

Submission to the Senate Select Committee on School Funding



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Prepared by: South Australian Secondary Principals' Association (SASPA)

The South Australian Secondary Principals' Association (SASPA) is a professional body that represents the interests of principals, deputy principals and assistant principals from government secondary schools in South Australia. SASPA works with the profession to shape a new paradigm of leadership and learning in order to create a better, preferred future for all students in South Australia's government secondary schools. We are committed to ensuring that high quality government secondary education is provided to young people regardless of their geographic, social or personal circumstances.

For this to be realised the Australian government has to accept its role in setting and maintaining funding levels that facilitate a thriving public education system. As we know, the Gonski Review concluded that Australia was under-investing in education and that the existing funding was not going to where it was most needed. We are also well aware of the significant variations in how the *Better Schools* funding is flowing from state to state. South Australia, in particular, has been significantly disadvantaged by having an agreement that has the bulk of its funds scheduled to flow in Years 5 and 6 of the agreement (should the Federal Government honour these 2 final years).

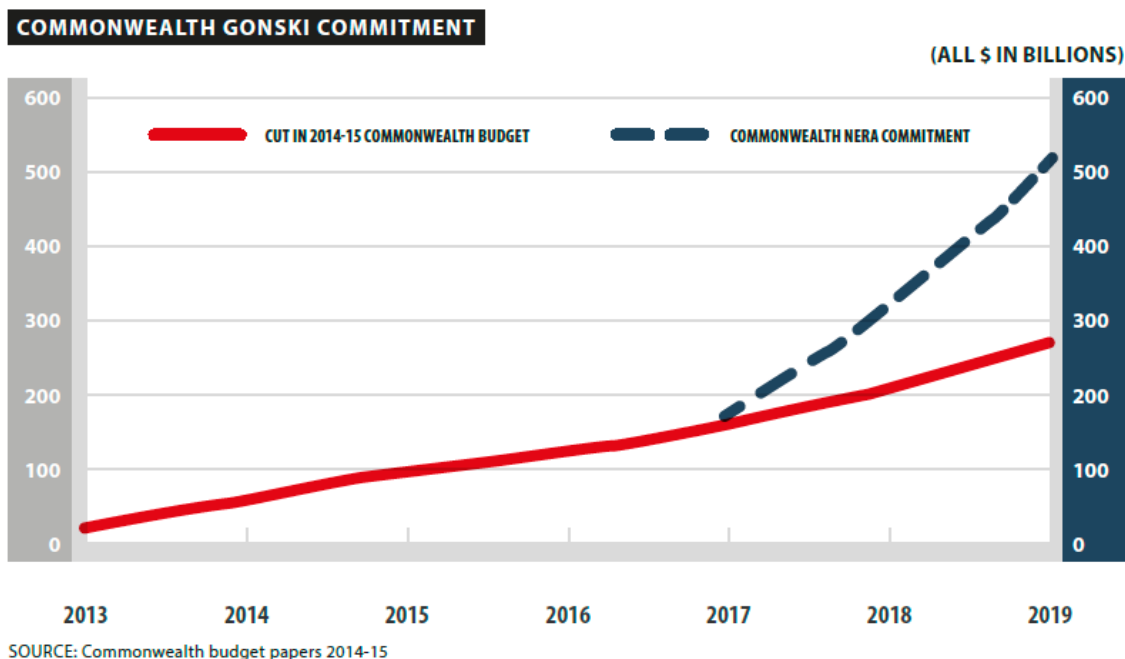


Table 1: This graph shows the projected shortfall of funds flowing from the Commonwealth Government to SA Government; i.e., \$45 million (2017-18) to \$200 million (2018-19).

Equity of educational outcomes

Universal access to education does not currently translate into a nationally consistent minimum standard of educational provision for all students.

The national goal that all students achieve their potential requires a deliberate funding response that closes the gaps that exist in the universal, yet imbalanced education provision we have today. The proportion of students with higher and more complex learning and social needs is growing in the South Australian public education sector and their resource needs are not being met.

In a nation where the Federal Government has a public, moral and human rights obligation to every child, our model of funding education must have equity as a foundation principle.

The OECD has described our education provision as high quality but low equity. This disparity in income distribution is acknowledged internationally (OECD reports) as an indicator of student performance on any measure; i.e., that students from families with higher income are more likely to achieve at higher levels than students whose families' incomes are lower. Whilst low income is not a guarantee of low levels of achievement, the data comparisons are compelling and deeply concerning.

Australia's national challenge is to redress disadvantage through investment in public 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 comprehensive Report outlines the findings by a highly credentialed independent review body.

SASPA's peak body, the Australian Secondary Principals' Association (ASPA), advocates for the full implementation of the needs based funding model to enable school leaders to put in place sustainable interventions to address the needs of students in their communities.

Our public education must be based on both equity and excellence.

A non-political approach to Education:

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 plan (a minimum of 10 years) 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 also 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 so much common ground to build upon but we get tangled up in political cycles where the same problems are addressed in different ways.

We have to get commitment from all parties to key national initiatives and undertake transparent long term planning and funding designed to systematically achieve our common goals.

The education of our children is too important to let politics get in the way.

Impact on curriculum:

Having a national curriculum does not guarantee equal opportunity to succeed with that curriculum. Adequate resourcing allows better access to the whole curriculum and specialist teachers. School communities do not want school leaders to have to make choices around curriculum provision because there is insufficient funding to pay for teachers and / or allied staff and/or materials.

If funding investment is reduced:

- It will impact on curriculum choice; school leaders will need to rationalise resources and this will reduce choice
- It will, in many schools, reduce access to specialist teachers
- Many schools will need to combine classes in Years 11 and 12 to facilitate student choice
- Schools will have less capacity to adapt and innovate
- This will impact on a schools ability to provide professional learning to up skill staff and develop common understandings
- School leaders will struggle to bring the required expertise into their schools.

Isolation exacerbates the impact of each of these points in rural and remote schools.

Impact on students:

Public education must cater for all students. Whilst we celebrate the diversity in our schools, we understand that the more diverse the student cohort, the more human, physical and financial resources are needed to service their needs.

The Gonski Report concluded that too many children were missing out on the education they needed due to insufficient resourcing.

If funding investment is decreased:

- The ability for schools to cater for diversity will be reduced even further and students will have less access to the diverse curriculum they require
- Students will have less choice
- Participation rates will decrease
- Targeted programs (literacy and numeracy) will be under threat
- Student support programs will be under threat.

Impact on Australia

"If you think education is expensive, wait until you see how much ignorance costs in the 21st Century." President Barack Obama

The Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, has used his first few months in the role to share a compelling narrative about our nation's future: a more entrepreneurial economy, a labour market geared to creativity, innovation and advanced technologies, and a workforce with a set of sophisticated and transferable skills such as critical and creative thinking, problem solving, and creating and responding to change. This view of the future is consistent with South Australia's Premier, Jay Weatherill, who recognises the need for us to become the Innovation State.

As an outsider looking in, both the Prime Minister and our Premier share a common vision of the future and the fundamental role that education will play in shaping it. Where they differ, is on the funding levels for education and the model for its distribution.

To actualise the shared vision for the future that Australia and South Australia seek, we must invest in education and honour the full recommendations of the Gonski Review.