

31st October 2008

John Carter  
Committee Secretary  
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee  
Department of the Senate  
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**A SUBMISSION on behalf of AUSTRALASIAN ASSOCIATION for PROGRESSIVE and ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION**

**RE: Senate Inquiry into Schools Assistance Bill 2008**

Dear John,

The Members of the Australasian Association for Progressive and Alternative Education (AAPAE) are passionate about the value and place of diversity in education and the central role of learner choice and responsibility for their own learning.

We welcome the Government's guarantee to maintain the current levels of funding for the next 4 years and hope that the planned Review will enable the development of funding which focuses on the needs of the individual, provides equity of access and is not dependent on requirements contrary to the philosophy of our diverse school communities.

We continue to be concerned that the Government has retained and increased the National Performance and Transparency Requirements which are part of the Funding Agreements between the Government and the Schools. Participation in national student assessments and reports to parents which include an assessment of the student's achievement against any available national standards and relative to the student's peer group at the school are contrary to the philosophies of many of our schools. We value the development of the individual in caring, co-operative, democratic learning environments. We seek policies and implementation of assessment and accountability processes which recognize individual difference and learning styles, enable collaboration and co-operation rather than competition and which reduce rather than increase the comparisons between students and schools which often results in low self esteem, constricted learning and fearful parents and communities.

One of the most recent international voices comes from Former Director of Institute School Education at the University of London, Peter Mortimore who was reported in the Australian, Oct 27th as saying that testing backfires, with teachers teaching to the test, spending an inordinate amount of time rehearsing the test, with the result that students were bored by their education and turned off. In the time that the testing system had been introduced, Britain has progressively slipped in testing by the OECD, and it performs well below Australia. The Federal Government's policy requiring schools to publicly report their results in national tests was described as macho and populist and overlooks the critical issue of the quality of teachers. Professor Mortimore said that Australia should look to Finland, which consistently tops the OECD tests, for inspiration rather than emulating policies that have failed in England [and United States, my addition]. Finland runs comprehensive schools, with no testing or streaming of students by ability and struggling students are identified and helped before they fall too far behind. Professor Mortimore said that key to the success in Finland was the very high standard of teacher education.

AAPAE would add to that the central importance of the quality of the relationship between the co-learners.

The requirement to implement a national curriculum is also of considerable concern as we seek the continued right for our schools to value and acknowledge explicitly what each learner brings to the table through implementation of diverse, flexible curricula including, emergent, negotiated and natural

learning. When curriculum is viewed as " experience" teachers are co-learners with their students, responding and wondering together about their world and taking action in it. As teachers we are learning about the child, who they are, their aspirations, their interests their ways of knowing and understanding and building from those to support and scaffold the child's learning in ways that are relevant, useful, timely, meaningful, engaging and inspiring. A national curriculum has the potential to seriously distract us from this process as the focus switches to ensure that external requirements are met rather than those of the learner whose sense of themselves as a self-directed learner who loves learning and will continue to learn throughout their life.

Thanks you for considering this submission.

Yours sincerely,

**Cecelia Bradley**

**President, Australasian Association for Progressive and Alternative Education.**