



# The Education State

## Conversation Workbook

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# Conversation Workbook

This workbook will assist you in having an informed conversation about the Education State. Use the workbook to record your thoughts and ideas. Your host will take a record of the group's conversation and submit it after the session. Your conversation will focus on questions in four areas:

1. The Education State vision
2. Achieving the vision
3. Student needs
4. Partnering

# 1 The Education State vision

“Education is the key to our own future. It unlocks creativity, opportunity and innovation. It’s what keeps young people engaged, the economy strong, our culture vibrant and society healthy” The Hon James Merlino MP, Deputy Premier and Minister for Education

Lifelong education through a strong education and training system is important to ensuring that where you are born or grow up doesn’t determine your life chances.

A high quality education system positively impacts peoples’ lives through better physical and mental health, creating more links and networks between people and their communities. Education is the foundation of a cohesive, healthy and prosperous society.

## **Question 1: What will the Education State look and feel like to you? How would you define it?**

*Student engagement is of the utmost importance; students would be strongly engaged at all levels, because they perceive the relevance of learning to their own lives.*

*Students at all levels would be strongly and directly engaged with nature and their communities, not necessarily spending most of their time in a traditional classroom setting*

*Students would be taught not just to find knowledge and store knowledge, but to want knowledge and to know how to apply it in the real world.*

*Students would be fit and healthy, in mind and body. They would be able to form positive and lasting relationships, able to engage in society in sophisticated and effective ways, and would share a love for our country and nature.*

*The education system would work well for all kinds of learners, not just those who thrive in classroom settings and/or with “traditional” teaching methods.*

*Teachers would be confident with a variety of content areas, teaching environments and methodologies. They would be highly trained, well supported in their work, respected in their communities, and part of an ongoing community of practice and improvement.*

*By the end of their schooling, students would have strong knowledge and skills, both in academic and practical areas. They would also have fostered positive personal traits, such as resilience, creativity, curiosity, confidence, ambition, empathy, and the ability to collaborate well.*

*The education “system” would be seen not only as schools, but as an extended network reaching throughout our society, including our community organizations, businesses and our natural world. Education should extend well beyond the school – and conversely, the community should feel welcome and invited into our schools.*

*There would be no sense of an adversarial stance between schools and families; parents and teachers would feel they are in a genuine partnership to educate our children.*

**Question 2: As a learner, what is your experience of education and what impact has it, or will it have, on your life?**

*[Note: our discussion did not focus heavily on this topic.]*

## 2 Achieving the vision

To achieve the Education State, we first need to understand the current challenges and opportunities facing the Victorian Education System. We need to understand our current performance and the key drivers which influence it.

Once we understand the state of play in the education system we need to determine the right interventions and solutions that will achieve a more equitable system across the whole State. To do this we need to reflect on the successes in the Victorian system and look abroad for replicable education system Interventions.

**Question 3: Do these strengths and challenges reflect your experience of Victoria's education system?**

*Additional strengths:*

*Victoria is globally recognised as having some the leading outdoor education programs in the world. Many of our kids have increasing access to learning outside the classroom, with demonstrable benefits for engagement, skills acquisition, personal development, health and wellbeing, and crossover benefits for other areas of learning. Outdoor experiential education has a strong base in Victoria.*

*There is broad agreement with the other strengths listed in the consultation paper.*

*Additional challenges:*

*Programs to learn outside the classroom, such as outdoor experiential education, are generally more costly than traditional classroom approaches. They are therefore under constant pressure, and many schools view outdoor education as too costly, or only worth doing in a tokenistic way.*

*Teaching in schools often works well for only a subset of students. For students who learn best through experiential or kinesthetic learning, school environments don't necessarily work well, and these kids can often be left behind.*

*A very full curriculum is intended to ensure students are learning across a broad range of areas – but it can have the unintended consequence of stifling innovation in teaching, neglect of anything that isn't strictly required in the curriculum (like learning outside the classroom) and taking time with students on particularly important developmental issues.*

*Teacher training and professional development is sound, but can be too focused on mastery of content and not enough training and mentoring to ensure all teachers are confident with a wide range of educational methods, learning styles and learning environments.*

*Integrative teaching is normal in primary schools, but has mostly disappeared at the secondary level, because teachers have little reason to teach beyond "their" subject. But outdoors education is inherently integrative, as are many other learning outside the classroom experiences. This makes it very difficult for a school to design and deliver an experience outside the classroom that delivers learning and personal development across many subjects – even if such an experience would maximize student engagement and development.*

*In addition, the shift in teacher training to more online content inevitably lessens the focus on direct practical knowledge.*

*Finally, students today face tremendous pressure and challenges. Among these are high rates of sedentary living, and physical and mental health issues including depression, ADHD, obesity, childhood diabetes, alcohol and substance abuse, and risky behavior. A lack of connection to nature and our communities is also evident. Our students have tremendous strengths as well – adaptability and confidence are hallmarks of our kids today. But obtaining strong student engagement in the face of the above issues can be difficult.*

***Question 4: What other areas of our current performance do we need to address to help us become the Education State?***

## 2 Achieving the vision

***Question 5: Are there areas of our performance that we need to know more about?***

**Question 6: Should we measure our performance against both local and global measures of success?**

Measurement of performance is important, but not all that is important can be objectively measured.

At an individual student level, tests can “measure” a student’s test-taking ability with respect to a particular body of knowledge. However, many important aspects of student development are observable but not necessarily measurable. This is the case for aspects like creativity, curiosity, respect, leadership, and resilience.

We should not set a system that will privilege “measurable” acquisition of knowledge over “observable, non-measurable” acquisition of strong and dynamic personal characteristics – which are arguably at least as important or more important in an individual’s ability to lead a fulfilling life and contribute to society.

