

31st March 2006

Honourable Syd Stirling
Minister for Employment, Education and Training
Parliament House
Darwin NT 0801

Dear Minister

Re: Building Better Schools – Middle Schools

On behalf of the Northern Territory Council of Government School Organisations, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you, as Minister for Employment, Education and Training, the Northern Territory Government, and the Department of Employment, Education and Training for a strong commitment to improving educational outcomes for all children in the Northern Territory.

The organization unequivocally supports government's call for a new approach to teaching and learning for the Middle Years, and notes that quality middle years pedagogy is applicable across all years of schooling.

In line with COGSO research, and a recent public survey carried out by the organization, COGSO has developed an alternative framework for the management, planning and implementation of Middle Years Schooling in the Northern Territory: **'Recommendations - A Northern Territory Middle Schooling Approach 2006 – 2016 Onwards'**.

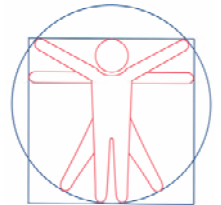
We trust that you will give your due consideration to the attached document. We would be pleased to meet with you at any time to further the discussion on Middle Schooling. I can be contacted on 8999 3255 or 0409694102 should you require further information..

Sincerely



Peter Garrigan
President

Cc Members of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly
Margaret Banks CE DEET
Australian Education Union
Isolated Parents and Children's Association
Independent Schools Association
NT Government School Councils
NT Government School Principals
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COGSO

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Background

COGSO Middle Schooling Research

In 2005, COGSO commissioned research on a Middle Schooling approach to education for distribution across all key stakeholder groups in education in the Northern Territory.

Outcomes were published in the discussion paper, '*A Review of Middle Schooling Concepts and Approaches*', which has proved to be a seminal work in educating and informing the Northern Territory education community on a Middle Schooling approach to teaching and learning.

The research finds that implementation of a quality Middle Schooling approach, depends upon four critically significant factors. We bring these to your attention.

1. Changing teaching practice (pedagogy) is a fundamental component of successful middle schooling, without which the hopes and expectations of middle schooling are unlikely to be realized.
2. Establishing separate Middle Schools does not guarantee appropriate teaching, curriculum, organizational changes etc., will be developed to meet the learning needs of the a perceived middle school cohort.
3. Creating separate Middle Schools involves high capital cost and considerable educational, social and community disruption. This is particularly critical for the NT's highly diverse community and socio-economic configurations.

It is COGSO's view that:

- a. ***Securing solidly embedded pedagogical change for Middle Years practice is the immediate and primary operational imperative for Northern Territory schools. Physically restructuring Northern Territory schools to include or exclude year 7, and/or create dedicated Middle Schools is an external response to a Middle Years approach which has no relevancy to a successful Middle Years pedagogical approach.***
- b. **Costs associated with establishment of separate Middle Schools would be better utilized in the first instance in the provision of well planned and long term execution of:**
 - ***Professional Development for teaching staff***
 - ***High level support, advice and resourcing to schools and teaching staff involved in Middle Years pedagogical delivery***
3. Structural change to schools may prove to be a requirement in the future, but only after substantial implementation, monitoring, assessment and reporting of changes to Middle Years pedagogy, has been undertaken.
4. Changing pedagogy takes time and requires constant effort to maintain. It requires understanding of the need for change by teachers themselves, commitment to implementing change, effective leadership within schools and school systems and high level financial resourcing and support for pre-service and in-service programs.

It is COGSO's view that:

- a. *Pedagogical change should be implemented via careful, well planned and managed programs from 2006 – 2016.*
- b. *Pedagogical change programs should be subject to constant monitoring, assessment, revision and reporting, and communicated to all key stakeholders at bi-annual forums.*

Community Response to *Building Better Schools – Middle Schooling*

Further to the research, COGSO has secured significant community feedback via a number of avenues (listed below) on *Building Better Schools – Middle Schools* (Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training, 2006), presented for public consultation in March 2006.

- COGSO Middle Schools and Middle Schooling survey
Returns via COGSO Website
Telephone and fax
(Respondents - Parents, School Councils and members of the general public)
- COGSO Executive and Regional members attendance at all Middle Schools consultations held across the NT in March 2006
- COGSO liaison with other key parent stakeholder organizations

Seven areas of community concern

Outcomes of our investigation into community response, show very clearly that there are six major areas of concern in the community. These are:

1. Middle Schools – Structural Change
 - Structural change models proposed during consultation are not supported by the majority of respondents
 - High level concern exists in relation to impact of proposed structural models on rural and remote communities
2. Middle Schools – Pedagogy
 - Supported by the majority of respondents
3. Socio-Economic Impact
 - High level concern by the majority of respondents on loss of population and economic base in rural and remote communities
4. Learning Outcomes
 - Understanding by majority of respondents that better teaching and learning outcomes are dependent on pedagogical not structural change
 - High level concern around children being subject at critical developmental stages to change of school locations and subsequent settling in periods impacting negatively on learning
 - High level concern that a decade of children will pay the price of the rushed changes under the current implementation plan
5. Timeframes (Consultation and Proposed Implementation)

