



## Australian Council of State School Organisations Ltd.

*One voice for every child in public education*

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### President's Message, September 2018

#### **Agreement reform**

With the first month under his belt as the new Commonwealth Minister for Education, The Hon. Dan Tehan MP, faced his first Education Council meeting with his state and territory counterparts in Adelaide last week. The topic that is front and centre of all jurisdictional interests is the National School Reform Agreement (NSRA). The hope was that these were to be settled by now. The fact that there are ongoing negotiations on the necessary bilateral agreements, and co-dependant funding obligations, suggests that jurisdictions are still to resolve how they may embrace the various recommendations of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools (available [here](#)). For our nation's public schools this is where we will see the greatest impact as the states and territories are the owners, operators and majority funders of public education.

#### **Compromise deal**

It's interesting to note that a compromise deal has already been established as the state and territory governments have negotiated to demonstrate how they will reach only 75% of their contribution to the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) - rather than the full 80% that was established in the Australia Education Amendment Act 2017. Within this, it's to be acknowledged that the ACT and WA are standouts by already contributing well above the 80% rate for their public schools.

The fact that virtually all states and territories fully exceed their 20% requirement to fund non-government schools in their jurisdictions, whilst claiming poverty in funding our public schools is a farcical conundrum that needs to be put right. If it's ok for most state and territory governments to underfund our public schools by 5%, then the same rule has to be applied to their contribution to non-government schools.

#### **Make a real difference**

We need to set the funding goal for non-government schools at 15% and transfer the excess to fund public schools where it can make a real difference to the education and life outcomes of our public-school students.

This is especially true for those from a disadvantaged background; a recent article from Gerry Redmond and Jennifer Skattebol available [here](#) offers a unique perspective on this opportunity. Put simply, with some astute rebalancing the states and territories have a pretty much cost neutral and co-dependant solution to ensure a fair go for all. This would be despite the shrill cry of entitled want from those non-government school representatives with the ability and power to influence government policy.

With this single action state and territory governments can demonstrate that they truly care about the interests of the students, parents, staff and wider communities of our nation's fully inclusive public schools.

### **Fair, Simple and Transparent**

Additionally, the new Minister's priority must be to reaffirm the integrity of Fair, Simple and Transparent, and truly needs based funding agreements with no special deals. This has not been helped with his apparent direction from the new PM to sort the 'Catholic problem' - together with ongoing and fevered speculation around a new special deal for Catholic schools, and private meetings with its most fervent representatives. He and his government must be resolute and resist the temptation to give in to such powerful vested interests.

As part of last year's Act the National School Resourcing Board has delivered the report on its review of the socio-economic status score methodology in a way that should resolve those issues for Catholic and other non-government sectors. The States and Territories are already overfunding their share of non-government schools and they are close to signing their new agreements with the Commonwealth. The children, families and educators in our nation's fully inclusive public schools need the certainty and knowledge that their future is secure with no last-minute special deals to further advantage non-government schools.

One commentator that has consistently offered a fresh perspective on education funding has been Dr Peter Goss from the Grattan Institute. He studiously takes an impartial approach to education policy and his recent thoughts available [here](#) may be challenging for some but offer an interesting reflection on my comments above.

### **Enrol now**

Another point of debate is the overt and growing confidence in promoting public education as a great option for parents and their children. With surging enrolments in our nation's public schools it's always interesting to see the reaction of the champions of school 'choice' when public education is celebrated and modestly promoted. This is often as an absolute contrast to the expansive and eye-wateringly expensive advertising campaigns delivered by non-government schools and systems.

A thought provoking article by Henrietta Cook, [here](#), explores the Victorian Department of Education and Training's innovative 'Enrol now' approach to celebrating its public schools with a coordinated series of marketing activities that has begun with digital ads at the MCG. There is some comment by supporters of 'choice' that the resources for such a promotional would be better utilised within schools; maybe they believe choice only applies to supporters of non-

government schools – an obvious misnomer for those families that actively chose public schools for their children’s education.

This is an interesting point if one were to reflect on the scale and expense of activism, advertising and sense of entitlement delivered by non-government schools and their systems. It’s hard to escape their marketing efforts and also good to pause to reflect that virtually every non-government school receives significant levels of taxpayer funding and yet have no compunction in using this in expansive swaths of advertising efforts.

