

SPECIAL COUNCIL AGENDA

MONDAY, 4TH JULY 2011



GLENORCHY CITY COUNCIL

* *The General Manager certifies that the reports contained in this Agenda have been written by qualified persons under Section 65 of the Local Government Act 1993.*

Hour: 5.30 p.m.

Present:

In attendance:

Leave of Absence:

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1. APOLOGIES

2. PECUNIARY INTEREST NOTIFICATION

COMMUNITY

3. PROPOSED SCHOOL CLOSURES IN THE CITY OF GLENORCHY

Author: General Manager (Frank Pearce)

Qualified Person: General Manager (Frank Pearce)

File Reference: School Closures

Community Plan Reference:

This item discusses a corporate management/governance issue. Since the Community Plan is outwardly focussed, there is no applicable reference to this matter.

Strategic or Annual Plan Reference:

The strategic and annual plans are based upon the Community Plan which is outwardly focussed. Since this item discusses a management/governance issue there is no applicable reference to this matter.

Reporting Brief:

Mayor Adriana Taylor has called a special meeting of Council as follows:

In accordance with the Local Government (Meeting Procedures) Regulation 4, I would like to convene a Special Meeting of Council on Monday, 4th July 2011 at 5.30 p.m.

The purpose of this meeting is to establish, as a matter of urgency, a Council position on the proposed school closures in the City of Glenorchy.

Proposal in Detail:

Background:

Two Glenorchy City schools, Collinsvale Primary and Goodwood Primary have been nominated for potential closure as a cost-saving measure in the 2011/12 Tasmanian State Budget. It is totally inappropriate that such a decision should be based on economic grounds and not on the best educational and social outcomes both for the children and their local communities.

Strong support is already being given to the school associations by individual aldermen but the Council at present has no position on the closures and therefore is unable to lobby or support the school communities as their Local Government representative body.

As school staff are not permitted to assist their associations in this matter, Council, through its Community Development department, could assist the communities with research to help them draft their submissions to the Minister on why their schools should not be closed.

The Glenorchy community has already undergone a major amalgamation of schools in the last two years and a significant amount of money has been spent by the Australian Government through the BER program on both the schools under threat. It cannot be good economy to see that money wasted.

A number of aldermen have expressed their desire to see this meeting called to address this issue as a matter of urgency and subsequent to calling this meeting the request included as attachment 1 was received. The suggested recommendation in the attachment, which is similar to that proposed by Mayor Taylor, is:

Glenorchy City Council offer support to both Collinsvale and Goodwood School Associations both verbal through direct lobbying, and assist with research of relevant information to support the submission through our community development Department.

Alderman Jenny Branch also provided some information for Aldermen which is included as Attachments 2 and 3.

Qualified advice

Council's policy 18-1 The Council and the Policies and actions of other governments is included as attachment 4. It states:

1. *The Council may comment upon or seek to influence other Governments when their policies or actions:*
 - a) *adversely affect the citizens of Glenorchy while not affecting the citizens of most other Local Government areas; or*
 - b) *adversely affect the service delivered by the Council or other groups to the citizens of Glenorchy; or*
 - c) *adversely affect the citizens of Glenorchy as well as those of all or most Australian Local Government areas when there is a significant ground swell of opinion within the Glenorchy community that it wishes its Council to become involved.*
2. *The Council shall not become aligned with any political party.*

The proposed closure of Collinsvale and Goodwood primary schools could readily fit into the policy's provision "a".

Consultations:

None

Human Resource / Financial and Risk Management Implications:

Researching information and community consultation will require re-allocation of Council's human resources from their normal duties. There will be some direct cost associated with the preparation of public relations material plus the cost of providing the human resources to research information and undertake any required community consultation. There does not appear to be any risk management implications.

Community Consultation and Public Relations Implications:

It can be expected that there will be a need to carry out some community consultation. Public relations implications are likely to involve media releases and media interviews by the Mayor.

Recommendation:

That the Glenorchy City Council offer support to both Collinsvale and Goodwood Primary School Associations, through lobbying, and assisting with research of relevant information to support their submissions.

Attachments/Annexures

- 1** Attachment 1
- 2** Attachment 2
- 3** Attachment 3
- 4** Attachment 4

Attachment 1.

