

**SOUTH AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL PARENTS CLUBS INC  
(SAASPC)**



**Submission  
to the House of Representatives Standing Committee Inquiry  
into the Provisions of the Australian Education Bill 2012**

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SAASPC is a peak organisation for parents who send their children to South Australian government preschools and schools. Our families are diverse and representative of the socioeconomic situations as well as the complexities that make up the communities in which we live.

In South Australia our public schools educate the vast majority of students who have special needs. We also know that they cater for the majority of students who are genuinely low SES; for young people living in transient families; for the majority of our indigenous students and for those who have culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds including refugee students.

The Gonski Review has confirmed the real urgency of the need to reform the way we fund education and in particular the way we fund public schools. This reform needs to be protected by legislation to ensure that all our young people have equitable access to a high quality education and their outcomes not be determined by their family background and circumstances or where they live.

### **Preamble**

We are pleased to see a commitment to a high quality, high equity schooling system. This will provide the opportunity through legislation for the Gonski reforms to be implemented. We know, and the review confirmed, that the current levels of funding are inadequate if we are to be a high performing country or indeed create equitable opportunities for all children to achieve equitable outcomes.

Australia's spending on education falls well below the OECD average. In a media release in September 2012, Minister, Peter Garrett said 'our spend on education as a total share of GDP has remained flat since 2001 and is currently still lower than the OECD average, once the one-off spend on the BER is removed'. This cannot be accepted as good enough by Australians.

As a nation our investment in education is inequitable. Public education caters for the majority of students from a disadvantaged background and those who have additional needs yet it is very clear that the proportion of total government schools funding which is spent on public schools, has declined from 77.1% in 2003 to 68.6% in 2009, compared to an OECD average of 85.8%. (*OECD Education at a Glance 2012*)

The equity gap is widening. International data, such as TIMSS (*Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study*) and PIRLS (*Progress in International Reading Literacy Study*), and national NAPLAN data confirm the impact of social background and the effects in particular of multiple disadvantage and of high concentrations of disadvantage. Funding must be targeted to where there is most need.

For our nation to prosper we need a population of well educated people. It is time to look at our future when considering the funding of education. Education must be seen as a long term investment – one that will be well paid back by higher economic growth, reduced health costs, reduced incarceration and a more equitable society.

SAASPC welcomes the Bill's intention to ensure that future funding arrangements are based on the real needs of Australian schools and their students.

SAASPC has always articulated the importance of strong, positive partnerships between home, school and the wider community. The evidenced based paper by ARACY which was commissioned in 2012 by the Australian Council of State School Organisations and the Australian Parents Council *Parental engagement in learning: lessons from research* clearly identified parental engagement as the missing link in student achievement. The recent OECD's education working paper 73 *Parental involvement in selected PISA countries and economies* noted that 'those children who have parents who are more actively involved are

more likely to have better scores at school, be more engaged with and be more motivated in school, have better mental health outcomes and show more sociable behaviour.’ (p13)

Strong parental and community engagement is central to effective education reform. There is in excess of forty years of research that supports this and some resources have been developed (and funded through DEEWR) to strengthen that link. Parental engagement however requires not only targeted funding to support it in schools, but high level recognition and understanding of its importance.

We do not underestimate the difficulties of the negotiations which of necessity must occur between the state, federal and territory leaders over the implementation of The Bill, particularly considering it will need a substantial investment by all. We urge all members of parliament to consider the critical importance of a new, fairer and transparent funding model and the difference the investment will make to our children, to our economy and to a better Australia.

### **Preliminary**

The key objects of the Act are fully supported by SAASPC. The goals clearly identify the need for education reform.

The challenge is significant and will need not only financial investment but commitment and goodwill by all levels of government and education providers, if it is to be achieved.

### **Improving the performance of schools and school students**

SAASPC supports The Bill’s intention of making student need and improving student learning a key reform.

While the Bill outlines five key reform directions for the National Plan for School Improvement SAASPC would strongly urge that serious consideration be given to including parental engagement as a critical factor which is embedded in the Plan. As stated above, research has clearly indicated that parental engagement has a profound effect on student learning outcomes. It is essential therefore that financial support and government and sector commitment be given to it.

While we agree that decisions about schools and school students are best made at the local level we believe that those decisions should be made jointly by the school leadership team and the school community – and not by the school leaders alone. We would strongly urge that this be included in the Bill.

We have concerns that NAPLAN results are used for far more than they were intended and we would support the collection of higher quality and broader data. We do not believe that the data currently published on the MySchool website provides a true, or useful, picture of a school to the public and would suggest that it should either have a major redevelopment or be taken down and schools be required to publish specific data on their own websites.

### **Conclusion**

SAASPC is concerned about the increasing calls to delay any new funding model. David Gonski highlighted the urgency of the reform agenda and warned that failure to act urgently would have enormous social and economic consequences.

The results from the recent Auspoll survey commissioned by the AEU shows that almost 90% of people support an agreement on the funding between the federal and state and territory governments. It also revealed that over 85% believe that this is an urgent matter.

Recent Federal Government figures show the high price that Australia will pay if the Bill is not implemented - schools would lose up to \$5.4 billion in funding over the next five years. This will have a profound and compounding effect on public schools. Failure to act would mean, public schools would receive \$673 million less in real terms in 2015/16 than they did in 2011-12. By contrast Commonwealth funding for non-government schools would increase in real terms by more than \$1.3 billion, a real increase of 15% over that period.

Winding down current programs such as National Partnerships will only further perpetuate the situation and widen the equity gap.

The Bill recognises the urgent need for funding reform and the provision of full, fair and equitable funding for public education in order to allow every child to reach his or her full potential.

The Bill provides the legislative platform for these reforms. We recognise the Bill does not indicate funding or indeed proportional funding for state and commonwealth contributions

We noted that the Prime Minister indicated in her September announcement of the Government's intention to legislate to implement Gonski's core recommendation that it would require significantly increased investment in education - in the order of \$6.5 billion annually (2012 dollars).

This is the level of funding identified by Gonski as necessary to ensure that every child's education will be supported with a benchmark amount of funding for all schools based on what it costs to educate a student at the schools. We totally support funding supplemented by a system of 'needs loadings' to address the major areas of disadvantage associated with disability, Indigeneity, low SES, lack of English proficiency, and the size and location of a school.

We believe the implementation of the Act will lead to ensuring a fairer funding model for all students and will enable our nation to start to bridge the widening education gap. All young Australians deserve equitable access to a high quality education no matter what their background.