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Stand and deliver

Vote for public education

Australia's schools funding system must be reformed if Prime Minister Julia Gillard's notion that 'demography is not destiny' is to have real meaning.

Earlier this year, Julia Gillard acknowledged that the review of schools funding "marks an important milestone in schooling for this country".

She went on to say "how we resource schools goes directly to aspirations Australians have for the future, for their children, for their communities and for their sense of fairness in Australian society".

Australia's new funding system should be underpinned by an unequalled commitment to ensuring that every child has an equal opportunity to achieve his/her full potential at school.

It therefore follows that the review must acknowledge the special legal role, moral purpose and place of public education in Australia's past, present and, most importantly, its future.

This review is the key opportunity to argue for a new funding system beyond 2012 based on the right of every family to have access to a well resourced, high quality public school in their local community—and the primary obligation of governments to adequately and appropriately fund it. After all, the only guarantee every child has to an educa-

tion is enrolment at their local public school—a school that is free, secular and universally accessible.

The achievement of high quality education outcomes for every student also requires further recognition of the additional costs involved in educating children from a diverse range of backgrounds and circumstances. Factors such as family income, Indigeneity, language background, geographic location, disabilities and special needs, and other socio-economic and cultural factors have an impact on the educa-

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tional needs and outcomes of students, and thus of schools and sectors.

Given what is at stake, we are calling on every public school community across Australia to have their say in the review.

The Liberal/National Coalition has indicated that it will not be making a submission to the schools funding review because they've already announced that if elected they will keep the existing schools funding model.

In the words of the Shadow Minister, Christopher Pyne: "We have already committed to using the SES model if elected, because we believe it places the funding of non-government schools on a much more equitable basis than existed in the past." He went on to say: "If elected the next Coalition government

will take up the reins where the Howard government left off."

In effect, the Coalition intends continuing with a discredited system which a Howard government-commissioned review showed is indefensible, unsustainable and contributing to a deepening inequality in the provision of education. This system is so corrupt that more than 50 per cent of private schools are receiving more Commonwealth government funding than they would be entitled to if the funding formula were properly applied—\$3.5 billion more.

While welcoming the commencement of the review of schools funding, the Greens have expressed disappointment that the government has not moved more quickly. Their view is that the current funding system is flawed and inequitable and must be changed. The Greens are calling for a fairer model—including a significant investment in public education—so that public schools set the standard for education in Australia.

In the context of a federal election these matters cannot be ignored. ●

Angelo Gavrielatos
AEU FEDERAL PRESIDENT

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