school district leadership in the reform process. Third, support networks were organised around strategies for improvement linking large numbers of schools. Fourth, discussions were conducted with schools about assisting this kind of change. When California's year 4 students scored the lowest in the nation in reading in the National Assessment of Educational Progress in 1994, the legislature reached a consensus to initiate standards-based reform by passing the California Assessment of Academic Achievement Act in 1995. The process of standards-based reform began in October 1995 when working groups commenced developing Challenge School Standards by referring to national standards, California's curriculum frameworks, and school district frameworks. The drafts were distributed at a meeting in Sacramento in December 1995, so that school districts could determine how they related to local standards, and whether they matched student work (Lango and Schwarzbach, 2002). The California Assessment of Academic Achievement Act led to the formation of the 21-member Commission for the Establishment of Academic Content and Performance Standards, which commenced overseeing the development of standards for the core subjects over two rounds in October 1996. McDonnell and Weatherford (1999) examined the development of standards through a process of democratic deliberation within the arenas of the wider political context and the Commission. They interviewed 15 stakeholders, analysed 1,370 submissions lodged with the Commission, scrutinised drafts of standards documents developed by the Commission, and examined articles published in three newspapers based in Los Angeles, Sacramento and San Francisco. The Commission was appointed at a time when the balance of political responsibility between the governor, legislature, state superintendent and the state board of education was shifting. It also followed controversy over the California Learning Assessment System, a student assessment based on the state's curriculum frameworks, which focused on assessment in the language arts. The membership of the Commission was broad-based, and reflected a range of political views and educational philosophies. Initially, the Commission examined the concept of standards-based education by contracting StandardsWork, a Washington-based organisation, to lead the standards-setting process. Committees formed for each subject reviewed the Challenge School Standards, Education Round Table Standards for High School Graduates, standards from other states, and international studies and standards. Debate over whole language and phonics failed to emerge in developing the English-Language Arts standards, because a Reading Task Force had paved the way (California Department of Education, 1995). A progressive and a traditionalist dominated the proceedings of the committee developing the Mathematics standards, but neither was open to persuasion or compromise. The committee failed to act deliberatively by producing a consensus document, which the state board rejected after being lobbied by the traditionalist. As a consequence, the state board commissioned a panel of mathematicians to revise the standards (Bishop, 1999; Cossey, 1999; Becker and Jacob, 2000a; Becker and Jacob, 2000b; Haimo and Milgram, 2000). In the first round, coverage of the Commission's work by the news media was

limited, but this changed after the Commission awarded a contract to a group to assist develop the Science standards, but rejected another group prepared to do the work free of charge. In response to negative news reports, the Commission reversed its decision by hiring both groups. The two teams of consultants, who dominated development of the Science standards, worked independently and represented different perspectives. The Commission was forced to compromise between these two groups, and not being willing for the state board to reject the Science standards, took a more traditional stance. The development of the History-Social Science standards encountered few problems, because the committee drew on the History-Social Science framework published in 1988, which was widely accepted by teachers. The Commission held public hearings, directed meetings for community input, and circulated drafts for comments to academics, educators, business people, and parents. The state board adopted California Content Standards for English-Language Arts and Mathematics in December 1997, and History-Social Science and Science in October 1998. McDonnell and Weatherford concluded that the Commission fulfilled its potential as a deliberative body by providing multiple opportunities for public input and the commissioners subscribed to deliberative norms. However, the political process in which standards policy was shaped impinged on the Commission's efforts to ground decisions on reasoned deliberation. Initially, Republican Governor Pete Wilson attempted to influence its direction, and when the Commission began developing performance standards in a direction opposed to the Governor's preference, it was dissolved in December 1998. The shift in the balance of political responsibility weakened the state superintendent, but gave the state board, which followed a mode of decision making opposed to reaching deliberative solutions, ultimate authority in approving the standards. Teacher unions, education groups and the business community supported the initiative, but played little active part. Subsequently, the state board adopted California Content Standards for Visual and Performing Arts in January 2001, Physical Education in January 2005 and Career Technical Education in May 2005.

