



Australian Secondary
Principals' Association



SUMMIT REPORT

Evolution of Equity and Excellence

A new ambition for Australian secondary education

Report from the

ASPA National Summit

25 March 2025

Australian Parliament House Canberra

Executive Summary

The 2025 ASPA National Summit, held on Ngunnawal and Ngambri Country at Parliament House in Canberra on March 25th, brought together a diverse range of stakeholders to shape a forward-looking agenda for Australian secondary education. With participation from public secondary school leaders, policymakers, academics, union representatives, NGO leaders, students, parents, and community stakeholders, the Summit provided a unique platform for constructive dialogue. Federal Education Minister Jason Clare, Shadow Education Minister Sarah Henderson, and Greens Education Spokesperson Penny Allman-Payne contributed valuable perspectives, underscoring the bipartisan importance of education reform, on the eve of the 2025 Federal Election.

The discussions focused on three interconnected themes: Flourishing Students, Strengthening Leadership, and Transforming Systems. These themes, informed by 18 months of consultation with school leaders, were chosen to address critical challenges in public secondary education. The themes align closely with the ambitions of the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration, particularly its focus on achieving equity and excellence in education.

The Summit highlighted the shared commitment of participants to advancing public education and produced a wealth of ideas to address current challenges and seize emerging opportunities. The collaborative spirit of the discussions underscored the importance of working together for the benefit of all students.

This report serves as the foundation for the next phase of ASPA's Summit program, aiming to transition into a modelling and design phase, informed by the insights from the Summit. These ideas will serve as the basis for the 2026 ASPA National Summit. This next phase aims to deliver meaningful, actionable proposals to help Australia's public secondary schools achieve the aspirations of the Mparntwe Declaration and create a stronger, fairer education system for all.



Contents

Introduction	4
Session 1: Flourishing Students – Responses	5
Session 2: Strengthening Leadership - Responses	10
Session 3: Transforming Systems - Responses	18
Cross-theme Analysis	25
Design Directions	28
Alignment with the Mparntwe Declaration	30



Introduction

The 2025 ASPA National Summit on March 25th 2025 was a landmark event that brought together a diverse range of voices to engage in meaningful dialogue on the future of Australian secondary education. Our three interconnected themes—Flourishing Students, Strengthening Leadership, and Transforming Systems—reflect ASPA’s commitment to addressing critical challenges in public secondary education, including student well-being, systemic inequities, and the evolving demands on school leadership.

The diversity among the 165 participants ensured that discussions were informed by multiple perspectives, fostering a collaborative and inclusive approach to identifying solutions.

Two preparatory events set the stage for the Summit’s discussions:

- **The Principals’ Council** at the National Press Club enabled secondary school leaders from all states and territories to reflect on shared challenges, align priorities, and build a collective voice.
- **The Youth Delegation Program**, hosted at Canberra College, amplified student perspectives, with participants aged 15 to 19 co-designing policy recommendations in collaboration with Young Change Agents, the ACT Principals’ Association, and the ACT Education Directorate.

The themes selected for the Summit are central to ASPA’s mission, ensuring that all students, regardless of their background, have access to quality education that prepares them for life, work, and active citizenship. Throughout the Summit, participants were encouraged to focus on actionable solutions, with discussions emphasising the need for a shared commitment to reform and innovation.

ASPA acknowledges the constructive contributions of all participants. The outcomes of these discussions are collated in this report, which serves as the foundation for the next phase of ASPA’s Summit Program.

Looking ahead to 2026, ASPA envisions a Summit that builds on the current program’s progress and successes. Our goal is to develop and debate meaningful, actionable proposals on behalf of Australia’s public secondary school leaders and their communities, contributing to a stronger, fairer education system that realises the aspirations of the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration.

Report Methodology

Participants at the Summit were asked to consider the three themes and respond through facilitated table discussions, identifying current challenges and possible opportunities. These discussions were recorded using Padlet, an online learning tool ideally suited for documenting rich talks in real time.

The following analysis collates and presents participant responses, organised into categorical themes, with a summative general commentary provided at the start of each session section. Due to the interconnected nature of the three overarching themes, some challenges and opportunities recur through the responses, and a cross-theme analysis is provided later in the report.

Finally the report distils these inputs into ‘Design Directions’ to provide a framework to guide the development of actionable policy solutions, and concludes with a review of how these directions align with the goals for equity and excellence as set out in the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration of 2019.



