



THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN
COUNCIL OF STATE SCHOOL
ORGANISATIONS INC.

151 Royal Street, East Perth
Western Australia 6004
P.O. Box 6295, East Perth
Western Australia 6892

Telephone: (08) 9264 4000
Facsimile: (08) 9264 4948
Email: info@wacssso.wa.edu.au
Web: www.wacssso.wa.edu.au

WACSSO Inc.

2016 Federal Election Position Paper

May 2016

Introduction

Australia will hold its Federal Government election on July 2, 2016. The pre-election period provides an important opportunity for the WA Council of State School Organisations Inc. (WACSSO) and its affiliates to lobby their position on key issues to political candidates, members and parties. This document sets the position of WACSSO on four key federal issues pertinent to education in Western Australia.

The issues listed in this position paper are:

- **Funding for an equitable education**
 - The full Gonski commitment
 - Educating students with disabilities
- **Information Communication Technology**
 - Internet Access for a digital education
- **The wellbeing and welfare of young people**
 - Support for parents in the provision of children's education resources
 - Continue funding student support with a reversion to the National School Chaplaincy and Student Welfare Program.
- **Encouraging philanthropy in schools**
 - Extending Schools Plus to ensure eligibility for all government schools

We hope this document is of assistance to affiliates, Federal Government, opposition and others seeking to know WACSSO's position on these key issues during the election period.

WACSSO encourages Parents and Citizens' Associations (P&Cs) to use this position paper as an aid to lobby candidates from all political parties within their local electorates on education issues relevant to their school community.

Funding for an equitable education

The full Gonski commitment

Preamble

WACSSO staff and state councillors are regularly contacted by parents and P&Cs with regard to a range of issues, including more frequently in recent years funding pressures on schools, due to political financial decisions at a state and federal level. Likewise, from time to time in response to budgetary and policy decisions taken by government, WACSSO seeks information and opinions from its affiliates. As a result, WACSSO has gained considerable anecdotal evidence from schools about the benefits of needs-based funding supplied to targeted schools through the National Partnerships for Low SES Schools, Literacy and Numeracy and Improving Teacher Quality Programme.

The Education Community viewed the National Partnerships programs as a precursor to the improvements that could be expected under the full Gonski Agreement. The Final report on analysis of activity and evaluation effort in the Smarter Schools National Partnerships concluded that National Partnerships programs in schools supported “improved school leadership, contributing to improving teacher quality, strengthening student engagement and are contributing to higher levels of student attainment in literacy and numeracy.”ⁱ It is disappointing given the positive outcomes that were clearly being achieved for students through National Partnerships, that the funding did not continue as intended through the full Gonski agreement.

In Western Australia, one metropolitan primary school that received funding under the National Partnerships implemented teacher coaching, modelling, one on one assistance and technological support. NAPLAN scores jumped significantly following implementation of these measures but dropped back as new staff came in to the school that did not have access to the support and coaching, as the funding had ceased with the end of the Partnerships program. Also, during the program, the school introduced the MultiLit literacy initiative, with successful results. This program is still provided at the school, but at a reduced coverage, only for children with the highest need, as the funding ended. For this school, the full Gonski agreement would mean the level of support and positive results achieved through the National Partnerships would be a permanent situation, not an aspiration.

It is important to note that in 2013 the Western Australian government conscientiously objected to the terms of the Gonski Agreement (now called the National Plan for School Improvement) and did not sign, resulting in the state receiving only two-thirds of its intended share of funding. It is disappointing that the National Plan for School Improvement agreement will be abandoned in 2018 under the current government, forgoing the final two intended funding-heavy years. How can it be guaranteed that the rate of funding growth for education will even keep pace with the growth of student population and actual changes in the costs of schooling?

The federal funding announcement on May 1st of an additional \$1.2 billion into the education portfolio from 2018-2020 falls short of the \$4.5 billion committed to by the previous Labor

government. This indicates a separation from the recommendations within the universally accepted 2011 Federal Review of Funding for Schooling (Gonski) report that Australia needed to significantly increase investment in education to ensure equity in educational opportunity for all children, with the bulk of the increase flowing to government schools.

Further, recent figures published by Save Our Schools showing that between 1998-99 and 2013-14, government funding (Commonwealth and state/territory) per private school student, adjusted for inflation, increased, by 39% compared with only 17% for public schools, makes the case even stronger for the full-rollout of Gonski funding.