Proposed School closures in Glenorchy

History

We already have six empty schools in Glenorchy City.

- Brent ST
- Claremont High
- Claremont primary
- MT Faulkner
- Abbotsfield primary
- Old Roseneath Primary

I've spoken to many community members since our conversation last week and everyone is very disappointed with the proposal to closure Goodwood Primary School. The school plays a crucial role in the local Community and the closure would be devastating for the entire community.

As you are aware the Goodwood Community is already disadvantaged in many ways and local parents from low socio-economic backgrounds are placed under constant stress due to rapid social and economic changes within the community and their families. The school is instrumental in fostering strong and consistent relationships in the community and their contribution is unsurpassed in enabling positive long term generational change.

As a matter of urgency we should have a council position on the proposed school closures in our City.

Collinsvale would appreciate council support since access to the school staff to help has been withdrawn; Jenny has been working with Collinsvale School Community

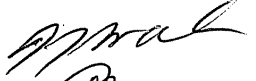


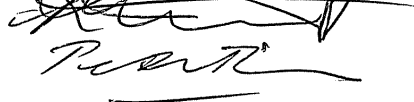

- *The number of schools already closed shows that our school community have already taken a huge hit.*
- *The Education department have not even bedded down the last round of school closures.*
- *This only indicates the State Government has not done a good job of the last round*
- *I agree that the school submission should be based on facts and include Educational outcomes and projected enrolments*
- *Goodwood Community has experienced an increase of young families moving into the area and the play group numbers have doubled.*
- *I was speaking a Grandmother who had already moved her 8 Year old Grandson (she is the guardian) from Abbotsfield to Goodwood he would not cope in a large school.*

Suggested recommendation

Glenorchy City Council offer support to both Collinsvale and Goodwood School Associations both verbal through direct lobbying, and assist with research of relevant information to support the submission through our community development Department.

Special meeting of council

I request that you convene a Special meeting to discuss the proposed school closures have the support of seven Alderman listed below.

Jenny Branch	
Richard Lowrie	
Steven King	
Bob Vervaart	
Peter Ridler	
Luke Martin	
David Pearce	David B Pearce
Christine Lucas	Christine Lucas

SAVE OUR SCHOOLS

Education Policy Comment

The Tasmanian Government's Case to Close Schools is Threadbare

The Tasmanian Government is treating the public with contempt over its proposal to close 20 schools. It has provided no evidence to support its case. It has failed to detail the expected savings and it has provided no evidence that closing schools will improve the quality of education.

The school communities affected have been refused critical information to assess the Government's case and to put their own. The arrogance of the Greens Education Minister, Nick McKim, is unbelievable. When requested to provide the information, he said "look on the Internet".

It is the Minister's responsibility to provide this information so the Government's claims can be properly scrutinised and assessed. This is fundamental for proper public consultation and effective public participation in government decision-making. It is a principle the Greens Party has always supported. Yet, this Greens Minister seems intent on denying school communities this right.

Without this information, the Government's case can only be seen as threadbare. The claimed financial savings from closing schools are dubious and the weight of research evidence is that students in small schools do as well as, if not better, than students in large schools on a range of student outcomes.

The Government should provide the evidence in support of its case to close schools and the consultation on school closures should be extended so that school communities can examine this evidence and prepare their case to remain open.

The claimed financial savings are dubious

The Government's main justification for the closures is to make financial savings. The Premier of Tasmania, Lara Giddings, said that the Government "cannot fund half empty schools" [*The Mercury*, 16 June 2011]. The Department of Education website states:

The State Government has to make urgent savings in all areas....It is very expensive to continue to run a large number of very small and/or under-utilised schools so closing schools and amalgamating some others will result in significant cost savings for the Department.

The Government claims that it will save a total of \$24 million over four years from closing the 20 schools. This amounts to an average of \$300,000 per school per year.

However, so far it has refused to provide any detailed breakdown of these savings estimates. Without detailed data it is not possible to assess the Government's claims. The Government should disclose the details of the expected savings in salaries, school operating costs,

buildings and grounds maintenance, etc. It should also disclose the expected costs of transferring students to other schools.

Experience with school closures elsewhere shows that savings estimates from school closures are often much over-stated. Governments often ignore additional costs arising from amalgamating schools and additional costs to other government departments. This happened with the school closures in the ACT in 2006.