Indiana lagged behind many states in advancing standards-based reform until Governor Frank O'Bannon brought together the state superintendent, the higher education commissioner and other stakeholders in 1998 to create a 29-member advisory group called the Education Roundtable. In 1999, legislation charged the Education Roundtable with overseeing the development of academic standards. Beginning in July 1999, Indiana Department of Education staff identified academic standards contained in Core 40, a technology and college preparation curriculum for years 9 to 12 adopted by the Indiana State Board of Education in 1996, and proficiency guides previously used for kindergarten to year 8. Following public reviews of the drafts, the academic standards were revised by the Education Roundtable. Commissioned to benchmark the draft academic standards for English Language Arts and Mathematics, Achieve (2000) recommended they should be revised to provide greater clarity, coherence and rigour, and the Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress Plus should be revised to ensure it measured the full range of standards. The state board adopted Indiana Academic Standards for English Language Arts, Mathematics, Foreign Languages, Music and Visual Arts and Science in 2000, Physical Education and Social Studies in 2001, Health Education in 2002, Theatre in 2003, and

Dance in 2004. Beginning in August 2002, the Education Roundtable sought advice from local, state and national experts, researched best practices, reviewed state and national data, and collected input from stakeholders and the public to design the P-16 Plan for Improving Student Achievement. Intended to integrate efforts across all levels of the education system, the P-16 Plan for Improving Student Achievement was planned over two phases. In October 2003, the Education Roundtable approved the first phase, the strategic framework for aligning policies, resources and strategies. These referred to academic standards, assessment and accountability, teaching and learning, school leadership and governance, school readiness and early learning, academic progress for all students, college and workplace success, dropout prevention, higher education and continued learning, communication, and effective use of technology and resources. The second phase involved evaluating current expenditures, realising efficiencies, leveraging resources, practising strategies and making critical investments before presenting the P-16 Plan for Improving Student Achievement to the legislature, the governor and the state board for approval. In Indiana, Governor O'Bannon and education leaders set the stage for standards-based reform by involving external experts and bringing stakeholders around to accepting the importance of detailed and explicit content standards. The Education Roundtable was successful in engaging teachers to develop standards by drawing on exemplary standards of other states.

In 1991, the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education initiated education reform by producing a manifesto, *Every Child a Winner*. It presented a reform agenda based on raising student achievement, improving teacher quality and reforming the system for funding education. At the same time, a law suit challenging the system for funding schools led the legislature to correct the system and become involved in the reform agenda. In June 1993, Governor William Weld signed the Education Reform Act into law, introducing reform initiatives to improve student achievement. Appointed by the Massachusetts Board of Education in September 1993, the 40-member Commission on the Common Core of Learning conducted public hearings and received submissions to provide a basis for developing a Common Core of Learning. Adopted by the state board in July 1994, the Common Core of Learning articulated three broad goals for public education: thinking and communicating; gaining and applying knowledge; and working and contributing. The Common Core of Learning provided the foundation for the next phase, the development of the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks for seven subjects. Prior to this phase, the Massachusetts Department of Education had commenced developing curriculum frameworks for Mathematics, and Science and Technology in 1992 through the National Science Foundation-funded Partnerships Advancing the Learning of Mathematics and Science (PALMS). In January 1993, consultants from the Technical Education Resource Centers, a research and development organisation based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, produced a set of recommendations for pre-kindergarten to year 8. These recommendations formed the basis for developing and extending later drafts to include years 9 to 12, work undertaken by separate committees overseen by the PALMS Steering Committee. The state board adopted the Mathematics and Science and Technology frameworks in December 1995. In 1993, curriculum framework development committees were appointed to develop successive

drafts in the other five subjects, which were reviewed and revised on the basis of responses from subject-based focus groups over a two-year period. In 1996, Governor Weld appointed a new state board, which in turn appointed new committees to facilitate the developmental process. Disputes emerged between new members and those retained from the original committees, particularly in history and social science (Stern, 1998). Following public consultation and revision, the state board adopted the frameworks for the Arts, Comprehensive Health, and World Languages in January 1996, English Language Arts in January 1997, and History and Social Science in June 1997 (French, 1998). A Statewide Advisory Council was appointed to develop a draft for the common chapters of the frameworks, which defined their purposes, presented guiding principles, defined school restructuring, and outlined requirements for implementation. Presented for review to 1,076 study groups, the common chapters were revised on the basis of responses and adopted by the state board in January 1997. The Education Reform Act requires the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks to undergo periodic updating, improvement or refinement in order to ensure they reflect current research, the results of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, and recommendations from experts and practitioners. After revision by curriculum framework review panels, the curriculum frameworks are presented for public comment on the Internet and revised on the basis of the public's responses before presentation to the state board. Revised frameworks were adopted for Foreign Languages in March 1999, Arts in June 1999, Comprehensive Health in October 1999, Mathematics in July 2000, English Language Arts in November 2000, Science and Technology in December 2000, History and Social Science in October 2002, and Science and Technology Engineering in January 2006. Although leadership from the business community set the stage for education reform in Massachusetts, it took the intellectual influence of education leaders, backed by Governor Weld, to develop exemplary state standards (Reville, 2004).

