



Australian Education Union

**submission
to the**

Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System

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Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System

Introduction

The Australian Education Union (AEU) represents over 195,000 members employed in the public primary, secondary, early childhood and TAFE sectors throughout Australia. Public education is without a doubt the foundation from which all Australians can secure a better future and the AEU strongly believes that the urgent need for significant additional investment in public education is integral to this review.

It is the fundamental right of every child to have access to a high quality education and to be supported to reach their full potential. This can only be achieved through the provision of fully resourced public schools in every community. However, a decade after governments adopted a Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) the reality is that 98% of public schools remain resourced below that standard because governments have failed to close the resource gap and bring every school to a minimum of 100% of the SRS. Closing the resources gap is an essential component of closing student achievement gaps between children from different background and it is the strident position of the AEU that equity must sit alongside excellence as the twin ambitions for Australia's public schooling system. Therefore, this Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System (the Review) must prioritise equity at the heart of all its recommendations.

Further, it is of paramount importance to recognise the outstanding commitment of the teaching profession who are doing an extraordinary job delivering a high quality education for their students at a time when the ongoing workforce crisis and unsustainable workloads are deeply impacting on health and wellbeing, and attrition rates for the sector. Full funding of public schools is the only way to ensure that the teaching profession is properly supported to deliver high quality teaching and learning programs that ensure every child has the opportunity to succeed. This cannot be ignored or set aside by this review. Further, one size fits all solutions and recommendations that do not take account of the widely varied levels of advantage, resourcing and capacity that exist across schools in Australia will not provide a panacea, but will only further entrench inequity.

This submission will address the fundamental funding reforms necessary to restore equity to Australia's schools and outline the essential drivers of effective whole systemic reform before providing detailed answers and case studies in response to each of the specific questions asked by the Review Panel in the Consultation Paper at Appendix 1.

Whole system reform must have teachers at its heart

It is the view of the AEU that the formulation of effective educational policies cannot be achieved without being driven by substantial and ongoing input from those teaching professionals who are involved in the daily tasks associated with ensuring that students have every chance to learn and grow to their fullest extent. As noted by the Director of the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Andreas Schleicher:

*“... one thing is clear, where teachers are not part of the design of effective policies and practices, they won't be effective in their implementation. Education needs to do more to create a teaching profession that owns its professional practice. When teachers feel a sense of ownership over their classrooms and their profession, when students feel a sense of ownership over their learning, that is when productive learning takes place. And when teachers assume that ownership, it is difficult to ask more of them than they ask of themselves. So the answer is to strengthen trust, transparency, professional autonomy and the collaborative culture of the profession all at the same time.”*¹

This collaborative approach is supported by Canadian educational researcher, Michael Fullan who identifies the ‘crucial elements for whole system reform’ as ‘intrinsic motivation, instructional improvement, teamwork and “allness”’.² Further, ‘the key to system-wide success is to situate the energy of educators and students as the central driving force’.³

For Fullan, the system is the locus of collaboration, improvement and motivation. To improve, systems need to be guided by an articulate, ambitious and rich set of educational goals. These goals go beyond merely improving achievement measured by standardised test scores, and must focus on equity, well-being and inclusiveness as traits that excellent school systems need to pursue. As Fullan points out, these can only be reached by improving the capacity of the system as a whole. Partial solutions that target some within a system get only partial results, and “fragmentation by default favours inertia, and deepens existing systems of prejudice and discrimination.”⁴

The collective experience of AEU members has shown that tools and policies designed to achieve a better and fairer education system will not succeed unless backed by appropriate resources across the public school system as a whole, whether they be human resources, time-allocations, materials, support structures and personnel, professional development, or physical infrastructure.

¹ Andreas Schleicher in Gomendio, M. (2017). *Empowering and Enabling Teachers to Improve Equity and Outcomes for All, International Summit on the teaching Profession*, OECD Publishing, Paris., p.3

² Fullan, M. (2011). *Choosing the wrong drivers for whole system reform*, Centre for Strategic Education. Retrieved from <https://michaelfullan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/13396088160.pdf>, p.3

³ Fullan, M., *The right drivers for whole system success*, Centre for Strategic Education, 2021., p.6 s.

⁴ Fullan, *op cit.*

Fullan identifies four key ‘wrong’ drivers to educational reform, which “are compelling on the surface, and have a lot of face-value appeal for people with urgent problems.”⁵ but that fail to embed lasting reform when they are the primary focus of attempts to reform systems. Fullan describes the four ‘wrong’ drivers thus:

“In the rush to move forward, leaders, especially from countries that have not been progressing, tend to choose the wrong drivers. Such ineffective drivers fundamentally miss the target. There are four main ‘wrong driver’ culprits that I discuss with their matched pairs that refer to the more effective alternative. In all cases choosing a combination of the drivers makes matters significantly worse.

The culprits are

- 1. accountability: using test results, and teacher appraisal, to reward or punish teachers and schools vs capacity building;*
- 2. individual teacher and leadership quality: promoting individual vs group solutions;*
- 3. technology: investing in and assuming that the wonders of the digital world will carry the day vs instruction;*
- 4. fragmented strategies vs integrated or systemic strategies”.*⁶

Fullan is adamant that partial solutions implemented with the wrong drivers not only hinder whole system progress and result in a fragmentation or atomisation of educational functions or actors. In this misguided approach, schools, teachers and students are seen as discrete locations of reform that can be improved through discrete or fragmented interventions; the tasks of pedagogy are simplistically broken down into their basic components and reorganised into step-by-step procedures. Collective responsibility at a system level is frequently diverted to these atomised units.