Amalgamating schools incurs several additional one-off costs which should be offset against the savings estimates. These additional costs include duplication of special education facilities in other schools and refurbishment works. In some cases, demountables may need to be purchased to accommodate additional students. The Education Minister has already admitted that refurbishment and extra classrooms will be needed in some receiving schools.

A major additional ongoing cost will be the transport of children over some distances to other schools. Increased student bus travel following school closures will increase the costs to government and reduce financial savings from closing schools. In some cases, road infrastructure may have to be upgraded as well. Studies show that the increased costs of transporting students to other schools in rural areas often outweighs direct savings obtained from closing schools.

There are also the additional environmental costs of increased car and bus travel caused by closing schools. It is paradoxical that a Greens Minister is imposing additional environmental costs on communities so as to obtain dubious financial savings to government.

The expected financial savings to government should also be assessed against the increased financial and social costs to families and the affected communities.

Families will be faced with significantly increased transport costs and safety risks in getting their children to and from schools. Much of the burden will fall on low income families. The Government is effectively transferring some of its costs in providing public education on to families who can least afford it.

Small regional towns will lose the focus of their local community. As one Collinsvale resident told *The Mercury* [18 June] “without the school we would not have a community, it would fall apart....Collinsvale’s history and community would be gone”. A Ringarooma parent said: “Small country towns are all struggling, and a blow like this would just finish us. We’d become a ghost town” [ABC News, 20 June 2011]. Greens MLA, Kim Booth, said: “Lose the school and you lose the community” [*The Mercury*, 18 June 2011]

If the Education Minister is serious about consulting with local communities, he must immediately release the detailed savings estimates and a full social impact statement for public analysis. His consultation with school communities can only be seen as a sham if this data is not provided.

Education in small schools is just as good as in large schools

The Premier has also claimed that savings are not the primary reason behind the decision [*The Examiner*, 18 June 2011]. She claims there will be benefits for children going to larger schools. The Education Minister claims that bigger schools lead to better educational

outcomes and that there is a wealth of evidence showing that smaller schools struggle to teach a broad curriculum.

However, neither the Premier nor the Education Minister has produced any sound research evidence which shows that larger schools achieve better results than small schools. The reason is that there is no such evidence.

There is no robust research evidence that shows that small schools have lower student achievement than other schools. Student outcomes in small schools are at least equal to, if not better than, outcomes in larger schools.

Many studies conducted during the past 20 years have found that small schools, particularly at the primary school level, have a positive effect upon student achievement, extra-curricular participation, student satisfaction, student behaviour and attendance. The most recent evidence comes from a review of some 57 studies conducted around the world since 1990. The review was published in the Review of Educational Research, the journal of the American Educational Research Association, in 2009.

The Government has also failed to take account of a new stream of research literature that shows that small schools mitigate the effects of low socio-economic status (SES) on education outcomes and that students from low SES backgrounds do better in smaller schools.

There is no evidence to show that curriculum is less comprehensive in small primary schools than in larger schools or that it is inadequate in smaller high schools. However, larger high schools are better able to offer more advanced courses and a greater range of elective courses than small high schools.

Conclusion

Thus, the Tasmanian Government's case to close schools is unproven. It has failed to provide the evidence to justify its claims. It has failed detailed evidence of financial savings to government from closing schools and that closing small schools will increase student outcomes.

The Government's claims are highly questionable. It has only provided estimates of the gross savings to the Education Department from closing schools. It appears to have failed to factor in additional costs to receiving schools and for school transport. It has also failed to take account of the additional financial and social costs to families and communities.

The weight of research evidence suggests that student achievement is unlikely to improve as a result of closing small schools. It shows that small schools do as well as, if not better, on a range of student outcomes, especially in relation to students from low income families.

There seems little wonder then why the Premier and the Education Minister want to limit the community consultation to four weeks and ram through school closures. Its case for school closures is threadbare.

Trevor Cobbold
National Convenor
27 June 2001

Further reading

Save Our Schools, Towards 2020: An Unsubstantiated, Flawed and Inequitable School Plan, A Submission to the ACT Department of Education and Training, November 2006.

Trevor Cobbold, A Look Back at School Closure Issues in the ACT, Save Our Schools, September 2009.