The case studies on these three states show that their success in developing exemplary content standards is due to a combination of factors. In each state, the governor and key legislators worked across party lines to set the stage. In California and Indiana, cross-sectoral groups took strong leadership roles, whilst the business community and the state board of education in turn accomplished the same role in Massachusetts. Teacher unions in the three states supported strong academic standards. Once strong political leadership had set the stage, advocacy for standards-based reform from education leaders established a sound decision-making process. Education leaders in the three states brought opposing parties around to accepting the importance of detailed and explicit content standards, instead of developing standards by establishing consensus between opposing groups on committees. Their leadership in developing rigorous standards focused on consulting benchmarking experts, referring to exemplary standards of other states, and including academics from the disciplines on committees.

In Tasmania, policy makers and education leaders face challenges in establishing rigorous outcomes and standards in the curriculum framework and developing demanding curriculum area descriptions, unless they take account of these factors. It is evident that the process of co-construction used to develop the Essential Learnings curriculum took account of some of these



factors, but it failed to enlist scholars and engage parents, the business community and the public. Instead, this task must be accomplished within a context in which political leadership sets the stage, and education leaders establish a sound decision-making process by bringing stakeholders around to accepting the importance of rigorous outcomes and standards. Rigorous outcomes and standards need to balance educators' and scholars' professional judgments about what constitutes challenging, important content with the views of parents, the business community, and the public about what young people need to learn. Such a decision-making process is more likely to satisfy the requirements for rigorous outcomes and standards, and demanding content students need to meet for the Tasmania Tomorrow initiative, which will track students entering the post-compulsory level into institutions catering for particular interests based to some extent on academic achievement.

### ***Assessment and Reporting System***

The review identified that each of the components of the assessment and reporting system had been adopted. Difficulties experienced by teachers in inputting data into the Student Assessment and Reporting Information System had been overcome by developing and disseminating a user's guide and establishing two help centres.

The review also showed that policy makers were grappling in 2007 with key issues relating to the assessment and reporting system, which were prominent among factors impeding successful curriculum reform. In May, the Australian Education Union (2004) surveyed members finding that whilst most teachers knew how to assess student work, only a small proportion had a good or thorough understanding. In May and August of 2005, the Australian Education Union polled members finding a marked increase from 17 percent to 62 percent of teachers believing that they were ready to report on students' progress. In spite of concerns raised by parents during the controversy over the Essential Learnings curriculum and assessments in 2005, the poll and survey conducted by Tasmanian State School Parents and Friends (n.d.) showed that most parents were positive about the Essential Learnings Report. On the other hand, the survey conducted by the Australian Education Union (n.d.) identified high levels of dissatisfaction among teachers with key aspects of the assessment and reporting system. Barely one-tenth of the respondents believed that reporting on nine key elements was a reasonable expectation, a reporting system based on five standards and three performance levels was effective, and the standards were sufficiently clear and unambiguous to assist their teaching.

Minister Bartlett responded to the most contentious criticisms raised by parents about the assessment and reporting system by appointing the Reporting to Parents Taskforce. In examining best practice in reporting student performance to parents, the Reporting to Parents Taskforce presented 16 recommendations addressing three key issues. A short progress report early in the school year, a comprehensive mid-year report and a summary report at the end of the school year should be issued to convey information about student progress, attitudes and behaviour. Progress should be measured across 15 steps for each standard with lower

and higher performance levels. The state standard for a particular year group should be reported to ensure that reports are consistent and reliable across Tasmania. Reports should be communicated at meetings between the teacher, parents and the student. Teachers should be provided with pre-service and in-service professional development in report writing. The recommendations of the Reporting to Parents Taskforce met the most contentious criticisms raised by parents, but they did not address the lack of clarity in the standards and the sufficiency of the format used in the Student Assessment and Reporting Information System for written comments to cover learning experiences.

### ***Capacity Building and Teacher Development***

The review showed that promising strategies for strengthening the organisational capacity of schools to implement the curriculum reform have been initiated. The first stage of building the capacity of schools was taken by several teams of centrally based consultants, who 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 was taken in 2005 to extend capacity building to support schools by forming three organisational branches in the Department of Education to manage accountability and provide support to clusters, and creating clusters to form local administrative units. The strategy of appointing principal leaders to strengthen the work of boards of principals, and support teams servicing schools extended the capacity of schools to implement the Essential Learnings curriculum in classrooms. However, the formation of clusters was fraught with difficulties in 2005, because of the short time frame for implementation and inadequate 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 at the same level as in the past were not met. This situation resulted in significant variations between clusters during the implementation process. Although opportunities occurred for cohesive groups to form at the cluster level, such opportunities varied across the state. Coordinating principals, responsible for operating the clusters, were sometimes compelled into their positions. 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 led to a serious decline in morale among principals, teachers and parents in 2006.

