

Australian Education Union

Policy

A Charter for Fair Go Schooling

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The AEU supports public schooling. Public schools and public school educators provide an inclusive and comprehensive environment in which all students are welcome, in which their special needs are recognised and met, and in which each student is supported to develop to his or her maximum potential regardless of cultural, social, economic, ethnic background, gender, sexual preference or personal circumstances.
- 1.2. It is important that disadvantage is recognised as a community issue affecting whole schools. Programs designed to address disadvantage should be aimed at building community capacity to improve outcomes for students
- 1.3. Within this context the AEU recognises that there are many schools that need additional resourcing in order to provide their students with the same opportunities as students in other schools.
- 1.4. It is therefore imperative that funding address disadvantage on a whole school, community, and system basis, with greater resourcing going to those schools in greatest need.

2. POVERTY AND EDUCATION

- 2.1. Socioeconomic disadvantage is a key factor that overarches and exacerbates other problems of inclusive practice and therefore must be addressed as a priority to achieve equality of outcomes for all students.
- 2.2. The AEU acknowledges that poverty and disadvantage are matters that originate outside of school, but that the nature of schooling can either increase or decrease inequality.
- 2.3. The AEU supports curriculum, pedagogical and educational practices that lead to greater access and equity for all students, which reject the exclusion and alienation of any students, and which recognises the importance of high expectations.
- 2.4. It will work with and support community organizations that are seeking to alleviate poverty in the community. In particular it will continue to support and contribute to the work of the National Coalition Against Poverty (NCAP).

3. RESPONSIBILITY AND FUNDING

- 3.1 The AEU notes as an improvement the principles of funding expressed by MCEETYA at its meeting in Auckland in July 2002 (Background Paper 1), which give greater primacy to public education and call for a collaborative partnership between the states and territories and the Commonwealth in funding. It notes that these were endorsed by all states and territories, but not by the Commonwealth.
- 3.2 Commonwealth and state or territory governments must give greater priority to equity and disadvantage in funding decisions and work in partnership with each other, teacher unions and the teaching profession to achieve equity for Australian children.
- 3.3 The Commonwealth government should increase its role as a funder of initiatives and programs designed to create greater equity in Australian society.

- 3.4 It should resume funding for the Australian Center for Equity Through Education.
- 3.5 The AEU asserts that issues of disadvantage are inherently part of all funding and policy decisions and supports the idea of an “Equity impact study” for major educational decisions made by governments. Schools should also consider the impact on poverty and disadvantage in all decisions.
- 3.6 Within a context where schools are given the flexibility to find the most appropriate solutions, departments must accept responsibility for the situation overall. It cannot be left to individual schools to decide whether equity is an issue for it, and whether it gives priority to programs to counter disadvantage.
- 3.7 All jurisdictions should have a comprehensive and coordinated plan to tackle disadvantage and inequity through education. There should be clear responsibility for matters of equity in all education departments.
- 3.8 Some matters of equity and disadvantage are best dealt with by giving schools extra funding for the particular profile of student need in their school, as in the case of specific disabilities. The AEU also strongly reaffirms that in many circumstances disadvantage is a community issue and that the collective resources of the community are an important consideration in dealing with equity. There is therefore an ongoing need for programs that target schools and their communities that are collectively experiencing disadvantage.

4. CHARACTERISTICS OF DESIRABLE PROGRAMS

- 4.1. School programs designed to alleviate disadvantage and create greater equity are likely to have the following characteristics:
 - They are directed at schools where disadvantage is greatest.
 - They focus on capacity building and enabling at the school level.
 - Financing is sufficient to make a substantial difference to the school, and sufficiently ongoing to allow at least medium term certainty.
 - They provide resources which can be used flexibly through school and community based decision making.
 - The objectives, targets and outcomes are explicit, measurable where appropriate, and broad enough to tackle fundamental and ongoing issues that may not be susceptible to measurement.
 - The school works cooperatively with other schools, government and community departments and agencies.
 - They focus on improving outcomes for students.
 - They engage teachers, parents and other education staff in the development of programs.
 - They are focussed on whole school.

- 4.2. Whilst each school must be given the opportunity to decide its own solutions to its own problems, the following areas should be targets for expenditure:
- Reduced class size with a priority for disadvantaged schools;
 - Public early childhood facilities;
 - Early problem identification and additional support in literacy and numeracy;
 - Provision of additional teacher support;
 - Additional staffing to provide time for parent, community and interagency liaison;
 - Additional promotion positions with a focus on welfare.
 - Additional time for induction and mentoring;
 - Additional time for teachers to meet, and for counselling of students;
 - Professional development in relation to behaviour management and changed pedagogies.
- 4.3. Within a context which provides adequate funding and staffing levels and does not further increase workloads, and where agreement is reached between the relevant Branch or Associated Body and employing authority, the AEU will support initiatives which have the potential to increase equity and lessen disadvantage. Potential areas for further work include:
- Curriculum/school change;
 - Middle years schooling;
 - Appropriate pedagogies;
 - Full service schools (including related health issues);
 - Alleviation of disadvantage;
 - The role and delivery of VET in schools, and other matters related to the relationship between school and work;
 - Funding of school based initiatives;
 - Sectoral inequalities (EC, Primary, Secondary, etc.)
 - Targeted Resources for Special Programs;
 - Student welfare and behaviour management;
 - Whole of school mapping and tracking of whole of student issues;
 - Congruence between home and school in development of integrated programs;
 - The use of targets, and their relationship to other assessment and reporting issues;
 - The importance of teacher recruitment, training and induction.

- 4.4. The AEU supports the idea of pilot projects in a number of these areas. In particular, it believes it is time for Commonwealth and state/territory governments to initiate well-funded and researched projects in the area of full service schools.

This Charter should be read in conjunction with other AEU policies, including, (but not limited to):

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education – 2002

Anti Discrimination – 1989

Combating Racism – 1987

Early Childhood Education Policy 2003

Education in Rural Areas – 1989

Elimination of Sexism in Education and Employment – 1988

Gender Equity – 2002

Sexual Orientation and Gender Preferred Identity – 1995

Special Education – 1987

Students with Special Needs – 1996