

RESPONSE TO PETITION

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Petition No. 2 of 2023

Legislative Council

Albert

The petitioners ask the House to:

That, despite Tasmania's 50% functional illiteracy rate, and the Tasmanian Government's target that by Year 7 all students will meet an expected reading standard that is above the national minimum by no later than 2030 by investing in evidence-based literacy instruction, the Government has sought literacy instruction advice and engaged professional development services, from prominent members of the Australian Literacy Educators' Association, a partisan professional association that:

- by its nature, primarily exists to further its members' – not necessarily students' – interests; and
- openly promotes a literacy instruction methodology which scientists have repeatedly demonstrated to be less effective than those based on developments in science, having roots in the "whole language" ideology that has been – over decades of research – shown to be incompatible with the scientific knowledge of brain function.

Petitioners request that the House:

- Call on the government to commit to giving precedence to the advice of the Australian Education Research Organisation – the independent body created specifically to evaluate the effectiveness of different teaching methodologies – when determining policy and professional development appointments; and
- Review any existing contracts in light of this commitment, as a value for money proposition for the Tasmanian taxpayer, recognising that paying out existing contracts and re-engaging appropriately is likely to cost Tasmania far less than the impact of another cohort of children instructed under the outdated and scientifically flawed "balanced literacy" model.

GOVERNMENT POSITION:

RESPONSE:

- The Government is committed to improving literacy outcomes in Tasmania.
- In September 2021 the Government established the expert Literacy Advisory Panel (the Panel). The Panel was co-chaired by Jenny Gale, the Secretary of the Department of Premier and Cabinet and Professor Natalie Brown, the Director of the Peter Underwood Centre for Educational Attainment.
- The Panel was tasked with making specific and targeted recommendations to inform and build upon existing literacy approaches and supports in the early years, schools, and adult learning environments.
- The Panel delivered its Final Report and Community-wide Framework to the Premier on 2 May 2023, including 23 Priority Recommendations for implementation.
- On 6 June 2023 the Premier announced that he has accepted all 23 Priority Recommendations in the Panel's Report and \$6.5 million over four years has been allocated in the 2023-24 State Budget for implementation.
- The Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPAC) will develop the first Three Year Implementation Plan in consultation with education and community stakeholders.
- In line with the Panel's advice regarding governance, an independent skills-based Literacy Outcomes Monitoring Group will be established to monitor implementation progress and outcomes. The Group will be skills-based, and will include at least one person with expertise in outcomes measurement and a Tasmanian with lived experience. The Group will report directly to the Premier.
- A key Priority Recommendation relates to the Minimum Schooling Guarantee for literacy (Recommendation 6). The Minimum Guarantee recommends the adoption of approaches aligned to the science of reading evidence-base and that all current policies, programs and practices that do not align with the Minimum Guarantee are discontinued.

- The Panel made a number of recommendations regarding measures and targets, including that by 2026 all schools must demonstrate that they are implementing the elements of evidence-based literacy instruction, as described by the Minimum Schooling Guarantee recommended by the Panel (Recommendation 19).
- The Government will ensure 25 per cent of primary schools across Tasmania are implementing structured literacy programs for K-2 in 2024.
- The Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) will play a critical role in implementation, including providing guidance and quality assurance on the scope and sequences for the Minimum Schooling Guarantee and participation on the Literacy Outcomes Monitoring Group.
- The Department for Education, Children and Young People (DECYP) has engaged with AERO in relation to its current and future approach to the teaching of literacy, in particular the teaching of reading in the early years.
- DECYP has paused all planned literacy professional learning connected to the teaching of reading and writing, with the exception of the Phonics Training for teachers, and is not currently engaging with any external contractors in relation to literacy.
- A review of current guidance, practices and supporting resources has begun to ensure alignment to the Literacy Advisory Panel's recommendations.
- The Final Report is publicly available on the Lifting Literacy Lifting Tasmania webpage (<https://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/literacy/home/framework-and-final-report>)



Jeremy Rockliff MP
Premier

Date:

23/6/23