In contrast, the advent of the eCentre for Teachers in 2005 was a promising initiative for developing the capacity of schools to become high performance organisations. 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 played an important role in providing practising teachers with knowledge and skills to teach the Essential Learnings curriculum. Various professional learning activities offered through the Professional Learning Program focused on assisting teachers to understand the concepts underpinning the *Essential Learnings Framework*, and equipping them with a range of skills to assist students to master the concepts. However, differences between schools in their levels of professional learning, compounded by schools having been involved in this activity at different times, created tensions within the organisational structures of clusters. Although the devolvement of decision making to clusters allowed teachers to take greater responsibility for their own professional learning, there was a greater need to provide cluster-based professional learning that was relevant to meeting this need, sustain it over time, and enhance flexibility in centrally mandated requirements.

The four-year Bachelor of Education degree and two-year Bachelor of Teaching degree provide pre-service teachers with the key concepts underpinning Tasmanian-based curriculum and opportunities to apply the knowledge and skills to plan lessons, which are taught in classrooms during school experience sessions. However, the Faculty of Education in the University of Tasmania has the potential to play a more significant role in providing new teachers with knowledge and skills to teach Tasmanian-based curriculum. A tentative step has been taken to improve the relevance of instruction in curriculum practice for pre-service teachers by seconding two teachers. However, the Faculty of Education is impeded from making further improvements, because only about 30 percent of pre-service teachers are employed in Tasmania, a situation that is likely to worsen as student enrolments in schools decline. As an alternative, an opportunity exists for the Faculty of Education in partnership with the Department of Education to develop a program to provide new teachers employed in Tasmania with sustained support through the initial years in the classroom.

The 18-month plan to restructure the Department of Education shows policy makers have realised that problems experienced in 2005 and 2006 in establishing the three organisational branches and 27 clusters posed challenges for improving capacity building. The plan to integrate and extend capacity building activities to provide a coordinated, statewide strategy for offering technical assistance to schools and teachers could overcome some of these challenges. The organisational restructure presented in this plan represents an example of policy making intended to introduce small, incremental changes about which little information is available concerning how to achieve them. Reorganisation of the three organisational branches into four learning services units represents an attempt to assist schools to form networks for establishing learning communities and alliances by ensuring resources are delivered closer to schools. The governance of the learning services units is likely to be enhanced by establishing school improvement boards, and the operation of learning services units is likely to be improved by forming learning teams. The acquisition of the administrative responsibilities of coordinating principals by the learning services units is

intended to build clusters into more dynamic local administrative units. By managing service functions, strategic governmental initiatives and research activities and operating as a hub for schools' needs in policy direction and resource development, the Learning Support Unit is likely to provide a bridge between policy-driven research and educational practice. However, the plan fails to incorporate a coordinated strategy to equip pre-service and practising teachers with knowledge and skills to prepare all students to master rigorous standards and succeed in demanding content.

### ***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 curriculum 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 for a comprehensive accountability system. 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.

The 18-month plan to improve capacity building and accountability requires Educational Performance Services to develop an accountability framework providing corporate benchmarking, school support and targeted intervention. The plan presented sets of key performance indicators for educating students to the highest possible standards and supporting schools and colleges to be high performing, but indicated that these indicators required further discussion and evaluation as to their usefulness, reliability and validity. In spite of the positive intention, the Department of Education still faces a substantial challenge in designing an accountability system, which uses multiple measures to provide incentives for success and intervention to support failing schools.

### ***Public Leadership***

This review substantiates a view that controversy over the Essential Learnings curriculum and assessments was the main factor changing the course of curriculum reform in Tasmania. In spite of the curriculum consultation proceeding without contention, controversy arising in September 2005 over specific aspects relating to the Essential Learnings curriculum and assessments debilitated the credibility of Minister Wriedt's leadership. Her failure to accept criticisms of the Essential Learnings curriculum and assessments led to a loss of bipartisan support from other political parties, employer, union and community groups, and the general public. Minister Wriedt and supporters of the curriculum reform failed to retrieve their positions by the time of the state election in March 2006, in spite of a six-week campaign to promote the Essential Learnings curriculum and assessments to parents through advertisements on commercial television channels. The substantial decline in Minister Wriedt's personal vote at the state election, attributed to this controversy, led to her losing the education portfolio.