The surface appeal of these ‘quick fix’ initiatives and a reluctance to properly invest in the necessary resources to improve the whole system are some of the main barriers to achieving educational excellence and equity in Australia. If we accept that “an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers” then we must also acknowledge that “the quality of teachers is a result of the system that trains and supports them”.⁷

A decade on from identifying the ‘wrong drivers’ in 2011, in 2021 Fullan identified the ‘right drivers for whole system success. To counter the urge towards the ‘wrong drivers’ systems must focus on four big reforms that achieve lasting change including capacity building to make learning more exciting and engaging with a deep commitment to the moral purpose of raising the bar and closing the gap for all students, building collaborative cultures within and

⁵ Fullan, *op cit.*

⁶ Fullan, *op cit.*

⁷ International Summit on the Teaching Profession, (2017). p.13.

across schools, using technology to support rather than dictate pedagogical innovations and ensuring that reforms are conceived and designed as working interactively.⁸

These drivers speak directly to the issues detailed in the Review's Consultation Paper and provide an integrated framework to success across the whole education system. They are:

1. *Wellbeing and Learning – focusing on wellbeing drives intrinsic motivation.*
2. *Social Intelligence – embedded collaboration that is inclusive of the culture of the students and school community between educators supporting each other.*
3. *Equality Investments – these produce social and monetary benefits to the system for the foreseeable future.*
4. *Systemness – people at all levels recognise that they have a responsibility to interact with, learn from, contribute to and be a living member of the system as it evolves.⁹*

Giving teachers the time and space for collaboration and innovation drives student outcomes

Improving student outcomes is inextricable from addressing education equity.

No evidence-based practice, regardless of government mandate will ever overcome the systemic under resourcing of public education in Australia. Any assertion that any singular “evidence-based” practice for nurturing learning is deeply flawed. It demonstrates a shallow and false understanding of children and their development - by the time a child has commenced school, their experiences in their first few years have shaped the synapses in their brain and this will affect their ability to learn the curriculum.

Equally, just as no single practice can address education inequity, neither can teachers alone. However, there is no solution that does not involve teachers. The voice of teachers and their experience must be central to the consideration of any educational practice. The notion that an instructional practice, or curriculum reform is a solution to providing more time for teachers misidentifies the problem, and thus will only ever be wasteful of resources, and hope.

As such the AEU cautions the Panel against accepting the common narrow interpretation of “evidence-based practices”, which is often a synonym for conformity and compliance. These practices drive stressful cultures with standardisation treasured, and creativity neglected.

The AEU acknowledges that many ‘evidence-based practices’ are developed by expert teacher practitioners and done so with the best intentions for their use and application by other teachers. However, the reality of their implementation in classrooms and schools is often de-professionalising.

⁸ Fullan, *op.cit.* pp. 17-18

⁹ Fullan, *op.cit.* pp. p. 5

The recent development of curriculum units in South Australia exemplifies this. As described in the 2020 Progress Report:

Professional learning is being augmented through the development of new R-10 curriculum resources in science, mathematics and technology aligned to the Australian Curriculum. The resources are being released progressively to 2023.

These resources are written to align to the Australian Curriculum at specific year level, yet without a specific cohort of students. This model assumes a sameness of all students in a year level at a certain point in time and does not consider the breadth of individual learning needs of each student, let alone the educational development gaps¹⁸. The children and students in Australian public schools reflect the diversity of modern Australian society: in gender, class, race, ethnicity, and domicile: therefore, the curriculum, its materials and accompanying teaching approaches must also.

The consequences of this top-down approach are foreseeable: it intensifies the workload demand of teachers as they are, often with short notice, compelled to redirect their teaching and learning programme to these ‘one-size-fits-all’ resource units, regardless of the context of the students they teach. Frequently, this direction is accompanied by insufficient resources to deliver the direction as intended. This includes purchasing of curriculum materials, access to quality professional development for teachers, and ongoing mentoring and support for the implementation. Principals are expected to resource the initiative within existing budgetary limitations.

A further unfortunate consequence of this is it often drives conflict between teachers and school-based leadership, as leaders are directed systemically to use their local managerial responsibility to direct teachers to work. This is unhelpful to building positive school communities, and damages respectful professional collaboration and trust.

Regarding professional development, there are significant issues of equitable access, with the vast majority provided only in metropolitan or major regional locations. The high cost of travel and relief creates an additional barrier for those in rural and remote schools. It also places a personal burden on the individual teachers, mostly women, to travel without consideration on the impact of care and cultural obligations outside of work. An online model is a woefully inadequate substitution for face-to-face professional development.

This example is one of many across Australia, over many decades.

The Grattan Institute report titled ‘Ending the lesson lottery: How to improve curriculum planning in schools¹⁰’, falls into this same pattern of dehumanising and de-professionalising teachers.

¹⁰ Hunter – Grattan Ref

It requires critical examination, particularly in relation to the survey results used as evidence to support the report's recommendations. 81% of teachers in government schools saying "I am aware of these instructional materials, but don't use them regularly". Further, in the initial consultation surveys report for this Review only 17.6% of teachers selected "Off the shelf, adaptable lesson plans" as one of three priority areas for government investment to improve student outcomes, whereas 54.5% selected "More specialist classroom support for students" and 53.8% selected "More teachers" and 42.8% selected "Small group or individual tutoring to help children who fall behind".¹¹

This lack of take up or enthusiasm from teachers for off the shelf lesson plans in favour of more resources for teachers, support staff and one on one support for students demonstrates that teachers do not value such 'one-size-fits-all' materials or could demonstrate that public schools teachers lack sufficient resourcing to make use of the materials. There is a nearly 30% difference in take up between public school teachers and those in the non-government sector. This suggests such 'off the shelf' materials do not match the circumstances or needs of the students in the classes at public schools, and that public education systems are not resourced for teachers to have the time to use and adapt them.

Similarly, the survey results state that only 18% of teachers found the 'one-size-fits-all' materials address the particular learning challenges of students*. That is an alarming low percentage, and unacceptable for those students most at risk of falling behind.

'One-size-fits-all' materials de-professionalises teachers and their capacity to make use of multiple pedagogical approaches that best fit the circumstances and needs of their classes. Teachers must be able to use their professional judgement to make use of a range of bodies of knowledge, from which they select what is relevant and most appropriate to the students in their class. They incorporate multidisciplinary research from fields such as neuroscience, psychology, and education, as well as evolving best practice for cohorts of children at risk such as trauma-informed practice. With sufficient resources and time, teachers differentiate their lesson planning and delivery to suit the specific needs of every child in their classroom.

There is strong evidence to say this is a significant contributing factor to the breadth and severity of Australia's teacher shortage. The overworking and undervaluing of the teaching profession is a key driver of the teacher shortage. Regarding the undervaluing of the profession, surveys of AEU members increasingly find that teachers feel their professional voices are silenced in discussions on teaching and learning, and that there is no opportunity to influence or contribute to educational policy design.

