



The State School Teachers' Union of W.A. (Inc.)

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**SSTUWA Senate Education and Employment Committees submission
on
Better and Fairer Schools (Funding and Reform) Bill 2024 Inquiry**

Introduction

The SSTUWA exists to meet the needs of its members and to support the public education system. We are fierce public education advocates; the principles of inclusion and equity are central to our beliefs. The inequity gap created by past WA funding agreements is already visible and this will only grow should this deal proceed. Australians do not accept inequity and unfairness, yet this agreement will drive both. More broadly the Australian education funding model is already the most inequitable in the world and ridiculed by most developed countries. The OECD supports this view with evidence.

The SSTUWA has been advocating for full funding of WA public schools for more than a decade following the politicisation of school funding changing for the worse under the Howard government. WA public school students were identified as being of great need due largely to our geography and demographics. The signed WA agreement will not see WA schools receive greater than 96% of the Schools Resourcing Standard (SRS) – a minimum standard, whilst WA private schools will not fall below 100% SRS, an equity gap of greater than \$225 per annum of the agreement.

The SSTUWA position

Full funding for WA public school students needs to be a minimum of 100% of the SRS, and this does not accommodate the state government's ability to reduce their contribution by 4% as is currently the case and valued at \$225m in 2024. Alternatively, the WA public school agreement must become 104% of the SRS and the 4% flexibility remains. The figure of 4% climbs by approximately \$10m per annum, by the end of the new proposed agreement, the 4% gap alone for WA public schools students will be in excess of \$300m per annum.

Full funding of WA public schools would mean smaller class sizes. WA has the largest class sizes in the country. Greater support for students with increasing complexities and support for teachers and their schools to be able to meet these challenging demands is urgently needed, (*Facing the Facts; A Review of Public Education in Western Australia* (Dr Carmen Lawrence *et al*; 2023):

- WA student performance on national and international tests has not shown any consistent improvement over the last decade.
- WA student school attendance and retention rates have been declining.
- ATAR completion rates are declining.
- Educational achievement in Australia is stagnating.
- A significant minority of WA students report little enjoyment and satisfaction with their school experiences.
- A variety of indicators show that that Aboriginal student achievement is not improving.

Better and fairer investment in public education should deliver:

- Desperately needed capacity *in* schools in relation to:
 - Disadvantaged children and young people
 - Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or complex needs, including those with disabilities.
 - Children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
 - Aboriginal children and young people.
 - Education in the early years.
 - Improving behaviour and reducing aggression and violence.
 - Improving student outcomes.
- Resources for teachers and school leaders developed and produced at system-level to obviate the need for schools to rely on expensive and sometimes dubious commercial products to deliver curriculum, student wellbeing programs and professional learning.
- High quality local services and support to students, teachers and school leaders.
- Relief from the impact of rising costs, especially the cost of utilities, on school budgets.

In conclusion

The gap between the Albanese Government's offer to states of 22.5% and the full 25% is worth an additional \$1000 per student. Yet, the legislation is proposing to lock in a floor of only 20% which any future government could revert to, resulting in funding cuts to schools.

It is essential that the Commonwealth government set a floor of 25% rather than 20%. Failure to do so threatens the life chances of countless Australian children and young people, undermines our hopes for an equitable and inclusive community and diminishes our prospects for productivity and prosperity as a nation.

The evidence

A Decade of Inequity; How Australian governments have funded private schools above public schools since 2013 (Australian Education Union, 2024)

A Different Kind of Brilliance; Report of the inquiry into support for autistic children and young people in schools (Education and Health Standing Committee, 2024)

Australian Government response to the Senate Standing Committees on Education and Employment report: The national trend of school refusal and related matters (Australian Government, 2024)

Child Development Service in Western Australia: Valuing our children and their needs (Select Committee into Child Development Services, 2024)

Child Poverty in Australia 2024; The lifelong impacts of financial deprivation and poor-quality housing on child development (Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre, 2024)

Delivering School Psychology Services (Office of the Auditor General, 2022)

Education at a Glance (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2024)

Facing the Facts; A Review of Public Education in Western Australia (Lawrence *et al*, Commissioned by the State School Teachers Union of WA, 2023)

Findings from the Australian Early Development Census (Australian Government, 2021)

Improving Outcomes for All: The report of the Independent Expert Panel's Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System (O'Brien *et al*, Commissioned by the Australian Government, 2023)

Indicators of Wellbeing Survey (Commissioner for Children and Young People, 2023)

Inquest into the 13 Deaths of Children and Young Persons in the Kimberley Region (State Coroner R V C Fogliani, 2019)

Profile of Children and Young People in WA (Commissioner for Children and Young People, 2024)

Report 8; REPORT REVIEW 2023: Examination of selected reports by the Commissioner for Children and Young People (Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People, 2024)

Report 9: PATHWAYS TO THRIVING: Enhancing support for humanitarian children and young people in Western Australia (Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People, 2024)

Report on Government Services 2024 (Productivity Commission, 2024)

Review of the National School Reform Agreement (Productivity Commission, 2022)

Understanding and Reducing the Workload of Teachers and Leaders in Western Australian Public Schools (Robinson and Hamilton, Commissioned by the Department of Education for the WA Minister for Education, 2023)

Wellbeing Across the Regions (Commissioner for Children and Young People, 2023)

Yours sincerely

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