
From the President

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Politicians

At last year's very successful and widely acclaimed ACEL National Conference in Melbourne we had three serving Ministers for Education on the agenda which attracted much comment from a number of those in attendance and even from a few who chose not to attend. It would not surprise you to learn that not all of the views espoused were favourable and indeed there were a few who did not believe that politicians had any place even being at these events. The irony is that one of the presentations made from the Queensland Minister was centered on the theme of 'taking the politics out of education.'

ACEL prides itself as the best positioned professional association in the nation to proactively influence the development of evidenced-based educational policy and strategy to ensure that all students can succeed no matter where they are from or which school they attend. It is impossible to do this however, without engaging with key policy makers and those who have the most power; our state and federal politicians! As an organisation we would be fundamentally negligent not to have these pivotal people in our midst on every possible occasion especially at our national conference where we have a thousand or more passionate educators seeking to improve their practice to improve outcomes for all. The members of ACEL are key stakeholders who must have access to governments to ensure our collective needs are heard and acted upon.

For a few people, the criticism in relation to politicians at the conference extended to the fact that all three invited Ministers were from the conservative side of the politics and this was indeed an accurate observation. We did however, invite a number of opposition members to also attend and speak but for varied reasons none were available, which was unfortunate.

I have two points that I would like to make about politics and politicians which I think need to be articulated and clarified.

First, politics are everywhere and not just in parliaments around the country. Every workplace in which I have ever worked, and every club or organisation of which I have been a member, has been beset by local politics. People are always caucusing to bring about change. Very rarely in any arena does everyone agree on the way forward or the decisions that have been made. We are

all politicians in that respect and we need to be positive about this rather than shy away from these interactions. Democracy in the workplace, home, sporting team or the political cauldron is what gives us all a voice as long as we take the option to use it proactively.

Second, I want to provide a staunch defence of politicians in general. It has just about become a national sport to pour scorn on our elected state and federal members of parliament but in my experience this popular pastime is built upon ignorance and mythology from commentators with their own agendas to propagate. In my privileged position I work in close proximity with politicians and over the past decade have worked directly with Labor, Liberal and LNP ministers. I have also spent considerable time in regular national forums with education ministers from all states representing all parties including those mentioned above along with the Greens (Tas), CLP and the National Parties. These are people who are not paid excessively and they face re-election every three or four years, however, never have I met one who wasn't fully committed to the best interest of all students, schools and sectors. Sure they have differing beliefs and ideology but up close they are invariably intelligent people who want to make things better. It is amazing how often the nine ministers from states, territories and the Commonwealth agree on issues of national importance but equally as important, the professional respect in evidence across state and party lines is reassuring and not something often seen in the media outside of these forums.

In conclusion we need to be working assiduously to make our politicians' jobs much easier by sharing our ideas, research and practice directly with them to ensure they use the best evidence available to make pivotal decisions. To do this we need to treat them all with the dignity they deserve rather than prejudging without the courtesy of listening, engaging and respectfully challenging.

At ACEL we seek to influence all stakeholders and we continue to actively build relationships with all key politicians. We won't sit in the back rows complaining as it is our job to lead and act. We're doing it on your behalf and we intend on getting better at it so expect to see more politicians in our midst. We need them but more importantly, they need us.

All the best for 2015. May it be your best year yet!