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'Complex' school funding models need review

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by Brett Henebery | 11 Apr 2016

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ACSSO president, Phillip Spratt, told *The Educator* that at the heart of such a review should be a rebalancing of Federal and State and Territory funding to ensure each is responsible for an equal proportional input into the public and private sectors.

"In an ideal world, it could be hoped that a new and truly needs-based funding model, such as that outlined in David Gonski's proposal, could offer a starting point for discussion – and one that was unencumbered by the requirement that no school would lose a dollar per-student as a result of the reform," he said.

A national public education group is calling for a review of existing school funding models, saying they are too complex and need to be simplified.

The Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) said the current funding models, which are made up of 27 different agreements across the three school sectors, have led to a "highly complex situation" that few understand.

ACSSO president, Phillip Spratt, told *The Educator* that at the heart of such a review should be a rebalancing of Federal and State and Territory funding to ensure each is responsible for an equal proportional input into the public and private sectors.

"Such a model should apply the normal elements of needs based models such as defining a needs-based funding threshold, additional loadings for specific disadvantage and an appropriate level of indexing."

In March, Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, suggested that the Federal Government be absolved of the responsibility of funding public schools, saying this would force the States and Territories to spend money for education more wisely.

Spratt opposes the idea, saying it would exacerbate an already worsening school equity problem.

"Much seems to be made of the point that public education is a matter for the States and Territories alone with the Federal government having a bystander role," he said.

"I have to ponder what the implications for Australia's future would be if we were to apply that perspective to a subject such as defence? I cannot believe that national responsibility for education should be discarded by the Federal government."

Following Turnbull's remarks, the Australian Education Union (AEU) **warned** that Australia was already regarded by the OECD as one of the most inequitable school

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systems in the developed world and that should the proposal go ahead, Australia would become a country with "deep entrenched inequalities that will affect generations to come".

Spratt agreed, saying that while risk and entrenched inequality "can sometimes be taken as subjective judgements", the same could not be said for public education.

"In this case we are considering the ongoing future of 3.6 million school age students – two thirds of which are in the public education system," he said.

"This figure is not stationary as it is a rolling population that responds to the natural demographics of our society. It could be argued that the current Liberal government sees its role as a hands-off government with a particular enthusiasm for the principles of subsidiarity."

Spratt questioned claims by the Federal Government that Gonski funding had not led to improvements in student learning outcomes, suggesting wealthy private schools were clearly going to have the advantage so long as they received more funding.

"The Federal Government argues that record levels of funding are being made to education with no indication of outcome improvements," he said.

"ACSSO contends that perhaps the funding is going into a sector that already has sufficient resourcing and therefore shows no advantage."

Spratt said that before any "fair, simple and transparent" needs-based funding model can be implemented it must be "based on an objective foundation that looks to Australia's future".

"As education transcends the various party political aspirations, and is an ongoing responsibility of all Australians, there has to be an expectation that every layer of government is fully supportive of the future of our children," he said.

"Truly fair, simple and transparent needs based funding agreements, with provision for additional disadvantage, and no special deals are vital for the future of our children – children who are constantly progressing through the system and who will have to do the heavy lifting for the future of the economy, and Australia as a whole."

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COMMENTS

by Glen Whitton | 11/04/2016 2:54:26 PM

Thank you for your support of the majority of students! While any government is able to blithely ignore or manipulate facts to their own agenda Australia will live in a country where citizens are treated as second class if the parents cannot afford private schooling. It is our responsibility to stand against this type of thinking.

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