



AEU Parliamentary Brief

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AEU National Public Education Campaign

The Australian Education Union is pursuing a claim for at least an additional \$2.9 billion per annum to be spent in public schools. In 2003 the Schools Resourcing Taskforce of the Ministerial Council for Education Employment and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) calculated the amount of funding necessary to ensure that all students at public schools were able to achieve the agreed National Goals of Schooling and compared this with the amount of money they were actually receiving. It found that public schools were under funded – at that time – by approximately \$2.4 billion (in 2003 figures). This calculation did not include capital spending or money for students with disabilities.

That this state of affairs is allowed to continue despite an unprecedented economic boom which has endured for some 15 years, is indicative of the low priority placed on public education in Australia by federal and state/ territory governments alike.

The additional funds are necessary for:

- Pre-school education for all children, to provide a strong foundation for future schooling;

- Additional targeted resources for smaller classes and specialist programs in the early years of high school, when students make the challenging transition from primary to secondary school;
- Maintenance and capital works programs that provide buildings, classrooms and equipment conducive to effective teaching and learning, including access to modern technologies;
- Preparing and supporting the future generations of teachers and continuing to support existing teachers with appropriate professional development and time to ensure students continue to receive high quality teaching and learning from a well-respected teaching profession;
- Greater support for students with identified needs. This would include improved funding for Indigenous education programs, for students from non-English speaking backgrounds, and for students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties who require specially targeted programs.

OECD figures show not only that Australia spends less on education than the majority of OECD countries, but that educational benefits flow to the more advantaged to a greater extent than in many other countries.

The Review of the SES Model

The Federal Government is currently conducting a review of its Socio-Economic Status (SES) model of school funding. This review is not intended to redress the inequity between the Federal Government funding of private schools as opposed to public schools but rather to consider the way in which the model is actually operating **within** the private sector.

More than half of the schools to which this model applies, are actually receiving more money than they should be under the government's own formula. According to Senate estimates data this overpayment amounts to more than \$2 billion during the current quadrennium.

This is due to commitments made when the model was first introduced:

- When the SES was introduced, any school that would have received less under its SES than under the old system kept its old funding level – indexed against inflation.
- Catholic schools did not come onto the SES until 2005. Even then, only just over half were funded at their SES level, the others were “funding maintained” at 56.2 per cent of AGSRC (51.2 per cent in ACT). The money will go to the system not the school.
- Some schools would have lost funding when the SES changed from using the 1996 Census data to the 2001 Census data. These are “funding guaranteed”. They get their old funding level until inflation catches up.

This created several different ways of funding private schools. In total, barely half of schools are funded at their SES. Because it is the larger schools which tend to be funding maintained, an even higher proportion of students are not at schools funded by their SES.

Flaws in the SES model

The SES model contains many ongoing flaws which contribute to inequity in funding both within the private sector and, because they result in larger grants to already wealthy schools, to

the provision of schooling in general. These include:

- ***The SES Model is not based on the actual incomes of the families with students in the school***

Because the SES is based on the average income of the Census Collection District from which the students come, not the income of the actual parents of the schools, it distorts the results. As one commentator has put it, the SES of a school is based on the income level of the neighbours of the students, not the families of the student themselves.

Because of this, many schools which are by any measure (except the SES one) the most wealthy in the country are judged not to be wealthy.

For instance, Haileybury College in Melbourne, which has students from families that can afford the over \$15,000 per year fees, has an SES score of only 108, implying it is only the 275th most wealthy school. Geelong Grammar has an SES of 111 (221st) and The King's School, recognised as one of the wealthiest NSW private schools, has an SES of 116 (149th wealthiest)!

- ***The SES Model ignores a school's private income***

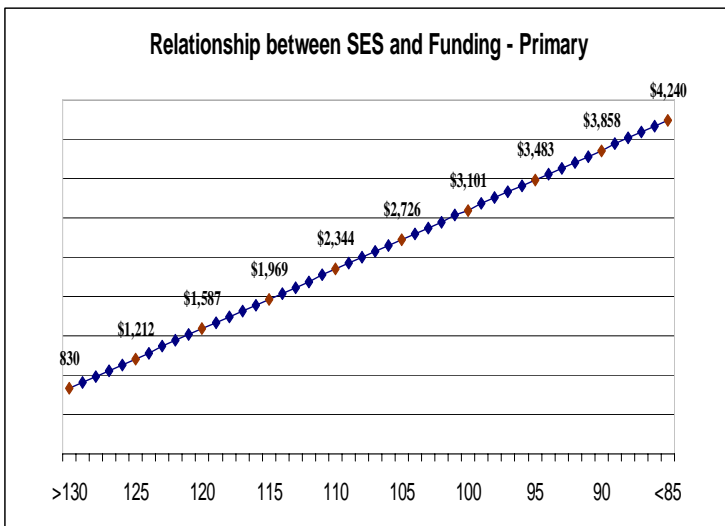
The SES model takes no account of the resources available to a school such as the fees it collects, bequests, investments and other private income. Because of this, schools with resources most can only dream of are given large grants by the Australian Government. It is not possible to achieve equity of resourcing without taking account of the private income of private schools.

