

SECONDARY EDUCATION OVER THIRTY YEARS

Some dramatic changes and their meaning for the future

Dr David Mulford



David reported that over the years the overall trend has been incredibly positive, and schools are much better places than they were 30 years ago. He then went on to outline ten positive trends, ten negative and ten risks for the future. His presentation was peppered with numerous humorous personal anecdotes.

The Ten positives

1. A move from content and facts to qualities including creativity, communication, problem solving and thinking skills
2. A focus on how to learn and challenge information and deal with complexity
3. A growth in pastoral care
4. Catering for individual differences, disabilities and mental health
5. More and diverse Cocurricular opportunities, engagement with schools and character development
6. Vast improvement in education of girls and the expansion of their career opportunities
7. Expansion of technology, a two-edged sword, but has made significant improvements in cross discipline links. For example, in STEM subjects design, philosophy and creativity etc.
8. Stronger focus on character education and spiritual dimensions
9. Growth in multicultural and international outlooks
10. Improvement in quality of teachers. Now far better trained and using diverse teaching skills

The Ten Negatives

1. Growth in pastoral complexities, mental health, family dysfunction, depression and suicide
2. Waning resilience, mistakes are another's fault, must win prize, must be in A team. Often parent led!
3. Technology can be timewasting, excessive screen time
4. Parenting trends, tiger parents against schools, physical and emotional abuse. Teachers wary of parents abuse and intrusive emails
5. Too many go to university and so reduced numbers entering vocational careers
6. Many teachers have only B Ed and dropping of academic discipline strength especially science and mathematics
7. Poor teacher salaries but excellent conditions. Work has intensified by emails, tiger parents and excessive reporting. Better to have higher pay and work longer hours, but same teaching time
8. HSC is outdated
9. More boys than girls have learning disabilities. Teaching needs to match maturity level
10. Indigenous education

The Ten Risks

1. Poor funding for education, OECD ranks us behind Mexico at 21 in the world
2. How to measure outcomes, eg NAPLAN
3. Teacher supply and quality especially in core subjects, a reflection of poor salaries
4. Focus on exams versus other core skills and maintaining rigour. For the AI revolution students need flexibility, creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, the human touch etc.
5. Entrance into tertiary education is too easy, fostered by institutions for funds. Huge drop out rate is expensive, early specialisation in courses and ATAR is on way out.
6. Vocational education pathways need restoration, too many attempt university
7. Mental health provision, youth suicides
8. Parental complexity growing, fewer families dine together, both parents working
9. Finding and training good school teachers
10. Federated model of government and constant changes