Additionally, the recently released Australian Education Union-commissioned report *Australian Schooling - The Price of Failure and Reward for Success* found that Australian students' failure to complete Year 12 would cost the economy \$72 billion in unemployment benefits and lost income tax revenue by 2070.ⁱⁱ The report makes the case for increased investment in schools. It is supported by a recently released report by The Smith Family charity that found increased financial and learning program support for disadvantaged school students led to better attendance and school completion rates and better engagement in post-school employment, education and training, when compared to national averages.ⁱⁱⁱ

The move to tie funding to a number of requirements, including assessment, teacher quality and pedagogy, is problematic and does not take into account the variation between states in processes already undertaken. There is concern that enforcing such a blanket approach to funding conditions will impact states' and individual schools' ability to provide education for students that specifically addresses need. This is at odds with the push toward autonomy through the Independent Public Schools initiative.

The federal government maintains that more money is not the answer. However, in 2014 when WACSSO surveyed its affiliates on P&C and community contribution to schools, results revealed that a significant proportion of the estimated more than \$15 million donated to public schools was spent on core learning resources – literacy and numeracy programs, readers, science equipment, books and basic technology items. WACSSO asserts that schools should be funded to provide the basic items students require to succeed educationally.

Position

WACSSO fully supports the recommendations in the Federal Review of Funding for Schooling Report (Gonski Report) and recommends a continuation of the full Gonski agreement.

WACSSO calls for the following actions:

1. That the Federal Government honour its initial funding commitment for schools, based on the recommendations of the Gonski Review.
2. That each major political party explain its commitment to and plan for, the future of Federal funding of schools, 2016 and beyond.

Educating students with disabilities

Preamble

According to data from the Federal Government's Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on Disability (NCCD) for 2015, 13.6 per cent of students Australia-wide needed funded support at school for their disability, but only 6.2 per cent of students received it. This data is supported by Australian Education Union data released in April 2016, following the annual State of Our Schools survey, taken by 9324 principals, teachers and support staff. Survey data revealed that 17.7 per cent of students required help in class for a disability and 77 per cent of principals said they did not have the means within their budgets to provide that assistance.^{iv}

In January 2016, following a wide ranging Senate inquiry into school access and attainment and related impacts for students with disability, the Education and Employment References Committee made 10 recommendations^v in their report after considering 295 submissions hearing evidence from a plethora of parents, students, schools and other individuals and stakeholders in the disability and education sectors. The recommendations primarily dealt with ensuring adequate needs-based funding for students with a disability and the use of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability to deliver more funding to students where it is required. The report also recommended better collaboration between the federal government and the states to consistently improve many aspects of education for students with a disability administered by the states.

The report also references the success of the More Support for Students with Disability (MSSD) program, which was funded under National Partnerships and ceased in 2014. The program was intended to be replaced with funding based on the NCCD. Like other Partnerships programs, an evaluation found the MSSD initiative "...achieved its major objective to build the skills of teachers and increase school capacity to better meet the educational needs of students with disability."^{vi}

Additional funding of \$118 million over two years in the 2016-17 federal budget is a welcome inclusion, however in reality when distributed between the states and across schools it is not anticipated to seriously address the shortfall experienced by schools in trying to provide an adequate educational experience for these students.

It is clear that students with a disability are missing out on vital funding to ensure they receive an equitable education. Schools should not have to be put in the position of telling parents that they simply do not have the resources to ensure that child has a reasonable opportunity to learn. WACSSO asserts that the long-lasting impact of a systemic failure to provide education for these students far outweighs the cost of providing an quality education from early childhood.

Position

WACSSO calls for the following actions:

1. That government funds all students with disability on the basis of need by honouring the initial funding commitment for schools, based on the recommendations of the Gonski Review.

2. That each major political party explain its commitment to and plan for, the funding of support at school for students with a disability as determined by the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability.

Information Communication Technology (ICT)

Internet access for a digital education

Preamble

Significant advances in technology over the past decade have led to an increase in the use of ICT in public schools to aid teachers in ensuring their students receive a high quality education. The rapid development of mobile phone, computer and other digital technologies has led to several new initiatives in schools such as the introduction of electronic whiteboards, tablet computers and a highly digital curriculum. Students now turn to internet search engines instead of indexes of books to conduct research for assignments. Students learning via distance education require the internet to access an optimum education.