Session 1: Flourishing Students - Responses

General Summative Commentary

- *Schools need to prepare students for life, not just further schooling.*
- *Education systems should focus on transferable skills and holistic development.*
- *Generational cycles of disengagement need to be broken through systemic change.*
- *Schools should balance structure and innovation to meet diverse student needs.*
- *The broader community must be engaged in discussions about rethinking education.*

Theme 1: Recognising Diverse Skills and Talents

Challenges

- Metrics used to measure success are too narrow and need to change.
- Traditional measures like ATAR don't capture the full spectrum of student learning and potential.
- Standardised testing often focuses on ranking rather than recognising diverse talents.
- There is a misconception that alternative learning is not a legitimate parallel pathway.
- Measuring communication and collaboration is subjective.
- There is a resistance to change from traditional schooling models and metrics.
- Ensuring equity in access to diverse learning pathways can be difficult.

Opportunities

- Broader metrics like those developed by Melbourne Metrics and Big Picture Learning highlight diverse skills and talents.
- Developing credentials beyond numeric scores to capture broader student capabilities.
- Exploring alternative pathways to university and careers.
- Using micro-credentials and learner profiles to recognise creativity, collaboration, and growth.
- Celebrating diverse forms of success, such as real-world capabilities and personal growth.

Uncategorised Commentary

- Success looks different for all learners.
- ATAR students entering university is one path; other avenues for entry need to be acknowledged.

Session 1: Flourishing Students - Responses

Theme 2: Personalised Learning and Pathways

Challenges

- Traditional schooling models do not suit all students and families.
- A “one-size-fits-all” approach can leave students disengaged.
- Limited flexibility in curriculum and system structures restricts personalised learning.
- Equity issues prevent many students from accessing alternative pathways.
- The system isn’t changing at the pace of students’ needs or wants.
- Breadth of choice in vocational education is limited.
- Individualised programs are hard to implement due to resourcing and staffing constraints.

Opportunities

- Personalising curriculum experiences improves engagement and well-being.
- Modular timetabling and flexible learning pathways can cater to student interests and goals.
- Big Picture Learning and other project-based models allow students to explore their passions.
- Providing students with real-world learning opportunities like internships and work experience.
- Flipped learning models offer students more flexibility and agency.
- Schools can co-design curricula with students to better reflect their lived experiences and ambitions.

Uncategorised Commentary

- Learning should be self-paced and responsive to individual student interests.
- Real-world applications of learning, such as financial literacy, are essential.
- Students thrive when they have a say in their learning and feel ownership of their journey.



Session 1: Flourishing Students - Responses

Theme 3: Student Well-Being and Engagement

Challenges

- Many students face mental health concerns and systemic disadvantages.
- Attendance and engagement are central to learning but are often low due to external factors.
- Students cannot flourish without feeling safe and connected to their school community.
- The demanding curriculum can lead to disengagement and stress.
- Schools often lack the resources to cater to diverse student well-being needs.

Opportunities

- Embedding student-led well-being practices fosters peer support and resilience.
- AI-driven emotional well-being tools can provide targeted support for students.
- Schools that prioritise connection and safety create environments where students can thrive.
- Investing in programs to engage parents and break cycles of negative school experiences (e.g., Families as First Teachers (FaFT) programs).
- Building partnerships with students and parents to promote meaningful engagement.

Uncategorised Commentary

- Flourishing equals engagement, and students need to feel safe and supported to thrive.
- Teachers play a vital role in fostering connection and outcomes for students.



Session 1: Flourishing Students - Responses

Theme 4: Role of Teachers and School Leaders

Challenges

- Variance in teacher quality impacts student outcomes.
- Teachers are often overburdened, limiting their ability to personalise learning or innovate.
- Attracting and retaining quality teachers is an ongoing challenge.
- Professional learning and support for teachers to adapt to new assessment methods are resource-intensive.

Opportunities

- Quality teachers with flexibility and autonomy can enable student success.
- Professional development for teachers can help them embrace innovative teaching and assessment methods.
- Schools can benefit from strong partnerships between leaders, teachers, and communities.

Uncategorised Commentary

- Students benefit from teachers who take time to understand their goals and aspirations.
- One teacher can make a lasting difference in a student's life through connection and support.