The AEU supports high quality curriculum, professional collaboration and whole school approaches to curriculum delivery. These are concepts fundamental to education.

Curriculum is often represented as what, why, how, and when students should learn. The Australian Curriculum formalises this content into a program of studies from Foundation to year 10². It follows the Early Years Learning Framework and precedes the relevant senior secondary framework in each jurisdiction. It is underpinned by content yet is as much about skills and concepts. Therefore, the outcomes of curriculum processes should be about the

¹¹ Department of Education: *Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System – Initial Consultation Surveys, Summary Analytical Report*, 2023, p.12.

capacities developed and an understanding of the skills specific to fields of knowledge as well as the knowledge gained, and the connections between these.

A report commissioned by UNESCO International Bureau of Education explains:

Unintended learning (such as through the 'hidden' curriculum) can occur anywhere – inside or outside the classroom – and is largely 'uncontrolled'. It can emanate from, for example, the ethos or culture of the school, from unintended features of the intended curriculum (such as gender or cultural bias), from relationships between students and teachers and between students themselves, from societal power structures and existing social arrangements and patterns, from economic, political, social and cultural relationships in the broader society, and, at the broadest level, from how students understand the way things are in their world.¹²

This speaks to the totality of a student's experience and learning within education institutions. Beyond the formal program of studies and classroom activities, learning occurs in the playground during recess, or whilst eating lunch, or participating in extra curricula activities such as performing arts, and sport, and broader civic activities such as assemblies and student voice initiatives.

Curriculum is not solely a singular modular unit of content delivered at a mandated point at prescribed schooling levels. It is inclusive of the processes and culture in which it is developed, implemented, and evaluated.

Ultimately, curriculum is the outcome of the complex interaction between educational institutions and society. Schooling is one of the sources of personal and educational development, alongside the family and affinity groups, the local community, the mass media, and work. Schooling's unique contribution lies in its formal program of studies, together with the experience of living and working within a broad and inclusive social environment.

Furthermore, narrow "evidence-based" practices typically prioritise settler-colonial knowledge systems and learning methodology. A modern and future-looking education system must recognise and prioritise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowledge Systems and research practices when relying on evidence-based practice using research undertaken by First Nations scholars and academics who are specialists in the field of education.

An example is the failed education experiment importing Direct Instruction from the United States to ██████████ Schools. For ██████████ School alone, it cost nearly \$2 million per year, which was paid to the US Developer: The National Institute for Direct Instruction (NIFDI)¹⁹.

¹² Stabback, P, *What Makes a Quality Curriculum? In Progress Reflection No.2 on Current and Critical Issues in Curriculum and Learning*, UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2016, p.8.

In addition to the expensive bill paid to an international company, there are significant education criticisms of this approach, such as:

- Direct Instruction focuses on teacher control of lesson pacing and content and does not encourage the engagement with student cultural resources, background knowledge and community context.
- It deskills teachers by routinizing their work and downplaying their professional capacity to vary instructional pace and curriculum content depending on the student cohort and context.
- It works through strict tracking of student progress and ability grouping, which research shows can severely disadvantage some students.
- Finally, it places the teacher and child in a rigid relationship where the teacher is always the one with the power and knowledge with limited allowance or recognition of individual and cultural difference. This relationship is not conducive to local adaptation of lessons or content to accommodate community, cultural or individual differences, creativity, and innovation in teaching and learning²⁰.

The appeal of ‘shortcut’ models, such as Direct Instruction, for education requires careful analysis. Glossy marketing and aggressive PR strategies obscure the real beneficiaries of their ‘educational’ products: it is the entrepreneurs, investors, and publishing companies who benefit. Not Australian students. This global phenomenon has had a devastating impact on equity and fairness in education.

Successful teaching requires the selection of appropriate practises, not the application of a single strategy which has been endorsed as “evidence-based” and then implemented without regard for educational context. For this reason, the AEU supports teachers being provided with knowledge of a range of teaching strategies, and the skills and resources to implement them, in order to make informed judgements as to the most appropriate strategies for a particular student at a given time.

Explicit teaching practices can be valuable, however with respect to varying learner contexts ITE students should be familiar with a broad range of approaches. Prescribed pedagogies must be avoided as they not only undermine teachers’ professional judgement but also inhibit teachers’ growth and development as they learn and experiment with different methods of teaching for different contexts and students - improving student outcomes requires giving teachers the time and space and professional autonomy to do their jobs.

It is important to ensure that research and evidence is appropriately contextualised, and that the role of teachers’ professional judgement in interpreting research evidence and adapting teaching and learning strategies to local school contexts and diverse student need is not undermined in the next NSRA.

Any determination of which classroom practices have the “highest impact” must be based on a broad range of valid, reliable and representative educational studies which utilise rigorous research methodologies, including both quantitative and qualitative methods, and which are sensitive to different national, school and individual student contexts. Importantly, research that focuses upon ‘high impact’ classroom practices in school contexts that experience high levels of socio-cultural disadvantage, must be included in the research basis.

Ultimately, teachers and school leaders must be empowered to make judgements about implementation that is contextualised for their students, in their school, in their community based on the myriad factors that impact student learning and engagement that can vary from day to day, requiring continual adjustment to responses.

The AEU supports the implementation of best practice in professional learning in order to ensure that theoretical information is transferred into classroom practice where that is necessary, but the AEU explicitly rejects a mandated approach to teaching, as this ignores the individual circumstances of the child; it also limits the benefit that a combination of approaches brings and undermines the professional judgement of teachers.

