

NAPD Annual Conference 2023: Highest Aspirations for CAFÉ

Principals and Deputy Principals attending the annual NAPD Conference in October 2023 were invited to write a word or sentence that reflected their highest aspiration for the Citizens Assembly on the Future of Education (CAFÉ) envisaged for the first half of 2024. This followed an extended conversation about the Assembly with the NAPD National Executive and a summary reporting of the outcomes to the conference attendees.

The following are the comments from the delegates. They have been organized according to broad categories for ease of assimilation.

Purpose of Education

- My favourite phrase for schools is '**schools without failure**' - everyone should read the book with this title by William Glasser;
- Flourish... a system that enables students to **flourish**;
- Education for **active citizenship**... informed, engaged and responsive citizens of the future;
- To afford every young person the opportunity to **experience success**;
- To allow for meaningful differentiation to allow young people to work at a level appropriate to their needs;
- Education equals..... Set **our students free**;
- We need to **trust students and schools** more;
- Autonomy;
- Education should be a dual journey – one that **educates the mind and one the soul**:
The mind. Education should be about choices. Students should be allowed to follow their passions and interests.
The soul. We need to educate student how to be good people- how take care of themselves and to take care of others. Add to society. Citizenship.
- Education as a **life-long** event;
- Education as a **life skill**;
- Ask what purpose does our current curriculum and system of education actually serve? Why do we have to concentrate on the **points race** in 2nd level and let it shape the Leaving;
- The Assembly needs to **value the whole person**. It needs to be enjoyable and formative for all involved;
- The Assembly should **value the variety of skills and attributes** of young people;
- I would like to see **equal value for all aspects of learning** - academic, non-academic, life skills, apprenticeships, life-long growth;
- Schools that **cater for different intelligences** – so that every child feels success and knows their worth;
- The Assembly is an opportunity to focus on a vision for the entire education system;
- An acknowledgement that space must be made for **creativity**. Not a timetabled add-on;
- A motto for the systems might be 'education.. building **curious minds**;'
- Education for the sake of education is important;
- Education is **not about points** – not everyone needs university;

- We need to establish what are the purposes of schools? Are schools all things to all people or can we talk about a **common purpose**? If the latter, what is it?
- I really like the concept of **preparing citizens for a wholesome life**. Skills required for communicating, learning, healthy living and supporting our most vulnerable;
- Balancing/weighting the sometimes **opposing perspectives** of education .. to prepare for work... for fun and enjoyment... to prepare for life... to teach social skills for society... to get points for CAO system.. to combat societal issues... to promote learning as an enjoyable activity... to teach ICT skills.. to teach knowledge;
- **Reimagine the purpose of education** to nurture confidence, creativity and independent thought;
- What is the purpose of education in Ireland – and, in particular, at 2nd level? Sometimes **I feel that our only purpose is to prepare students for 3rd level**;
- Link the experience of long-time educators and the vision for the future of a rich educational experience for our future students and learners in Ireland;
- When you strip away all the padding, the point of education is **to create good people**. The real question should be, how do we create good people?
- What is the future of ‘scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge’ in light of the huge shortage of teachers who can teach through Irish?
- Is there an understanding of what the purpose of education is? I think there is a sense it’s about examination.. can we move away from the competition of the CAO?... can we focus on **what would allow the system to flourish**?
- Maybe so many of our young people are feeling mental health issues as we have created an unhealthy system? Isn’t this the very opposite of what education should be about.. i.e. **how to live a full life**?

Choice, Curriculum & Pedagogy

- **Life Skills**: Looking at the skills involved in six years of secondary schools:
- Reduction of wide curricula to ensure true depth and creative engagement – allowing staff and students to develop real skills of critical thinking not just rote learning.
- Citizenship education;
- Other areas of **learning in the community** around the school’
- Upskilling throughout lifetime;
- **Practical skills** and jobs given equal status to expertise;
- Reskilling opportunities for later in life;
- Acknowledgement of the broad education... **non-academic talents and skills** of students;
- How can the system embellish the skills, talents, and abilities inherent in young people that currently can only exist outside school?
- Building **communities and connectedness**... ‘Ar scath a cheile’;
- **Curriculum**: Can the LC and TY be incorporated into a 3-year cycle?
- What reforms can be introduced at Senior Cycle that promote a greater interest in apprenticeship after LC?’

