

**The Western Australian Council
of State School Organisations Inc.**

2013 Federal Election Position Paper



WACSSO

Supporting parents, supporting public schools

Introduction

Australia will hold its Federal Government election before the end of November 2013. 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 three key federal issues pertinent to education in Western Australia.

The issues listed in this position paper are:

- **Federal Education Funding Reforms**
National Plan for School Improvement (Gonski)
- **Information Communication Technology**
Digital Education Revolution
National Curriculum
- **Education Welfare Payments**
Schoolkids Bonus

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 P&Cs to use this position paper as an aid to lobby candidates within their local electorates on education issues relevant to their school community.

Federal Education Funding Reforms

National Plan for School Improvement

Preamble

The Federal Review of Funding for Schooling (Gonski Review) provided a comprehensive report on the restructuring of the current complex and inequitable Federal funding model, which it cites as basing school funding on an “outdated and opaque average cost measure.” It found that there is a distinct lack of coordination in the way governments fund schooling, particularly “in relation to directing funding to schools based on student need.”

The quantifiable decline in Australian educational performance by our schools is alarming. At the foundation of this decline is the inequity that exists across the spectrum of Australian schools. The Review provides a clear framework for the achievement of equality in educational opportunity for all students regardless of their location, family income, ethnicity, disability or any other disadvantage that impacts on their capacity to achieve their educational potential.

The Gonski Review provides a once-in-a-generation opportunity to enact serious reform in regard to how schools in Western Australia are funded. The recommendations made facilitate increased opportunities for all students and greater equity in education. The review found that “...the current funding arrangements are unnecessarily complex, lack coherence and transparency, and involve a duplication of funding efforts in some areas.”

In April, the Federal Government released figures for its National Plan for School Improvement, proposing to inject \$14.5 billion extra into education over six years. The Plan also includes a National Curriculum, improved teacher training and support and an aim to take Australian schools into the top five in the world.

A school-by-school analysis of the 1:2 Federal to State Government funding offer of \$920 million extra over six years for Western Australia demonstrates that no school will be financially worse off under the National Plan for School Improvement, with some schools projected to experience funding growth of more than 66% over six years.

It is now time for Federal and State Governments to negotiate and work together to implement the National Plan for School Improvement to ensure a high quality education for the future of all students in WA.

Given the current impasse of some State and Federal Governments in supporting the proposed model, if negotiation fails between the present and February 2014, when the current funding agreement ends, WACSSO calls for information on what funding model will be in place after that time.

Position

WACSSO fully supports the recommendations in the Federal Review of Funding for Schooling Report (Gonski Report) and would like to see the broad principles implemented as a more equitable funding model throughout Australia.

WACSSO calls for the following actions:

1. That a new Federal funding model for schools, based on the recommendations of the Gonski Review, be implemented throughout Australia.
2. That each major political party explain its' commitment to and plan for, the future of Federal funding of schools.

Information Communication Technology (ICT)

Digital Education Revolution

National Curriculum

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 laptops for every student. If fully supported through appropriate funding and resourcing, this technology has the potential to have a dramatic and positive effect on student outcomes. In an evolving classroom environment that continues to move away from traditional teaching methods, the effective use of ICT to supplement a student's education helps to accommodate the varying learning styles of modern students. It has been well documented that the effective use of ICT in classrooms leads to an improvement of student outcomes.

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, which will be fully implemented across all schools by 2015, recognises this and 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.

The Federal Government introduced the Digital Education Revolution in 2008, injecting \$2.1 billion into ICT resources and support. The scheme included the provision of new computers to all high school students in years 9-12 on a one computer to one student ratio through the National Secondary School Computer Fund. Disappointingly, the scheme ended in June 2013 leaving schools battling to work out how to continue delivering this level of ICT for students, some asking parents and carers to foot some of the bill.

There are many concerns associated with the discontinuation of funding. Greater disparity will occur between schools in different socio-economic areas, schools will have differing abilities to continue funding for laptops, computers and ICT. Equity issues arise as provision of technology becomes dependent on a families' capability to pay. There are further concerns about cyber-safety, and consistency and standardisation of software would be near impossible if students were to bring personal computers to school.

We want to ensure all public school students have equitable access to digital technology that will optimise their educational outcomes. We believe that the Federal Government must provide funding to ensure all students have equal access to modern and reliable digital technology systems that are supported through both the training of staff and the provision of school-based technical and maintenance support.

Position

WACSSO believes that once digital technology becomes a core part of education, it should be an ongoing Government responsibility.

On the Digital Education Revolution, WACSSO calls for the following:

1. Funding for the provision of computers on a 1:1 ratio to be continued for *all* high school students.
2. An adequate sum to be provided on top of the amount for each computer for technical and maintenance support.
3. Funding to be provided for ongoing staff training in the delivery of curriculum on ICT devices.
4. Funding should be provided to ensure all schools have the most up to date Standard Operating Environment (SOE).
5. All schools must have access to consistent, reliable internet access with speeds that will enable the effective and efficient delivery of curriculum and school operations.

On the National Curriculum, WACSSO calls for the following:

1. Ongoing assessment and verification of all electronic learning resources.
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 National Curriculum at an individual school level can be assessed against their ability to fully use electronic curriculum delivery and learning resources.

Education Welfare Payments

Schoolkids Bonus

Preamble

Growing cost of living pressures on families, combined with the ever-increasing cost of educating a child make 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), is set to place 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 \$51,000 to educate one child beginning pre-primary in 2013 all the way through to year 12. 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 Schoolkids Bonus comprises 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.

Eligible recipients include a parent or carer receiving Family Tax Benefit Part A for a dependent child in primary or secondary education, or a primary or secondary student turning 19 years or younger in the calendar year who receives certain government payments. This is a payment that directly impacts the most vulnerable children in society.

1.3 million families currently receive the Schoolkids Bonus Australia-wide. The Liberal Party has announced plans to axe the payment should they gain Government this year. We are seeking a commitment from both parties that the payment will be retained.

Position

A fundamental role of Government is to fully fund education at public expense 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 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:

1. The Schoolkids Bonus to continue as a bi-annual payment to eligible families
2. The Schoolkids Bonus to be indexed with inflation.
3. Both major parties to commit to funding the School Kids Bonus in 2013 and beyond.

For information about this publication, please contact The Western Australian Council of State School Organisations Inc. (WACSSO) by phone on **(08) 9264 4000** or by emailing **communications@wacsso.wa.edu.au**. Alternatively, visit **wacsso.wa.edu.au**.



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