AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF STATE SCHOOL ORGANISATIONS
Submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Provisions of the Australian Education Bill 2012

Introduction

The Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) is pleased to have the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate regarding this historic bill

ACSSO is recognised as the peak parent organisation for families of over 2 million students in our nation's public schools. We have also in recent times been the voice for families accessing prior to school services and have worked closely with the Minister for Education and the Minister for Early Childhood. With the changing nature of education we also give voice for options in the post compulsory education sector.

Whilst our member base is the peak organisations in the states and territories ACSSO is now making use of new technologies and social media to reach a larger audience of parents in schools.

Our families are diverse and a representative of the full range of socio-economic situations as well as the full range of complexities that make up the communities in which we live.

We are well aware that our public schools educate the vast majority of students who have special needs. We also know that Public Education caters for the majority of students who are genuinely low SES. Public Education also caters for the young people living in transient families; the majority of our indigenous students and those who have culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Public schools educate our refugee students

The Gonski Review has confirmed for us as a nation the urgency of the need to reform the way we fund education and in particular public schools. This reform needs to be protected by legislation to ensure that all our young people have equitable access to a high quality education and their outcomes not be determined by their postcode or family background

Education is a long term investment in our nation.

Preamble to the Australian Education Bill 2012

All students are entitled to an excellent education …..

We are pleased to see a commitment to a high quality, high equity schooling system. This will provide the opportunity through legislation for the Gonski reforms to be implemented.

We know and the review confirmed that the current levels of funding are inadequate if we are to continue to be a high performing country or indeed create equitable opportunities for all children to achieve equitable outcomes

Australia's spending on education falls well below the OECD average. The Minister, Peter Garrett was recently quoted in a media release September 2012 "*our spend on education as a total share of GDP has remained flat since 2001 and is currently still lower than the OECD average, once the one-off spend on the BER is removed.*"

As a nation our investment in education is inequitable. Public education is the system that caters for the majority of students from a disadvantaged background and / or have additional needs yet it is very clear that the proportion of total government schools funding which is spent on public schools, has declined from 77.1% in 2003 to 68.6% in 2009, compared to an OECD average of 85.8%. (*OECD Education at a Glance 2012*)

Equity in Education

We have already seen the results of the current model of underfunding of public education with the equity gap widening. Our performance internationally is declining.

International data, such as TIMSS (*Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study)* and PIRLS (*Progress in International Reading Literacy Study*), and national NAPLAN data on confirm the impact of social background and the effects particularly of multiple disadvantage and high concentrations of disadvantage. The impact of the inequities in funding is profound.

Funding must be targeted to where there is most need. ACSSO is pleased to see that the Bill recognises that.

If Australia is to be a prosperous nation…….

Evidenced by the PISA report for Australia are significant gaps in achievement between Australian students, the equivalent of up to three years of schooling, associated with factors such as SES, Indigeneity and location. For our nation to prosper we need a population of well-educated people – we need to look at our future when considering the funding of education. It's a long term investment that is paid back in higher economic growth; reduced health costs; reduced incarceration and a more equitable society. Tony Vinson, in his Inquiry into Public Education in NSW, made it clear that there are substantial future savings to be made by investing in our young.

The Bill states clearly that future funding arrangements must be based on the real needs of Australian schools and school students. ACSSO welcomes this.

Schools for the 21st Century

Today and tomorrows classrooms need to be different from the past if we are to engage and prepare our young people for their future. Digital technologies and new methods of teaching need to be adopted.

This needs to be totally resourced and the funding required available

Strong partnerships…..

For many years ACSSO has been vocal in the importance of strong partnerships between home, school and the wider community. The evidenced based paper commissioned by ACSSO and the Australian Parents Council *Parental Engagement in Learning: Lessons from Research* (launched by the Minister for Schools, Peter Garrett) clearly identified parental engagement as the missing link in student achievement. Strong family and community engagement is central to effective education reform. There is in excess of forty years of research that supports this and recently resources have

been developed (and funded through DEEWR) to strengthen that link. The implementation requires targeted funding to support this.

The role of other partners in the delivery of school education, including the state and territory governments is also recognised.

This clearly supports the fundamental role of all government's federal, state and territory in the education of our nation – it is everyone's responsibility.

The statements by the Prime Minister:
"A quality education for every Australian child would no longer be a privilege extended by the state from time to time,"

"It will be an entitlement arising from their common citizenship in our commonwealth."