- Choice of subjects and choice within subjects;
 - Range of **options** for courses/study;
 - Curriculum change is too long and heavy. More choice with curriculum would allow more self-directed and enjoyable learning without students rote learning;
 - Individualised/**personalised education** tailored to the strengths of students;
 - The obligatory nature of core subjects needs to go;
 - The obligatory nature of course subjects needs to be examined;
 - How can we rebalance value for the **arts subjects** (e.g. music) so it's not competing on school timetables? Presently too much focus on science/computers/higher-level maths;
 - Apprenticeships;
 - Schools should have greater autonomy to **design their own curriculum** based on the needs of their schools and their students.
 - Choice, empowerment;
 - Opportunities for **bespoke looser curricular provision** especially at post primary à la carte
 - Modules for students – **elective elements** of curriculum (e.g. Algebra 1, 2, 3, 4, etc). Students can build a bespoke curriculum focused on areas of interest. This can allow for assessment to be an ongoing process without being bound by age groupings and negate the need for a final/terminal exam at the end of 6 years of study;
 - Varied choice for students at all stages – do away with rigid, streamlined, curriculum.
- Allow menu of options;**
- How can students be empowered to engage in more **self-directed learning**? What are the possibilities of changing the Irish curriculum to a more conversational approach?
 - **Phenomena-based learning**... a real opportunity being missed between sixth class and second year in brackets first year... is a real chance to integrate this type of learning into our system. The experience over Covid really emphasised this. All first-year students are still so open to all aspects of learning. I always thought pbl was more suited to transition year but possibly too late in the second level journey.
 - Education and the **wider community integration** as a curriculum;
 - Community based learning across groups;
 - Place of **voluntary work in TY programme**.... Inspectorate were critical of voluntary work in TY... we removed it and the programme is much weaker because of that - volunteerism eroded?
 - **Cross curricular** links for real issues;
 - Alternatives to formal assessment;
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- **Other:** The role and accountability of **parents** in the learning process – active supporters, not just commentators – e.g. how can I help my child learn at home?'
 - One size does not fit all students.
 - School buildings must be fit for this new vision for education. Adequate, bright, open spaces allow for such a great education system.

Disadvantage and Inclusion

- Include **social justice** as key component;
- Free education for all. As a teacher/GC in a DEIS school, it breaks my heart to see how many students through home circumstances will never have the **opportunity to go to university** (if they would like), despite SUSI. The barrier is there, despite the Gov rhetoric.'
- 'The six year senior cycle programme is not for every student. How will we cater for these students?'
- 'Include all sectors of education in the Assembly from primary, secondary, and beyond'
- **Inclusive model** – work needs to be done to make this work for all students '
- 'An education system that seeks to **level the playing field** for each child and afford them consistency and opportunity – this way, schools will be places for young people to flourish no matter their postcode.'
- How can we provide for students who are not coming to school (for various reasons). Do we need to look at **hybrid schools** for some? Online school for some? Current system is not meeting the needs of all students;
- Schools have the potential to be a care and educational centre for young people - **include the most vulnerable** students at the most local level possible. It puts students at the centre;
- Meaningful strategy to forge real change for young people in the most disadvantaged schools;
- 'The idea of paying for education..'financial doping'... grinds.. **fee paying schools**.. we need to look into this;
- The voices of those the system has failed should be included;
- What if policies were written with **the most vulnerable** in mind;
- **Inclusivity** regardless of socio-economic advantage;
- What supports can be provided to schools to help them deal with **mental health**?
- Full equality for transgender students - school trips etc.

Leaving Certificate Reform and Assessment

- CAFE**Continual creative Appraisal** For Education;
- Quick fix. LCPA... leaving cert achievement... student who can complete a task but not a state exam can work with qqi level three coursesthey need a positive cert with what they have achieved and the skills they have developed...inclusive assessment..... How do we build it into our system?
- Find a process to **measure students' abilities for the world of work** other than the leaving cert;
- Leaving cert reform needs to return to looking at **a model that incorporates the needs of students** that want a real education path to work, trades/skilled-labour without a focus on final/terminal exams after two years;
- L.C.A. Is not enough

- A **reimagining of the 'tec'** is required not a newer version of a system focused on third level only;
- Until the point system changes it is difficult to remove the focus of teaching the curriculum towards a common goal/....access to 3rd level. More **emphasis on the value of apprenticeships**/... poor set up currently in place, not well organized;
- Please reform the leaving cert;
- There is no need for a **terminal exam that is antiquated, discriminatory and stressful**;
- Why should 14 years of free education culminate in a single type assessment that **only serves as a sieve for third level**?
- How do we accurately assess what the students are learning?

Leadership vs Administrative Burden

- 'Sharing the load'... more opportunity and resourcing to facilitate **distributed leadership** opportunities... reducing teacher allocation to Croke Park hours... should be more based on school needs;
- What is the **role of principal and deputy principal** in education?
- Teaching/learning versus all other tasks;
- How will the **administrative and management burden** be lifted from schools?
- ETBs are not the solution;
- To reduce the **endless/repetitive paperwork that** is dumped on principals....build a system that we /FETAC and other bodies can take the information from. To keep the practical elements in all subjects... day exams/projects/coursework - these elements need to evaluate and promote key skills, challenge the students/teachers to develop creativity;
- I have been a senior leader for 12 years. Throughout that time I have attended multiple conferences and heard multiple addresses about **reducing the workload of the principal**. I am still waiting for any meaningful progress on that;
- **Greater connect between policy decision-making and implementation** reimagining the role of school leadership to reflect the variety of leadership roles that are in schools/not just focusing on the principal.

Teacher Education & Development

- What do we want a **well-educated teacher** to look like in the next 10 years?
- What are the benefits of moving to a **two-year PME** from a one-year HDip? Are these teachers better equipped? And do the benefits outweigh the cost of the time and money that excludes people from this course?
- **CPD** as 'continuous professional development' or 'creating professional dialogue';
- How can we make teaching **more representative** of society. It is very middle class.

Miscellaneous

- Include the **student voice**;
- **Mobile phone ban** in schools?
- Are mobile phones essential in schools?
- All-Ireland ban on mobile p phones in schools by the department of education?