Gonski fight continues



By AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe

Malcolm Turnbull will remain as Prime Minister but his huge drop in support at the election has changed Australia's political landscape.

His failure to commit to needs-based Gonski funding was a key factor decline in the decline of his popularity and the tight result.

Two things are clear: firstly that opposition to Gonski cost the Coalition votes, second that the Coalition has no mandate to end Gonski.

We will continue our campaign for proper, needs-based funding of our schools, because we have made too many real gains for our students to give up on an issue which is vital for Australia's future.

The election result was the culmination of a year of hard work in marginal seats by our branches, our local Gonski co-ordinators and thousands of Gonski supporters and volunteers, who have ensured that Australia understands how important Gonski needs-based funding is for our students.

Across every state and territory the "I Give a Gonski" campaign has taken the fight to local MPs and many Coalition MPs who refused to give a Gonski have now been voted out.

Parents, particularly in States where Gonski is going directly to schools, are now aware of the difference it is making and will not accept less than the full six years of Gonski, and recurrent funding beyond that.

We will keep campaigning because there is no alternative to Gonski funding on the table.

We still don't know the details of Malcolm Turnbull's alternative, how it is to be funded or whether funding will be needs-based.

No State Government has supported it, and the Catholic and independent school sectors both support Gonski.

The Coalition will need to change the Australian Education Act to end Gonski, and it will need the support of minor parties and independents in the Senate to do so.

We will continue to build on the momentum our campaign has generated.

During the election campaign we had many principals willing to tell parents, through newsletters or leaflets, the facts about what Gonski was doing, and what their school would miss out on without the full commitment to funding.

Teachers and school support staff joined parents in standing up and fighting for their students.

Our campaign has helped our members to understand what needs-based funding is, and how it impacts on the issues they deal with daily in the classroom.

We can't and we won't lose that momentum. It is vitally important to maintain those connections in every school community because if we need to, we will mobilise them to secure Gonski needs-based funding.

We will also keep campaigning for the long-overdue increase in funding for students with disability, which has now been pushed out by the Coalition until 2018.

And this had a significant effect on July 2nd.

In Eden-Monaro and Lindsay winning Labor candidates have specifically mentioned schools as a key issue which saw them win their seats. Of our other target seats, the Coalition also lost in Hindmarsh (SA), Longman (Qld), Dobell (NSW) and Macquarie (NSW). Several others recorded bigger-than-average swings away from the Coalition.

We ran targeted TV advertising in Tasmania and the NT, where Malcolm Turnbull's budget actually offered a cut to funding for public schools. The Coalition lost all three of their seats in Tasmania and their one seat in the NT.

A SKY News exit poll found that 61 per cent of people named education as an important issue, only slightly behind 72% naming health. Both education and health rated ahead of economic management at 51 per cent.

Our campaign has lifted awareness and public support for Gonski

AEU polling in NSW marginal seats just before the election found that:

- 61.6 per cent of voters supported Gonski, compared to just 17.4 per cent who opposed it (21 per cent undecided).
- A clear majority of 63.4% of voters prefer investment in schools to Malcolm Turnbull's cuts to company tax (36.6%.
- 51.5% of voters were "very aware" of Malcolm Turnbull's plans to cut Gonski funding after 2017, and another 29.8% were "somewhat aware"

This is a great base to build on.

We have also made big gains in getting support for Gonski amongst political parties.

This year, Labor locked in their support for the full six years of Gonski needs-based funding with their policy announcement in January.

The Greens locked in their support for Gonski and several independents including Nick Xenophon and Jackie Lambie did the same in the lead up to the election.

We know that PM Malcolm Turnbull's public support went from stratospheric last October to subzero on July 2nd with a huge loss of seats for the coalition.

This is largely due to the public recognising that he would continue the Abbott agenda of cuts to public services such as health and education which was driven home by strong campaigns.

Gonski funding remains vital for the future of our schools and their students. It is the only way students who attend disadvantaged schools will be able to get the support they need.

We cannot have a return to the old days where funding was not based on the needs of students.

Gonski funding is delivering real improvements in schools across Australia and failing to fund it in full will fail our students.

We can be proud of what our campaign has achieved so far and we will keep fighting for our members, for our schools and for every student who needs support at school.

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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