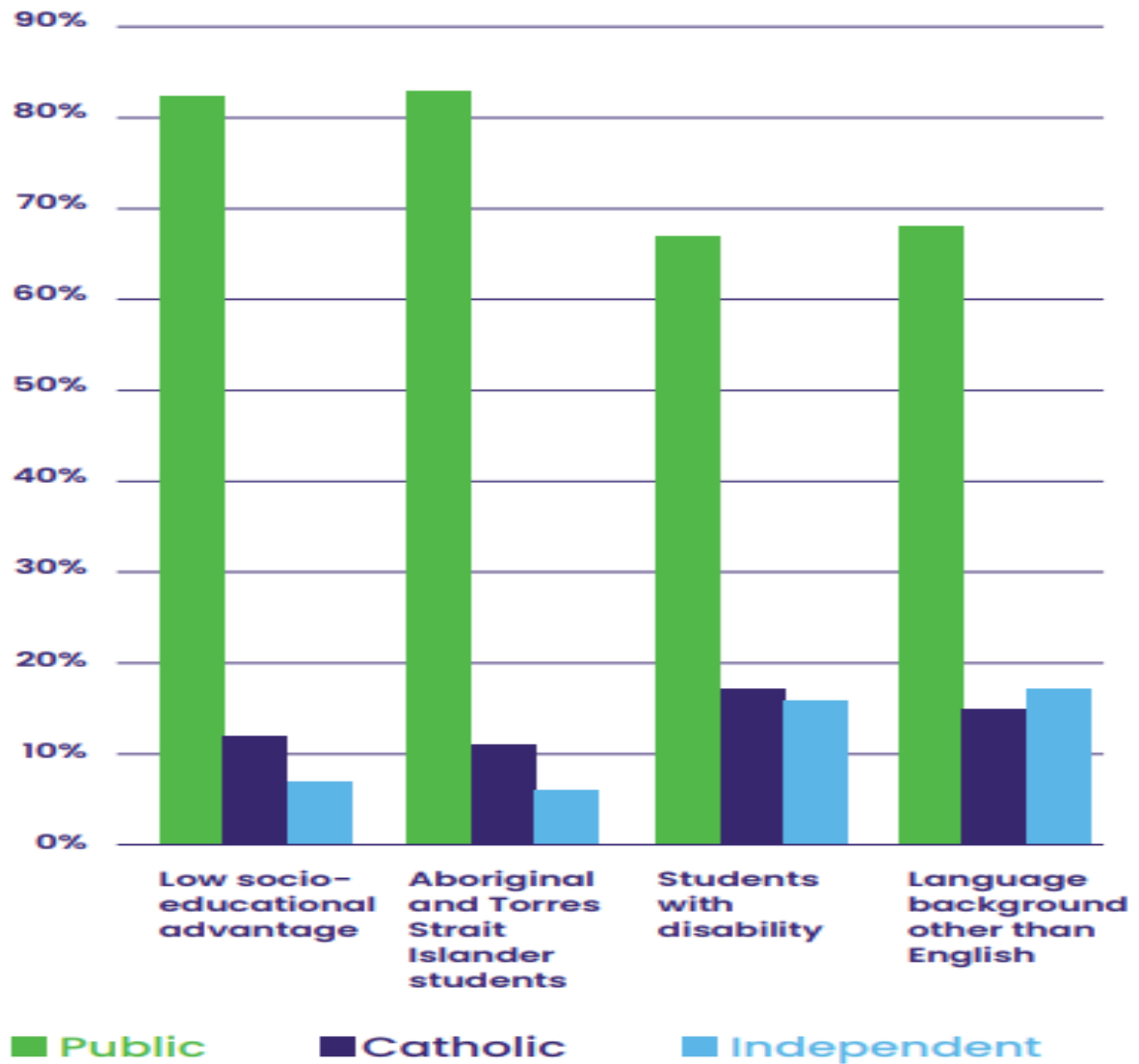
Achieving equity for all students must be the priority in the next NSRA

Equity has been foremost of Australia’s education goals from the Hobart Declaration in 1998, through to the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration in 2019. Yet the current NSRA and its goals are not orientated towards equity, and according to the Productivity Commission its initiatives “are patchy, lack additionality (they often catalogue existing measures), and give little sense of what they are trying to achieve. Some persistent, common issues faced by all jurisdictions, such as a lack of equity in outcomes across students, were largely left unaddressed.”¹³

Public schools educate the vast majority of students from low socio-educational (SES) backgrounds and the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with a disability and those from non-English speaking backgrounds.

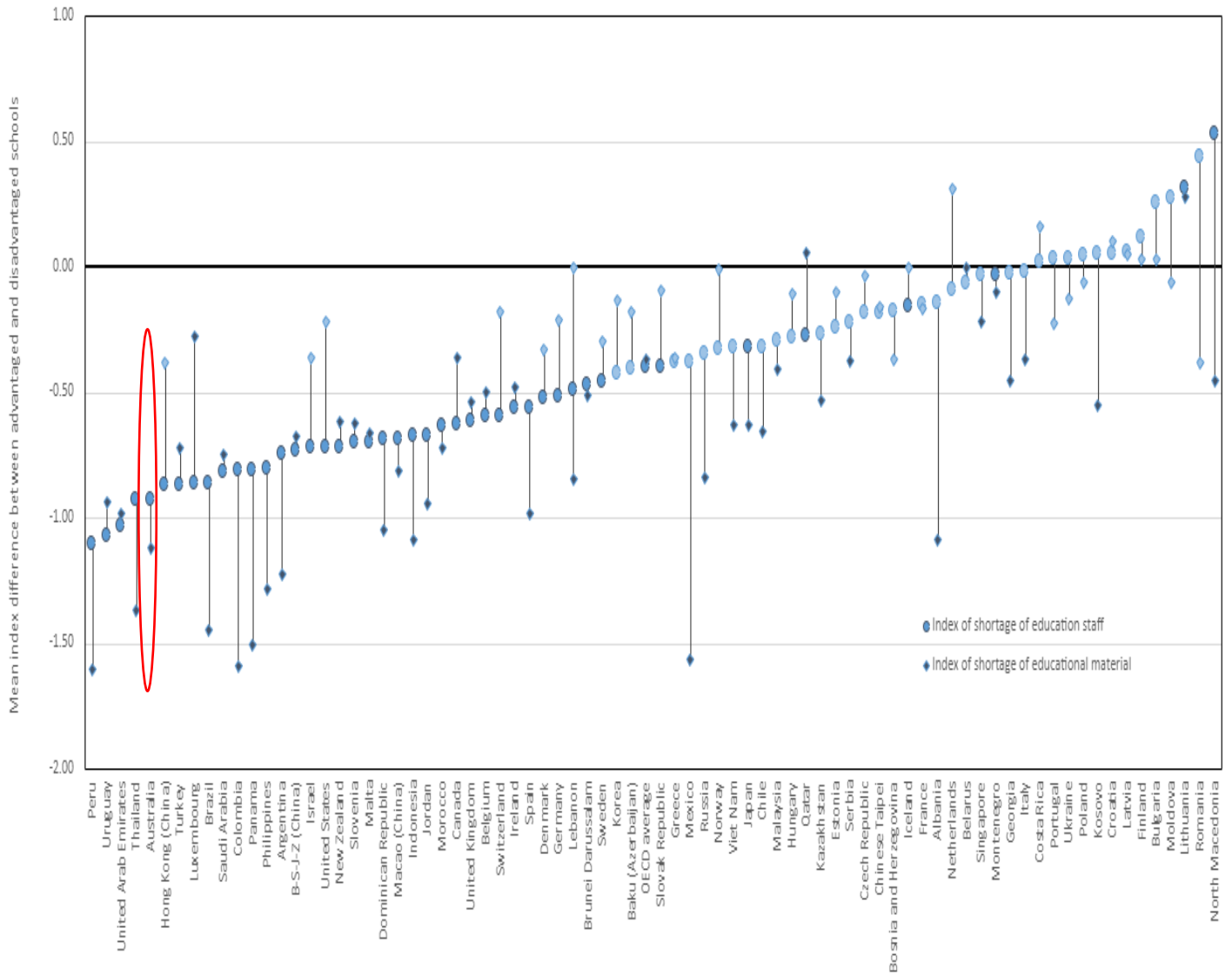
¹³ Productivity Commission, *Review of the National School Reform Agreement Study Report*, 2022, p.9.