Session 1: Flourishing Students - Responses

Theme 5: Equity and Inclusion

Challenges

- Systemic inequities prevent disadvantaged students from accessing quality education.
- Students in rural and remote areas face additional barriers to engagement and learning.
- Public schools often lack the resources to provide the same opportunities as private schools.

Opportunities

- Equity should be the foundation for building excellence in education.
- Meeting students' diverse needs requires flexible systems and funding models.
- Schools can act as community hubs to address broader systemic challenges like poverty and housing instability.
- Providing access to real-world mentorship and industry links can enhance inclusion and engagement.

Uncategorised Commentary

- Equity must be prioritised to ensure that all students can flourish.





Session 2: Strengthening Leadership - Responses

General Summative Commentary

- *Leadership within the system needs to become more collaborative and less top-down.*
- *Narratives on the challenges of principalship often overwhelms the joy and moral purpose of the role.*
- *Principals play a vital role, but their responsibilities need to be better defined and supported.*
- *Trust, respect, and meaningful consultation between systems and principals are essential for long-term success.*

Theme 1: Administrative Burden

Challenges

- Increasing administrative burden distracts principals from their core purpose of leading teaching and learning.
- Compliance and risk management activities are unrelenting and divert focus from instructional leadership.
- Administrative tasks are often handed down without consultation, adding to principals' workload.
- Principals often lack the necessary skills or support to manage tasks like HR, WHS, and accounting, creating inefficiencies.
- Legislative and departmental regulations place excessive accountability on principals for all aspects of school operations.
- Red tape and bureaucratic hurdles (e.g., risk assessments, timetable changes) complicate decision-making.
- Digitisation of systems has not reduced workload due to systems that do not integrate well.
- Compliance activities are often misaligned with the core needs of schools.

Opportunities

- Centralised, fit-for-purpose departments could take over some compliance and administrative tasks.
- Business managers, HR officers, WHS specialists, and other support staff could relieve principals of operational burdens.
- Systems could provide executive assistants for principals to allow better delegation.
- Redesigning support systems for principals to reduce administrative burden and red tape.
- Digitising and streamlining systems to eliminate duplication and improve efficiency.

Uncategorised Commentary

- Principals' time is often spent on "garbage tasks," such as lawn mowing contracts or minor operational details, instead of focusing on educational leadership.

Session 2: Strengthening Leadership - Responses

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Session 2: Strengthening Leadership - Responses

Theme 2: Principal Well-Being and Support

Challenges

- Principals face significant social and emotional burdens, including burnout and stress.
- Current well-being strategies are reactive rather than preventative.
- Principals lack psychological safety networks and independent professional support.
- The constant demands of the role, combined with long hours and a lack of work-life balance, exacerbate stress.
- Principals often feel unsupported by their system, describing it as “top-down” and unresponsive.
- There is a lack of formal supervision models or reflective practices for school leaders.
- Bullying of principals, both publicly and privately, adds to the strain.

Opportunities

- Professional supervision programs could support principals through challenges and help set boundaries.
- Readily available, independently funded professional support services (e.g., EAP programs).
- Providing principals with autonomy and authority to lead their schools effectively.
- Systematise supports, such as “red flag” email processes, to address principal well-being concerns.
- Networks of colleagues and peer support systems could be better supported and sustained.

Uncategorised Commentary

- Well-being is determined when principals' values align with their work.
- Trust between principals and their systems is critical for fostering morale and agency.



Session 2: Strengthening Leadership - Responses

Theme 3: Leadership Development and Training

Challenges

- Principals often enter the role unprepared, with little or no formal training or induction.
- There is a lack of differentiated support for principals in different contexts or career stages.
- Many principals feel underutilised in strategic decision-making processes, leading to frustration.
- Early-career principals, especially in remote or disadvantaged areas, face high burnout rates.
- Teacher shortages and workforce challenges make it difficult to recruit and retain strong leaders.

Opportunities

- Developing a national framework for principal training and development.
- Systematically identifying and addressing gaps in leadership capabilities.
- Secondment opportunities could allow principals to move between schools and sectors, gaining diverse experiences.
- Recognition of prior learning and cultural responsibilities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander principals could improve retention and support.
- Professional learning and induction programs could address the evolving complexities of the principalship.

Uncategorised Commentary

- Leadership development should balance the moral purpose and joy of the role with practical skills.



