



AEU Parliamentary Brief

Australian Education Union
120 Clarendon Street
Southbank VIC 3006
Phone (03) 9693 1800
Fax (03) 9693 1805
Email: aeu@aeufederal.org.au
Website: www.aeufederal.org.au



Issue Number 14: March 2008

2008 AEU Annual Conference Statement – Public Education

Following more than a decade of systematic coalition attack on public education, the election of the Rudd Labor Government presents an opportunity for a change in policy direction.

With ALP governments in every State and Territory, and in the spirit of cooperative federalism, the opportunity now exists to end the blame shifting between the Commonwealth and States/Territories that has plagued public education. The opportunity also now exists for all levels of government to fulfill their primary obligation to provide, and adequately fund, high quality public education.

There would be no greater and more tangible example of governing in the national interest than ensuring that public education is a national priority.

It is now time to give the "Education Revolution" real substance and meaning through significant investment of additional funding for public education.

In light of evidence showing that the SES funding model is discredited, corrupt and distorted, Conference calls on the Federal

Labor Government to abandon its commitment to maintain this model until 2012.

To enable all students to reach their full potential and excel, we call on the Rudd Labor Government to meet the \$2.9 billion annual shortfall in funding for public schools and support the development and implementation of a comprehensive national literacy and numeracy strategy. The success of this strategy is reliant upon the following key areas:

A curriculum guarantee for all students

A curriculum guarantee will provide all students, irrespective of their socio economic background or where they live, with the chance to pursue the widest range of opportunities in life.

The reduction of class sizes

Reducing class sizes would allow teachers to increase individual attention for all students – including gifted and talented students and those with other special learning needs.

Competitive, professional teacher salaries

Teachers' salaries have been identified by major employers as in urgent need of improvement to recruit and retain quality teachers.

The provision of 21st Century learning environments

The provision of high quality teaching and learning environments befitting a 21st century education in an economically advanced nation like Australia is an absolute necessity.

A national strategy for Indigenous education

Bringing the standard of education available for Indigenous Australians and the educational outcomes attained up to that of the rest of the country must be a priority.

At least 20 hours of free high quality public pre-school education per week

The commitment by the ALP to fund 15 hours of early childhood education represents a significant step forward. Further funding is now needed to provide every 4 year old child in Australia with at least 20 hours of free high quality public pre-school education per week. Access for Indigenous children must be a priority.

TAFE

Beyond schooling, the Education Revolution must also invest in TAFE to ensure further education and a skilled workforce for Australia's future.

Since 1997, the Howard Government cut TAFE Funding by 26% in real terms. This resulted in hundreds of thousands of Australians being turned away from further education and training, including from key skilled trade areas.

Conference calls on the Rudd Government to dramatically increase investment in the TAFE system where the shortfall is calculated at \$470m in 2008 rising to over \$2b over the next 4 years. Such additional funding must allow for projected growth in enrolments and invest in teachers and quality teaching through a Quality Improvement Fund.

The success of the Education Revolution in TAFE also involves a reduction of class sizes, competitive professional teacher salaries, the provision of 21st Century learning environments, a national strategy for

Indigenous education and access to comprehensive vocational knowledge.

In addition, the Rudd Government must arrest the drift within TAFE towards the teaching of narrow, instrumentalist employer-driven skills and support a broad and comprehensive vocational education experience for all students.

Conference calls on the Rudd Government to dismantle Australian Technical Colleges and roll them into existing public education structures.

The TAFE system offers the most efficient and effective way of educating and training Australians to meet the country's needs and build our skills base.

Recent AEU Poll: Voters Want Public Schools to be Top Priority for Education Revolution

The results of a national poll released in January by the AEU show the majority of Australians agree that there will be no Education Revolution unless the Labor Government invests substantially more in public education.

Conducted among 600 voters by research and communication company Essential Media Communications, the poll showed that:

- 82% agree or strongly agree there will be no education revolution unless the Labor Government invests substantially more in public education;
- 71% of Australians say education was important or very important in determining their vote, versus only 27% for whom it was not important;
- 60% of people who switched their vote from the Coalition to Labor in the 2007 election said the Howard Government's neglect of public education was an important factor in determining their vote;
- 67% agree or strongly agree that the Rudd Government should make investing in public schools their top priority.

Opportunity to re-direct misguided Howard Government programmes

The 2008 Federal Budget provides a significant opportunity for the Rudd Government to redirect a number of Howard Government programmes which were driven by ideology rather than sound education policy.

Ill-conceived and misguided programmes such as the *National Literacy and Numeracy Vouchers*, *Chaplaincy* and *Summer School* programmes should be redirected to better meet student literacy and welfare needs and teacher professional development requirements.

