



Australian Secondary Principals' Association (ASPA)

Submission – Education in Rural and Complex Environments

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A thriving public school system is essential to nation building. Australian Government schools cater for the majority of students including those students who experience disadvantage. At a time when the myriad of socioeconomic and related health impacts on children are being discovered, and uncovered, the Australian government has an opportunity to lead and support their communities by setting and maintaining funding levels that facilitate a thriving public education system filled with excited children at the heart of families proud to send their children to government schools.

Equity of educational outcomes

Universal access to education does not currently translate to a nationally consistent minimum standard of education provision for all students. The national goal that all students achieve their potential requires a powerful funding response that closes the gaps that exist in the universal, yet imbalanced education provision that prevails today. There is also evidence from across the nation, that the proportion of students with higher and more complex learning and social needs is growing in government secondary schools compared to other sectors.

In a country where the government has a public, moral and human rights obligation to every child, any funding model must have social justice and equity as a foundation. Our current system is high quality but low equity.

This disparity in income distribution is acknowledged internationally (OECD reports) as an indicator of student performance on any measure - that is, that students from families with higher income are more likely to achieve at higher levels than students whose families' incomes are lower. Low income is not a guarantee of low levels of achievement, but the data comparisons are compelling and deeply concerning.

As a Nation, for what purpose do we provide education for young Australians?

It is the position of the Australian Secondary Principals' Association that the Federal Government has an obligation to ensure that high quality public secondary education is provided to every young person no matter what their geographic, social or personal circumstances.

Education in our Nation is a democratic and human right. In contemporary Australia, the provision of education also comes with an expectation of a minimum standard that ranks highly when international comparisons are made. Australia has slipped in this area in recent years. For more than a decade funding

models for school education have not targeted school performance and need, but relied on a distribution of resources that did not best nurture the future prospects of the young in Australian communities - Australia's future.

The adolescent years are **high stakes years** as they are significant predictors for life success and wellbeing. It is during these years that exposure to adult and community problems have the potential to change the lives of young people. The opportunity to fund and support the needs of each adolescent is essential. The inclusive priorities of our national secondary school system should be the centerpiece of a fair and productive school-funding model. Further, there must be recognition that the core purpose of all secondary schools is education and that funding and additional resources should be targeted to ensure that all secondary schools can focus on the key work of teaching and learning.

Only government can ensure that there is a quality secondary schooling option for everyone and only government, working with the profession, can require achievement benchmarks that reflect the quality of that schooling. Transparent, consistent and equitable funding of national secondary education will be the measure by which the young people of this nation, their parents, teachers and principals will judge the commitment of governments to the education of all Australians.

Australia's challenge is to redress disadvantage through investment in government education, where the greatest challenges demonstrably lie. The review of Funding for Schooling Final Report (2011) provided more than sufficient evidence to suggest that Australian education was not meeting the needs of the most vulnerable. The Report outlines the findings by a highly credentialed independent review body. This was the most comprehensive review undertaken and it has not been fully implemented.

The Australian Secondary Principals' Association advocates for the full implementation of the needs based funding model to enable school leaders to put in place sustainable interventions and staffing to address the needs of students in their communities.

A non-political approach to Education:

It would be reasonable to assert that our educational leaders are best placed to make strategic decisions about the educational future of schools and systems but it appears unfortunately, that many decisions concerning education are made for political reasons and not necessarily sound educational reasons.

Something as important as education should not be dependent upon political funding or election cycles. It is time for agreement from all political parties around education to secure the future for our students. Education needs our political leaders and our education leaders to commit to a long term (10 year plus) plan and a structure for regular review. The further challenge then is to commit to its sustainability by ensuring adequate funding. Finland made a conscious decision in the recent past to adopt a non-political approach to education; making universal decisions about key factors that would not change with election outcomes. Australia **MUST** take this path if we are to achieve the outcomes desired by all Australians.

There is general agreement from all sides of politics on the aims for education and goals for our students. There is much common ground but we get tangled up in political cycles and trying to solve the same problems in different ways.

We have to get commitment from all parties to State initiatives and transparent long term planning and funding which will enable the systematic achievement of common goals. The education of our children is too important to let politics get in the way.