Session 2: Strengthening Leadership - Responses

Theme 4: System and Policy Alignment

Challenges

- Disconnect between policymakers and schools often leads to top-down policies that are impractical or misaligned with local needs.
- Political cycles disrupt long-term educational planning.
- Lack of consultation on policy development creates frustration among school leaders.
- Risk-averse departments create excessive legal accountability for principals.
- Policies are often rolled out without adequate testing, consultation, or implementation frameworks.

Opportunities

- A system that allows principals greater agency and authority to make decisions for their schools.
- Soft launches of policies to test them before full implementation.
- Co-designing policies with principals to ensure practicality and alignment with school contexts.
- Establishing a national set of best practices for policy development and implementation.

Uncategorised Commentary

- Systems need to walk alongside principals, providing differentiated support based on school context.



Session 2: Strengthening Leadership - Responses

Theme 5: Equity and Contextual Needs

Challenges

- Schools in disadvantaged or remote areas often face higher principal turnover and less experienced leaders.
- Principals in these areas may carry additional responsibilities, such as community leadership, that are not formally recognised or supported.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander principals face unique challenges, including racism and additional community responsibilities.
- State and system discrepancies in resources and support create inequities across schools.
- Teacher shortages exacerbate challenges in disadvantaged communities.

Opportunities

- A differentiated approach to supporting principals based on their school's context.
- Recognition of the unique responsibilities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander principals.
- Equity-focused policies and resourcing to support remote and disadvantaged schools.
- Encouraging diverse pathways into the principalship to improve representation and address workforce shortages.

Uncategorised Commentary

- Trust and respect for cultural diversity are essential for fostering an inclusive leadership environment.



Session 2: Strengthening Leadership - Responses

Theme 6: Role Clarity and Delegation

Challenges

- The principalship role has become overly broad, requiring expertise in areas beyond education, such as HR, finance, and facilities management.
- Many principals struggle to delegate tasks due to a lack of qualified support staff or restrictions on delegation.
- The current definition of the principalship is outdated and no longer fit for purpose.
- Society places unrealistic expectations on principals, often treating them as being on-call 24/7.

Opportunities

- Redefining the principalship to focus on educational leadership while delegating operational tasks.
- Introducing COO-type roles or strengthening business manager models to handle non-educational responsibilities.
- Aligning role definitions with the values and priorities of school leaders to improve job satisfaction.

Uncategorised Commentary

- Principals must balance leadership and management, but the current structure leaves little time for leadership.



Session 2: Strengthening Leadership - Responses

Theme 7: Teacher Shortages and Workforce Challenges

Challenges

- Teacher shortages are a national crisis, with many educators leaving the profession due to stress or dissatisfaction.
- Underperformance among teachers can create toxic work environments, requiring significant time and effort from principals to address.
- Workforce shortages in remote areas lead to high turnover and “green” principals being placed in complex environments.

Opportunities

- National solutions to teacher shortages, including incentives for teachers to work in disadvantaged or remote areas.
- Improved performance management processes to address teacher underperformance more effectively.
- Expanding pathways into teaching and leadership to attract and retain high-quality educators.

Uncategorised Commentary

- Teacher shortages are cyclical, but strong leadership can create environments where teachers want to stay.





Session 3: Transforming Systems - Responses

General Summative Commentary

- *The current system requires a fundamental rethinking rather than incremental fixes.*
- *Collaboration between sectors, states, and communities is essential for meaningful reform.*
- *Trusting schools and leaders to make locally informed decisions can improve outcomes and innovation.*
- *System transformation must prioritise equity, inclusion, and student well-being*

Theme 1: Equity in Education

Challenges

- Equitable access to quality education cannot happen until all schools meet minimum standards for facilities, staffing, and resources.
- The current funding formula does not reflect true student needs and is fundamentally flawed.
- Equity of funding is a major concern, particularly when comparing public and non-govt schools.
- ICSEA metrics are a poor way to measure advantage and do not fully capture inequities.
- Family resourcing impacts access to education, including purchasing resources, paying fees, and selecting subjects.
- The perception of better facilities in independent schools creates inequity in public perception and resourcing.
- Zoned enrolment systems can become barriers to inclusion.
- Students with disabilities face inconsistent support, and inclusion varies significantly across regions.
- Political cycles and short-term priorities hinder long-term equity planning.

Opportunities

- A fair and consistent national framework for inclusion and disability support would ensure all students can attend their local schools with the support they need.
- Fully funding schools to a base rate should be a minimum expectation, with equity loadings to address disadvantage.
- Transparency in public funding allocation and spending across all school sectors promotes equity.
- Inter-agency collaboration can address societal challenges impacting student outcomes.
- Fee-free denominational schools (e.g., Canada's model) could help distribute complex students more evenly across sectors.

