



Australian Secondary Principals Association

Senate Select Committee on School Funding Submission

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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.

The need for a Review?

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.

Professor Jane Kenway opened her address at the Monash University Education Forum *What's Worth Fighting For?* with the following: *"We can judge the virtue of a nation by how well it treats its most vulnerable people. Equally, we can judge the virtue and thus the quality of an education system by how well it educates its most vulnerable students."* 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 the Australian Secondary Principals Association (ASPA) believes there is no need for further review and advocates for the full implementation of the needs based funding model.

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

It is the position of the Australian Secondary Principals Association that federal, state and territory governments have 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 Australian community - Australia's future.

The adolescent years are the **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 (such as drugs, peer violence and sexual experimentation) 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 public school system should be the centre piece of a fair and productive school funding model. Further, there must be recognition that the core purpose of all schools is education and that funding and additional resources should be targeted to ensure that all schools can focus on the key work of teaching & learning.

Only government can ensure that there is a quality 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 secondary public education will be the measure by which the young people of this country, their parents, teachers and principals will judge the commitment of governments to the education of all Australians.

ASPA is concerned that there is no consistency with balanced measures over time addressing educational need. Instead funding and support measures appear to be connected to political cycles, exacerbated by the fact that education is in both a federal and state responsibility and each has conflicting priorities. This creates uncertainty as exemplified by the policy announcements associated with the 2014 elections in South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria.

In this context ASPA provides the following submission to the 2014 Senate Select Committee on School Funding addressing the key themes.

1. The implementation of needs-based funding arrangements, from 1 January 2014, for all schools and school systems:

- i) Commonwealth funding, methods for the distribution of funds, funding arrangements and agreements with states and territories, as well as related accountability and transparency measures***

The review of Funding for Schooling Final Report (2011) outlines funding arrangements however the different agreements and implementation means there is little transparency around funding for individual states and territories and systems. There is also little transparency around the amount of funding into individual schools. The nexus of shared contribution and shared responsibility should be maintained.

ii) funding arrangements for individual schools

This lacks transparency and individual states and territories have made variations to the Gonski approach; this has added another layer of system – sector – school complexities. Schools need funding certainty and this was evident in the Gonski approach. This proposed move away from “silver bullet” funding that offers no sustainable interventions is essential.

iii) the extent to which schools can anticipate their total future funding and links to educational programs in future years

The SRS allows schools to anticipate future funding; school communities need funding certainty and with funding certainty school principals and their communities can successfully plan for sustainable interventions. Relying on “one off” buckets of money does not allow for long term sustainable interventions to improve student outcomes. The positive impact of SRS funding is that long term planning is possible and sustainable programs can be resourced. This also has a positive impact in terms of leadership expectations and performance.

Where schools are currently over SRS funded there will need to be transitional arrangements to the lower level. This could vary from school to school as capacity to cope varies.

iv) the consequential equity of educational opportunity between states and territories, schools and students

Without a national framework what can we assure? The SRS provided a guarantee that monies would get into schools and students would not remain victims of postcode and disadvantage.

v) progress towards the Schooling Resource Standard

It is clear that progress to a national SRS has stalled and there is no transparency around individual state and territory school funding models. ASPA believes that work must continue to implement the sophisticated modelling for SRS in all jurisdictions as informed by the review; only this will meet the needs of a high equity, high quality education system.

vi) the implementation of schools reforms

We have agreement from all sides of politics for the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young People and whilst there is much common ground, political cycles dictate that parties must try to differentiate and we get tangled up implementing different solutions to the same problems. This has to stop. We all want what is best for our children and our nation and surely if we all commit to achieving these goals everyone wins.

Whilst ASPA is supportive of the Students First reforms, appropriate funding is required to enable the implementation of these initiatives. Research emphasises the importance of quality teaching and quality leadership in improving outcomes for students. We acknowledge that teacher quality is important but “quality teaching” is the key. The importance of school leadership must not be overlooked; effective leaders develop effective teachers and enable them to engage successfully with the curriculum to improve outcomes for students. Effective leaders engage parents and communities in education and develop effective school communities.

Sustained school improvement relies heavily on quality leadership. Educational leaders are tasked with establishing a collective vision; initiating change to spur innovation; ensuring student learning; and increasing achievement. Good leaders develop a culture of improvement and at the same time, develop good teachers who improve outcomes for their students.

Principal autonomy will only result in improved student outcomes if principals have the capabilities, mindset, focus and resources to use it effectively. Current and aspiring school leaders, federal and state policy makers, and education stakeholders must understand how policy, research and practice come together to transform schools and school systems. Principals need to know what works and why it works; practice and policy must be informed by high quality contemporary research.

If the goal is to improve student outcomes, then there must be an investment in principals and their ongoing professional development. Only then can we hope to achieve sustained improvement. Principal autonomy by itself will not guarantee improved student outcomes. Autonomy is a powerful tool in the hands of the highly effective principal who has a focus on improved student outcomes and the resources to implement an ongoing cycle of collaboratively developed evidence based planning and review. School leaders and aspiring leaders need appropriate and timely professional development to ensure that the right person with the right skills and capacity is leading an autonomous school community.

Quality leadership is the key to transforming schooling and learning.

2. How funding arrangements will meet the needs of all schools and individual students, including Indigenous students, students with disability, small schools, remote schools, students with limited English, and students from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds;

The SRS model proposed by Gonski provided loadings to meet the needs of all schools and individual students, including Indigenous students, students with disability, small schools, remote schools, students with limited English, and students from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. It also provided a funding guarantee with necessary indexation from state and territory as well as the federal government.

