School Funding Debate

Deputy Prime Minister’s Proposal

Media reports indicate that the Deputy Prime Minister has presented a proposal to COAG to fund government schools based on the Socio-Economic Status (SES) model. (See article attached). It is unclear whether this proposal would combine Commonwealth and State funds. It appears the proposal will again focus on disadvantaged students and schools.

The AEU has indicated support for such a proposal; however their media statement refers to an SES funding model that takes into account ‘... all income sources for schools, including public and private income sources’. The media statements however demands that the Rudd Government rectify problems with the current Commonwealth funding arrangements. The AEU indicated it was not embracing the current SES model. Some State Government spokespersons gave qualified support for the above proposal.

Australian Primary Principals Association Submission

Background

The Australian Primary Principals’ Association (APPA) has presented a submission (Delivering Better Educational Outcomes in Australian Primary Schools) to the Deputy Prime Minister seeking a major reform of funding arrangements for primary schools in both the government and non-government sectors.

The submission seeks improved public funding for primary schools across the three school sectors.

The submission states

Finally in regard to the retention of the SES funding arrangements for non-government schools, it should be recognised that many non-government schools as well as government schools cannot provide an adequate primary education within their existing resource levels. The Australian Government is urged to adopt measures described below which will improve assistance to those schools most in need by supplementing the recurrent funding provided by the existing SES model.
It recognises the difficulty for the Australian Government in making cross-sectoral enhancements of funding for primary schools without a shared commitment from State and Territory authorities; hence the need to present the proposal to COAG.

The submission refers to a funding safety net to ensure all disadvantaged students receive adequate funding. It proposes that the federal Government should issue a funding guarantee that stipulates that by 2012 all Australian schools in the lowest quintile receive a level of funding that is at least twice the 2007 average amount.

It also addresses the issue of the significant difference in the per capita rate for primary and secondary students, (particularly in relation to Government schools). The submission also alleges that the Commonwealth funded programs favour secondary schools.

APPA also proposes increased Commonwealth funding for students with disabilities, and severe behavioural problems. The submission is critical of current funding arrangements for literacy and numeracy which is based on targeted programs rather than increased recurrent funding.

APPA confirms its opposition to league tables but supports national assessments of literacy and numeracy and sample assessments of other outcomes. However, the submission also urges governments and policy analysts to put the results of national testing and other accountability requirements to ‘...practical use’.

APPA again recommends that a much higher level of transparency with regard to individual school funding and proposes that total income acquired by non-government schools be made public. It also acknowledges the picture ‘...is even more obscure in the government systems since State and Territory governments do not disclose the individual school recurrent per students grants...’. It recommends that financial data should be reported in the ANR according to student background characteristics, the financial questionnaire be retained and government schools also supply comparable information so that valid cross sectoral comparisons can be made.

**Recommendations**

The submission contains the following recommendations:

The Australian Government is urged to adopt the following courses of action in regard to its primary school funding for the 2009 - 2012 quadrennium.
a) Wherever possible, funding streams should be consolidated into a global general recurrent grant.

b) Recurrent funding for primary schools in all sectors should be indexed to a common SES measure.

c) The minimum recurrent grants to government school systems for primary education should be increased from 8.9 per cent to 10 per cent of the AGSRC to take effect in 2009.

d) The weightings for the SES index should be adjusted so that government and non-government schools in the lowest quintile of the SES distribution receive a per student recurrent income twice the amount of that allocated to schools at the median.

e) The recurrent block grant for government primary schools should be composed of individual school grants, that are indexed according to the SES model used to calculate non-government recurrent school grants.

f) The individual amounts for each government school recurrent grant should be published using the same protocols as those currently in place for reporting non-government recurrent school grants.

g) The Australian Government's primary general recurrent grant should be progressively increased so as to achieve parity with the secondary AGSRC by 2012.

h) All funding for infrastructure and capital works should be allocated on the basis of need so that the schools with the most inadequate facilities are able to reach a national standard.

i) Targeted programs should more adequately reflect the importance of primary education.

j) The level of support for schools enrolling students with disabilities should be increased.

k) Targeted programs should address the problem of extreme student behaviour.

l) A new targeted program should provide for schools to develop their capacity to work collaboratively with other agencies and community groups in order to alleviate educational disadvantages.

A representative of APPA is quoted in *The Australian* (17 March 2008) as stating the SES funding model had to be reviewed.