State, territory and commonwealth education ministers have agreed that NAPLAN tests will be conducted online from 2017 on an opt-in basis over two to three years. State/territory education authorities will make decisions about the logistics and timing of moving NAPLAN online for their jurisdiction. This comes after the Online Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (OLNA) was introduced in Western Australia in 2014 to assist secondary school students who do not meet the NAPLAN benchmark to meet the Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE) requirement of demonstrating the minimum standard of literacy and numeracy. The completion of the OLNA is fully contingent on internet access.

The Melbourne Declaration on the Educational Goals for Young Australians acknowledges that in a digital age, and with rapid and continuing changes in the ways that people share, use, develop and communicate with ICT, students must be highly skilled in its use. The Australian Curriculum has been developed in a way that is heavily technology-focused. ICT used as a tool throughout the curriculum and Technology as an isolated study area is fast, interactive and diverse, requiring sufficient funding and resources to adequately deliver it.

Internet access is a significant concern in rural and remote Western Australia. Mobile coverage is patchy and following oversubscription to the national broadband network's (NBN) interim satellite service, which has provided poor internet connections for the approximately 37,000 customers who were able to access it, the new NBN service, Sky Muster has just begun to be rolled out. Homes and businesses in rural and remote Australia that fall outside the fixed line and fixed wireless areas will be able to access this service, with the rollout schedule aiming to connect 85,000 premises by the end of June next year, and a further 50,000 by June 2018.^{vii} This means that for many households, adequate access to the internet is still two years away.

Position

Now digital technology has become a core part of education, it is an ongoing and important Government responsibility.

WACSSO calls for the following actions:

1. A commitment to ensuring imminent, high speed internet access for all students, including adequate provision for students in rural and remote areas of Western Australia.
2. For the 'My School' website to include data stating the speed, quality and availability of each school's internet access so that the delivery of the Australian Curriculum at an individual school level can be assessed against their ability to fully use electronic curriculum delivery and learning resources.

The wellbeing and welfare of young people

Support for parents in the provision of children's education resources

Preamble

Growing cost of living pressures on families, combined with the ever-increasing cost of educating a child made payments like the Federal Government's Schoolkids Bonus an essential helping hand for eligible Australian families.

Increased reliance on technology for delivery of the Australian Curriculum beginning in 2015, compounded by the loss of funding for computers for high school students due to the discontinuation of the Digital Education Revolution (DER), has placed added pressure on families trying to provide the necessary resources for their children's education. Increasing costs of new technology, books, stationery, excursions and uniforms and the rising cost of living leaves some families choosing between food on the table and providing educational items for their child.

Calculations by the Australian Scholarships Group indicates that on average it will cost metropolitan Perth families almost \$50,000 to educate one child at public schools beginning pre-primary in 2016 all the way through to year 12.^{viii} These calculations take into account fees, charges and levies, extracurricular activity, uniforms/clothing, necessities and travel. That's about \$4000 per year on average.

The now discontinued Schoolkids Bonus comprised two instalments of \$205 for each child in primary school - a total of \$410 each year and two instalments of \$410 for each child in secondary school - a total of \$820 each year, automatically paid in January and July each year to eligible families and students. The final payment is to be distributed in July 2016. The removal of this funding, provided to more than 1.3 million families, is expected to result in increased demand on welfare charities, and in some families going without.

In a report released at the end of April, 2016, The Smith Family charity found that long-term support over decades can help improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged children.^{ix} The report references the charity's *Learning for Life* program, which currently provides assistance to 34,000 young Australians engaged in primary school to tertiary level study. The program provides a biannual payment to families as well as support and access to a range of learning programs and mentoring opportunities. Evaluation of the program found that compared to the national average, students engaged in Learning for Life had significantly higher attendance and school completion rates and better engagement in post-school employment, education and training.

Position

A fundamental role of Government is to fully fund public education at a level that enables the best possible provision of that education, and to ensure access to a school experience of the highest quality is not dependent on a parent or carer's capacity or willingness to make a financial

contribution. For the sake of equity, support should be provided to those families unable to provide resources for students to meet core education demands.

WACSSO calls for the following action:

1. Support for families that are unable to provide adequate educational resources for their children, in order that children facing disadvantage have an equal opportunity to participate in education as their advantaged counterparts.

Continue funding student support with a reversion to the National School Chaplaincy and Student Welfare Program

School chaplains focus on the delivery of pastoral care in schools, which can include support and guidance about ethics, values, relationships and helping students engage with the broader community.

