



Australian Secondary Principals Association

Submission to the Senate Select Committee on School Funding Investment

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The Australian Secondary Principals' Association (ASPA) is a professional body that represents the interests of principals, deputy principals and assistant principals from government secondary schools across Australia. ASPA works with the profession to shape a paradigm of leadership and learning in order to create a better, preferred future for all students in Australia's government secondary schools. We are committed to ensuring that high quality government secondary education is provided to young people no matter what their geographic, social or personal circumstances.

A thriving public school system is essential to nation building. Australia's public 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, Australian governments have 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 public schools. 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.

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 state jurisdictions that the proportion of students with higher and more complex learning and social needs is growing in public 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 equity as a foundation. 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 - 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 federal, state and territory governments have 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 Australian community - 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 public school system should be the centrepiece of a fair and productive school-funding model. Further, there must be recognition that the core purpose of all schools is education and that funding and additional resources should be targeted to ensure that all schools can focus on the key work of teaching and learning.

Only government can ensure that there is a quality schooling option for everyone and only government, working with the profession (public school leaders), can require achievement benchmarks that reflect the quality of that schooling. Transparent, consistent and equitable funding of secondary public education will be the measure by which the young people of this country, their parents, teachers and principals will judge the commitment of governments to the education of all Australians.

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.

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 national 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!

Terms of Reference:

Funding must be sufficient to ensure that all schools can offer the breadth and depth of curriculum to cater for the diverse needs of the students in their school. Since public education must cater for all students, diversity of curriculum and therefore appropriate resourcing to support it is essential.

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 will exacerbate the impact of these points in rural, regional and remote schools.

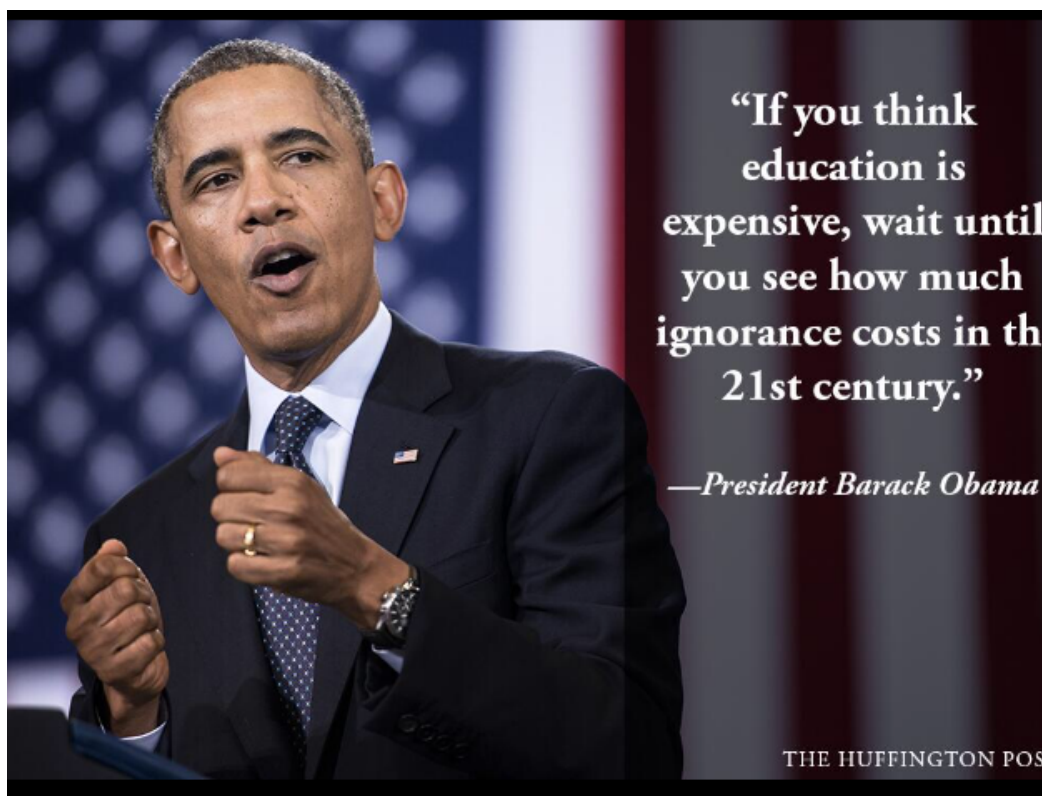
Impact on students

Since public education must cater for all students, diversity is essential and this places heavy demand on human, physical and financial resources. Funding must recognise the breadth and depth of diversity and ensure that funding is sufficient to provide equal opportunity for all. 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



Poor engagement and low school attainment result in poor educational and social outcomes including increased risk of mental illness. A lack of education results in diminished employment opportunities

and the social issues and impacts of unemployment. School retention reduces youth unemployment, which improves outcomes and contributes to the national productivity.

A new OECD Report ***Low-Performing Students - Why They Fall Behind and How To Help Them*** (10th February 2016) shows that a socio-economically disadvantaged student in Australia is six times more likely to be a low performer than an advantaged student. After taking account of several other factors influencing school performance such as gender, immigrant and language background, family structure, urban or rural location, pre-primary education and grade repetition, a socio- economically disadvantaged student is still five times more likely to be a low performer than an advantaged student.

The socio-economic gap in the probability of low performance is much larger in Australia than the average for OECD countries. The average gap for the OECD increases by only 7 percentage points compared with 22 in Australia. This indicates that the risk factors have a much stronger effect on the performance of disadvantaged students in Australia than the average for the OECD.

While the conversation continues about funding for education, the gap between those for whom demography determines destiny, and those for whom there is real choice, continues to widen. 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 system must be based on both equity and excellence.