

**JENNY MACKLIN'S**  
**SPEECH TO THE AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION UNION ANNUAL**  
**CONFERENCE**  
**17<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2003**

Thank you for the invitation to be here today.

I'm excited about 2004 – this is the year we end the Howard years of lost opportunities.

Education will be a key battleground and one of the top priorities for Labor in the upcoming election and on all fronts – the development of policy, the execution of political strategy and the hard yakka of daily political campaigning.

Labor has an ambitious education agenda and I am determined to win Government and implement it.

If Olympic medals were given out for a country's performance in reading, mathematics and science, the silver medal would be Australia's for the taking in all three categories.

And the secret to our medal success would largely be our public education system – a system that proudly educates 70 per cent of Australians.

Your conference is a chance to celebrate the achievements of our public schools and the inspiring work of public school teachers.

It is also a chance to highlight the areas that need reform, especially the gross inequities that are resulting from the way the Federal Government allocates the nation's education dollars.

Teachers contend with the impacts of these inequities on a daily basis and know more than most what needs to be done. I would like to congratulate the AEU on the policy you took to the ACTU Congress that sets out the priorities you see for education in our country.

I would also like to congratulate the AEU for raising the profile of early childhood education based on the knowledge that the first five years of a child's life are critical to his or her educational and social development.

Mark Latham has elevated early childhood development onto the national agenda. It is the first rung in what he calls the ladder of opportunity and he will make sure it is accessible to all. This is one of his personal passions and he is eager to lay out his agenda.

### **School Funding**

Schools funding is set to be a major election issue in 2004.

It is time we reformed school funding so that educational and financial need is at the centre of what determines funding.

Labor will end the scandalous Howard Government policy that gives some of the nation's wealthiest schools, like Trinity Grammar in Sydney, a 220 per cent funding increase; while government and needy non-government schools receive much smaller increases.

Labor understands that many schools, especially in the public sector, are operating with ageing and outdated buildings and facilities.

Not only does this impact on the education students receive, it also sends clear signals about how much society values education.

Expenditure on capital works in public schools is around \$350 per student. For independent schools, the average expenditure is over \$1,500 per student. These figures demonstrate what an enormous gap there is in resources between schools and that need is not driving school funding decisions.

If it did Commonwealth funding to private schools would not be outstripping funding to public schools by nearly two to one.

Labor wants to see all children in all schools have access to a great education.

We will base funding for all schools, both government and non-government, on clear principles of educational and financial need.

The Labor Party's draft national platform to be debated at our national conference in the next few weeks will commit Labor to including the total level of resources available to a school including those from private sources when assessing financial need.

Labor is serious about quality. We believe that public schools should set the educational and professional standards that apply for all. We want our public schools to be the standard bearers.

That is why we plan to make public funding to non-government schools subject to meeting quality standards for curriculum and teaching, and planning arrangements that promote the economic use of public resources.

We will introduce accountability and reporting conditions that are consistent with those required by governments for schools in the public sector.

A quality education must be provided to all students regardless of the school their parents choose.

Every student is entitled to go to a properly resourced school and every teacher deserves to teach at one. Labor's policy strives for an excellent standard of resources and quality learning for the many, not just the few.

These are the principles upon which Labor's policy work is based and these are the principles we will fight the next election on.

Our policy is in stark contrast to the Government's inequitable and divisive funding model – a model that reveals the Howard Government's obsession with an elite few at the expense of the many.

In 2004 around \$100 million of federal funding will go to elite private schools, which less than two per cent of school children will ever see the inside of.

When I become Education Minister my job will be to make sure that every child goes to a school with the resources they need to succeed in the modern world.

Brendan Nelson says that school resources don't matter; it's about the ability of the child. This is what he said last November:

*It is true that the non-Catholic independent schools (and particularly the high fee ones) have a greater proportion of students going on to university. However, these schools frequently recruit bright students and this has an impact on their results just as it does for academically selective state high schools. It is ability that is at work in both cases – not the resources.*

Students with ability he claims are going to perform regardless of resources. Why on earth then is he giving these elite high fee schools funding increases of 220 per cent?

Wouldn't the increase in Commonwealth funding be better directed to needy government and non-government schools that aren't even heated properly – or, for those in the north, air conditioned.

For me every child has ability but not all have the same opportunities.

