



Australian Education Union
2008 Annual Federal Conference

Conference Statement
Public Education

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Following more than a decade of systematic coalition attack on public education, the election of the Rudd Labor Government presents an opportunity for a change in policy direction.

With ALP governments in every State and Territory, and in the spirit of cooperative federalism, the opportunity now exists to end the blame shifting between the Commonwealth and States/Territories that has plagued public education. The opportunity also now exists for all levels of government to fulfill their primary obligation to provide, and adequately fund, high quality public education.

There would be no greater and more tangible example of governing in the national interest than ensuring that public education is a national priority.

It is now time to give the "Education Revolution" real substance and meaning through significant investment of additional funding for public education.

In light of evidence showing that the SES funding model is discredited, corrupt and distorted, Conference calls on the Federal Labor Government to abandon its commitment to maintain this model until 2012.

To enable all students to reach their full potential and excel, we call on the Rudd Labor Government to meet the \$2.9 billion annual shortfall in funding for public schools and support the development and implementation of a comprehensive national literacy and numeracy strategy.

The success of this strategy is reliant upon the following key areas:

- A curriculum guarantee for all students – We need an Education Revolution that guarantees all students access to a rigorous, rich and rewarding curriculum aimed at equipping them with the knowledge and skills required to be successful in the 21st century. A curriculum guarantee will provide all students, irrespective of their socio economic background or where they live, with the chance to pursue the widest range of opportunities in life.

- The reduction of class sizes – Governments must acknowledge that Australia has above OECD average class sizes. Reducing class sizes would allow teachers to increase individual attention for all students – including gifted and talented students and those with other special learning needs. More teachers would ensure that all students receive the education they need and deserve through expanded enrichment and extension programs and appropriate early intervention programs.
- Competitive, professional teacher salaries – Teachers' salaries have been identified by major employers as in urgent need of improvement to recruit and retain quality teachers. The guarantee of a rigorous, rich and rewarding curriculum for all students can only be made possible with a highly qualified, well paid teaching service. Governments need to ensure the equitable distribution of teachers to ensure there is a qualified teacher in every classroom across the nation, no matter where it is located.
- The provision of 21st Century learning environments – Australian children deserve learning environments conducive to the most effective teaching and learning in the 21st century. Governments must urgently redress the continuing under funding of public education infrastructure - its buildings, facilities and equipment. The provision of high quality teaching and learning environments befitting a 21st century education in an economically advanced nation like Australia is an absolute necessity.
- A national strategy for Indigenous education – We need a dramatic investment in Indigenous education to put an end to the national disgrace which continues to see many of our Indigenous students denied basic access to education. Bringing the standard of education available for Indigenous Australians and the educational outcomes attained up to that of the rest of the country must be a priority.
- At least 20 hours of free high quality public pre-school education per week – Research continues to show that by the time children begin the compulsory years of schooling, many of the factors contributing to future inequality are evident. Disparities in access to early childhood learning are further exacerbating those inequalities. The commitment by the ALP to fund 15 hours of early childhood education represents a significant step forward. Further funding is now needed to provide every 4 year old child in Australia with at least 20 hours of free high quality public pre-school education per week. Access for Indigenous children must be a priority.

Beyond schooling, the Education Revolution must also invest in TAFE to ensure further education and a skilled workforce for Australia's future.

Since 1997, the Howard government cut TAFE Funding by 26% in real terms. This resulted in hundreds of thousands of Australians being turned away from further education and training, including from key skilled trade areas.

Conference calls on the Rudd Government to dramatically increase investment in the TAFE system where the shortfall is calculated at \$470m in 2008 rising to over \$2b over the next 4 years. Such additional funding must allow for projected growth in enrolments, and invest in teachers and quality teaching through a Quality Improvement Fund.

The success of the Education Revolution in TAFE also involves a reduction of class sizes, competitive professional teacher salaries, the provision of 21st Century learning environments, a national strategy for Indigenous education and access to comprehensive vocational knowledge.

In addition, the Rudd Government must arrest the drift within TAFE towards the teaching of narrow, instrumentalist employer-driven skills and support a broad and comprehensive vocational education experience for all students.

Conference calls on the Rudd Government to dismantle Australian Technical Colleges and roll them in to existing public education structures.

The TAFE system offers the most efficient and effective way of educating and training Australians to meet the country's needs and build our skills base.