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Protecting the public good

The school funding review is a significant moment in the history and politics of education in Australia.

This review provides the opportunity to redress the damage caused by the existing system of federal government funding of schools – a funding system that is biased against public schools and blind to the real needs of students their families and teachers.

There is no doubt that the stakes surrounding the review have risen as a result of announcements made during the federal election.

The lowest point for public schools during the election campaign came when Prime Minister Gillard caved in to private school interests and announced the extension of the current funding quadrennium by an extra year. The decision to delay the start of a new funding system until 2014 means Labor will not have changed in almost seven years a system that it has repeatedly acknowledged is flawed and failing to deliver for all children.

If we are to have the necessary impact on the review and the future of schools funding, we must mobilise our public school communities in a way never before witnessed in order to generate the necessary political imperative that will bring change.

Every school in Australia is being encouraged to put in a submission to the review. If you haven't already done so,

please visit the campaign website www.forourfuture.org.au for details on how to make a submission to the review.

Federal election policies

Beyond matters directly related to school funding, during the election campaign the Government made a number of announcements that one would have expected of a Coalition government. Announcements such as teacher performance bonus pay, school bonuses/rewards, the maintenance and extension of the school chaplaincy program, and the “devolution” of the provision of education are virtually plagiarised coalition policies. Our responses to these flawed announcements can be found at www.aeufederal.org.au

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The most elementary literature search presents a large body of research illustrating that these policies would be detrimental to the provision of quality public education for all.

The minority Gillard Labor government cannot afford to continue to ignore and alienate teachers. Meaningful negotiations are required to achieve the development and implementation of sound education policy.

Special education

Following repeated representations, during the election campaign Prime Minister Gillard formally expressed a

commitment to the AEU to address the needs of students with special needs and disabilities.

The Government has established a working party to identify priority needs and guide policy options in the area of support for students with disabilities and special needs. Recommendations from the working party will be considered by the government during the 2011-12 budget process.

Given that special education remains one of the most neglected areas of education, we trust this process will deliver a substantial increase in funding to better address the needs of special needs students.

National curriculum

Bureaucrats and politicians continue to show unwarranted haste in the introduction of a national curriculum. Whilst there is in principle support for a national curriculum, the adherence to a timetable for its introduction from the beginning 2011 defies logic. Apart from ongoing valid concerns about content, volume and sequencing, there has yet to be any announcement of an implementation plan and resources necessary to support it.

Curriculum is one of the most powerful forces in a democracy. It reflects what a society believes its future citizens should know and be able to do. A national curriculum involves changing what 3.3 million children learn. Change in curriculum is too important to be sacrificed to political timetables. ●

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