

# Fair funding now!

Photography **Philip Martin**

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**Two hundred public education supporters gathered at a national forum in Parliament House, Canberra, on 26–27 March to advocate for fairer funding.**

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**T**he National Public Education Forum was the second organised by an alliance of supporters including the Australian Education Union, the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO), the Australian Government Primary Principals Association (AGPPA) and the Australian Secondary Principals Association (ASPA).

With the next schools funding review due to start later in 2010—for implementation from 2013—and a federal election also due later this year, the forum marked an important point in the ongoing campaign to ensure a better funding system for our schools, said AEU federal president Angelo Gavrielatos.

“Despite its record investment in schools, the Rudd government continues to be haunted by its decision to extend the funding policies of the Howard government until 2013,” said Gavrielatos. This discredited funding regime will see government schools receive only 36 per cent of the total schools funding budget, despite enrolling two-thirds of the nation’s students, he told delegates attending the forum reception at Parliament House.

Urging the government to deliver a transparent and comprehensive schools funding review, Gavrielatos said: “A real revolution in education will only come when a government ensures that its state schools set the standard of excellence.”



Speakers at the forum included Parliamentary Secretary for Employment, Jason Clare, Greens leader Senator Bob Brown, Shadow Minister for Education, Apprenticeships & Training Christopher Pyne, NSW Governor, Professor Marie Bashir (see story p. 4), Associate Professor Lyndsay Connors, Associate Professor Jim McMorrow, Professor Alan Reid, Professor Jack Keating, and students Keziah Bennett-Brook, school captain, Keira High School, NSW, Tim Matthews, vice captain (2009), Caringbah High School, NSW and Kristina Gorgievska, student leader, Eltham High School, Victoria.



NSW Governor  
Professor Marie Bashir



Keziah Bennett-Brook  
& Professor Alan Reid

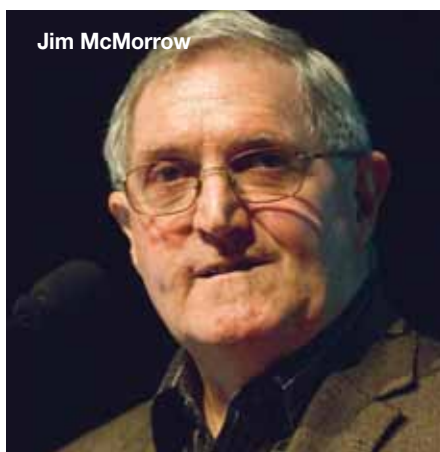


Angelo Gavrielatos





Lyndsay Connors



Jim McMorrow

## Schools' funding alternatives explored

Forum delegates were presented with an example of an alternative schools' funding model from University of Sydney professors Lyndsay Connors and Jim McMorrow. "The need for change is urgent," Dr Connors told the forum. "Some schools are trying to cope with an undue share of the 'heavy lifting'. These are the schools where the workload is most intense and complex, as teachers work with students often from troubled families and communities and without adequate resources.

"Schools funding arrangements have come adrift in this country. Debates about curriculum and teaching standards largely occur in a resources vacuum, and increasingly debates about schools funding seem to take place in a largely education-free zone," she said.

Connors and McMorrow's study presents one alternative to the

'mishmash' of current funding sources and mechanisms. "Responsibilities for funding the public and private school systems are shared in an irrational, asymmetrical and dysfunctional way between Commonwealth and state governments and responsibilities are poorly delineated."

"There's almost universal agreement that the current arrangements are unacceptable and in need of reform. At least the stage of denial is passed." ●



### Resources

■ To read the full McMorrow/Connors report, go to: [www.Sydney.edu.au/education\\_social\\_work](http://www.Sydney.edu.au/education_social_work). Click the 'Professional learning' menu, followed by 'Resources' then 'Studies & reports'.

## "We have much work to do"

The fight for proper funding for public education is Australia's longest running political battle, NSW history teacher and former AEU federal president Denis Fitzgerald told delegates at the forum. "Two centuries ago Governor Bourke wondered why a private school was singled out for sole government funding when its purpose was to teach and create an elite of males."

Warning that teachers would not allow public education to become a 'residual' system, Fitzgerald reminded delegates that "equality is the precondition of excellence. It is an empirical fact—not just an ethical principle—that equal societies almost always do better."

"We have much work to do." ●



Denis Fitzgerald

## Proposals for funding models

A number of schools funding proposals have already been presented in the context of the schools funding review and more are likely to be announced now that the review is under way. The AEU will judge any announcement or funding proposal against three fundamental principles:

1. True equity can only exist when government schools set the standard for high quality education.

2. The primary obligation of governments is to properly and adequately fund public schools.

3. Every family has a right to a well resourced, high quality public school in their community.

This guarantee ensures that every child has a right to:

● a high quality public school where all children can learn together and learn to live together.

- qualified teachers and staff to meet their needs and aspirations.
- a curriculum of the highest quality which ensures the development of the whole child.
- a safe, modern 21st century learning environment.
- achieve his /her personal best.



Jason Clare



Senator Bob Brown with  
Senator Sarah Hanson-Young



Christopher Pyne

## 'A powerful cause for good'

In an opening address to forum delegates at the Mural Hall reception, Parliamentary Secretary for Employment, Jason Clare, representing Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, spoke about the importance of public education. "We are all passionate about public education, and so we should be. It is the most powerful cause for good in this country."

Although not an attendee at the forum, Education Minister Julia Gillard recently announced the Government's schools funding review.

The Greens party leader Senator Bob Brown told the forum: "We are absolutely committed to our public education system, and our policies back that up." Brown also highlighted the current inequitable spending on private schools, describing it as "unfair" to the two-thirds of students who attend the public school system: "We in Australia are 18th of 30 OECD nations in spending on the public sector for education. We're second after South Korea in the world, for spending on the private school sector."

Speaking on behalf of the Coalition parties, Shadow Education Minister Christopher Pyne confirmed they would retain the current Commonwealth Government funding model if elected this year. ●

**"Public education:  
a promise one  
generation makes  
to the next."**

## Value and values

Victoria's Eltham High School student leader Kristina Gorgievska spoke of her school's commitment to social and environmental responsibility, and its respect for diversity, and integrity. "These values are not merely platitudes for letter heads and plaques but how the school lives and breathes," she said. "It's part of the school's DNA."

"Our school welcomes all students regardless of their background, sexuality, ambition or personal history ... At the core is a focus on egalitarianism."

Former Caringbah High School NSW vice captain Tim Matthews remembered his public education as "the best".

"This year as I walk around my dream university, studying my dream degree, I know that public education has delivered me my dream."

"When I reflect on 13 years of schooling, one minute our teachers were introducing new things and encouraging us to give something a go, then suddenly someone had found something to be passionate about," he said. "There was always a teacher ready to translate our passions into real sustained effort." ●



Tim Matthews



Kristina Gorgievska