Uncategorised Commentary

- Equity must be prioritised, as talent comes from all backgrounds and communities.
- The current system has widened the gap between private and public schools, failing to meet the conditions of Gonski reforms.

Session 3: Transforming Systems - Responses

Theme 2: Accountability and Governance

Challenges

- Independent schools receiving public funding are not held to the same reporting and accountability standards as public schools.
- Publicly funded non-government schools often avoid obligations such as enrolling students with disabilities or meeting transparency requirements.
- Political interference, short cycles, and ideological agendas disrupt education system governance.
- Governance structures and funding policies differ significantly between states and sectors, creating confusion and inequality.
- There is a lack of systemic trust in principals, despite devolving accountability to them.

Opportunities

- A common regulatory framework for all schools could standardise accountability and remove sectoral divides.
- Linking public funding to enrolment obligations for students with disabilities and disadvantaged backgrounds can promote equity.
- Bipartisan agreements on education funding and governance could provide stability and remove political agendas.
- Systems independent of political control (e.g., Finland's model) could reduce political turmoil and prioritise education as a public service.
- National teacher registration could allow for consistency across states, facilitating workforce mobility and addressing shortages.

Uncategorised Commentary

- Schools accepting public funding must have public obligations, including transparency and accountability.



Session 3: Transforming Systems - Responses

Theme 3: Funding and Resource Allocation

Challenges

- Funding for public schools is often slower and less responsive compared to private schools, particularly in new residential areas.
- Multiple funding streams (federal, state, fees, and parent contributions) create confusion and inequality.
- Public schools face additional administrative burdens in proving how funding is spent compared to independent schools.
- Maintenance of school facilities is often overlooked, sending a message to students that they are undervalued.

Opportunities

- Transparency in funding deals between states and territories can clarify how resources are allocated and when they will flow to schools.
- Funding portability and flexibility can allow schools to meet local needs more effectively.
- Reforming ICSEA metrics and exploring new funding models can better reflect student needs and address inequities.
- Aligning financial accountability with innovation can enable schools to use resources effectively while maintaining oversight.

Uncategorised Commentary

- Money alone will not solve systemic challenges; reforms and strategic use of resources are also required.



Session 3: Transforming Systems - Responses

Theme 4: System Design and Collaboration

Challenges

- The system is fragmented, with significant variance in curriculum, policies, and practices between states and territories.
- Decision-making layers between policymakers and schools often lead to implementation problems.
- Principals are often forced to act as intermediaries between contradictory system directives and local needs, creating tension.
- Schools are dealing with increasingly complex student needs, but system expectations remain unchanged.
- Cross-agency collaboration (e.g., education, health, and social services) is limited, despite its potential to address complex challenges.

Opportunities

- A unified national approach to education could provide consistency in areas such as curriculum, enrolments, and inclusion.
- Co-designing policies with principals and communities can ensure system reforms are contextually relevant and effective.
- Cross-agency collaboration can provide integrated support for students and families, particularly in disadvantaged communities.
- Sabbatical opportunities for policymakers to work in schools could bridge the gap between policy and practice.
- A national education body, inspired by Canada's model, could guide reforms while allowing contextual flexibility for states.

Uncategorised Commentary

- System design should reflect the voices of principals, students, and communities to ensure it meets their needs.



Session 3: Transforming Systems - Responses

Theme 5: Measuring Success and Inclusion

Challenges

- Success indicators are narrowly defined (e.g., ATAR), failing to capture broader student achievements or school contributions.
- Enrolment policies often reinforce disadvantage by redirecting complex students rather than supporting them.
- Inclusion and support for students with disabilities depend on location, creating inequities in access and outcomes.

Opportunities

- Expanding success metrics to include broader student capabilities, such as creativity and collaboration, can redefine education outcomes.
- Developing a student-first approach to enrolment and support can promote inclusion and equity across all schools.
- Appreciative inquiry methods for evaluating school improvement can reduce high-pressure reporting and better reflect local contexts.

Uncategorised Commentary

- Success in education should prioritise student well-being and inclusion over narrow academic measures.



