

# SAVE OUR SCHOOLS

## Media Release

### **P-TECH Schools Are Unproven and Threaten Public Education**

Save Our Schools today called for public consultation and scrutiny of the P-TECH schools proposed for Ballarat and Geelong and sponsored by the giant IT multinational IBM. SOS National Convenor, Trevor Cobbold, said that P-TECH schools are unproven and threaten public education.

“P-TECH schools are being established without any evidence that they work and without any open discussion of their implications for the curriculum, how public schools are governed and how education is delivered in the classroom.

“IBM says that the new schools will replicate its New York model but it appears to be incompatible with the provisions of the Victorian Education and Training Act relating to school councils and curriculum development and accreditation and with the national curriculum for Years 9 & 10.

“The P-TECH program should be carefully assessed before being adopted. It should not be rushed through because it is Tony Abbott’s pet project. It is yet another “captain’s call” by the Prime Minister that has not received adequate public scrutiny.”

Last year, the Federal Government announced \$0.5 million funding for a new type of school in Australia incorporating high school education and two years of tertiary training. It is based on the P-TECH (Pathways in Technology Early College) model developed by IBM and established in Brooklyn, New York. The model received a strong personal endorsement by the Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, after his visit last year to the Brooklyn school.

Negotiations are underway to convert two existing schools in Ballarat and Geelong into P-TECH schools involving IBM and several corporate sponsors. IBM says that it is taking “responsibility” for the Ballarat school and will support the Geelong school.

An SOS Policy Brief released today examines the experience with P-TECH schools in the United States and concludes that there are several reasons to be concerned about their introduction in Australia.

“First, the model is unproven. The flagship school in New York continues to be one of the lowest performing schools in the city after four years of operation and its results are well below those of many other schools with a similar demographic composition.

“Second, the P-TECH curriculum is much narrower than the requirements of Australia’s national curriculum for Years 9 & 10. Adoption of this model presents a very real danger that students will be tracked into vocational specialisation too early. P-TECH schools give

priority to serving the labour demands of individual firms rather than providing the broad education needed by all young people.

“Third, the model also involves IBM having a key leadership role in public schools. In effect, the P-TECH model represents a new form of school privatisation in Australia with IBM and other firms having de facto control over public schools.

“Fourth, the schools and their students will be hostage to the future profitability of IBM and the other corporate sponsors. Students will not be guaranteed a future job and the schools could be abandoned in the event of a profit downturn or a change in global corporate strategy.

“Fifth, P-TECH initiative is part of IBM’s ambitious program in education to use data analysis to “transform” education. ‘Big Data’ could dramatically change the nature of schooling and how it is delivered. But, this could be more about delivering greater profits than better student outcomes. Data analysis can help good teaching but it cannot substitute for good teaching.

“Sixth, the heavy involvement of IBM and other IT firms also raises a very significant privacy issue about firms having access to detailed student records, a development which is being strongly resisted by parents in the US.”

Mr. Cobbold called for more public consultation on the proposal.

“Details of the program are shrouded in secrecy and are being developed and negotiated behind closed doors. This is not good enough. IBM may be used to getting its way in New York, but it shouldn’t happen in Australia.

“There should be extensive public consultation and discussion before the proposal is accepted. If it is to follow the New York model, as IBM wants, it will require changes to the Victorian Education Act. Parent, teacher and principals’ and other public school organisations should be consulted about proposals to convert existing schools to P-TECH schools.”

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**Contact:**  
Trevor Cobbold  
National Convenor  
0410 121 640

**SOS - Fighting for Equity in Education**

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

<https://twitter.com/SOSAust>  
[saveourschools690@gmail.com](mailto:saveourschools690@gmail.com)