Figure 1 **Distribution of students by characteristic and sector 2022**



Source: Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority

Figure 2 Difference in shortage of education material and staff, by schools' socio-economic profile¹⁴



¹⁴ OECD, PISA 2018, Volume 2 Figure II.5.5

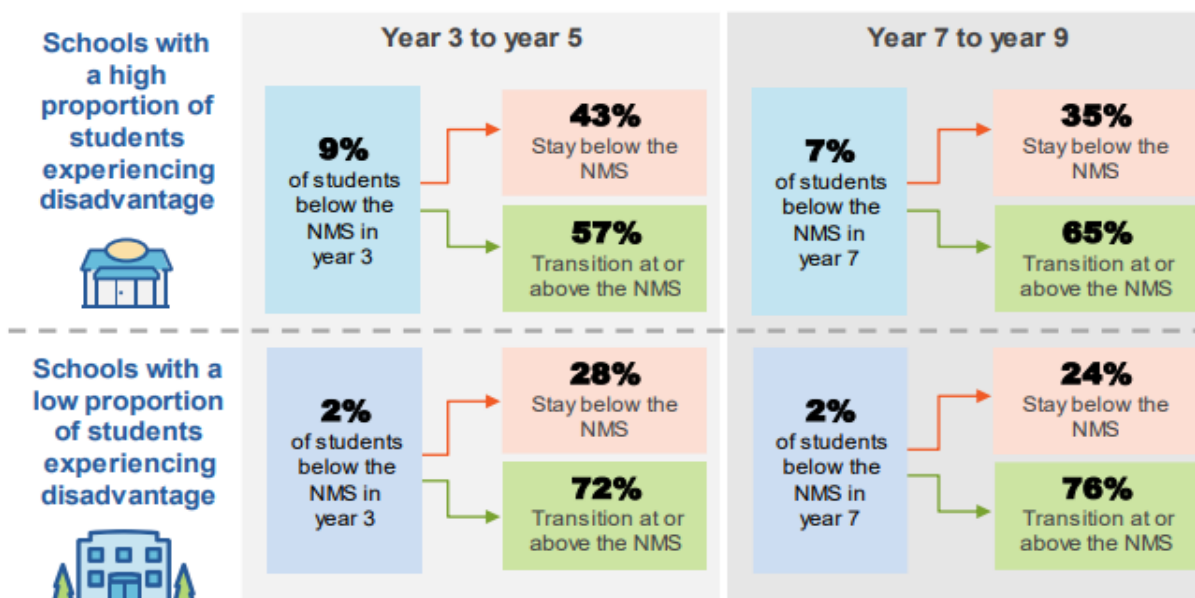
As recognised by the Review Panel throughout the Consultation Paper, excellence in education cannot be separated from equity in both opportunity and in outcomes, and as shown in figure 2, above, Australia has one of the most inequitable education systems in the world in terms of resource distribution.

However, the Review’s Consultation Paper does not sufficiently examine the complexities associated with concentrations of disadvantage. For example, it does not sufficiently examine the proportional enrolment of students from specific equity groups in government schools as compared to non-government schools, nor the negative educational impacts of school residualisation. Finally, it does not consider the impact of unfair funding arrangements on student outcomes in this context.

The need for the full funding of public schools must take into consideration the well-documented impacts of concentrations of disadvantage on student outcomes. Recent work by the Productivity Commission,¹⁵ as well as international and Australian research spanning decades,¹⁶ demonstrates that the concentration within schools of students from priority cohort groups and/or with indicators of disadvantage has a profound impact on academic achievement and post-school outcomes. A student’s achievement and future outcomes are closely linked to not just their individual SES, but also to average school SES.

The Productivity Commission has found that students in schools with high concentrations of students experiencing disadvantage were much less likely to transition at or above the NAPLAN minimum standard.

Figure 3 Likelihood of transitioning out of the minimum standard, comparing schools with a low and high concentration of students experiencing disadvantage¹⁷



¹⁵ Productivity Commission, *Review of the National School Reform Agreement*, Study Report, Canberra (2022).