The current inequity that exists in secondary schooling has many contributors. Significantly, in the education market, the choice model promoted by federal and state governments has contributed to the decline in enrolments in public secondary schools nationally. The importance of choice for parents has been promoted at the expense of equity for students

with the result that Australia's performance in international educational measures is slipping. Australia needs an inclusive funding model that ensures all our children, families and school communities have access to quality education that enables them to achieve their potential.

We must also ensure that we have the best teachers with the right skills in the right place to deliver an inclusive program that aims to achieve every child's potential and this will require the provision of excellent professional learning nationally.

3. The Government's proposed changes to the Australian Education Act 2013, related legislative instruments and their consequences;

Without knowing the proposed changes it would appear that any changes to reduce command and control will increase the disconnect between the commonwealth and the states. Whilst the current Act provides for transparency, we are concerned that this will be lost and result in deregulation / decoupling. ASPA does not support anything that reduces transparency and removes the obligations of governments to the provision of a high quality equitable education for all students.

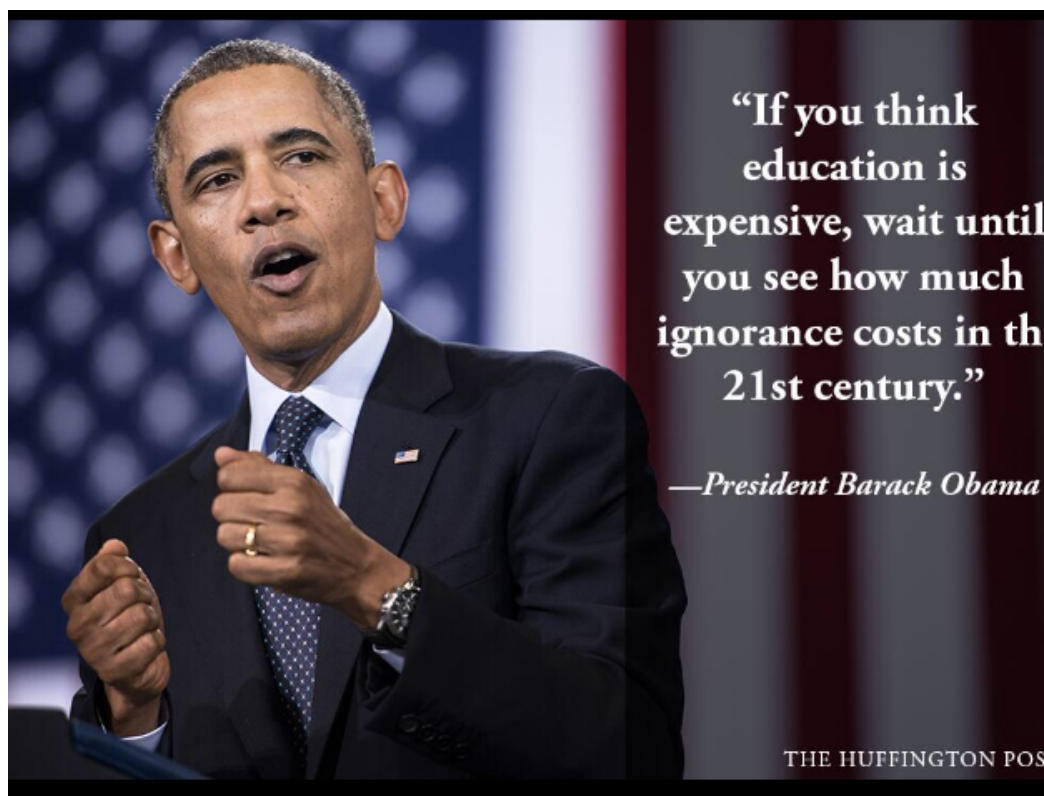
We support broad accountability measures within a system in which funding and support is transparent and where governments properly assume their obligations to ensure long-term provisions for all students. We do not support OFSTED type accountability.

4. The economic impacts of school education policy;

Education success is life opportunity. Year 12 completion equates to life earning with students making a greater social and economic contribution. School retention reduces youth unemployment, which improves outcomes and contributes to the national productivity.

It is generally acknowledged that the economic impact of implementing the SRS model is significant. This is primarily linked to the notion that no school will be disadvantaged (lose \$) which means that many schools will continue to be paid above entitlement during the implementation phase. Many of these schools have the financial capacity to operate effectively with reduced funding and no hardship. This should be considered.

We have general agreement around the SRS model; if this is model is implemented without the caveat of "no loss", the economic impact is more manageable.



5. The Government’s consideration of expert findings, research, public consultation and reports in the development and implementation of school policy, including the selection of experts to provide advice on education policy.

ASPA considers that expert findings, research, public consultation and reports are essential in the development and implementation of school policy. The selection of experts must be transparent and the expertise must be validated. The Gonski panel had expertise that were relevant and beyond reproach. ASPA supported this panel and its subsequent recommendations.

Future reviews should also ensure that respected, peer accredited experts are appointed. Diversity of expertise and integrity is essential for all appointments.

Conclusion:

If we are truly going to make a difference for all students and for Australia’s general prosperity, our political leaders across all parties must commit to a long-term plan, guarantee funding and build some sustainability into our interventions. Cross-party commitment to system initiatives, transparent long term planning and long term funding will enable the systematic achievement of our common goals.

Something as important as education should not be dependent upon political funding or election cycles. The education of our children is too important to let politics get in the way!

ASPA represents the Principals of over 2000 schools across the nation. We are dedicated to the moral purpose that universal access can serve – an education provision that enables all children to achieve their potential.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Review of Funding for Schooling