Craig Howley; Jerry Johnson & Jennifer Petrie. Consolidation of Schools and Districts: What the Research Says and What It Means. National Education Policy Center, Boulder, Colorado, February 2011.

Lorna Jimerson, The Hobbit Effect: Why Small Works in Public Schools, The Rural School and Community Trust, September 2006.

Kenneth Leithwood and Doris Jantzi. A Review of Empirical Evidence About School Size Effects: A Policy Perspective. *Review of Educational Research*, 79 (1): 464-490.

For further information on issues in school closures see:

Save Our Schools – School Closures

Rural and Community Trust – Consolidation Fightback Toolkit

SOS - Fighting for Equity in Education

<http://www.saveourschools.com.au>

SAVE OUR SCHOOLS

Education Research Brief

US Study Says that School Closures are Unlikely to Deliver Financial Savings or Better Education

The Tasmanian Government's claims about the benefits of its planned closure of 20 schools are called into question by a research study published earlier this year on the experience with school closures in the United States. The report analysed the benefits of school closures and found them wanting.

The report was published by the National Education Policy Centre at the University of Colorado and reviewed the major research studies on school closures in the US over the past 20 years.

It notes that the arguments for closing and amalgamating schools are based primarily on two presumed benefits: fiscal efficiency and higher educational quality. It concludes that contemporary research does not support claims about these presumed benefits of district and school consolidation. It says that the assumptions behind such claims "are most often dangerous oversimplifications" [p.11].

The report concludes that the research evidence offers remarkable little support for the proposition that reducing the number of schools and districts will reduce administrative costs. It also says that the idea that offering a greater variety of courses equates with expanding opportunities for students is also contradicted by the evidence.

Research on the effects of contemporary consolidation suggests that new consolidation is likely to result in neither greater efficiency nor better instructional outcomes—especially when it results from state policy that implements large-scale forced consolidation. [p.8]

The available research comparing pre- and post-school expenditures shows that district consolidation does *not* on average reduce educational expenditures. Indeed, studies report increased costs, as operational budgets are affected by *diseconomies* of scale resulting from increased expenditures for transportation, operation, management and supervision, security, and guidance.

Related research shows that the likely result of making schools or districts larger through consolidation is more nuanced, indicating that efficiencies can be achieved in some expenditure areas and for certain types of schools or districts, but also suggesting caution for policymakers pursuing consolidation in the hope of cutting costs.

School consolidation also often fails to deliver the promised enhancement of academic offerings. Even when consolidation does produce a wider menu of educational experiences for students, evidence suggests that large school and district size negatively affects desirable academic outcomes.

The report notes that a sizable body of research investigating school size has consistently found larger size (after moving beyond the smallest schools) to be associated with reduced rates of student participation in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, more dangerous school environments, lower graduation rates, lower achievement levels for impoverished students, and larger achievement gaps related to poverty, race, and gender.

A particular finding is that larger district and school size is negatively associated with the achievement of impoverished students. While the evidence is largely correlational rather than causative, the studies show that large schools often exhibit these negative trends and that the correlations are largest for the most impoverished students.

The overall pattern is nonetheless clearly negative and is sufficient to raise serious doubts that substantial benefits will accrue from making a given school or district larger—especially in terms of academic outcomes for poor and minority students. [p.9]

...low-wealth and minority populations tend to be inordinately and negatively affected by consolidation initiatives. [p.10]

The report finds that econometric (and financial, it must be said) studies of district and school consolidation tend not to include the value of important educational contingencies such as extra-curricular participation rates, parental involvement, and community support – all of which are features of small schools. Econometric, and financial, studies of district and school consolidation can be faulted for underestimating these costs.

The report notes one very recent school-size study by an economist that did directly link the effects of changes in school size to student achievement. This study, which examined “shocks to enrolment” (increases and decreases, via either consolidation with another school or by removing grades) in Indiana, found that increasing the size of Indiana elementary schools (partly by school consolidations) lowered student achievement significantly, with a predictable future economic cost that, according to the researcher, far outweighed the marginal fiscal savings of sustaining smaller schools.

The influence of school and district consolidations on the vitality and well-being of communities may be the most dramatic result, if the one least often discussed by politicians or education leaders. The loss of a school erodes a community’s social and economic base—its sense of community, identity and democracy—and the loss permanently diminishes the community itself, sometimes to the verge of abandonment.