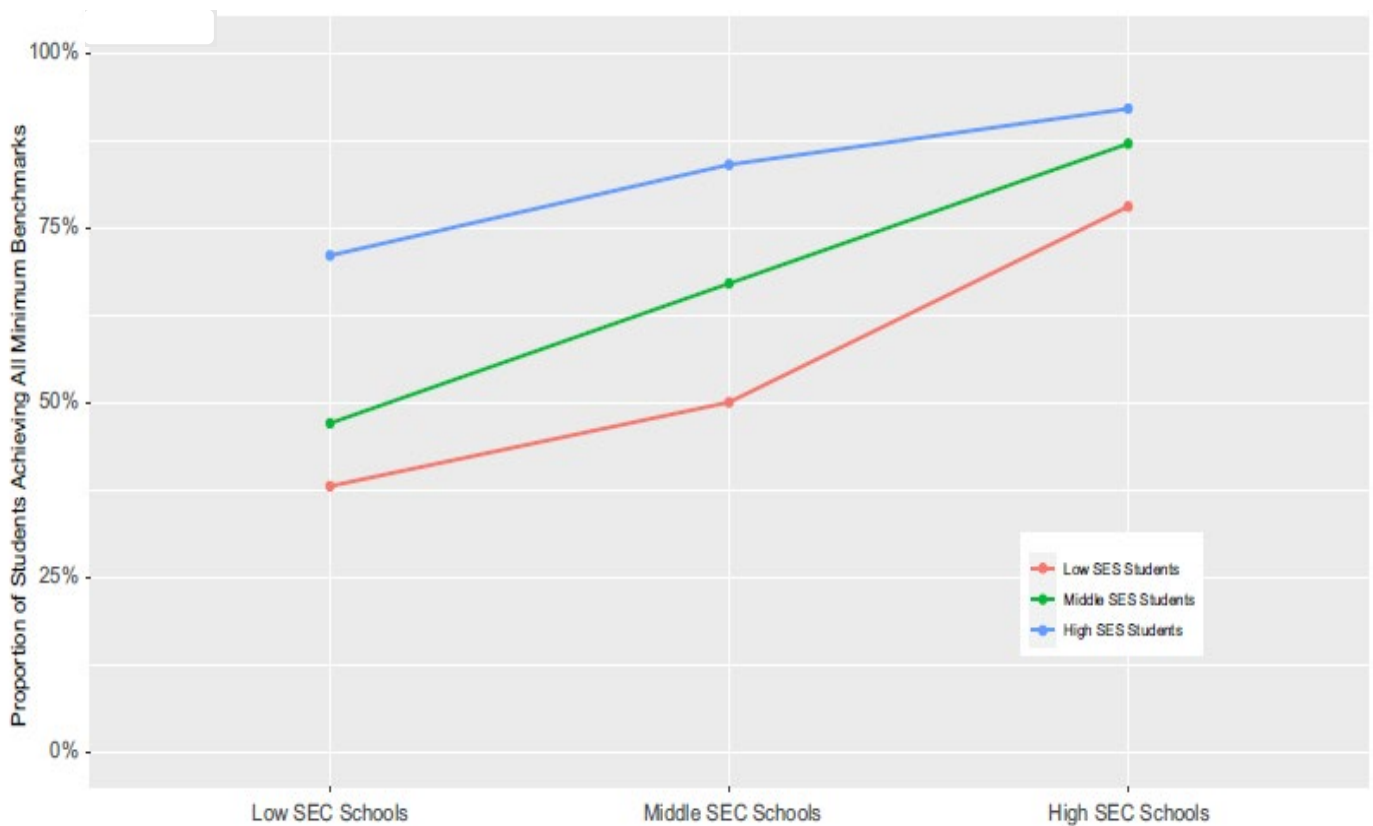
¹⁶ Sirin, SR, “Socioeconomic Status and Academic Achievement: A Meta-Analytic Review of Research”, *Review of Educational Research*, 75(3), 2005, 417–453.

¹⁷ Productivity Commission 2022, *Review of the National School Reform Agreement*, Study Report, 2022, p. 26.

Concentration of disadvantage functions as a barrier to teachers and principals being able to ensure all students achieve their academic potential.¹⁸ The effects are profound. For example, if attending a disadvantaged school, low SES grade 9 students are two times less likely to achieve minimum NAPLAN benchmarks than if they attended an advantaged school,¹⁹ and attending a low SES school compared to a middle SES school results in students losing almost one term of learning from grades 3-5 and over two terms from grades 7-9 (on average across all assessed academic domains).²⁰

Although individual student SES is a significant factor, the following figure shows clearly the impact of school SES on student outcomes.

Figure 4 Proportion of low, middle and high SES students that achieved minimum benchmarks in low, middle and high SES schools²¹



¹⁸ Palardy, GJ, “Differential school effects among low, middle, and high social class composition schools: A multiple group, multilevel latent growth curve analysis”, *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 19(1), 2008, 21–49.

¹⁹ MG Sciffer, LB Perry and A McConney, “The substantiveness of socioeconomic school compositional effects in Australia: Measurement error and the relationship with academic composition”, *Large-Scale Assessments in Education*, 10(1), 2022, 21. Available from [\(PDF\) The substantiveness of socioeconomic school compositional effects in Australia: measurement error and the relationship with academic composition \(researchgate.net\)](#), p.11.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p.17.

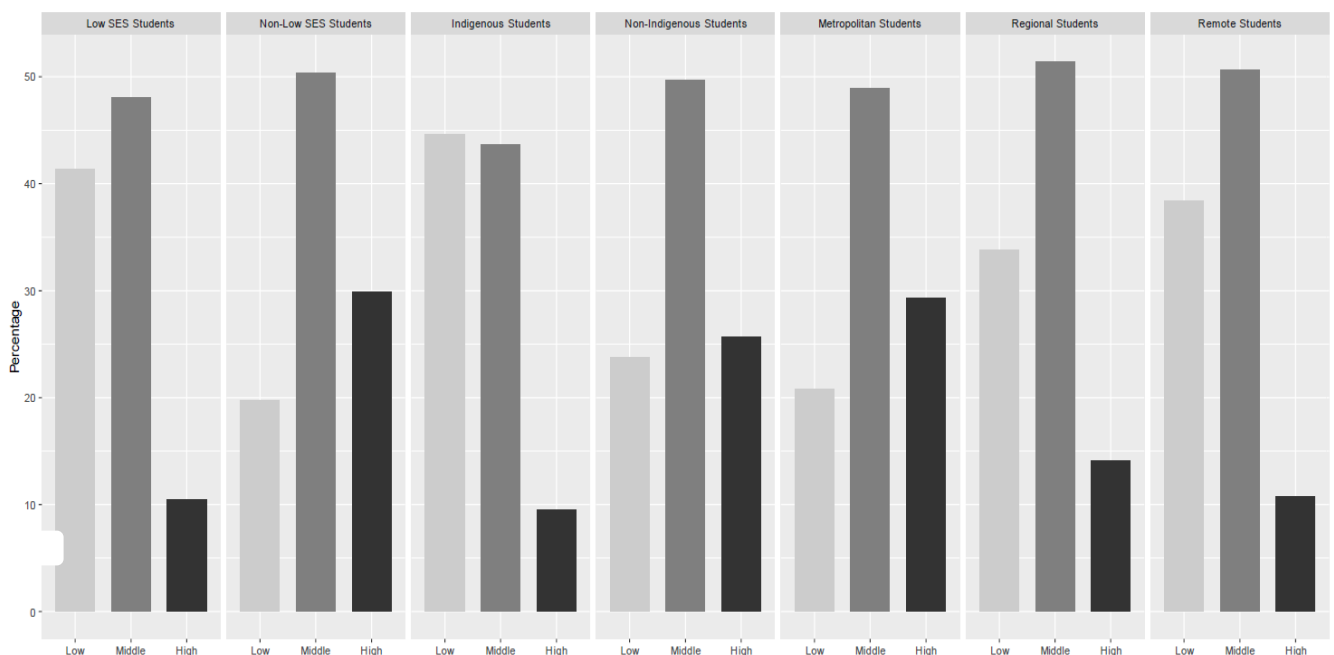
²¹ *Ibid*, p.11.

