

Submission to school funding inquiry

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I am a Professor of Educational Leadership at Monash University Faculty of Education. I am also a proud public school graduate who was the first in my family to finish high school let alone go to university.

I currently lead an ARC study of the emotional labour of public school principals: *Invisible Labour: Principals' emotional labour in volatile times*. We argue that the emotional management work of caring for others whilst managing one's own emotions is a crucial part of the 21st century principalship. I have asked public school principals to talk anonymously about their experiences of critical incidents and how they manage their emotions and that of others in volatile and polarised times. The accounts the principals provide are shocking. See our website for their accounts and discussion of the study's preliminary findings:

<https://www.monash.edu/education/research/projects/school-principals-emotional-labour-in-volatile-times>

One of the most clear and striking aspects of public school principals' emotional management work is how they are struggling to manage children and families with highly complex emotional and physical needs in public systems that are severely under resourced and that lack specialist teachers, specialist training and resourcing. 85% of the most disadvantaged students in Australia attend public schools. But public schools are persistently underfunded despite serving some of the most disadvantaged students in our country. And they do not have the luxury of turning away students. The result of the persistent underfunding of our public schools is we now rank in the bottom third of OECD nations when it comes to educational equity. The current debate which blames teachers for students not achieving is a convenient way to take attention away from a severely underfunded public education sector which is leading to student disengagement, poor behaviour, an increase in student and parent violence (which is related to structural violence when services are denied to students who have complex needs and are not getting appropriate support) and teacher attrition. The costs to our society in the continued and severe under funding of public schools are huge.

I note the following:

- The gap between the Albanese Government's offer to states of 22.5% of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) and the full 25% is worth an additional \$1000 per student. Yet, their 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 crucial that the Commonwealth government set a floor of 25% SRS share as opposed to 20%. If full funding is delivered for public schools, the cost of living benefits for parents, families would be huge. It would lead to much higher teacher retention, a lessening in student violence, misbehaviour and disengagement and ultimately a more economically and socially productive society.