Demonstration of skills is important as well - the example is given of a year 9 “year of challenge”, which included a “mountain challenge” that tested students abilities to cook, operate safety in a natural environment, camp, solve problems together, navigate, etc.

Indeed, one participant relayed the story of a conversation with an educator from Singapore, who suggested that Australia should not seek to compete with Asia on formalised testing performance. Innovation, initiative, creativity and practical problem-solving were the traits that Singapore admired about Australian young people, and what they were trying to foster in their own systems. These traits are not easily testable, but they are what other nations are emphasizing today.

### 3 Student needs

Victoria will fulfil its Gonski obligations by targeting more funding at the students who need it the most. This will be done by focusing efforts at children in primary school who are from disadvantaged backgrounds as well as high school students whose education levels are well below what they should be for their age.

To move from a good education system to a great education system we need to learn from our success in Victoria as well abroad. This means implementing the right interventions across the state to meet the needs of our students and teachers.

***Question 7: What would you like to be different when you visit early years services, kindergartens, schools, TAFEs and training providers – now and in the future?***

The following ideas are focused on how to improve access and quality of outdoor experiential education programs for all students.

The reasons for this is that outdoor education delivers at least the following three broad benefits for students:

First, it make a general contribution to any area of the curriculum to make it more engaging, relevant, and authentic to students. Math is more “real” when it is seen in the form of fractals in nature, environmental science and indigenous studies are more “real” and authentic when students perceive the subject of their study first-hand, and so forth.

Second, outdoor education make a specific contribution to the development of desirable personal capabilities, such as resilience, working together, leadership, knowledge of self, and others.

Third, outdoor education is the means for delivering specific content that is difficult or impossible to deliver in a classroom setting, such as: risk assessment and management, contact with nature and our environment, and how to survive and enjoy being in Australia’s outdoors environments.

To improve outdoor education programming, the following ideas were suggested:

- Ensuring every school has a dedicated “learning outside the classroom” coordinator, or outdoor education coordinator, available to work with all teachers. This would be similar to the common practice of schools having a digital education coordinator. Such a person could manage the administrative and risk management aspects of outdoor experiences, contribute to required ratios for such activities, and work with teachers to ensure strong curriculum linkages.
- Providing a specific outdoor education curriculum at the F-10 level;
- Facilitating ways for schools (especially smaller schools and/or schools in regional areas) to pool their resources to undertake outdoor experiential activities
- Provide better resource support for teachers to teach in outdoor environments, in terms of guidance, lesson plans and other teaching materials, professional development, and a place for teachers to share experiences
- Encouraging or even requiring all schools to have an outdoor experiential education strategy, and supporting them to develop and implement that strategy in close collaboration with businesses and community groups in their area
- Ensuring all teachers as part of their training acquire a basic understanding of methods for

teaching in natural environments.

- Update and improve existing online departmental information about how to conduct excursions in the outdoors
- Increase the capacity for teachers to undertake external placements. Good examples include existing programs with CSIRO, the Royal Botanical Gardens, and the ROSA schools. But more opportunities are needed to scale-up outdoor educational opportunities.
- Improve the numbers of teachers undertaking a qualification in outdoor education. Currently, only 30% of teachers who deliver outdoor education programs have a qualification in outdoor education. This circumstance would not be permitted in most other subjects.

***Question 8: What targets do you think we need to set to measure our progress towards becoming the Education State?***

## 4 Partnering

Achieving the Education State will require a journey together with students, families, teachers, education providers, the Department and the Government. There will be unique challenges and opportunities for different sectors. We will need to work together to achieve an equitable Education State that encourages lifelong learning.

***Question 9: What opportunities exist in our communities for learning outside of the formal education system, for example in our libraries, museums and community centres?***

There are many community partners willing and able to work with schools to get students learning in the outdoors more. These include scouts and guides groups, recreation club, institutions such as the Zoo and the Royal Botanical Gardens, private camps and journey-based outdoor experience providers, and many others.

**Question 10: What is the most important thing you could do, and Government can do, to help Victoria become the Education State?**

*Every child in Victoria should have a meaningful opportunity to learn in nature, outside the classroom. A clear strategy to deliver this objective, including some of the elements listed above, would be transformative.*

## 5 Other

Please provide any other feedback, comments or ideas you may have about the ideas in the ideas in the School Consultation Paper

# 6 Conversation form

## Contact details

As a host please ensure that you fill out the following details about your consultation event.

### Personal information

- Full name: Charles Berger
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### Event information

- Date/time: July 29 1630-1800; July 30 1800-1930
- Location: via Telephone (statewide)
- Number of attendees: Total 13
- Overview of attendees: numbers below; some participants fit multiple categories
- Parents: at least 5
- School staff: 5
- Indigenous Victorians: unknown
- Members of the general community:
- Alternative carers: unknown
- Culturally and linguistically diverse Victorians: unknown
- Business representatives: 3
- Parents of a child with a disability: unknown
- Students: 0
- Early childhood educators: 1
- Early childhood providers: 0
- TAFE/VET students: 0
- Other (please specify) – tertiary educators/academics: 2  
community partner organizations: 3

Date: 31 July 2015

Signed: 

Full name: Charles Berger

Please submit your feedback via email: [educationstate@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:educationstate@edumail.vic.gov.au)

## 7 Privacy Statement

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- **I agree that my group's feedback can be published openly with my name and suburb/town but no other detail**
- ~~I request my group's feedback is to be published anonymously with my suburb/town but no other details~~
- ~~I request that my group's feedback not be published and my comments or submission will only be disclosed to DET officers and any working group formed to consider the Education State.~~

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