National education and union news

Resources delayed are resources denied

The Australian Education Union (AEU) acknowledges the significant $768 million funding deal struck between the Albanese Government and the Northern Territory.

However, the AEU is calling on the federal government to step up for the other states and fulfil their promise to provide full funding to public schools by increasing their contribution from 22.5 per cent to 25 per cent, rather than pressuring states to sign a deal which falls short.

AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said she is deeply concerned about the government's approach to school funding citing the deal as an ultimatum.

"The critical funding and support needed for Australian public school staff and students should not be compromised amidst a political spat between governments which has the potential to deny long awaited promised funding for public schools," said Ms Haythorpe.

"With only 1.3 per cent of public schools funded at the minimum benchmark, the Schooling Resource Standard, the stark reality is that public schools have waited more than a decade for the vital resources that they need to deliver high quality education for every child.

"Students on the cusp of finishing Year 12 are amongst the first cohort of students who were promised this funding but have not had the full benefits they were entitled to.

"In the lead up to the last federal election, Prime Minister Albanese promised to ensure that every public school was fully funded. This current deal on the table, of an additional 2.5 per cent or nothing, is inadequate and does not deliver on their promise.

"This has the potential to entrench inequality in a way that we have not seen since the Coalition Government changed the Australian Education Act in 2017. The government cannot expect to implement a reform agenda without resolving the public school funding negotiations first.

"Delivery of full funding must be a joint commitment from both the Commonwealth and the state and territory governments. The fact that five states and one territory are refusing to sign the current deal is a clear sign that the Albanese Government's offer is not good enough."

Time is quickly running out on this issue with school principals, teachers, education support staff and parents calling on all governments to work together to deliver full funding for public schools now.

Ending the stand-off on school funding

Save Our Schools (SOS) has called on the Commonwealth and state governments to end their stand-off on school funding.

SOS national convenor Trevor Cobbold said: "This disgraceful squabbling over cost-shifting by governments threatens the future education and lives of millions of students. It puts at risk government goals of increasing Year 12 completion rates and participation in tertiary education."

"It is now 12 years since the Gonski Report identified the need to boost funding for public schools and disadvantaged students to improve equity in school outcomes. The shameful failure of governments to fully fund public schools cannot continue any longer. Governments must embrace Gonski's recommendation for cooperative federalism in school funding.

"Public schools continue to be vastly under-funded while private schools are over-funded. In 2024, public schools are

funded at only 87.6 per cent of their Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) on average across Australia while private schools are funded at 104.9 per cent of their SRS. The under-funding of public schools is estimated at about $6.8 billion per year.

“Public schools are massively under-funded in every state except the ACT. Private schools are over-funded in every state except the Northern Territory.”

Mr. Cobbold called for governments to adopt a three-point plan from the SOS:

- The Commonwealth Government increase its share of funding for public schools from 20 per cent to 25 per cent of their SRS.
- State governments renounce the accounting tricks in the current agreements and increase their share of funding public schools to 75 per cent of their SRS.
- The Commonwealth and state governments end their over-funding of private schools.

“The Commonwealth should play a greater role in increasing equity in school outcomes. This is a national goal for the national government,” Mr Cobbold said.

“Public schools will not be fully funded until the states renounce the accounting tricks that defraud public schools of about $2.4 billion alone. The accounting tricks allow the states to claim expenditures excluded from how the SRS is measured as part of their share of the SRS funding for public schools. These expenditures include capital depreciation, school transport and expenditure on regulatory authorities.

“The Commonwealth and the states must also end their over-funding of private schools. It will contribute to fully funding public schools.”

Mr Cobbold said that fully funding public schools was critical to improving school outcomes and reducing inequity, as well as future economic prosperity.

“Overcoming the effects of educational disadvantage remains the fundamental challenge facing Australian governments. The Commonwealth and state governments must come to their senses and end the stand-off,” he said.

Record low gender pay gap closing faster under Labor

The gender pay gap is closing three times faster under the Albanese Government, than under the previous Coalition Government, according to new ABS wage data.

The pay gap is now 11.5 per cent, a record low, down from 14.1 per cent when the Albanese Government came to power. The gap is now closing at an annual rate of 1.3 per cent, more than three times faster than the far slower annual rate of 0.4 per cent on average achieved under the previous Coalition Government.

The gender pay gap has closed faster recently for a range of reasons, including strong growth in full-time jobs for women over the past two years; strong increases in award wages; and the union-won pay increase for aged care workers.

There are now a record 3.9 million women employed full-time in Australia and 308,000 full-time jobs for women have been created since the government changed in May 2022. Full-time employment has grown faster on average under the ALP (5.1 per cent annual growth) compared to the LNP (2.4 per cent).

The federal government has also funded aged care pay rises of up to 23 per cent, supported three good increases in minimum and award wages that predominantly help women in lower paid jobs, and has toughened company reporting on the gender pay gap.

The official measure of the Gender Pay Gap is the difference in average ordinary time earnings between men and women working on a full-time basis. Women in full-time work now earn on average $1,782 per week, compared to men earning $2,014.

The gender pay gap is caused by the undervaluation of work in occupations that are dominated by women, particularly in care, as well as discrimination in recruitment, hiring and the setting of pay.

Women are also far more likely to be in part-time and insecure work and have significant career breaks because of the disproportionate and unpaid caring work they perform.

The government’s recent strengthening of flexible working rights and paid parental leave are also expected to help women better secure the hours and pay they need.

The gender pay gap is expected to shrink further given the government’s commitment to fund a 15 per cent pay increase for

early childhood education and care workers phased in from December, and stronger protections for workers misclassified as casuals, who are mostly women, which came into effect at the end of August.

ACTU Assistant Secretary Liam O’Brien said: “Working women deserve equal pay and Australia’s economy can’t afford to lose the skills, talent, and experience of working women. Australian unions won’t stop until we smash the gender pay gap altogether because Australia needs the full and equal participation of women in the workforce.”

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