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Submission to the Senate Inquiry re: Schools Assistance Bill 2008.

Thank you for the invitation to make a submission to this inquiry. I appreciate your willingness to consult with the profession in relation to such an important piece of legislation.

I have examined the legislation and believe that it has some omissions that weaken it as a part of the Australian Government's commitment to an education revolution.

At the same time as this Bill is before Parliament, the Ministers of Education from across the country, including the Deputy Prime Minister, are having prepared a 'National Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians'. This document is intended to replace previous nationally agreed goal statements (Adelaide 1999 and Hobart 1989). The Schools Assistance Bill 2008 makes no mention of this, yet the National Declaration outlines the commitments that all governments will make to the development of education in Australia.

I draw your attention to several parts of the National Declaration (draft 17 October 2008). In the section on educational goals, the following explicit commitment is made:

Australian governments in collaboration with government, Catholic and independent school sectors commit to promoting equity and excellence in Australian schooling, including through high expectations and outcomes for all young Australians.

This means that all Australian governments and all school sectors must:

- *provide all students with access to high-quality schooling that is free from discrimination based on gender, language, sexual orientation, pregnancy, culture, ethnicity, religion, health or disability, and differences arising from students' socioeconomic background or geographic location*


- *strive to ensure that the socioeconomic and other forms of disadvantage cease to be a significant determinant of educational outcomes*
- *ensure that schooling contributes to a socially cohesive society that respects and appreciates cultural, social and religious diversity*

I am unable to find any section of the Bill that supports this commitment. I would have hoped that the funding agreements would have included requirements to show that non-government schools were abiding by this commitment, and that funding would be subject to doing this. Such a requirement could be added to Part 3, Division 3 of the Bill concerning the various acquittals in relation to funding agreements.

The Bill would be much enhanced if it were to incorporate the various commitments that the National Declaration on Education Goals for Young Australians makes. The Goals aim to strengthen accountability and transparency as well as improving outcomes for students, regardless of their backgrounds, and strengthened accountability in relation to the expenditure of Government funds over the next four years would be welcome.

I ask the Senate Committee to consider strengthening the legislation by adding to the sections on funding agreements the requirement for schools receiving Government funds to comply with the new Goals. This would not only ensure greater consistency but should also lead to improved educational outcomes for all young Australians, free from all forms of discrimination.

Yours faithfully



Jim McAlpine
President
New South Wales Secondary Principals' Council

31 October 2008.