In the early 1990s, reforms in outcomes-based education in the USA generated controversies between advocates and conservative Christian groups, such as Citizens for Excellence in Education, the Eagle Forum and Concerned Women of America. These groups attacked outcomes-based education over an emphasis on the teaching of values, the presentation of radical social, political and economic values, the promotion of a whole language approach in reading, and multicultural education. These attacks stifled efforts at outcomes-based reform in their infancy in Pennsylvania and Connecticut (Pliska and McQuaide, 1993-1994; Frahm, 1994). Such controversies eventually relegated outcomes-based education to a marginal position in curriculum reform in the USA and contributed to the ascendancy of standards-based education (Spady, 1998).

The role of controversy in changing the course of curriculum reform can be illustrated in a case history on Minnesota's contentious Profile of Learning, showing similarities to the challenges affecting the educational and policy contexts in Tasmania (Nelson, 1998; Nelson, 1999; Pitton, 1999; Pearlstein, 2000; Avery et al., 2003). In 1987, the Minnesota State Board of Education articulated an intention to develop an outcomes-based education system for defining what students should know at the time of school graduation. In 1989, the state board adopted model learner outcomes to be used as a basis for developing curriculum, and essential learner outcomes to be used as a basis for assessment. Appointed in 1990, the Graduation Standards Committee, consisting of representatives from education, business and citizen groups, developed the first drafts of the graduation rule, which were reviewed at public hearings and meetings held in 1991. Following legislation mandating a results-oriented graduation rule, the state board developed a two-tiered graduation rule of basic and high standards in 1993. The process for developing the standards involved teams of teachers considering various subjects, the requirements that should be specified, and the assessments that might be used. Working at pilot sites across Minnesota, the teams developed the high standards and model performance packages, presenting assignments for assessing each standard. The state board conducted public hearings on the drafts in the spring of 1994, consulted business, military and

higher education communities in 1995, and approved the high standards in May 1998. In April 1999, controversy emerged over the Profile of Learning, the structure of ten learning areas for the high standards, when the Maple River Education Coalition rallied supporters in St Paul to urge the legislature to repeal the Profile of Learning and replace it with its North Star Standard. Formed in 1998 by Renee Doyle and other concerned parents from school districts in south central Minnesota, the Maple River Education Coalition rallied conservative groups to oppose outcomes-based education in Minnesota thereby gaining national prominence, which led to it being renamed EdWatch in 2003. To quell the controversy, the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning proposed modifying the Profile of Learning, granting waivers to school districts wishing to experiment with the Profile of Learning, reviewing and clarifying key terms, improving practices for implementation, and establishing a revision process. Contracted in 1999 to review the academic expectations in the Profile of Learning, Achieve and Council for Basic Education (2000) found that content knowledge in the academic disciplines was minimal, the standards needed greater rigour, clarity and specificity, and ten learning areas made the Profile of Learning unmanageable. In 1999, the state legislature debated the Profile of Learning. The House of Representatives passed a bill to replace the Profile of Learning with rigorous academic standards, but rejected its elimination, whilst the Senate supported a proposal to give school districts the option of reducing the number of required performance packages. In May 2000, both houses of the legislature compromised by passing modifications to the Profile of Learning allowing school districts to phase in the number of standards required for students to graduate, and removing the requirement to use model and local performance packages. Appointed in September 2000, a 12-member Academic Panel recommended in February 2001 that the learning areas should be consolidated, a review cycle should be established for continuous improvement of the Profile of Learning, and a group of educators should be convened to review the standards. Following election of Republican Governor Tim Pawlenty in November 2002, a plan was released in January 2003 to develop Minnesota Academic Standards to replace the Minnesota Graduation Standards. Committees of teachers, representatives of higher education, business people and parents, appointed for a first round in February 2003 and a second round in July 2003, reviewed standards from other states to develop draft standards. Following reviews of the draft standards at public hearings across the state, the legislature approved the Minnesota Academic Standards in the first round for the Arts, English Language Arts and Mathematics in May 2003, and the second round for Science and Social Studies in May 2004.

