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Parents' Voice in Government School Education

Committee Secretary
Senate Education and Employment Committees
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Better and Fairer Schools (Funding Reform) Bill 2024

Dear Committee Secretary

Parents Victoria (PV) is a state wide democratic organisation representing parents of students in Victorian government schools. For further information about us:

<https://www.parentsvictoria.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Parents-Victoria-Brochure-download.pdf>

PV cosigned a joint letter with the AEU (Victoria), Victorian Principal Association and Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals on the 29 August 2024 to the Prime Minister and Federal Education Minister to emphasise our concerns about future school funding in Australia. Minister Clare introduced the Bill to amend the Australian Education Act, promising “a pathway to full and fair funding for all schools”. However, public schools will remain severely underfunded, even if all states and territories sign up for the Better Fairer School Funding agreements. The proposed amendments do not rectify the accounting tricks and shortfalls to fund public schools fairly so they can deliver on the educational reforms you have set them to do.

In the August joint letter we described the current Victorian context and the pathway to full and fair funding has constant roadblocks.

“Victorian public schools are only funded to 90.4% of the funding standard established in legislation, the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS). Our schools are a further 4% short with the capacity of the Victorian government to discount depreciation and other system costs from their share of the funding. This means our public schools and students are missing out on \$1.9 billion of funding this year alone. Over the next four years, Commonwealth budget papers show that the federal government will provide \$20.1 billion to the state’s 724 non-government schools, but only \$12.1 billion to the 1570 public schools, with non-government schools remaining overfunded until 2029. How is this fair?”

No one disputes the fact that public schools do the heaviest lifting when it comes to the most disadvantaged students in Australia, yet the funding doesn’t provide what is needed.

Source: <https://pasisahlberg.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Deans-Talk-2024.pdf> (Slide 17)

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To remove the roadblocks, Parents Victoria proposes two key amendments:

- Increase the Commonwealth share of funding public schools to a minimum of 25% of their SRS.
- Prohibit the states from including non-SRS funding items as part of their share of funding the SRS of public schools.

PV agrees with others that “Changes to the Commonwealth funding share should be subject to disallowance by the Parliament” to provide transparency and public scrutiny of future funding decisions.

PV sees in our everyday work, the difference full funding for every public school student would make to their life and educational outcomes.

Our closing remarks remain the same as they did in the August joint letter that *“As we approach another federal election, principals, teachers, support staff, students, and families are urging the federal government to finally end decades of neglect. We call on you to step up and fully fund public schools now, for the benefit of our students, staff, and the community.”*

This can only be “better and fairer” - success through equity is a smarter strategy.

Gail McHardy
Chief Executive Officer
23/10/24