While OECD/PISA results show that on average Australian students do exceptionally well by international standards, the tests also reveal our education system is leaving some students behind.

Compared with other nations Australia has a wider range of performance in reading literacy. This means that while some students do very well, others are struggling.

It also shows that socio-economic background in Australia has a greater influence on reading ability than in the majority of other countries.

For a country proud of its egalitarian heritage we can't let this go on. The solution can only lie with our public education system – the most important rung in the ladder of opportunity.

Despite the need for action, the Howard Government has washed its hands of public education. It is a disgrace that our Federal Government has shirked its responsibility for the schools that teach 70 per cent of Australian students.

Labor rejects this view. For Labor public education is a national priority.

Labor strongly believes that the national government shares responsibility for all schools in partnership with the states.

That is why Federal Labor will work towards a national agreement with state and territory Labor governments. This will include a clear commitment by all

governments to providing and supporting high quality public schooling as a national priority.

### **Opportunities for All**

While, John Howard is obsessed with giving more and more Commonwealth funds to a small group of elite wealthy schools, I am obsessed with giving more Commonwealth support to the 200,000 young people who have left school before completing year 12 or its vocational equivalent. I want them to either stay on at school or be in some other form of education or training that will give them the chance to get a good job.

The ALP platform has been redrafted to include a new commitment that guarantees all young people access to valued learning to Year 12 of schooling or its equivalent in other areas of education and training.

And we aim to do what no Australian Government has contemplated – give every Australian with the motivation and the marks the opportunity to obtain a tertiary qualification – at either TAFE or university.

We do not believe in turning away qualified Australians committed to furthering their education.

Labor's policy means tens of thousands more Australians with TAFE or university qualifications.

Under Labor's policy every year, 20,000 extra university places will be created.

We will also create an extra 20,000 new TAFE places every year.

It's impossible to over-state the absolutely critical role of education and training to a young person's future. And it is an absolute tragedy that so many young people are allowed to fall through the gaps.

There are regions in Australia today where more than half the students leave school by fifteen, youth unemployment tops thirty percent, and many families rely on welfare.

Yet the Education Minister says we push our children too hard; we should allow them to remain in what he describes as life's 'quiet pond'.

But quiet ponds are only quiet from afar. When you step up close you see social decay, crime and violence.

That's the reality of Brendan Nelson's 'quiet pond'.

It's simple to provide high quality education for the few.

Shrinking the quiet pond is much harder, but that is the challenge Labor has set.

## **TEACHERS**

Teachers are the backbone of our education system. And quality teaching is the foundation for excellence in education.

A good teacher transfers knowledge to their students. An excellent teacher inspires students with a thirst for knowledge that transcends the classroom lesson. You open a child's mind to their full potential; empowering them with the greatest lesson of all – how to learn. Excellent teaching broadens horizons and lays the foundations for a truly prosperous nation.

Australia is facing an imminent crisis as large numbers of experienced teachers reach retirement age over the next decade.

The Federal Minister's own review of teaching and teacher education acknowledges that shortages of up to 30,000 teachers are estimated for later in the decade.

Labor has already decided to fund an extra 4,600 new teacher education places as part of our higher education policy.

We will also do more through targeted programs to mentor new teachers, especially the large numbers in outer suburban and regional areas, and to retain good teachers in the system. We will work with the AEU to develop the best ways of providing incentives for the best teachers to work in the toughest schools.

## **Conclusion**

When Minister Nelson starts quoting the great men of history in defence of his policies, I sometimes think of Napoleon's advice that one should: *'never interrupt your enemy when he is making a mistake'*.

But on this occasion, we can't afford to follow this advice. It is time to interrupt the policy mistake that the Howard Government is making.

Australia needs a change of government.

Labor's education policy platform will draw a line in the sand between our hopes for high quality, inclusive and energised approach to schooling for all Australians and the backward, divisive and inward vision of the Howard Government.

To end, I went to Cohuna Consolidated School, Wangaratta High School and like Lisa Forest send my children to public schools because as she says:

*I'd rather my child go to a school that reflects the broader society he'll enter after his school days, where on a day-to-day basis his sense of*

*right and wrong, the way he thinks and feels about the world, will be challenged. I don't want him to be scared or suspicious of someone who isn't the same as him. From my experience a public school is the only place that guarantees him those experiences. To provide him with less would be a disservice.*