

Becoming a board member at Big Picture Education Australia

Chris Bonnor

Given the skills that principals accumulate over the years it is hardly surprising that both principals and their skills are sought by other organisations. For over six years I have been a member of the board of the not-for-profit Big Picture Education Australia (BPEA). I joined because I could offer some skills in research, writing and advocacy but cheerfully confess that I can (and do) offer almost nothing when it comes to finance and management.

I won't go into great detail about what Big Picture schools do, but I do encourage people to go to the website <http://www.bigpicture.org.au/> and find out. Cutting a long story short, Big Picture schools are existing schools, mainly public, which re-organise (in part or in whole) around the Big Picture design. The schools pick up the kids who just switch off in mainstream schooling. Their learning is driven by, and their curriculum designed around, their passions. Students complete internships while at school with teachers, families, mentors etc all working closely together.

As principals we all did some of these things, but rarely as part of any coherent design. Big Picture isn't a bolt-on program; it is a different way of doing school. The stories of success will open your eyes – just check out [Cook's Hill campus](#) in Newcastle. It has given me a new perspective on old problems. Maybe I'm involved now because I didn't go nearly far enough in this direction as a principal.

Back to belonging to a board; BPEA holds four board meetings each year, plus a couple of planning days. It is terrific to be involved with some of the smartest educators in the land and meet equally smart business people, philanthropists etc. Board membership is unpaid of course, but I separately do some paid work for the organisation. Throw in a bit of travel to similar schools overseas and it amounts to an all-round great experience.

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Big Picture Education Australia

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Chris was Principal of Asquith Boys High (1991-2000) and Davidson High (2002-2005), as well as NSWSPC Futures Principal (2001). He was President of the NSWSPC from 2002-2006. He is now a writer and advocate, in part for the Centre for Policy Development. Chris is a NSWSPC Life Member and was awarded his AM in 2007.