Session 3: Transforming Systems - Responses

Theme 6: Principal Role and Leadership

Challenges

- Principals often lack the support or resources to handle the growing complexity of their roles.
- There is a significant disconnect between policymakers and school leaders, with principals feeling unheard and unsupported.
- Increasing administrative responsibilities prevent principals from focusing on teaching and learning leadership.
- Principals in some schools are also teaching, which impacts their ability to lead effectively.

Opportunities

- Providing principals with specialist support (e.g., HR, facilities management) can reduce their workload and improve their focus on leadership.
- Building trust between systems and principals can foster morale, agency, and innovation.
- National frameworks for principal development and support can address the evolving demands of the role.

Uncategorised Commentary

- Principals are critical to system transformation but need systemic trust and resources to succeed.



Session 3: Transforming Systems - Responses

Theme 7: Political and Media Influence

Challenges

- The media often promotes negative narratives about public schools, impacting public perception and trust.
- Political agendas and cycles disrupt long-term planning and prioritise short-term deliverables over meaningful reforms.
- The education system is frequently used as a political tool, with decisions driven by votes rather than student needs.

Opportunities

- Promoting positive narratives about public schools can rebuild trust and strengthen their reputation.
- Removing political influence from education (e.g., Finland's independent system) can prioritise student outcomes over ideologies.
- Engaging diverse voices, including parents and students, in policy discussions can create a more inclusive and representative system.

Uncategorised Commentary

- Education should be treated as a public service, free from political and ideological interference.





Cross-Theme Analysis

The discussions at the 2025 ASPA National Summit highlighted the interconnected nature of the three overarching themes: **Flourishing Students**, **Strengthening Leadership**, and **Transforming Systems**. While each theme addressed distinct priorities, significant overlaps emerged, emphasising the systemic and interdependent challenges facing public secondary education in Australia. This section explores the key cross-theme insights and their implications for policy development and school leadership.

1. Equity as a Foundational Principle

Equity emerged as a central concern across all three themes, underlining the need to ensure that every student, regardless of their background, has access to quality education. Discussions revealed that systemic inequities—such as funding disparities, inequitable access to resources, and inconsistent inclusion practices—affect not only students’ ability to thrive but also the capacity of schools and leaders to address these challenges. Participants stressed that achieving equity requires:

- Transparent and consistent funding models that reflect the real needs of students and schools.
- Cross-sector collaboration to address socio-economic and systemic barriers, such as housing instability, poverty, and mental health challenges.
- A renewed commitment to inclusion, ensuring that all students, particularly those in disadvantaged or remote areas, can access the support they need to succeed.

2. The Role of Leadership in Driving Systemic Change

School leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping educational outcomes, with principals and school leaders acting as critical change agents. However, the increasing administrative burden and lack of systemic trust in leaders were identified as significant challenges. Participants across themes called for:

- Reducing operational and compliance demands to enable principals to focus on teaching and learning leadership.
- Providing targeted professional development and well-being supports for principals, especially those in disadvantaged or remote contexts.
- Strengthening collaboration between policymakers and principals to ensure policies are practical, contextually relevant, and co-designed.

Leadership's influence was also evident in the context of students flourishing. Effective leaders create environments where students feel safe, supported, and empowered to engage with their learning.

Cross-Theme Analysis

3. The Need for Systemic Reform

The theme of **Transforming Systems** often intersected with the other two, highlighting the need for structural changes to address recurring challenges. Participants emphasized the importance of rethinking outdated metrics, funding models, and governance structures to align with the evolving needs of students, teachers, and school leaders. Key insights included:

- Moving beyond narrow metrics like ATAR and NAPLAN to assess broader capabilities such as creativity, collaboration, and resilience.
- Developing national frameworks for accountability, inclusion, and teacher accreditation, reducing inconsistencies between states and sectors.
- Enhancing system-wide trust by shifting away from top-down directives toward more collaborative, context-sensitive approaches.

4. The Centrality of Student Well-Being and Engagement

Student well-being and engagement were recurring priorities across all themes, reflecting their foundational role in educational success. Participants recognized that fostering student flourishing requires a holistic approach that integrates:

- Personalised learning pathways tailored to students' diverse interests and ambitions.
- Well-being programs that address mental health challenges and build resilience.
- Strong partnerships with families and communities to support student success beyond the classroom.

Leaders and systems play a critical role in enabling this, whether through resourcing schools appropriately, embedding well-being into leadership practices, or creating flexible structures that support individualised learning.