The comparative silence surrounding this issue is likely the result of its frequent rural character—the block of affected voters is both numerically small and politically and economically insignificant. [p.9]

As an example of these effects, the report cites an extensive account of West Virginia students and their families depicts the experience as inflicting considerable harm. After the school consolidation (closures), students attended larger schools where they received less individual attention, endured longer bus rides to and from school (and hence longer days), and had fewer opportunities to participate in co-curricular and extracurricular activities (a result of both increased competition for limited spots and transportation issues).

Families' experiences included fewer opportunities to participate in formal school governance roles (as members of site-based leadership teams, for example) and increased barriers to participating informally in their children's education. Increased travel time, for example, proved a barrier to volunteering, visiting classrooms, and taking part in parent-teacher conferences.

The report makes the following recommendations to policymakers:

- Closely question claims about presumed benefits of consolidation in their state. What reason is there to expect substantial improvements, given that current research suggests that savings for taxpayers, fiscal efficiencies, and curricular improvements are unlikely?
- Avoid state-wide mandates for consolidation and steer clear of minimum sizes for schools and districts. These always prove arbitrary and often prove unworkable.
- Consider other measures to improve fiscal efficiency or educational services. Examples include cooperative purchasing agreements among districts, combined financial services, enhanced roles for educational service agencies, state regulations that take account of the needs of small districts and schools, recruitment and retention of experienced teachers for low-wealth districts, distance learning options for advanced subjects in small rural schools, smaller class sizes for young students, and effective professional development programs.
- Investigate de-consolidation as a means of improving fiscal efficiency and improving learning outcomes.

These are all good questions for school communities around Tasmania to begin putting to their Government.

Trevor Cobbold
National Convenor
20 June 2011

Howley, C., Johnson, J., & Petrie, J. 2011. *Consolidation of Schools and Districts: What the Research Says and What It Means*. National Education Policy Center, Boulder, Colorado.

SOS - Fighting for Equity in Education

<http://www.saveourschools.com.au>

THE COUNCIL AND THE POLICIES AND ACTIONS OF OTHER GOVERNMENTS

Policy Manual 18-1

Council Minutes Ref: Council (Item 17) dated 4th January 2010
Council (Item 14) dated 2nd April 2007
Council (Item 13) dated 18th August 2003
Council (Item 2) dated 21st February 2000

File Ref: 03436

Background

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to the Council on the type of issues and matters of concern arising from the policies and actions of other Governments upon which it should comment publicly.

Glenorchy City Council like all Local Governments has two complementary roles, to ensure the delivery of services to its community and to act as an instrument of democratic representation for that community. This policy is concerned with both of these roles which are alike in that they are both affected by other Governments, Commonwealth and State. Two key considerations need be borne in mind in this context:

- | ☐ all governments Federal, State and Local represent the same electors and only the boundaries of the various electorates differ
- | ☐ all are made up of elected representatives

Councils have traditionally sought to comment upon and influence other Governments when the interests of Councils and other Governments intersect. For example in the context of the service delivery role, Councils over the last two decades or so have resisted the efforts of both State and Federal Governments to transfer service delivery responsibilities to Councils without the necessary funding.

In the context of the political/democratic role, Councils have sometimes sought to influence other Governments as a result of pressure from varying numbers of citizens because they themselves have come to believe that their citizens are being adversely affected by the actions of other Governments. Examples of this are declarations by some Councils of nuclear free zones or the disquiet which Glenorchy has expressed over the Commonwealth Government's job network initiatives.

The following policy statement provides some principles to guide the Council when comment upon the actions and policies of other Governments is being considered.

Policy Statement

- | 1. The Council may comment upon or seek to influence other Governments when their policies or actions:
 - | a)a) adversely affect the citizens of Glenorchy while not affecting the citizens of most other Local Government areas; or
 - | b)b) adversely affect the service delivered by the Council or other groups to the citizens of Glenorchy; or
 - | e)c) adversely affect the citizens of Glenorchy as well as those of all or most Australian Local Government areas when there is a significant ground swell of opinion within the Glenorchy community that it wishes its Council to become involved.

- 2. The Council shall not become aligned with any political party.

Review January 2013

Status: CURRENT