A decade of inequity

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The extent of inequity in Australia's school funding has been revealed in new research, showing that almost double the number of private schools in Western Australia now receive more combined government funding (Commonwealth and state) per student than public schools of very similar size, location and with similar student needs.

The Australian Education Union report is being released as Commonwealth, state and territory leaders gather today for the National Cabinet.

Using school finance data, the AEU report '***A decade of inequity***' reveals:

- In 2013, there were 45 private schools in Western Australia that received more combined government funding (Commonwealth and state) than comparable public schools. By 2022, this had almost doubled to 87 private schools.
- This is an increase from 16.2 per cent of private schools receiving more government funding than comparable public schools to 29.5 per cent over the decade to 2022.
- In 2013 there were two private schools in the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) 1,050+ group [which includes the top quartile of Socio-Educational Advantage (SEA)] funded higher than comparable public schools and by 2022 this had increased sevenfold to 14 schools.
- In the top 15 per cent of SEA (In the 1,100+ ICSEA range) private schools receiving greater government funding than comparable public schools has increased from one to three over the last decade.
- In 2022 the largest gap between a private and public school in the same ICSEA range and same school size group is $3,608 per student.
- Under current settings private schools in Western Australia will continue to be overfunded by the Commonwealth and state governments by a total of $201.7 million from 2024 to 2028 under current arrangements, whilst public schools will remain underfunded by $1.32 billion over the same five year period due to the "additional allowance" of four per cent of total funding claimed for non-school costs by the WA government.

The report compares the combined Commonwealth and state/territory government recurrent funding as reported by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) for comparable public and private schools.

The report uses a strict methodology based on the level of SEA, school location and school size to determine comparable public and private schools.

Five conditions must be met for schools to be considered comparable to ensure that only schools of the same type, with very similar student parental and household characteristics, of similar size and in the same jurisdiction are compared.

AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe (pictured) said the shock findings underlined the urgent need for public schools to be fully funded by all governments.

"Some private schools in Western Australia are receiving up to $3,608 per student more in government funding than similar public schools with very similar student profiles, in some cases those schools are just around the corner from each other," she said.

"This unfair private school funding advantage translates into a school resourcing and staffing advantage and has fuelled a

private school capital works boom, while at the same time denying public schools the recurrent funding needed to attract and retain teachers and to address the high level of student needs in the classroom.”

President of the State School Teachers' Union of Western Australia Matt Jarman said: “Public schools in Western Australia educate proportionally 2.2 times the number of students from low socio-educational advantage backgrounds compared to private schools, and 2.7 times the number of First Nations students. Currently our schools are not getting the funding they need to meet students’ needs."

“The challenges are too great and the cost of inaction too high for governments to continue to fail on funding."

Find more information on the For Every Child campaign here and sign up here.

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