PISA results show why we need equity in schools funding



Australia's continuing decline in the PISA international school test results shows the urgent need for investment in disadvantaged schools, the AEU said today.

AEU Deputy Federal President Maurie Mulheron said the data showed that years of distorted schools funding had failed to lift results, or close the big gaps in achievement between advantaged and disadvantaged students.

"Australia's results have declined from 2000 to 2015 – a period where schools funding became more inequitable, and the biggest funding increases went to the schools which needed them the least," Mr Mulheron said.

"Australia is still above the OECD average in its PISA scores, so we need to recognise the strengths of our school system, but take action to address the inequities that are hurting our performance.

"We now have gaps equivalent to three years of schooling between students from rich and poor areas, and that is what is dragging our results down. We need the full needs-based Gonski funding to give all students a chance to succeed.

"Between 2009 and 2014 total recurrent government funding per student to public schools rose by 14.6%, while funding to private schools rose by 30%."

"While the Gonski reforms are beginning to address these distortions, when the PISA tests were taken in 2015 less than 10 per cent of the total funding increases from the Gonski agreements had been delivered.

"We need the full six years of needs-based Gonski funding right through until 2019 to ensure all schools have the resources they need for their students.

The 2015 PISA data showed:

- The difference in results between students from the highest SES quartile and the lowest were a full three years of schooling in maths, science and reading.
- Students from advantaged backgrounds were five times as likely to be high performers as students from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- The difference in results between students from metropolitan areas and regional areas was equivalent to at least one full year of schooling in maths, science and reading.

The PISA Report finds that equity of resourcing is vital for improving the overall success of a school system.

p.205*: "How educational resources are distributed among students of different backgrounds can be an important determinant of equity in education opportunities. Education systems that are successful, both in quality and equity, attract the highest quality resources to where these resources can make the most difference."*

p.206*: "PISA consistently finds that high performance and greater equity in education opportunities and outcomes are not mutually exclusive. In this light, success in education can be defined as a combination of high levels of achievement and high levels of equity."*

"These are the principles behind the Gonski agreements, which recognised the importance of funding schools on the basis of student need," Mr Mulheron said.

"The Turnbull Government's plan to cut $3.8 billion from schools and move away from needs-based funding after 2017 will deny schools the resources they need and entrench inequity in education.

"It is no wonder the majority of states and territories have said they do not support the Federal Government's plan to cut schools funding. They have seen what Gonski funding is delivering in schools, and know how crucial it is for the future."

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