Leaders must embrace Gonski and not abandon TAFE

Australia's political leaders must reach agreement on fully implementing Gonski if they are to lift Australian school performance and must keep TAFEs at the centre of vocational education, the AEU said today.

AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said this morning's official communique from the Retreat showed Mr Abbott and State Premiers had failed to progress the issue of school funding or how the Gonski agreements were to be delivered.

"Leaders are right about the need for action on schools, and they must commit to the full Gonski reforms which have broad support across the education, business and community sectors," Ms Haythorpe said.

"In States like NSW and South Australia which have delivered Gonski funding to schools we are already seeing improved results for students.

"That's why it is crucial that we deliver the full six years of needs-based funding the Gonski Review found was needed to lift all schools to a minimum resource standard.

"This meeting was supposed to have education as a major issue and it is disappointing it has not delivered bi-partisan recommendations on advancing the Gonski reforms.

"We still do not have a commitment from Tony Abbott to the last two years of the Gonski agreements, when most of the extra funding is to be delivered. Failing to provide that funding will cut the equivalent of 20,000 teachers from public schools alone.

"The communique says that Australian students are falling behind their international counterparts on test results. This is not news, it was noted by the Gonski Review in 2012, and the Review recommended better targeted funding as the solution.

"The decline in our test scores occurred in a period where funding to schools was not distributed on the basis of need, and some of the biggest increases in funding went to advantaged schools.

"The Review found the way we were resourcing schools a big part of the problem. Not just the overall level of funding but the fact it was not going to where it was needed.

"Our gaps in resources between schools in rich and poor areas are among the largest in the developed world, and they are linked to the fact that students in disadvantaged schools – public or private – are three years behind those in wealthier schools.

"Gonski funding targets additional resources to where they are needed most. That will help lift student achievement and break the link between disadvantage and poor outcomes.

The AEU is also concerned by the Retreat's position on TAFEs and its call for States and the Federal Government to work together to shift responsibility for vocational education to the federal level.

"We have grave concerns that this will increase the privatisation of vocational education and reduce the role of TAFE.

"State Governments must not walk away from TAFEs, if they do they reduce the quality of vocational education and hurt students.

"In Victoria, where the privatisation of vocational education is furthest advanced, this has had disastrous consequences. We have seen a drop in the quality of training from the growth of poorly-regulated private providers offering low quality courses, while TAFEs struggle for funding.

"TAFE needs to be at the centre of Australia's vocational education system, it must not be just another provider of training. Any attempts to further privatise the vocational education system and reduce the role of TAFEs must be resisted."

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
ABN 54 478 094 635 © 2026