Whilst evidence suggests that parents played a critical role in changing the course of education reform in Minnesota, divergent views expressed by academics and teachers about the value of the Profile of Learning were also influential. Conflicting arguments put forward in the debate between Minnesota academics, Wade Nelson and Debra Pitton, about whether the high standards in the Profile of Learning met high expectations, teachers were involved in their development, and the performance packages over-specified assessment, presaged the results of a survey conducted in September 2000. Avery et al. surveyed 1,237 secondary teachers, members of the Minnesota Council of Teachers of English and the Minnesota Council for the Social Studies, to which 658 subjects responded indicating inconsistent perceptions

about the Profile of Learning. Its impact on student learning was positive with 51 percent believing students' higher order thinking increased, 45 percent believing students' understanding of criteria for quality work increased, and 47 percent believing communications with students about work quality increased. Its impact on teaching was mixed with 66 percent believing conversations with colleagues about teaching and assessment increased, but 82 percent believed preparation time increased, and 53 percent reported their enjoyment of teaching decreased. A positive correlation was found between respondents' attitudes about the Profile of Learning and the quality of professional learning and resources. Only 30 percent, however, reported that their professional learning for working with the Profile of Learning was 'good' or 'excellent' and only 25 percent reported that the provision of human and material resources was 'good' or 'excellent'. Those respondents, who believed they had effective professional learning and adequate resources, were much more likely to report beneficial effects of the Profile of Learning in terms of teaching and learning. In follow-up interviews with 140 respondents, subjects raised other issues. They reported both positive and negative attitudes to the constructivist philosophy reflected in the Profile of Learning. Although they believed in the need for equity in applying high student expectations, they recognised this would be difficult to achieve across Minnesota because of the disparity in professional learning and resources. Some respondents expressed frustration with the lack of teacher involvement in developing the Profile of Learning. They reported lack of clarity in the high standards and performance packages. Some respondents were critical of the focus on process at the expense of content. They were critical of the increasing involvement of politicians in imposing educational policies and changing the Profile of Learning, which undermined their professionalism. Some respondents argued that accountability could not be achieved, because the requirements for implementing the Profile of Learning varied across Minnesota.

It is evident that the attitudes of academics, teachers and parents played a similar role in the controversy over the Essential Learnings curriculum in 2005. Parents' criticisms about convoluted language in brochures led to academics, teachers and commentators expressing divergent views about the value of the Essential Learnings curriculum. Surveys of teachers' perceptions about the Essential Learnings curriculum and Minnesota's Profile of Learning showed similar results on many contentious issues, suggesting that these issues may be common factors impeding the implementation of outcomes-based curricula.

The major challenge facing an education-minded politician coming to office after the controversy over the Essential Learnings curriculum in September 2005 was to garner broad-based support from a coalition of political, education and business leaders. Minister Bartlett adopted a consultative approach following appointment as minister in April 2006. After spending the first 100 days in office consulting the education community, he announced several initiatives to review aspects of the Essential Learnings curriculum and assessments and restructure the Department of Education. Generally, stakeholders welcomed these initiatives, but some raised concerns about the impact of further changes on teachers' workloads. This evidence suggests that Minister Bartlett has taken the initial steps to build a coalition of

stakeholders, but a coalition speaking with a single, unified voice, essential to build public understanding and will to sustain the reform strategy during implementation, has 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 established.

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. 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 the emergence of new managerial roles in the Learning Support Unit, learning services units and clusters. 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 revision and implementation of the new curriculum and assessments.

## **Conclusion**

This review shows that controversy in 2005 over the Essential Learnings curriculum has led policy makers to become more willing to consult the education community about curriculum reform, and more open to accepting that alternative strategies need to be employed to sustain education reform. Policy makers and education leaders have identified specific problems with the curriculum, assessments and the reporting system, and initiated a decision-making process for review and revision. In spite of the favourable impression made by such progress, considerable work needs to be accomplished to bridge the gap between education and public policies. Education leaders need to engage academics with expertise in the disciplines, commission consultants with benchmarking expertise, and refer to exemplary curriculum documents from other jurisdictions in order to develop rigorous outcomes and standards. Policy makers have initiated an 18-month plan to improve capacity building and accountability, but this plan fails to include teacher development as a component and considerable work needs to be done to design an accountability system. It is evident that the strong political leadership provided by Minister Wriedt following her appointment in September 1998 diminished substantially in 2005. Following appointment in April 2006, Minister Bartlett has offered forceful public leadership, but whether this leadership is sufficient by itself to meet the challenges facing curriculum reform in Tasmania is questionable. The lack of a single, cross-sectoral group to provide visionary leadership has restricted the scope of the decision-making process to building consensus among groups within the education community. Instead, public policy needs to be driven by visionary leadership and political bipartisanship.

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. In view of the lack of visionary leadership in public policy, it could be argued that recommendation 5 should take precedence. In support of this view, a case can be made that a 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 reform agenda 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 activities, suggested for revising the curriculum, provide scope for it to be initiated at different entry points in the revision process. The close relationship between the curriculum and assessments suggests that recommendation 2 should be considered next in order. As it is evident that 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.