We don't underestimate the difficulties of the negotiations between the state, federal and territory leaders over the implementation of The Bill, particularly considering it will need a substantial investment by all. We urge all members of parliament to consider the importance of a new, fairer and transparent funding model and the difference the investment will make to our children and our economy.

2. Objects of the Act

The key objects of the Act are to provide are fully supported by ACSSO. The goals clearly identify the need for education reform.

The challenge in particular 3.b.iii is indeed inspiring and will need substantial investment and commitment by all levels of government and education providers.

ACER release in December (TIMMS and PIRLS) highlight Australia being out performed in Year 4 reading (21 countries) and mathematics (17 countries). Australia's performance in maths has remained the same in Mathematics for the last 15 years.
The COAG Reform Council's report *Education 2011: Comparing performance across Australia* (COAG, 2012) reveals little change in education outcomes for the past eight years.

Lasting reform will take considerable investment in time – hence the urgency if as a nation we are to reach these goals.

3. Improving the Performance of Schools and School Students

Achieving this requires a much needed financial investment and reform.

David Gonski highlighted the urgency of the reform agenda and warned that failure to act urgently would have enormous social and economic consequences for communities and the nation.

The results from the Auspoll survey commissioned by the AEU shows that almost 90% of people support an agreement on the funding between the Federal and state and territory governments. It also revealed that over 85% believe that this is an urgent matter.

An overwhelming majority of people in NSW, Qld and Victoria are horrified by the cuts in public education by their respective State Premier.

Reform Directions for the National Plan

ACSSO supports The Bill's intention of making student need and improving student learning a key reform

The Bill gives outline of the key reform directions:

(1) Quality teaching
(2) Quality learning
(3) Empowered school leadership
(4) Transparency and accountability
(5) Meeting student needs

ACSSO would like to see parental engagement embedded in the National Plan for School Improvement. As previously stated research has clearly indicated that this significant relationship has a profound effect on student learning outcomes. It is essential that support both financial and by government and sector commitment is vital if we are to reach the key objective of the Australian Education Bill 2012

The OECD's *Equity and Quality in Education: Supporting Disadvantaged Schools and Students* report highlights the centrality of national investment in schooling, in particular for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, to education reform:

> *The evidence is conclusive: equity in education pays off. The highest performing education systems across OECD countries are those that combine high quality and high equity. ... Investing as early as possible in high quality education for all and in supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds is a cost beneficial strategy.* (p 14; p26)

Recent Federal Government figures show the high price that students and teachers across Australia will pay if the Bill is not implemented schools would lose up to $5.4 billion in funding over the next five years..

This will have a compounding effect on public schools.

Calls for the continuation, such as the Coalition's demand for a moratorium on school funding reform and a two-year extension of the current funding arrangements for non-government schools until 2015, would complicate the problems identified by the Gonski review which the Government's Education Bill is intended to reform.

Failure to act would mean, public schools receiving $673 million less in real terms in 2015/16 than they did in 2011-12. By contrast Commonwealth funding for non-government schools would increase in real terms by more than $1.3 billion, a real increase of 15% over that period.

We are also winding down current programs such as National Partnerships will only further perpetuate the situation and widen the equity gap.

Conclusion

The Bill recognises urgent need for funding reform and provides full, fair and equitable funding for public education in order to allow every child to reach his or her full potential.

The Bill provides the legislative platform for these reforms. We recognise the Bill doesnot indicate funding or indeed proportional funding for state and commonwealth contributions

We are pleased that Prime Minister indicated in her September announcement of the Government's intention to legislate to implement Gonski's core recommendation that it would require significantly increased investment in education in the order of $6.5 billion annually (2012 dollars).[1]

This is the level of funding identified by Gonski as necessary to ensure that every child's education will be supported with a benchmark amount of funding for all schools based on what it costs to educate a student at the schools. We totally support funding supplemented by a system of "needs loadings" to address the major areas of disadvantage associated with disability, Indigeneity, low SES, lack of English proficiency, and the size and location of a school.

We believe the implementation of the Act will lead to ensuring a fairer funding model for all kids and will enable our nation to start to bridge the education gap. All young Australian s deserve equitable access to a quality education no matter what their background

[1] Julia Gillard, 'A National Plan for School Improvement' Speech to National Press Club, Canberra 3 September 2012