

ACSSO Editorial

Public education is central to a fair and inclusive society

Steve Carter, ACSSO President, 28 March 2009

From the viewpoint of the parents and families of the more than 2.2 million young people in public education, I wish to focus on the uniquely important **value** of public education to past, present and especially to future Australia – and the core community **values-in-action** at the core of its effective operation.

Public education is a microcosm and model of our community: where young people meet, mix, work and interact with others from every part of society, drawn from all walks of life and social circumstances – from near and far. And, very often, from places and cultures across the world: so the values of tolerance and inclusion are enhanced by mutual respect and communication across cultures – we are shaping global citizens.

The other core value that has shaped public education is that of the fair go for all. That must not only be central to how public education operates – but in particular must inform and shape and drive the funding model and the levels of resourcing provided to support the learning and personal development of every young person.

If governments do not put in place processes and resourcing models which guarantee a fair go for all, then they are negligent of their responsibilities not only to all young people and their families – but above all to the future of our country.

I will quickly glance at three aspects of education which are essential elements of a system based on the principle of a fair go for all.

- We must firstly and fundamentally support the well-being and positive social and emotional development – the physical and mental health – of all young people. Kids who are feeling OK are ready and capable of learning. This state of “feeling OK” takes in their level of resilience, their sense of self-worth, connectedness to their community – and their sense of optimism for the future.
- The fair go also must more inclusively support young people with learning or other disabilities, and enable them to learn and develop to their potential, and equip them for a productive and satisfying life in our future society.
- And we must ensure that we build the learning and development foundations firmly in the crucially important early childhood years from 0-4. Research clearly shows not only the learning potential and neural development requiring nurture in these years - but also the extent to which neglect and failure to support that development will result in learning and behavioural problems in the later school years – and in later life.
 - The research also shows that for every dollar invested in early support programs, we get back more than \$10 in lower health care costs, fewer remedial interventions, reduced welfare support or revolving-door service needs; and less negative impact through the criminal justice system.

As I have said before, real nation building starts with education!

Central to that must be a commitment to value public education– in ways that support young people from “cradle to career” – right across the country - by resourcing our public schools at a level that enables public education to be the best it can possibly be.

Our young people deserve no less.

Closing comments by ACSSO President Steve Carter at the National Public Education Forum in Canberra on 28 March 2009.