Chaplains in schools are funded primarily under the federal government's National School Chaplaincy Programme (NSCP), with \$243.8 million committed over four years from 2014-15 to 2017-18 to fund 2900 schools – both public and private. WA will receive \$7.41 million per year under this arrangement and 247 public schools will be funded. Schools can apply to access \$20,000 a year to help engage a chaplain.

In December 2014, the Western Australian state government committed an additional \$4.15 million for 2015 and 2016 to help mitigate a shortfall left by the federal government when the National School Chaplaincy and Student Welfare Program (NSCSWP) ended at the end of 2015, replaced by the NSCP.

The federal funding reduction was not the only shortfall left when the program changed. Under the NSCSWP, schools could access funding for secular (non-religious) welfare workers as well as denomination-based Chaplains. The Abbott Government removed the funding provision for secular welfare workers, which means schools can no longer access funding for them.

WACSSO has been vocal in its opposition to the removal of secular worker funding. Whilst only a small proportion (<5%) of schools in Western Australia have previously chosen to engage a secular welfare worker, WACSSO believes that giving all schools the opportunity to decide which role best fits the needs of their unique school community is of utmost importance, given that state schools provide for an increasingly diverse population of students.

In addition, WACSSO acknowledges that school chaplains are also generously funded from alternative sources, namely P&C Associations, and also some Local Government Authorities.

Position

WACSSO calls for the following actions:

1. A commitment to continue funding for student support beyond 2017-18.
2. A commitment to fund secular student welfare workers, as well as Chaplains, under a renewed National School Chaplaincy and Student Welfare Program.

Encouraging philanthropy in schools

Extending Schools Plus to ensure eligibility for all government schools

Preamble

Under current laws pertaining to tax deductibility for donations, P&C Associations and similar groups are particularly limited. Only organisations with specific 'school building funds' can attract tax deductible receipts. Very few P&Cs go down this path as money donated to building funds can only be spent on school building projects. This inequity between P&Cs and other Non-Government Organisations overtly disadvantages P&C Associations, as it is difficult for them to attract donors when they are in competition with organisations that can provide tax deductible receipts.

WACSSO lobbied for a change to the legislation to allow a broader category of donations to school organisations to be afforded DGR status, thus enhancing the attractiveness for potential benefactors to donate. WACSSO proposed to the Federal Government that this could be enacted through the creation of an additional category within the Deductible Gift Register for: 'Not for profit organisations promoting education of students in government schools with respect to the provision of educational resources and services.'

In 2015 WACSSO connected with Australian Schools Plus, a charity that facilitates the collection of Tax Deductible Gifts to support disadvantaged schools. Schools Plus criterion limits eligible schools to those that have an Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) ranking, as shown on the My School website. ICSEA provides an indication of the socio-educational backgrounds of students, it is not calculated based on staff profile, school facilities or teaching programs at the school.

WACSSO believes that all schools should be able to avail themselves of opportunities to attract external funds. Philanthropy is more attractive to potential donors where the facility of tax deduction exists.

Position

At a time of economic instability, government should be reducing barriers to philanthropy in schools in an even-handed way.

WACSSO calls for the following action:

1. The Federal Government to allow all public schools, regardless of ICSEA rating, the ability to undertake projects through Australian Schools Plus.

References

- ⁱ Atelier Learning Solutions Pty Ltd. June 2012. Final report on analysis of activity and evaluation effort in the smarter schools national partnerships. P iii.
- ⁱⁱ Rorris, A. 2016. Australian Schooling-The Price of Failure and Reward for Success.
- ⁱⁱⁱ The Smith Family. 2016. Improving the educational outcomes of disadvantaged young Australians: The Learning for Life program. www.thesmithfamily.com.au
- ^{iv} The Australian. 18 April, 2016. School principals siphon funds to help students with disabilities. <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/>
- ^v Australian Senate. Education and Employment References Committee. 2016. Access to real learning: the impact of policy, funding and culture on students with disability.
- ^{vi} Australian Government Department of Education and Training. June 2015. Evaluation of the More Support for Students with Disabilities Initiative 2012-2014, Final Evaluation Report.
- ^{vii} The Smith Family. 2016. Improving the educational outcomes of disadvantaged young Australians: The Learning for Life program. www.thesmithfamily.com.au
- ^{viii} Australian Scholarships Group. 2016. Education Calculator. <https://www.asg.com.au/education-calculator>
- ^{ix} The Smith Family. 2016. Improving the educational outcomes of disadvantaged young Australians: The Learning for Life program. www.thesmithfamily.com.au