Post-school outcomes are also impacted, with those attending a low SES secondary school less likely to enrol in university.²² In the US context, students attending low SES schools have been found to be less likely to graduate from high school or enrol in college, even after individual SES is taken into account.²³

The correlation between the residualisation of education and negative student outcomes such as academic performance, is evident across all OECD countries. However, Australian schools rank the 9th most socially segregated within the OECD, and the single most segregated among English-speaking countries. Australia also experiences the second-highest negative academic effects of school segregation in consideration of English-speaking countries. In comparison, in Canada (which has consistently outperformed Australia in PISA since its inception in 2000), over 90% of secondary students attend government schools, and Canada has the lowest level of social segregation of secondary schools in the OECD. Canada has the lowest socioeconomic compositional effect (the effect of concentrated disadvantage) among English-speaking countries.²⁴

There are also substantial differences in the types of schools disadvantaged students attend in comparison to advantaged students. For example, low SES, Indigenous, and regional and remote students typically attend schools with higher proportions of low SES students, when compared to high SES, non-Indigenous and metropolitan peers. This type of residualisation contributes to intersectional and compounding disadvantage as shown in Figure 5 below:

Figure 5 The proportion of low, middle and high SES students in schools by priority student cohort²⁵



²² Chesters, J, "Alleviating or exacerbating disadvantage: Does school attended mediate the association between family background and educational attainment?", *Journal of Education Policy*, 34(3), 2019, 331–350.

²³ Palardy, GJ., "High School Socioeconomic Segregation and Student Attainment", *American Educational Research Journal*, 50(4), 2013, 714–754.

²⁴ Sciffer, M., "Measuring the Equity of Australia's Schools: The Case for Policy Reform" (Conference Paper, uploaded May 2023), p.7. Available from: [\(PDF\) Measuring the Equity of Australia's Schools: The Case for Policy Reform \(researchgate.net\)](#).

²⁵ *ibid.*

Although segregation in education is a complex matter with manifold dimensions, the past decade plus of underfunding has only entrenched educational inequity and Australia now has one of the most inequitable and segregated education systems in the world.

Current arrangements do not support adequately the needs of students with disability

A well-resourced public education system that values diversity, understands social and cognitive development, engages all learners through inclusive processes and is responsive to fundamental human needs, has the potential to develop highly literate, numerate, actively engaged, resilient and connected members of the wider community.

Resourcing for students with disability is by its very nature intensive. This resourcing must continue to ensure adherence to philosophies of equity, social justice and inclusivity. Despite numerous official reports and State and Commonwealth government reviews over the past two decades identifying serious deficiencies in the resourcing of the education of young Australians with disability, and recent changes to funding and loading arrangements, there has been little progress in this regard. Equity measures in the NSRA must directly address the holistic needs of students with disability.

The original 2011 *Review of Funding for Schooling* identified disability as one of the key factors of disadvantage affecting school attainment and achievement, and made a key recommendation that resourcing for students with disability be “set according to the level of reasonable educational adjustment required to allow the student to participate in schooling on the same basis as students without disability.”²⁶ Additional targeted resources were viewed by the review panel as being a basic matter of equity that will keep more students in schools longer and raise skill levels and ultimately lift workforce participation of persons with disability.

However, changes to disability loading categories in recent years have left many students without any support, or with inadequate support. In 2018, over half of all children with disability who attended school accessed support or a special arrangement (58.6% or 167,400). Around one third accessed special tuition (36.8% or 105,200) while around one quarter accessed a counsellor or special support person (23.2% or 66,100). Of those children aged 5-14 years who received support or special arrangements, over one third (36.1% or 60,500) reported that they needed more support than they received.²⁷

The Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD) dataset has consistently reported a much higher prevalence of disability among school students than the ABS, and the most recent data in the 2021 collection shows that 21.8% of all students, and 22.6% of public school students had a disability, as defined by the Disability Discrimination Act.

²⁶ Australian Government, *Op,cit* p. 185

²⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Schools dataset*, 2018

According to ACARA there were approximately 592,000 students with disability in public schools in Australia in 2021, but at least 186,000 of these students were not in receipt of any loading.²⁸

With nearly 70% of students with disability enrolled in public schools and 86% of all students with disability being educated in mainstream schools²⁹ there is an extraordinary contribution made by the teaching profession and education support staff in the education of students with disability, in an under resourced system where workload pressures are immense.

However, reporting of data for students with disability is currently opaque at best.

In order to provide students with disability with the best possible opportunity to achieve, engage and acquire skills, the AEU recommends that the following steps are taken into account in the next NSRA and progress on them is reported transparently:

1. Governments must undertake a review of loading mechanisms for students with disability, informed at every stage by the teaching profession, to determine the real costs of ensuring that all students with disability can access a high-quality education regardless of learning environment so that such loadings are set according to the level of reasonable educational adjustment required to allow the student to participate in schooling on the same basis as students without disability.”³⁰
2. Governments must ensure that all education sectors have funding certainty so that they can plan effectively and are not limited in the support they can provide to students with disability in terms of in-class education support personnel, personalised lesson plans, or vital equipment.
3. Governments must ensure that staffing allocations genuinely reflect the appropriate staff/student ratios and provide the funding needed for the development of individual learning plans. This includes the provision of teacher relief to cover classes while teachers develop, implement, monitor and review individual learning plans.
4. Governments must provide an adequate allocation of additional teacher resource and/or education support staff hours to support students with disability.
5. Governments must expand early intervention (prior to school entry) units and support classes and early intervention resource supports, and expand the provision of public preschools co-located with public primary schools and allied health services. This would improve students’ timely and ongoing access to additional support mechanisms and early intervention strategies at their point of need, such as early intervention and transition support teachers and appropriate health interventions and therapy sessions, and support schools and education departments to efficiently liaise and work with other agencies and services such as government health departments and services.

