



Australian Secondary Principals' Association (ASPA)

Increasing disruption in Australian school classrooms

Submission

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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.

The following is ASPA's response.

The disciplinary climate of a classroom may be defined as the degree to which noise and disorder are kept at bay, students listen to what their teachers (and other students) say, and students can concentrate on academic tasks (Moos, 1979). Cheema and Kitsantas (2014) conceptualise disciplinary climate as the perceptions that students hold on the consistency of classroom rules and how teachers address behavioural problems during class. PISA adopts a more pragmatic definition according to which the disciplinary climate is measured by the extent to which students miss learning opportunities due to disruptive behaviour in the classroom.

It is imperative that when discussing this matter – the notion of disruption is not viewed in isolation. Clearly there is a student centred component, however, we must consider the much broader view through a very strong need to understand 'why' the disruption is occurring. The 'why' component is, without doubt, the driver of the issue and therefore, driver of the solution –

Student Complexity

- Has the student a disability or an undiagnosed disability (physical/intellectual)

- Has the student the correct funding of this disability and support to learn in the classroom
- Is there a mental health or wellbeing concern
- Is poverty effecting the student
- Is there a dysfunctional family/community at the heart of the matter
- What factors outside the school impact on the student's readiness to learn e.g. drugs, alcohol, domestic violence, homelessness, mobility,

Value of education

In todays contemporary world, ASPA believes that the community attitude and value of education has reduced significantly. This then is mirrored by the youth (student) in our schools.

Other matters to consider -

- **Safety** – to the disruptive student, other students and staff.
- **Learning and teaching** – other students in the classroom require (deserve) a quality education in a quality environment.
- **Resourcing** – need to appropriate and continuous. The principal of equity is critical here – equity of education not equal education.
- **Resourcing - impacts on a schools ability to provide flexible, alternative learning environments with low student/teacher ratios to cater for the needs of students not ready to learn.**
- **Teacher workload** – many teachers are at breaking point, the addition of disruptive youth adds to this load. This is a significant contributor to the lack of resilience some teachers exhibit and burnout.
- **Administrator workload** – as above as the disruptive student is often sent to an Administrator for action – this takes the Administrator away from learning and teaching tasks
- **Families** – disempowered parents/carers who lack the skills and support to raise young people through their adolescent years
- **Disconnect** – between the jurisdictional Education Department need and the school reality. This disconnect causes significant tension within the school and the broader community that contributes to an increased perception of the real issue.

Going forward

- The National Teacher Workforce Action Plan (NTWAP) provides context around community expectations of teachers. As a Nation, there is a clear need to address the lack of respect and its causes that teachers need to contend with in schools and the broader community.
- Involving the Principal Associations in the development of a National Strategy to address this issue we see as critical to the future. Principals run schools, know schools and work with their community – they are best placed to give salient advice.

References

1. Cheema, J. and A. Kitsantas (2014), "Influences of disciplinary classroom climate on high school student self-efficacy and mathematics achievement: a look at gender and racial-ethnic differences", International Journal of Science and Mathematics Education, Vol. 12/5, pp. 1261-1279, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10763-013-9454-4>.
2. Moos, R. (1979), Evaluating Educational Environments, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA.
3. PISA – PISA 2018 Results (Vol 3) :What School Life Means for Students' Lives