Cross-Theme Analysis

5. Collaboration as a Catalyst for Progress

The importance of collaboration was a unifying insight across all themes. Participants highlighted the need for stronger partnerships between schools, governments, non-government organizations, and communities to achieve shared goals. Specific recommendations included:

- Encouraging co-design processes that bring together diverse perspectives, including those of students, principals, and policymakers.
- Building networks of support for school leaders, fostering peer collaboration and shared learning.
- Strengthening cross-agency collaboration (e.g., education, health, and social services) to address the complex challenges students and schools face.

6. Trust as a Driver of Innovation and Success

Across all themes, participants identified trust as a critical factor in achieving equity, enhancing leadership, and transforming systems. Trust between schools and their communities, between teachers and leaders, and between policymakers and practitioners was seen as essential to fostering innovation, morale, and sustainable change.

Conclusion

The cross-theme insights from the Summit underscore the interconnected nature of the challenges and opportunities in Australia's public secondary education system. Equity, leadership, systemic reform, student well-being, collaboration, and trust are not standalone issues but are deeply interwoven. Addressing these priorities in an integrated and coordinated manner will be central to achieving the aspirations of the Mparntwe Declaration and creating a stronger, fairer education system for all.





Design Directions

The insights gathered during the 2025 ASPA National Summit, alongside the contributions of the Principals' Council and the Youth Delegation, have informed the following design directions. These outline actionable potential pathways to address the challenges and opportunities under the themes of **Flourishing Students**, **Strengthening Leadership**, and **Transforming Systems**. These design directions are a starting point to guide the next phase of ASPA's work: the modelling and design of prototype policy solutions.

1. Flourishing Students

To support the holistic development of students and foster engagement, well-being, and achievement, the following design directions are recommended:

- **Broaden Success Metrics:**
Redefine success measures to include a greater emphasis on creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and social-emotional skills, moving beyond academic metrics like ATAR and NAPLAN.
- **Embed Well-Being in Curriculum and Policy:**
Develop national standards for integrating student well-being into daily school practices, ensuring mental health and resilience are addressed alongside academic outcomes.
- **Personalised Learning Pathways:**
Expand access to flexible, student-centred learning pathways that cater to diverse interests, talents, and career aspirations.
- **Strengthen Community Engagement:**
Build partnerships with families, local businesses, and community organizations to create wraparound support systems for students, particularly those facing disadvantage.

2. Strengthening Leadership

To enable school leaders to thrive and lead effectively in increasingly complex contexts, the following strategies are proposed:

- **Reduce Administrative Burdens:**
Advocate for reforms to reduce compliance and operational demands on principals, allowing them to focus on instructional leadership.
- **Support Principal Well-Being:**
Establish a national framework for principal well-being, including access to professional counselling, peer support networks, and mental health initiatives tailored to school leaders.
- **Professional Learning and Mentorship:**
Develop leadership pathways that provide targeted professional development opportunities, mentorship programs, and succession planning, especially for aspiring and early-career principals.
- **Enhance Trust and Collaboration:**
Foster stronger partnerships between policymakers and school leaders by co-designing policies that reflect the realities of leadership in diverse school contexts.



Design Directions

3. Transforming Systems

To create a fairer and more effective education system that supports equity and excellence, the following systemic reforms are recommended:

- **Equity-Focused Funding Models:**
Advocate for transparent, needs-based funding that ensures resources are distributed equitably, addressing the specific challenges faced by disadvantaged and remote schools.
- **Streamline Accountability Across Sectors:**
Develop consistent national accountability frameworks for all school sectors, ensuring transparency, collaboration, and equity in education delivery.
- **Policy Stability and Bipartisan Approaches:**
Promote long-term, bipartisan education policies that transcend political cycles and focus on sustained reform.
- **Reimagine Assessment and Reporting:**
Shift towards a more holistic approach to student assessment and reporting, incorporating measures of growth, well-being, and broader capabilities.
- **Strengthen Cross-Sector Collaboration:**
Build stronger connections between schools, health services, social services, and community organizations to address the complex needs of students and their families.

4. Amplify Student Voice

Across all themes, the importance of student voice was a consistent priority. To ensure young people are active participants in shaping their education, the following actions are recommended:

- **Establish Student Advisory Councils:**
Create formal mechanisms for student representation at school, regional, and national levels to inform policies and practices.
- **Integrate Student Perspectives in Decision-Making:**
Embed student consultation processes in the design of curriculum, school improvement plans, and education reforms.
- **Provide Leadership Opportunities for Students:**
Expand programs like the Youth Delegation to empower students as leaders and advocates within their school communities.

