

Funding Gonski as it was designed



**By Matt Jarman
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The 2013 National Education Reform Agreement (NERA) between the Commonwealth and state and territory governments (and through memorandums of understanding with private schools) planned a \$16 billion increase in school funding over six years, 80 per cent of which was to go to public schools.

As Trevor Cobbold of Save our Schools Australia has frequently reminded people, NERA was supposed to be the implementation of the Gonski report.

But it never happened. At least not in the way it should have.

It wasn't the Gonski model itself that failed, it was federal leadership that failed Gonski, a simple case of sabotage.

Recent federal funding approaches have left Australia with declining results in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), higher levels of social segregation between the rich and the poor schools and arguably unbridgeable gaps in school infrastructure standards. (The capital investment gap is valued around \$21.5 billion, whilst just short of \$10 billion is committed until 2029 in packages to help private schools adjust to a new school resourcing model.)

The current agreement is now set to expire and the position of the SSTUWA is that Western Australian students are entitled to 100 per cent of their federal funding entitlement. This should not include clauses which pay for services that all sectors receive.

For example, if everyone in the education sector uses the services of the School Curriculum and Standards Authority (SCSA), then costs should be met from everyone's slice of the pie, not just from the public sector's slice as is currently the case.

Just another sneaky example of inequity by reducing the public education funding pie. \$9 billion of JobKeeper payments to private schools only, the list is long...

The ideologically motivated funding of private and public schools in Australia under the previous federal government could easily have covered the intended Gonski model, such was its wastefulness.

Not only was the distribution inequity a rort, but the rate of private school funding increases was at a higher rate than any received by public schools.

This is a kick in the guts for public education when the system was already motionless on the canvas.

Gonski reacquainted Australians with fairness for school funding: Equity in funding, a fair go for all Australian students no matter the postcode.

Now it needs to be actioned. Backroom deals and shady agreements are hopefully now in the past. (A federal Independent Commission Against Corruption could seek to probe how bushfire, flood and other deals delivering education funding were cut in the last few years.)

A genuine needs-based system is necessary. An option for consideration would see all schools accessing the same system of needs-based funding, scaled by their fee structures, other income sources and current wealth.

This option may lead to the definition of a private school to be much more consistent with what is seen elsewhere right around the world.

The fact that private schools in Australia receive such large amounts from the public purse is mocked across the globe.

This option could lead to resolving the social inequity we currently see in our schooling system. Public schools would be far

better resourced and once again be schools of choice for parents from across the community.

Given the evidence that recent declines in PISA results have largely occurred in private schools, parents may consider schooling options in a different light under such a proposed shift in needs-based school funding.

Any ability to better cope with cost-of-living pressures would be welcomed by parents.

WA public schools, despite competing on unfair funding grounds, consistently punch above their weight and continue to deliver.

A fairer funding system would simply allow them to provide for students in a way that is currently, and has been for some time, unimaginable.

It's time for Gonski to be implemented as it was designed to be.

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