### ***Tasmanian Curriculum Framework***

The Department of Education faces a degree of challenge in refining the curriculum framework, because the lack of clear and explicit outcomes and standards, and curriculum area descriptions constitute the main weaknesses. Defining clear and explicit outcomes and standards, and incorporating curriculum areas into the curriculum framework involve making small, incremental changes for continuous improvement, based on structured inquiry and expert judgment into the efficacy of the existing curriculum and the recommended changes. Since this change is supported by little extant knowledge, this process should involve the employment of expert consultants, the conduct of special studies, and the formation of committees. The analysis of the process for refining the curriculum framework shows that only the preliminary phase of determining a plan has been completed. Therefore, the state should move this process forward by adopting the following recommendation.

Recommendation 1: The state should commission expert consultants to benchmark the quality of the outcomes and standards in the curriculum framework, collaborate and contract special studies to identify best practices emerging locally, and appoint committees to add greater specificity to the outcomes and standards in the curriculum framework.

The use of consultants to analyse curriculum documents has been employed in Victoria. As part of the review of the *Curriculum and Standards Framework*, the Victorian Board of Studies (1998) commissioned Education Strategies to benchmark the learning outcomes for English, mathematics and science against other curriculum and standards documents. Documents used in California, England, Japan, New South Wales, the New Standards Project, New Zealand, Ontario, Singapore, and Western Australia were reviewed. This study led the Victorian Board of Studies (1999) to host a symposium at which representatives from Achieve, the New Standards

Project, Australian Council for Educational Research, and the University of Melbourne discussed with education leaders the importance of setting rigorous standards to ensure high quality student achievement. As part of the review of the *Curriculum and Standards Framework II*, the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2004) commissioned a review of curriculum and standards documents used in the other seven Australian states and territories, Ontario, Finland, Hong Kong, the International Baccalaureate Organisation, Singapore, United Kingdom, and Pennsylvania. It is suggested that the Department of Education should identify a range of exemplary documents used in international contexts from benchmarking activities undertaken by organisations recognised for this work, such as the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation and the American Federation of Teachers. The outcomes and standards in the *Essential Learnings Framework* should be benchmarked against documents from those states identified as having set rigorous standards.

The Department of Education has not yet conducted research in Tasmanian schools to examine teacher's experiences and students' performances with the curriculum. The Department of Education has adapted the Essential Learnings Assessment Protocol from the tuning protocol used by the Coalition of Essential Schools for the Quality Moderation of Assessment Process. The New York State Education Department also adapted the tuning protocol used by the Coalition of Essential Schools for a peer review process to assess learning experiences. Designed in 1996 by consultants from the Annenberg Institute for School Reform based in Brown University, Rhode Island, the peer review process evolved from blind reviews based on written submissions to teachers meeting with peer reviewers annually in March to assess their learning experiences. Over the course of several sessions held in Albany, the peer review process was refined by more than 650 teachers to become an occasion for professional discussion. State Education Department officials were engaged to solicit learning experiences, to prepare the learning experiences before peer reviews, and coach teachers during the peer review process. The hour-long peer review process uses a team of seven to nine reviewers at least half of whom represent the subject area and level at which the learning experience is taught. A facilitator, who may participate actively as a reviewer or simply facilitate the peer review process, leads the team. Another team member records a summary of the discussion on a Recorder's Form. Each reviewer uses a Criteria for Review Reporting Form to comment on the relation of the learning experience to New York State's Learning Standards, the construction of knowledge, the challenge and engagement for students, the assessment plan, adaptability, integration of technology, value outside school, and presentation. The teacher presents the context for the learning experience, indicates the targeted Learning Standards and performance indicators, and outlines the teacher's and students' roles, the teaching approach, the amount of time required for preparation and presentation, specific assessment techniques, and examples of student work. Each reviewer submits the completed Criteria for Review Reporting Form to the facilitator at the end of the review, so that comments can be incorporated into a report to the teacher. Teachers, who have had learning experiences accepted through peer reviews, become members of the New York State Academy for Teaching and Learning. It is suggested that the Department of Education should collaborate with the Faculty of Education

in the University of Tasmania to develop a peer review process and conduct a series of studies in Tasmanian schools to identify samples of learning experiences and student work to support the *Tasmanian Curriculum Framework*.

The Department of Education should commission committees, consisting of teachers, experts in academic disciplines and 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. In the USA, findings from research studies on the work of committees, based on stakeholder representation, suggest that consensus rather than vision guides their work, often producing vague, encyclopedic, or politically correct standards. Representative committees should be bolstered by academics, such as scientists, mathematicians and historians, with recognised expertise in particular disciplines. Rather than being consulted, subject experts should be included in the membership of committees involved in refining the outcomes and standards in the curriculum.