- The majority of respondents agreed that the time for public comment on the proposed models has been far too rushed
 - The majority of respondents agreed that the proposed start up time of 2007, is far too soon for quality implementation of a Middle Schooling approach for the Northern Territory
6. Funding Implications
- High level of concern about appropriate levels of funding and resourcing for a Middle Years approach to teaching and learning
 - High level of concern about appropriate levels of funding and resourcing for any Middle Schools which may be established
7. Consultation style and process
- Over twenty five per cent of respondents have highlighted community concern about the nature of surveys and consultations; that surveys have been highly leading, poorly written and lacking in transparency, and that community consultations have fallen well short of true consultation.

Outcome of Research and Community Feedback

As a result of our research and community concerns as noted above, COGSO proposes that the approach to implementation of a Middle Years program in the Northern Territory (Building Better Schools), be reconsidered.

In line with our findings we submit the attachment, '**Recommendations - A Northern Territory Middle Schooling Approach 2006 – 2016 Onwards**', as an alternative framework for the management, planning and implementation of Middle Years Schooling in the Northern Territory. As an alternative, these recommendations slow the current proposed implementation phases, yet still result in an operational Northern Territory Middle Schooling Approach by 2008.

Recommendations
Northern Territory Middle Schooling Approach 2006–2016 Onwards

Phase	Activity
<p>Phase One 2006-2007 Management, Planning and Consultation</p>	<p>1. Management</p> <p>NT Middle Schooling Reference Group</p> <p>A reference group is established to guide, monitor and assess the development of the Northern Territory Middle Schooling approach.</p> <p>The group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • comprises members of all key stakeholders • meets quarterly, reporting directly to the Minister for Employment, Education and Training • is a standing committee <p>2 Planning</p> <p>Comprehensive planning is undertaken to fully prepare Northern Territory School communities and the broader community for the implementation of a successful Middle Years of Schooling approach.</p> <p>The approach incorporates the following key elements as key components of a successful approach:</p> <p>2.1 School Programs</p> <p>2.1.1 Curriculum</p> <p>2.1.2 Multiple learning and teaching approaches</p> <p>2.1.3 Assessment and evaluation programs promoting quality</p> <p>2.1.4 School administrative and organizational systems promote meaningful relationships and learning</p> <p>2.1.5 School wide policy and activity which fosters health, wellness and safety</p> <p>2.1.6 Multifaceted guidance and support services</p> <p>2.1.7 Transition programs at relevant milestones of learning</p> <p>2.2 School Culture</p> <p>2.2.1 Common and shared vision</p> <p>2.2.2 Genuine family and community partnerships</p> <p>2.2.3 Provision of an inviting, safe and supportive environment</p> <p>2.2.4 Adult advocacy for all students</p> <p>2.2.5 High teaching and learning expectations</p> <p>2.2.6 Courageous, collaborative leadership</p> <p>2.3 Structural Change</p> <p>2.3.1 Structural change to schools is investigated during the first five years of pedagogical implementation, monitoring, assessment and reporting.</p> <p>2.3.2 Investigation during the first five years, considers the most commonsense and cost effective structural options which have the least soci-economic impact on children, families and communities.</p> <p>2.3.3 In principle outcomes of investigation are clearly communicated to Regional Reference groups</p> <p>2.3.4 In principle outcomes are appropriately budgeted for</p> <p>2.3.5 Any accepted outcomes arising from investigation</p>

Phase	Activity
	<p style="text-align: right;">and community consultation, are carried out in a carefully considered and timely manner</p> <p>3. Consultation Children, families, schools and the broader community are critical and active contributors to Middle Schooling Approach management, planning and implementation frameworks, ensuring valid and reliable community contribution a tiered Reference Group format is established.</p> <p>3.1 NT Middle Schooling Reference Group See above at (1)</p> <p>3.2 Regional Reference Groups The NT Middle Schooling Reference Group communicates in an open and timely manner, with NT Middle Schooling Regional Reference groups, seeking community input and response to the NT Middle Schooling approach.</p>
<p><u>Phase Two</u> <u>2008-2010</u> Trial Implementation</p>	<p>1 Trial Implementation Outcomes of the previous two year planning process are implemented on a trial basis across the 2008-2010 period.</p> <p>2 Monitoring and Assessment Outcomes are subject to continual monitoring and assessment, utilizing a variety of valid and reliable research methodologies.</p>
<p><u>Phase Three</u> <u>2010–2015</u> Program Review</p>	<p>Revision Recommendations arising from Trial Implementation are implemented to ensure a successful Middle Schooling Approach is successfully established.</p>
<p><u>Phase Four</u> <u>2016 onward</u> Extended Development</p>	<p>Cyclical Implementation, Measurement and Revision The cycle of implementation, monitoring, assessment, reporting and revision is re-commenced.</p>