

**Principles of
Commonwealth and State/Territory
Relations in Schools**

1998

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Principles of Commonwealth and State/Territory Relations in Schools

(To be considered in conjunction with the Common and Agreed Goals for Schooling in Australia)

1. All students within Australia have a right to high quality public education regardless of geographic location, gender, socio economic status, social circumstances, cultural background or special needs.

2. Students attending school in one state/territory jurisdiction should not be disadvantaged by the nature or content of that schooling if they later seek to live, be educated, and/or work in another.

3. The inter-governmental arrangements should:
 - C be based on an acceptance of '*public first*' to ensure implementation of governments' primary obligation to the maintenance and improvement of a universal public system of education.
 - C whilst non government schools continue to be publicly funded, make explicit jurisdictional or government responsibility for planning, funding and accountability including minimising any negative impact on government schooling provision.

4. The states/territories have by tradition exercised constitutional responsibility for schools and are the managers of the government schools systems.

They have a particular responsibility to:

 - C ensure that the provision of physical and human resources of the highest quality are equally accessible to all children/students regardless of parents capacity to pay
 - C ensure that the curriculum is of the highest standard and relevancy
 - C promote equality of educational opportunities for individuals and equality of outcomes for groups (for example across gender, social class and ethnic and cultural groups).
 - C work collaboratively with other states/territories and the Commonwealth in the national interest.

5. The Commonwealth has the constitutional capacity and the moral responsibility to play a leadership role to ensure that schooling in Australia:

- C meets the social, cultural and economic needs of the nation
- C promotes equality of educational opportunities for individuals and equality of outcomes for groups (social, cultural and gender) in Australia
- C is supported by high quality teacher education including pre-service, induction and continuous development.

It has a responsibility to monitor and assist in the coordination of state/territory effort in education and ensure that school funding in Australia is at least at the OECD average.

It must meet its constitutional responsibility to ensure that the schooling of Australia's indigenous peoples' meets their special needs.

6. These dual responsibilities are best carried out through a partnership that is based on negotiated common objectives.

COAG/MCEETYA should become the principal forums for Commonwealth and state/territory negotiations on national policy on schooling, funding allocations, national targets and the reporting of outcomes.

However, as they are currently constituted these forums are removed from democratic and consultative processes. They should therefore:

- C publish agendas and outcomes widely in relevant communities
- C establish a Schools Advisory Council as the principal forum for advice on national schooling policy. This body should be broadly representative and have the capacity to access independent research support.