### ***Assessment and Reporting System***

The Department of Education faces a degree of challenge in incorporating the recommendations of the Reporting to Parents Taskforce into the assessment and reporting system. Incorporating 15 gradations of performance, the new basis for state standards, professional development in report writing, three reports and their delivery to parents involve making small, incremental changes for continuous improvement. These changes are based on structured inquiry and expert judgment into the efficacy of the existing assessment and reporting system and the recommended changes. Since this change is supported by little extant knowledge, this process should involve the employment of expert consultants, the conduct of special studies, and the formation of committees. The analysis of the process for refining the assessment and reporting system shows that an expert consultant was contracted and a committee formed to introduce incremental change into the reporting component of the system. Therefore, the state should move this process forward by adopting the following recommendation.

Recommendation 2: The state should commission an organisation with expertise in educational measurement and testing to assist implement the recommendations of the Reporting to Parents Taskforce and to evaluate the degree of alignment between the assessments and the standards in the *Tasmanian Curriculum Framework*.

The complexity of the task of implementing the recommendations of the Reporting to Parents Taskforce 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 activity. Once the recommendations of the Reporting to Parents Taskforce have been implemented, the Department of Education may consider commissioning an external organisation to evaluate the degree of alignment between the assessments and the standards in the *Tasmanian Curriculum Framework*. In principle, the assessment and reporting system

places a high level of reliance on individual teacher's assessments. This conclusion 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.

### ***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 knowledge and skills to teach the curriculum successfully. The new organisational structure has been modified to ameliorate problems encountered in 2006 and to provide a coordinated, statewide strategy for offering technical assistance to schools and teachers. The eCentre for Teachers supports this strategy by providing 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, the results of the survey conducted by the Australian Education Union (n.d.) confirmed that the quality of professional learning varies markedly between different schools, indicating there is a need to extend professional learning to make it more effective for all teachers. The Faculty of Education in the University of Tasmania provides pre-service teachers with key concepts underpinning Tasmanian-based curriculum through two graduate degrees, but a partnership needs to be formed with the Department of Education to extend support to new teachers. Therefore, the state should extend this process by adopting the following recommendation.

Recommendation 3: The state should extend the plan for a coordinated, statewide strategy to build the capacity of schools and teachers through technical assistance offered by the Learning Support Unit, learning services units and clusters by integrating a coordinated strategy of professional development activities into the plan.

Although 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. The 18-month plan to restructure the education agency addresses capacity building, but fails to include professional development as a key element. 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 *Tasmanian Curriculum Framework*, and equipping them with a range of skills to assist students to master the concepts. The creation of a statewide network of subject-based professional development academies sponsored by public and private sources could assist whole-school departments in schools to align their teaching to the *Tasmanian Curriculum Framework*. In addition to extending the plan to incorporate professional development, an effort should be made to identify, develop and disseminate curriculum materials, which are aligned to the *Tasmanian Curriculum 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 *Tasmanian Curriculum Framework* may be ameliorated by forming a consortium with other small jurisdictions to influence publishing companies.

### ***Accountability***

The 18-month plan to improve capacity building and accountability requires Educational Performance Services to develop an accountability framework providing corporate benchmarking, school support and targeted intervention. The plan presented sets of key performance indicators for educating students to the highest possible standards and supporting schools and colleges to be high performing, but indicated that these indicators required further discussion and evaluation as to their usefulness, reliability and validity. Therefore, the state should extend this process by adopting the following recommendation.

Recommendation 4: A comprehensive accountability system using multiple measures to provide incentives for success and intervention to support failing schools 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 refined the curriculum, assessments and reporting system 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 Bartlett appears to be forceful in supporting curriculum reform, other prominent leaders are not arrayed in support. Politicians from opposition parties have supported refinement of Essential Learnings curriculum and assessments, but their criticism of various aspects continues to undermine public leadership. Senior officials of the Department of Education have failed to project high-profile leadership needed to arouse public engagement. It is critical that Minister Bartlett makes a determined effort to extend consultation with the education community to engage representatives of other interest groups, whose primary mission is to serve their constituents, in creating unified public leadership based on a coalition of political, education, business, union and parent leaders. Therefore, the state should extend this process by adopting the following recommendation.

Recommendation 5: A single, cross-sectoral leadership group should be created to support education 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 should build on the success of the Literacy Summit, and aim at providing educators, parents and the public with reliable information about the progress of education reform in Tasmania. The leadership group could conduct searches to identify, and then study media strategies used by state education agencies in other Australian states and the USA 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 also needs to work closely with education, business, and community representatives to develop practical policies for promoting education reform, and to review and revise these policies periodically.

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