

We're counting down the days until polling day and entering the period where undecided voters make their choice. As a parent of school aged children education is always at the front of my mind – it's also our job to ensure it stays at the front of our politician's minds as well. The media has been playing its part too with the ABC's Revolution School telling the story of Kambrya College. If you haven't had a chance to see it yet please take the time to catch up on [iView](#) and a recent article from the Principal [here](#) – the final episode screens in the week before polling day; a timely reminder of what education can be in difficult times. Recently, the ACSSO Board had the opportunity to meet with Professor John Hattie to discuss the challenges facing education reform and the potential for improvement – and the necessary benchmarks to measure learning gain.

Hattie's straightforward view that every child must make a year's learning gain in a year's teaching input is a powerful benchmark. If we overlay this with what happens in your child's school do your teachers have the opportunity to achieve this..? Do they have the support and resources to fully devote their professional skills to our children so that they can gain at least a year's learning gain..? ACSSO believes that even with the very best educators and every opportunity to improve their skills, without adequate sector-blind needs based funding for schools this can be an impossible task. Education can never be a compromise; every student has to be able to reach their potential.

### **School funding and Gonski**

Gonski's recommendations put a baseline in sector-blind needs based funding; one that was ultimately compromised by the restriction that no school would lose a dollar as a result of his advice. His recommendations are the subject of heated political debate over what is possible, what is affordable and what gives the best value and outcomes for our nation – we as parents and voters have an opportunity to challenge the candidates on this, and cast a vote accordingly. Our current education funding system is highly complex and I challenge any politician to simply explain the supposed 27 separate funding agreements with an unknown number of additional models, special deals and partisan arrangements. Whichever flavour of politics forms the next government ACSSO will be advocating for fair, simple and transparent education funding agreements that everyone can easily understand. The Drum recently broadcast an education special discussing Gonski and current party policy, teacher skills and the quality of Australia's schooling – it neatly explored some key education issues and is recommended viewing that can be watched again [here](#).

### **Perfect partnerships**

ACSSO also recognises that our children's education is a true partnership – between parents as the initial and primary educators of our children, our children and their appreciation of the value of education, and their teachers as the professionals that maintain the highest standards of effective learning practice in schools and beyond. Do we almost need to ask the question of every adult – parents and teachers alike – what are you willing and able to do to improve and influence the learning and wellbeing outcomes of the children in your care..?

### **Speak up and be heard**

Looking to your child's school, its community as a whole, and parents' role in helping the school to deliver the best possible outcomes, please be aware that each State and Territory has a peak parent body that is devoted to supporting the school communities in their jurisdiction; support that is always there and freely available when you need it. In addition, they will have looked at the essential points of concern in the coming election that relates to your local area. ACSSO takes a national perspective on education policy informed by its members that are the same State and Territory peak parent bodies. There is a direct and fluid connection so please feel free to channel your thoughts through your organisation and in turn please take those points to any federal candidates that you may encounter in the coming days – as we will too.

### **Price, value or both...**

As education transcends the various party political aspirations, and is an ongoing responsibility of us all, there has to be an expectation that every layer of government is fully supportive of the future of our children. Truly fair, simple and transparent needs based education funding agreements, with provision for additional needs, and no special deals are vital for the future of our children. There's an old saying that price is what you pay and value is what you get. Our children must have the value they deserve from an education system that has their needs as an absolute right – it is the government's job to make it so and our job as parents and voters to hold it to account.

Phillip Spratt