Perhaps they expect that public schools should sit passively whilst the apparent virtues of exclusive non-government schools are trotted out *ad nauseum*.

### **Add it up**

There is also the additional point that NAPLAN results are demonstrating that there are no literacy or numeracy benefits from non-government schooling; with parents increasingly identifying that our nation’s fully inclusive public schools are of the highest quality and reflect the unique strengths and culture of the wider communities in which they are sited. They are local schools for local people working in partnership with passionate educators that want the very best for the students, families and communities they engage with.

Our public schools are increasingly and proudly the first choice for our children’s future; it’s great to see this celebrated in a way where everyone can appreciate the vital contribution public schools, their students, educators and families make to our wider sense of community and identity.

### **Cyber safety**

The whole concept of cyber safety is an ever-developing issue that we, as parents, are forever playing catch-up with the IT skills and preferences of our children and of those that wish to do harm. To aid us there are a plethora of schemes, initiatives and commercial products out there that can often be highly confusing in their intent, and often with no idea as to their quality, efficacy or trustworthiness.

The office of the eSafety Commissioner was established in 2015 to meet this challenge and now has an expanded national remit to empower all Australians of all ages to have a safer and more positive experience online. It has legislated executive powers to compel social media service providers to take down offensive material and illegal content, and is also taking on image-based abuse. As a starting point for parents its iParent portal, available [here](#), gives a range of shortcuts and information that can provide some assurance as to what to do, how to do it and conversation starters that may allow for an informed discussion with your children.

Last week, in the latest of a number of initiatives, the ‘[Yes Project](#)’ was officially launched as a digital and social health program with a totally free suite of resources and materials that will allow teachers and facilitators to deliver tailored programs for young people aged 14-17. The provenance and authenticity of this initiative is beyond question. The educator guide and workshop handbook and other resources are available [here](#). If you are part of a high school parent body it might make for an interesting agenda item at your next meeting.

## **Know before you go**

With the end of term break fast approaching for many of us the lure of the cinema and also apps is hard to resist. A long-established organisation to support parents with this is the Australian Council on Children and the Media (ACCM). If you struggle to find a detailed review of what's actually in a movie and whether its content is appropriate for your family then its '[Know Before You Go](#)' service could be invaluable. It also has a '[Know Before You Load](#)' app review service. Each provides a professionally reviewed appraisal of content and offers a straightforward rating on the age appropriateness of a movie or app. True to the modern day there is an app that combines both review services with links to the respective app stores, available [here](#).

## **Early learning reform**

Another part of last Friday's Education Council deliberations was to discuss the recommendations and findings of the 'Lifting our Game' review, or to give it its official title: the 'Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools through Early Childhood Interventions, 2017' a copy of which is available [here](#). There is also an 'at a glance' snapshot available [here](#) from CELA (Community Early Learning Australia) that also provides links to the state and territory initiatives referenced in the report that might be of particular interest. As a report that sits alongside the Gonski panel's report it provides a significantly deeper context to that panel's recommendations for early childhood education. For those that are unaware of it I draw it to your attention as a significant foundation document that will guide future policy development and thinking.

One of the major ongoing contentions between state and territory governments and the Commonwealth is the provision of resources to support high-quality early childhood education in our public schools and education departments. The legislated funding responsibility currently sits outside the scope of the amended Australian Education Act 2013 and is encompassed within the Universal Access to Early Childhood Education national partnerships program. The frustration with this is that it is funded on a year-to-year basis and that it only covers one year when there are clearly demonstrated benefits of at least two-years high quality early childhood education; the value and challenges of which I explored in last month's president's message, available [here](#).

With an election in the offing and declarations of intent from all sides of politics on what will give the best return on the investment of taxpayer funding, it's hard to look past the potential in early childhood education. It demands unequivocal support from all sides as a moral imperative to give the very best opportunities for the families and children that chose public education. To quote Andreas Schleicher for those without access to wealth or connections education is their best option to enjoy a successful life, it's a one shot hit and it has to be right. Early childhood education is the key that unlocks the future of this learning potential in every child. It has to be right and it has to be properly resourced.

Phillip Spratt

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