

# 2010 OECD Education Report Card

## *How Can Parents Influence The Education Of Their Children?*

By David Knuckey

There are 31 countries in the OECD, including England, France, Germany, Japan, New Zealand, Sweden, USA and Australia. The OECD releases an annual encyclopaedic research document called; *Education at a Glance*. This report compares education systems across these 31 countries – giving a revealing and compelling insight into how our education system rates by world standards.

Each year, *Education at a Glance* consistently measures dozens of education factors, such as class size, teacher salary, dollars per student, enrolment rates, how many hours teachers spend in the classroom, etc. etc. This not only allows international comparisons, but also shows us how these factors are changing over time.

This year, *Education at a Glance* also includes a new topic titled, 'How Can Parents Influence The Education Of Their Children'.

There are two immediately striking features about this section of the report:

1. Worldwide, parents have strong, clearly structured roles in public education.
2. Australia is missing.

31 countries in the OECD and 30 of them supplied detailed data on the role and rights of parents in their public schools ... but there is absolutely nothing from Australia. Our name doesn't appear on any of the graphs or tables; there is simply no information from us.

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But, let's see how the rest of the world includes its parents....

As we know, in the last decade the rest of the world has moved towards greater parent involvement in public education; beyond token 'consultation', embracing real and extensive decision-making powers in schools.

The OECD report examines these opportunities parents have to influence the education of children in schools. It focuses on three specific areas:

**“In 10 out of 26 OECD countries parent associations have a formal role in providing advice, as the government is obliged to consult with them on major policy decisions.”**

- Parent involvement in the governance of their school.
- The existence of an Education Ombudsmen and other formal complaint and appeal systems.
- The role of parent associations (like SAASSO).

The report claims that while there has been some previous investigation into parental involvement, this is the first international study on the formal structures and regulations related to parent voice – and Australia is absent.

### **School Governance - Parent influence at the school level**

Most OECD countries report that parents have a range of opportunities for participating in the governance of public schools.

- 18 out of 30 OECD countries require parent participation on school boards or councils.

The OECD's report defines Governance as when parents serve on boards or

councils with direct role in making decisions on:

- Budgets.
- Hiring and firing.
- Curriculum.
- School policies.

The report states that school choice and parents opportunities to influence or change the schools that educate their children are inextricably linked. When school choice is limited, there is likely to be more parent voice. Similarly, when there are ample opportunities for parents to influence the education their children receive, they are less likely to 'exit' and choose another school for their children.

### **Parent Associations**

Parent associations are common in all but a few countries and can play a number of

## Highlights from Education at a Glance 2010

roles. They are a means of advising or influencing education.

- In 10 out of 26 OECD countries parent associations have a formal role in providing advice, as the government is obliged to consult with them on major policy decisions.
- In 15 out of 25 OECD countries, these associations also serve to inform parents about relevant developments in education.

In SAASSO's 2010 state election submission, we called for the State Government to more formally recognise the role of parents and our association and to implement regulations which would require the education department to work with SAASSO on parent and Governing Council policy.



### Formal Complaints & Appeals

- 27 out of 30 OECD countries have regulations, which provide parents with a formal process for filing complaints regarding public schools – the exceptions being Japan, Korea and Mexico (and possibly Australia?).
- Around two-thirds of OECD countries have an ombudsman or an agency to receive complaints related to public schools.

Neither Australia nor South Australia have an Education Ombudsman – despite repeated attempts to introduce such legislation in parliament and calls from parent groups such as SAASSO for an independent 'education umpire' (see the SAASSO state and federal education submissions at [www.saasso.asn.au](http://www.saasso.asn.au)).

- In public schools, parents can appeal decisions made by the school, in all countries but Denmark, Japan and Korea (and maybe Australia?).



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Parents can appeal decisions made by schools in several areas:

- Decisions about special needs provisions.
- School fees and voluntary financial contributions.
- Regulation of assessments and examinations.
- Disciplinary actions.

The most commonly cited areas for appeals involved decisions made by

schools about special needs provision and disciplinary action.

- In more than half of countries parents could appeal decisions made by schools to multiple levels of government.

Source: *Education at a Glance 2010 OECD Indicators*

Download the full report at [www.saasso.asn.au](http://www.saasso.asn.au) ■