



Submission to the Senate Select Committee on School Funding Investment

**Prepared by: Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New
South Wales**

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The Federation of Parents and Citizens Association of New South Wales (P&C Federation) is committed to a high quality, free public education system which is open to all people, irrespective of culture, gender, remoteness, academic ability and socio-economic class and empowers students to take control their own lives and be contributing members of society. This commitment is based on the belief that all students have the capacity to learn and the Government has prime responsibility to provide an education system open to all, which is free and secular.

P&C Federation is pleased to submit our comments in regards to the inquiry into school funding investment. The Organisation's eighteen hundred and sixty affiliated school communities know that accessible and equitable needs based education is a National imperative and an investment in the future of Australia.

P&C Federation holds the unwavering view that our children's education must not be affected by politicking or returning the budget to surplus. P&C Federation calls on the government to place the needs of the child as the first and only priority when addressing matters pertaining to public education. In doing this we also believe the Government is addressing the needs of the nation as our children are our greatest asset and our future. Potential, talent and genius does not only reside amongst the wealthy, those that reside in our metropolitan areas or those that belong to certain religions, it can be found in any young Australian and should be properly supported and nurtured in all young Australians through a properly funded public education system!

P&C Federation fully supports the recommendations made in the Gonski Report as a fair and equitable funding model for schools. It represents the only currently viable needs based funding model that reduces the significant gap between the outcomes of rural and metropolitan students and between schools of high and low socio-economic backgrounds. It also represents a significant step forward in addressing the inequity in indigenous education.

New South Wales was the first state to sign up to the NERA funding arising from the Labor governments' adoption of the Gonski report. This funding has been flowing to NSW Public Schools with the greatest need for the last two years and all evidence suggests it is having a significant impact in producing improvements and positive student outcomes.

Unfortunately, just as the momentum is building the Federal government has decided not to fund the last two years of the NERA (GONSKI), the years in which the bulk of the money would have been delivered and had the most impact. P&C Federation believe that this is pulling the rug out from under public education, almost guaranteeing that the current needs based model will fail and leaving a great many schools to fall back into disadvantage.

Rural and remote public schools are particularly vulnerable as they represent nearly all of the educational institutions for students west of the Great Dividing Range. In metropolitan areas the loss of NERA funding will have a major impact on schools in low socio-economic areas. State-wide this would impact significantly on over half the public schools in the state.

It is important to recognise and emphasise the importance of involving parents and the local school community when determining the use of funds at the school level. At present it is often the school community who provide much of the gap in funding between what is

provided by the government and what is needed to ensure our students have the proper and adequate resources, and appropriate learning environments to support and nurture effective learning.

Public education provides schooling that imparts social, emotional and intellectual growth and the means to employment and meaningful participation in society. It must be resourced in a recurrent way to sustain positive community and individual outcomes as well as supporting the national interest. Money properly spent on intervention to address inequity can help reduce social and economic issues such as; social welfare, health, crime and unemployment. It is noted that an inability to access and engage in education is a feature of disadvantage. Therefore it follows that when education is properly accessed, delivered and realised a community can overcome disadvantage.

Public schools cater for students from all facets of society, indigenous, disabled, remote, limited English, refugees and socially or economically disadvantaged backgrounds. In our country it is only the Public Education system that is free and open to all. In many isolated and rural areas the local Government School is quite often the only educational facility that exists. A cut to Federal educational funding to the State Governments is going to have a devastating impact on the provision of Government Schooling and educational opportunity for Australians living in isolated and rural areas of NSW. It is often the case that government schools end up having to cater for students that the independent system does not cater for yet it does so without additional funding.

The individual needs of students should be addressed by the application of principles of equity, the participation and empowerment of students, parents and educators is supported in the UN International Declaration of Human Rights of the child. It is our belief that targeted needs based funding can make a difference when applied in conjunction with well-planned strategy. No policy, reform or review should seek to limit the undeniable right of children in Australia to access a quality education.

It appears that the Federal government do not wish to even consider the potential success of needs based funding in those states that have committed to it. P&C Federation believe that evaluation is a key tool in assessing the success and effectiveness of any reform. This funding model has only just been established, give it time to produce results and only then let the experts revisit the question and inquire upon the results and the sustainability of the model. With the Federal government now calling for an 'ideas boom' to drive Australia's future prosperity, appropriate needs based funding has to happen if this vision is to ever eventuate.

The education of children and young people must be a joint venture between government, parents and caregivers, the school and the community. A funding model which promotes schools working in partnership with parents and community must be highly valued as the means to achieving greater equity of outcomes.

P&C Federation acknowledges that as much as education must be a priority for governments it must not be used to fuel politically motivated agendas. Our Government, as leaders and legislators must demonstrate a sincere commitment to us, their constituents and to our children, for the good of society.