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Public education group calls for school funding agreements to be reviewed, simplified

AM – BY POLITICAL REPORTERS NAOMI WOODLEY AND FRANCIS KEANY

UPDATED THU AT 11:15AM



PHOTO Phillip Spratt says the school funding system is actually made up of 27 different agreements.

ABC TV NEWS - FILE IMAGE

A national group representing parents and students in public education is calling for the complex web of school funding agreements to be reviewed and simplified.

Key points:

- ACSSO says funding model is highly complex and needs to be simplified

- ACSSO "heartily endorses" Labor's commitment of \$37 billion over 10 years for school education
 - Birmingham says Coalition school funding will increase in line with inflation and enrolment growth
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The Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) has said the current funding system is actually made up of 27 different agreements between the Federal Government, states and territories, and independent and Catholic schools.

"There's a number of special deals and models within each sector that have led to the sort of integrity of the needs-based funding system being completely, I would almost say, completely destroyed by this," ACSSO president Phillip Spratt said.

"In essence, we have a highly complex situation that no one single person can understand.

"We'd like to think that we can have a review of this, so we can have a simple understanding, some sort of transparency, where funding can be [in] fair and transparent agreements that everyone can understand, and no special deals."

Mr Spratt said ACSSO "heartily endorsed" Labor's long-term commitment of \$37 billion over 10 years for school education.

But he still thinks a review would make sure the money is being spent in line with the recommendations made by David Gonski in his inquiry into school funding.

"The responsibility of funding was sort of balanced up between states and territories, so each took an equal share of the responsibilities to each sector," Mr Spratt said.

"If that can form part of a review, it would actually allow David Gonski's recommendation where educational outcomes should not be subject to differences in wealth, income power and possessions [to be realised]."

'We're always going to have children who need an education'

ACSSO has rejected the idea, floated by the Prime Minister, that state and territory governments could take total funding control of public schools, as part of a shake-up of Commonwealth state relations, while the Federal Government would continue to fund independent schools.

Mr Spratt said both levels of government should take an equal share in "properly resourcing" all school systems.

"We're always going to have children who need an education and need an equitable and fair and correctly resourced education. Essentially it's like any other service," he said.

"There has to be a sort of expectation from we as voters, tax payers, parents and communities that each layer of government is fully supportive of the future of our children, because it's our children that are going to have to do the heavy lifting for the future of the economy and the future of Australia."

The Federal Opposition is determined to make schools funding a key election issue, accusing the Government of trying to walk away from public education.

But Education Minister Simon Birmingham told 7.30 under the Coalition, funding to schools would increase in line with inflation and enrolment growth each year.

"What we are doing though is trying to give a responsible, affordable growth trajectory for school funding into the future that takes what is a record level of funding after record growth from the Commonwealth in recent years and keeps growing it into the future, but at an affordable rate," he said.

Labor defends using tobacco tax to pay for education promises

The Federal Opposition has said it will use a proposed increase in the tobacco excise, along with changes to superannuation tax concessions and negative gearing, to fund the full six years of the Gonski school deal.

VIDEO [9:29]

Interview: Kate Ellis, Shadow Minister for Education

LATELINE



But questions have been raised about whether Labor will achieve the necessary savings, if the measures reduce smoking and therefore the amount of revenue it receives from cigarette sales.

Labor's education spokeswoman Kate Ellis said the range of measures the party had planned would "more than cover" its education promises.

"This has been independently costed and it has been taken into account that we actually expect this policy will increase the number of people who will quit smoking," Ms Ellis said.

She said the Federal Opposition's plan would deliver over \$100 billion in savings, which will meet its promises, as well as deliver money back into the budget bottom line.

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