Next Steps

These design directions will inform the next phase of ASPA's work: the **modelling and design phase**, during which prototype policy solutions will be developed. ASPA will convene targeted working groups to design and refine these prototypes. The outcomes will serve as the foundation for the 2026 ASPA National Summit. By advancing these design directions, ASPA aims to contribute to a stronger, more equitable public education system that aligns with the aspirations of the Mparntwe Declaration and supports all Australian students to thrive.

Alignment with the Mparntwe Declaration

The 2025 ASPA National Summit was firmly grounded in the principles and priorities of the **Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration**, which outlines a national vision for education in Australia. The Declaration calls for an education system that fosters **equity and excellence** and equips all young Australians with the knowledge, skills, and capabilities they need to thrive in a rapidly changing world. This section highlights how the outcomes and design directions of the Summit align with the Declaration's two overarching goals and its broader principles.

Goal 1: Promoting Excellence and Equity in Education

The Mparntwe Declaration emphasises the importance of providing every child, regardless of their background or circumstances, with access to high-quality education that supports their potential. The Summit addressed this priority through:

1. Equity-Focused Funding:

- Summit participants consistently highlighted the need for funding models that allocate resources based on need, ensuring schools in disadvantaged and remote areas have the support to address systemic inequities.

2. Holistic Approaches to Well-Being:

- The focus on **Flourishing Students** aligns with the Declaration's emphasis on supporting students' physical, social, and emotional well-being. Recommendations such as embedding well-being into school policy and curriculum directly respond to this call for holistic development.

3. Inclusion and Diversity:

- The Summit emphasised creating inclusive school environments where every student feels valued, respected, and supported. This aligns with the Declaration's commitment to addressing barriers to education for students from diverse cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds.

4. Personalised Learning Pathways:

- The design directions for personalised and flexible learning pathways directly support the Declaration's vision of catering to students' diverse needs, interests, and abilities and ensuring their preparation for life and work beyond school.



Alignment with the Mparntwe Declaration

Goal 2: Equipping Young Australians for the Future

The Mparntwe Declaration calls for a focus on preparing students for the challenges and opportunities of the future, including globalisation, technological change, and environmental sustainability. The Summit outcomes align with this goal in the following ways:

1. Broader Definitions of Success:

- The Summit's recommendation to move beyond narrow academic metrics, such as ATAR, and include capabilities like critical thinking, creativity, and resilience aligns with the Declaration's call for education to foster 21st-century skills.

2. Student Voice and Agency:

- The active inclusion of the **Youth Delegation Program** in shaping policy recommendations aligns with the Declaration's emphasis on empowering young people to take responsibility for their learning and actively contribute to their communities.

3. Transforming Systems for Future Needs:

- The Summit's focus on systemic reforms, such as reimagining assessment and building cross-sector collaboration, supports the Declaration's call for innovative and future-focused education systems.

4. Leadership for Change:

- Strengthening school leadership was central to the Summit discussions, reflecting the Declaration's recognition of the critical role that teachers and leaders play in equipping students for the future.



Alignment with the Mparntwe Declaration

Alignment with the Declaration's Principles

The broader principles of the Mparntwe Declaration—such as **collaboration and partnerships**, **cultural responsiveness**, and a commitment to **sustainability and global citizenship**—were consistently reflected in the Summit's outcomes:

1. Collaboration and Partnerships:

- The Summit's emphasis on building stronger connections between schools, governments, and community organizations directly aligns with the Declaration's call for collaboration to improve student outcomes.

2. Cultural Responsiveness:

- The Summit acknowledged the importance of embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in education, aligning with the Declaration's principle of valuing Australia's First Nations cultures and histories.

3. Sustainability and Global Citizenship

- Discussions on reimagining systems and curricula included calls for greater focus on environmental sustainability and preparing students to engage meaningfully in a globalised world, reflecting the Declaration's vision for active and informed citizenship.

The 2025 ASPA National Summit outcomes and design directions align closely with the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration's vision for equity, excellence, and future readiness in Australian education. By addressing the Declaration's goals and principles through actionable recommendations, ASPA reaffirms its commitment to fostering a stronger, fairer, and more inclusive education system that enables all students to thrive.





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