



# Australian Secondary Principals' Association (ASPA)

## Submission – Australian Education Amendment (Direct Measure of Income) Bill 2020

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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.

### **ASPA's response**

The Australian Secondary Principals Association (ASPA) is the peak body in Australia representing some 4000 school leaders across the country in government secondary schools. We work to create a better, preferred future for all students in Australia's government secondary schools and the society in which we live and work.

ASPA is committed to providing high quality, secondary education to young people in government school no matter what their geographic, social or personal circumstances are. Each member has an unswerving commitment to social justice and equity in our schools, and, by extension, our communities and nation. Government schools educate up to 70% on on??students in Australia.

ASPA notes however, that Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration sets two broad goals for Australian education –

1. An education system that promotes excellence and equity
2. All young Australians to become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners and informed members of the community.

ASPA is very concerned that these proposed changes will increase the equity divide in Australian education – the principles of social justice and equity will be further diminished. ASPA believes that the proposed changes will not address the two goals as listed above.

ASPA acknowledges that the use of a school community's socio-economic status (SES) has been a consistent means of determining the base amount of funding for every primary and secondary student in use since 2001, and recognises that, at the time, this was the best available data.

ASPA has concerns that this measure, whilst well-intentioned, is too broad (the SES score for a school is based on an averaging of characteristics of all people residing in a certain geographical area not just families of students attending the school) to reflect the reality of the families whose students attend the school. ASPA supports the use of the more precise measures now available proposed in this amendment.

ASPA commends the intention of the Amendment, to use a measure of income that is a targeted, more accurate approach, ensuring funding flows to the schools that need it most, and fully supports each aspect of the Bill:

- amend terminology from ‘SES score’ to capacity to contribute or ‘CTC score’;
- enable the Regulation to prescribe a new method for calculating a non-government school’s CTC score by reference to a direct measure of income of a school community;
- enable the Regulation to alter the way in which the Commonwealth share for a non-government school is calculated, and alter the period over which that transition occurs, in order to manage any adverse financial impacts arising from the change in CTC score methodology;
- broaden the definition of a ‘majority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander’ school and enable the Minister to make a determination that a school is likely to be a majority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school for the year to avoid any unintended application of the capacity to contribute methodology; and
- amend the Act to provide clear authority and appropriation to make GST-inclusive payments, where necessary.

*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.**