

President's Message – October 2016

Three essential words: fair, simple and transparent

Sporting times

For many of us the memories of spring holiday season are now fading as we lead into the start of the last term of the school year. And for those of us in the colder southern states and territories it's the time when our children look to be outside enjoying some fresh air and welcome outdoor activity - and then Mother Nature has other ideas. It's also a chance to look at the summer sporting rosters and to possibly think of future physical education opportunities for your children and school community.

One such initiative is the Australian Sports Commission's Sporting Schools programme for primary schools; that encourages children to try out new sports and skills as an after school activity. It's a collaborative and inclusive programme that has received additional government funding to extend its reach. More information is available here - although with over 6,000 schools already registered it is proving to be extremely popular.

Australia's wicked problem

A few weeks ago I attended and was a panel member at the AWAVA / Our Watch Prevalent and Preventable Conference on practice and policy in the prevention of violence against women and their children. It brought a range of international and home grown speakers and delegates together over three days to discuss the truly wicked problem of preventing all forms of violence against women.

As in so much reform, education is seen as a key driver of change and all parties recognise the vital contribution made by young people in this space – the question then becomes the how and what are we, as the older generation, willing to do to support them in this essential work..? There is a particular idea that Rosie Batty and others complemented on its quality and potential as a national initiative - Project O. It's a pilot project with young people seeking to create generational change in preventing family violence.

More information can be found here. There is a storify page here that is summarising many of the conference conversations and presentations with the expectation that the final reports will be available by the end of November. Overarching this is the work in schools on respectful relationships education that has the potential to change our children's experience and understanding of all forms of violence and discrimination. Our Watch has a series of resources that can be utilised by school communities that are available here

## The winds of change

Looking at the media coverage that has resulted from September's Council of Australian Government's (COAG) Education Council meeting, and the Minister's candid observations made on the following Monday's Q&A, you could be forgiven in thinking that imminent change was in the air. In reality this is only the opening gambit in unravelling our highly complicated education funding agreements.

What the welcome media coverage has highlighted is the myriad of special deals and additional funding models, together with the unfair advantage that some schools enjoy. What is especially illuminating is the growing recognition that a significant number of schools are resourced at a level below what they should be according to the national SRS (School Resource Standard) – the fact that the vast majority of these are in the public sector is no great surprise to anyone. What it does highlight is the quality and professionalism of our public school teaching staff and leaders to deliver their very best, for the benefit of our children, despite such an obvious impediment to acquitting their professional strengths and abilities in the modern age.

The catalyst for change comes in the form of the Australian government's policy paper, Quality Schools, Quality Outcomes, or 'Quos-Quo' as it is euphemistically known, that can be found here, comes complete with this telling line:

Deals and special arrangements have damaged the integrity of the needs-based funding model

Integrity is the crucial word and ACSSO is strident and consistent in its advocacy for absolute reform in education funding to deliver Fair, Simple and Transparent agreements that are truly sector blind and needs based with additional resourcing, where necessary, for specific educational disadvantage. There has never been a more important time to engage with your local politicians and push this point home. We are told that there are 27 separate agreements with an inestimable number of additional models within them. The public education system only makes up a third of these with the remainder in the private sector systems.

These agreements are divisive, unfair and negotiated across all levels of government and all systems in a morass of differing formulas, differing proportions of funding responsibility from whichever level of government the sector deal was made, and differing expectations of entitlement. This has to change, integrity in funding has to be restored and the next few months are a critical juncture in establishing Fair, Simple and Transparent education funding agreements for the future of our children and the integrity of our nation. We as taxpayers, voters, and most importantly as parents can accept nothing less.

Phillip Spratt