Programmes and funding that the AEU believes should be redirected include:

National Literacy and Numeracy Vouchers

\$457.4 million over 4 years from 2007

Federal Budget Papers 2007 – 08

Federal Budget Papers 2007-08 Chaplaincy Programme

\$165 million over three years from 2006-07 to 2009-10

http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/policy_initiatives_reviews/key_issues/school_chaplaincy_programme

Australian Government Summer Schools for Teachers

\$101.7 million over four years

Federal Budget Papers 2007-08

Teaching Australia

\$30 million over the five years from 2005 to 2009

http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/programmes_funding/programme_categories/professional_skills_leadership/teaching_australia.htm

Values Education

\$34.6m over four years from 2004 – 2008

Funding announced in the 2004 budget

Rewarding Schools for Improving Literacy and Numeracy Outcomes

\$53.2 million over four years

Federal Budget Papers 2007-08

For further detail on this proposal see
www.aefederal.org.au

Stop Press: “Gillard to end school inequality” *The Australian, Saturday 15 March 2008*

Change School Funding System Now

The AEU believes that funding public schools based on a socio-economic index would deliver significant and urgently needed funding increases to public education.

Reports in the Australian Newspaper on Saturday, 15th March, 2008 indicated Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard will present a proposal to fund public schools based on their socio-economic status (SES) to COAG.

Over a decade of neglect by the previous Government has left a public education funding shortfall of at least \$2.9 billion per year.

The application of an SES funding index would deliver, without any doubt, additional funding for public schools.

Having acknowledged the inequality, the Rudd Government must act immediately to fulfil its stated responsibility to properly fund the public school system.

It must also rectify problems with the current system that sees 60% of private schools receiving more than they are entitled to at a cost of \$2.7 billion to taxpayers over the next four years.

If the Commonwealth gave public schools the same level of funding as even the wealthiest private school currently receives, the public system would receive an immediate increase of \$750 million.

The current minimum grant for the wealthiest private school is 13.7% of AGSRC compared to 8.9% for government primary schools and 10% for government high schools.

AEU Analysis of the Internal DEST Review of SES Funding Arrangements for Non-Government Schools¹

This report was commissioned by the Howard Government. It was conducted behind closed doors in 2006. Only lobbyists from the private-school and Catholic church-school systems were invited to comment. It confirms the validity of the AEU's longstanding opposition to the funding arrangements for Australia's non-government schools. The Report notes that "the consistency and equity of the SES funding arrangements is undermined by the fact that almost half the non-government school sector is funded outside the 'straight' SES model."

- The inequity lies in the guarantee from the inception of the SES formula in 2001 that no school will receive less money than it did the previous year.
- 60 per cent of mainstream Catholic schools and 25 per cent of independent schools are funded above what would be their SES entitlement on their actual SES scores.
- Over the last 4 years \$2 billion has been paid to schools which had their funding maintained at higher levels than they would get if the federal funding formula was strictly applied.
- The arrangements by which this occurs were intended to be transitional yet they have been in place for two quadrenniums and "there is no mechanism that would naturally unwind its effect."
- Transitional arrangements made for Catholic schools to preserve their funding entitlements at 2000 levels, even if they qualified for less when they joined the SES funding system in 2001, have continued at artificially inflated levels for eight years, despite their transitional nature.
- The cost of maintaining the existing SES system would be \$26.5 billion over the 2009-2012 quadrennium.

If Funding Maintained schools continue to be funded above their SES entitlement, the private school sector will gain an additional \$2.7 billion in overpayments over the next four years. Individual schools will be overpaid by up to \$23 million each in the next funding cycle.

The Report rejects the private school lobby's argument that the extra funding helps contain the amount of fees parents pay.

- 42 per cent of Funding Maintained schools (87) increased their fees by more than 40 per cent during the period 2000 to 2004 compared to 24 per cent of SES-funded schools (164).
- The number of Funding Maintained schools with annual fees below \$2500 fell by 24 per cent (48) compared to a fall of 10 per cent (67) for SES-funded schools.

The Report also reveals a pattern whereby non-government schools which have already been identified as receiving an overly generous share of government funding are exploiting a loophole to claim even more public money.

- Funding Maintained schools are establishing campuses in preference to new schools, which provides a funding advantage for the new campus as a campus of a school has the same funding status as the parent school.
- If the campus were established as a new school its SES would be assessed and it would be funded accordingly.
- By calling new schools 'campuses' of an over-generously funded 'parent' school rather than new schools.
- Example: The M.E.T School in Meadowbank NSW has an SES score of 102, which translates to funding of 48.7% of the AGSRC for its primary and secondary students. However, as it is an FM maintained school, it receives 56.7% of AGSRC for its primary students and 62.4% for its secondary students. The M.E.T school has 12 campuses, only one of which is within 50 km of the parent school. The other 11 sites range from 60 km to 600 km from the parent school.

To date, the Rudd Government has refused to release the report, but has committed to a review of the SES funding arrangements with any outcomes of the review to be implemented after 2012.

The AEU condemns funding arrangements which see the public system under-funded by nearly \$3 billion annually while over-funding of private schools is set to cost taxpayers a further \$2.7 billion over the next four years.

The AEU calls on the Rudd Government to immediately review funding arrangements with a view to abandoning this system that wrongly delivers billions of taxpayer dollars to schools that are not entitled to it.

¹ The report *Review of SES Funding Arrangements for non-Government schools* was sourced from the Sydney Morning Herald web-site, February 2008.

Authorised by: Susan Hopgood, Federal Secretary, Australian Education Union, 120 Clarendon St Southbank 3006