Following ASPA's response in broad categories of –

1. Valuing staff
2. Enhancing student potential

3. Building positive relationships

Valuing staff

Issue/commentary	The way forward
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Principals are best placed to make immediate and strategic decisions for the community. ➤ Genuine and authentic consultation and decision making. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Government (Federal and State) must genuinely engage ASPA in conversations and decisions around rural, remote and complex school community education.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A comprehensive and cotermporary incentive package for staff serving in rural, remote and complex schools must be developed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Develop a package to attract, sustain and retain staff in these locations ○ ASPA strongly suggests that package include but is not limited to – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Pay ➤ Accommodation ➤ Transfer/relocation process and expenses ➤ Additional leave (conditions) days to cater for travel to medical appointments etc
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Often, beginning school leaders are placed in rural/remote /complex schools. ➤ Placing a high value on experience of staff ➤ The use of retired Principals should be maximised in the development of new Principals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Develop a targeted mentor program using retired Principals to work with a cluster of beginning school leaders. ○ Carefully consider issues such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ IPS/non IPS schools ➤ Inter-jurisdictional transfers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The perception that it's too risky to go rural/remote communities as 'you won't get back'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Appoint high achieving graduates to rural/remote schools with a guarantee of return to their (nominated) preferred region after the agreed period of time. ○ Ensure that final year ITE students know the opportunities and supports that are available to them in rural/remote communities.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Relocation for HODs (and other classified officers) is problematic and often doesn't work. This results in effective HODs/DPs having to re-apply for the same position to move back to a preferred placement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Develop a renewed process for relocation of all classified officers, underpinned by the principle that rural/remote /complex service is valued.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Rural/Remote schools have a large number of beginning teachers which places strain on capacity of school to support ➤ Typical beginning school leaders have this scenario as another complexity ➤ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Adjust the staffing model to allow a differential allocative model to staff rural/remote/complex schools – e.g. reflecting that beginning teachers should be on a lighter load, distance to PL, distance to mentors etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Recognition of the outstanding work of rural/remote/complex schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Develop an awards structure specifically for rural/remote/complex schools

Enhancing student potential

Issue/commentary	The way forward
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Current By Pass/subsidy programs which support students from rural/remote communities to attend non-government embeds inequity of quality education provision for all students in all schools attending non State Schools is to be avoided - programs such as these exclude the more able students from our rural/remote/complex school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Discontinue such programs ○ Develop programs to subsidise students to continue their education in government schools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Students from rural/remote communities are inhibited from accessing further education in larger communities due to a lack of student accommodation ➤ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consider the procurement of student accommodation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ASPA acknowledges that this is large commitment – however, this type of commitment has very large social and community building potential.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Lack of experienced staff in rural/remote/complex schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ We must keep more experienced teachers in rural/remote/complex school situations and make it attractive for all type of staff to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Re-establish the teacher transfer system

stay and raise their children in that location.	
➤ Students not returning to rural and remote communities upon completion of their training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Develop a dedicated program attracting successful students in a range of professions back to rural and remote communities. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ This long term goal is focussed on community building and sustainability.

Building positive relationships

Issue/commentary	The way forward
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lack of consistent access to external supports, especially in the Health and Well-being area for school leaders <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Wellbeing support is closely linked to sustainability and success in the role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Develop a face-to-face support (not electronic) program for principals in rural/remote and complex schools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lack of contextual understanding in the planning/reporting requirements for rural/remote/complex schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ASPA believes that there is an assumption that rural/remote/complex communities have the capacity and expertise to ‘expand quality learning communities’ ○ ASPA believes that the capacity of many rural/remote/complex communities is not that of other communities. ○ Principals in rural/remote/complex communities are required to deliver on the same jurisdictional priorities as schools in less demanding settings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Make the ‘expand quality learning communities’ aspect of annual planning/reporting at the discretion of the school leader in consultation with the community.

Adam Smith - Education Analyst and Commentator in An Open Letter to Students in Australian Schools 15 / 11 / 2012 <http://sheilas.org.au/2012/11/an-open-letter-to-students-in-australian-schools> said:

“To the 3,541,809 students in 9435 schools in Australia, I wish I could promise that no matter where you live, no matter which school you go to, you will receive an education that equips and inspires you for the rest of your life. I wish I could promise that no matter how you learn or where you learn, your education will give you the skills you need to succeed. I wish I could promise that at the end of thirteen years of schooling, you will be confident and ready to embark on a combination of work and further learning that will give you the chance to live the life you want to live.

Sadly, I can’t promise any of this. Sadly, despite the many billions of dollars spent on school education in Australia, too many of you are missing out on the type of education you deserve”.

While the conversation continues about the funding model for education, the gap between those for whom demography determines destiny, and those for whom there is real choice, continues to widen.

ASPA represents some 4000 Principals, Deputy Principals and Heads of Department in Secondary, P-10 and P-12 schools across Australia. We are dedicated to the moral purpose that universal access can serve – an education provision that enables all students to achieve their potential.

Thank you for the opportunity for ASPA to contribute to the Education in Rural and Complex Environments Review.