- ***The calibration of the SES is based on an artificial linearity rather than real need***

When per capita grants for non-government primary students are plotted against SES scores, as in Graph 7 it can be seen that the distribution of funds is linear. The same

holds true for Secondary. This implies that need occurs on a linear scale, which is not the case. It implies that each SES grade carries the same weight, regardless of where on the scale that occurs. Thus the difference in need between 85 and 86 is the same as that between 129 and 130. It also implies that those with high SES scores still have a level of need. In other words even more advantaged students can be assessed as having a level of “need” based on a linear scale.

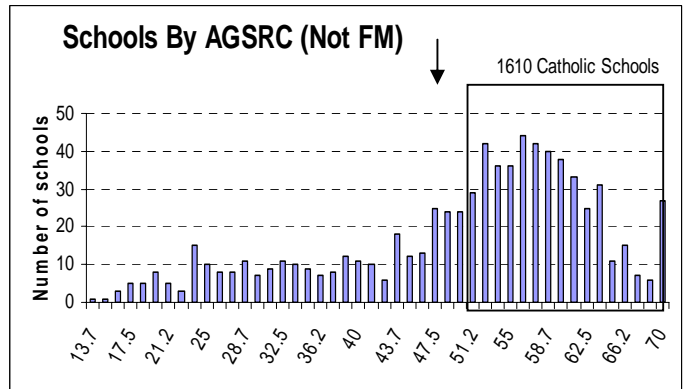
Graph 7 Source: DEST Table



In reality, those on lower SES scores require much more assistance and those on high SES scores much less. A more realistic distribution of funding according to educational need would not be linear, and would likely be based on ranges of need. Past a certain score there would be no level of need. This is reinforced by the fact that many of the schools on these high SES scores already operate above the AGSRC.

Because of their numbers, it is difficult to include the Catholic schools. However, the minimum grant to Catholic schools is 51.2 per cent (ACT) with the vast majority being on 56.2 per cent of AGSRC or above. They would therefore be placed somewhere in the boxed area in Graph 10.

Graph 10 Source – DEST Table



In short, the vast majority of schools are funded in the range 50 per cent to 70 per cent. In fact over 80 per cent of schools receive between 50 per cent and 70 per cent of AGSRC. This further undermines the extent to which “needs based” is a feature of the SES system.

It is the view of the AEU that the SES model is fundamentally flawed.

The limited scope of the current review will ensure that these flaws will not be addressed.

Given the findings of the MCEETYA Schools Resourcing Taskforce and increasing evidence of the widening gap in educational outcomes between rich and poor in Australia, the AEU calls for a return to a system which is genuinely needs-based and which measures this need on the basis of the financial capacity and the resource levels of those schools, assessed against a community standard.

Teacher Career Paths

Both major political parties are advocating the extension of teacher career paths as a strategy to encourage exemplary teachers to remain in the classroom (and in the profession).

They are, however, approaching the issue from entirely different directions.

The Coalition is advocating a “merit pay” model based on student results; the federal minister has mooted the possibility of using AWA’s for this purpose as well as suggesting that money be

paid direct to schools with the responsibility for allocation resting with the principal.

The ALP model seeks to assess teachers against an agreed professional standard for accomplished teachers which would see successful teachers receive up to \$10,000 in additional salary. This would build on existing work being done through MCEETYA and would be included in state and territory collective agreements.

This issue will be discussed at the AEU Annual Federal Conference in January.

School Chaplains

The announcement of an additional \$90 million over three years to fund the appointment of school chaplains represents another attempt by the Federal Government to force its particular perspective into school communities.

By requiring the funding to be used only for the provision of chaplains, the federal government leaves itself open to criticism about its motives. While claiming that this is about schools being able to choose whether or not to participate, the “choice” is not genuine. It is well and truly loaded in favour of organised religion. If schools want the additional resource, the only “choice” available is what sort of chaplain, and even this is subject to Federal Government approval. Schools wanting to employ qualified counsellors will be denied access to a potentially valuable resource person.

For many government schools, student enrolment patterns do not fit neatly and tidily into the major religious groups, making the selection of a chaplain problematic for a number of reasons. The proposed guidelines for receiving the money will make clear that much of the available money will of course go to subsidise the employment of chaplains currently employed in what are, in some instances, already extremely wealthy schools.

If the Federal Government is genuine in wanting to support children who are experiencing trauma, loss, anger, anxiety or any number of other stresses then it should trust school communities to make their own judgments

about how best to do this by removing the arbitrary restriction which prevents real choice from occurring.

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