²⁸ ACARA, *National report on Schooling Data Portal*, retrieved from:

<https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia-data-portal/school-students-with-disability#SWD>

²⁹ Education Council, *2016 Emergent data on students in Australian Schools receiving adjustments for disability*, retrieved from: https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/health/ED17-0046%20SCH%20NCCD%20Report%202017_ACC%20%281%29.pdf

³⁰ Australian Government, *Op,cit* p. 185

Additionally, and importantly, much greater attention needs to be paid to the impact from the NSRA and its bi-lateral agreements in not meeting the full SRS on all equity measures. AEU analysis of data provided at Senate Estimates shows that failure to fund public schools to 100% of the SRS means that nationally in 2021 the 399,336 students in receipt of a disability loading received \$601.2 million less in disability loadings than they should have that year.

This inequity for students with disability who qualify for loadings is entrenched in the NSRA and bi-lateral agreements until at least 2027 (and to 2032 in Queensland) and can only be rectified by ensuring that the shared responsibility of the Commonwealth and States/Territory governments is guaranteed in the next agreement.

A further and significant issue with the resourcing of disability loadings for students in public schools is that many public school teachers and leaders do not have the required resource or time available to them to engage in the repeated assessment and application processes necessary to ensure that their students receive their proper loading. This issue was raised by DESE officials in the 2022/23 Budget Estimates Hearings, and is borne out by the change in the percentage of students in receipt of funded disability loadings by school sector, particularly in recent years.

From 2015 to 2021 the percentage of students in independent schools who receive the supplementary disability loading has increased from 6.9% to 8.4% and in Catholic schools it has increased from 8.6% to 10.5%. In public schools the increase has been much lower, from 8.3% to 9.0%. Similarly, the percentage of Catholic school student in receipt of the substantial loading has increased from 1.7% to 3.6% and for independent schools it has increased from 2.0% to 2.6%. Over the same time period the percentage of public school students in receipt of the substantial loading has increased only from 3.4% to 3.9%.³¹

These figures suggest that there are significant numbers of students with disability in public schools who are not in receipt of a disability adjustment or are not in receipt of the correct level of adjustment and thus missing out on necessary support. Indeed, the AEU has had numerous reports from AEU Branches and Associated Bodies (in particular from New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania) that this is the case.

School systems have ultimate authority for ensuring that students with disability have access to the support that they need to participate in education on the same basis as students without disability, but it is the responsibility of governments who administer and fund these systems to ensure that schools have the resources necessary to support students with disability. It is also the responsibility of governments to ensure that schools have enough resources and the capacity to complete the administrative and bureaucratic requirements that the system demands.

³¹ ACARA, retrieved in <https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia-data-portal/school-students-with-disability>

The next NSRA must as a priority ensure that all schools systems have the resource and staff capacity required to assess students with disability and attention must be paid to ensuring that all students are able to access the level of support appropriate to their needs. To do this, it must require that all governments publish data on outcomes for students with disability as well as data on the allocation of loadings by level of support.

Unsustainable and damaging workloads make teaching a profession under pressure

The pressure on principals and teachers has never been greater and workload is the single biggest issue that teachers face. The volume and complexity of their work has increased, along with the needs of their students, but the resource and time available to teachers has been continually eroded by the increasing complexity of the job and the entrenched underfunding of Australia’s public school systems over the last decade.

These relentless twin pressures have resulted in endemic burnout among teachers and huge numbers leaving the profession in recent years. The AEU’s 2023 State of Our Schools survey reveals the scale of the teacher shortage and the impact it is having in schools. Ninety per cent of principals say they have experienced a shortage of teachers in the last year – more than triple the rate from the survey taken eight years ago.

As a result of these shortages, 58% of principals had unfilled teaching positions at the start of the 2023 school year, at an average of 3.1 vacant positions per school. By halfway through the year, 75% of principals still report vacant teaching posts at their school, at an average of 2.9 vacancies per school.

In the 2023 State of Our Schools survey teachers were asked “In your opinion, do schools as a whole currently have difficulty in retaining teachers in the profession?” The results demonstrate the scale of the attrition problem in public schools, and the extent to which attrition has increased in recent years.

- 95% of teachers say that schools have trouble retaining teachers in the profession. This has increased markedly from 68% in 2020. When teachers were asked what could turn reduce attrition - reduced workloads and improved salaries for all teachers were the most cited changes that would help to retain teachers.
- Only 19% of current teachers were sure that they would continue teaching until retirement. In 2015, 44% planned to teach for their entire working life.
- 31% said that they have plans to leave teaching prior to retirement – this has more than doubled from 14% in the 2020 survey. Another 41% said that they “possibly” planned to leave.

When teachers who plan to leave the profession were asked to choose the three most important factors in their decision to leave, 64% chose workload, 40% chose the amount of administration and compliance work required and 34% chose salaries as the main reasons for wanting to leave the profession.

When asked about pre-retirement resignations at their school 43% of principals said that they had experienced an increase in the last year, with only 21% planning to continue working in education in any capacity and only 4% of teachers resigning to take up a position at another public school and 32% planning to take a break from employment all together.³²

Workload is the major issue – and there is a huge and consistent body of evidence showing that unrelentingly high workloads are driving teachers away.

Both the Victorian and the NSW Teachers Federation Branches of the AEU have conducted extensive studies of teachers’ workloads and average weekly working hours in recent years, and both have found that teachers are working substantially more hours than contracted at significantly higher levels than the OECD average and are undertaking a very large amount of work at home and during holidays.

In NSW, a survey of over 18,000 teachers found that the average full-time teacher is working 55 hours per week during term time, with over 43 hours per week at school on average and a further 11 hours per week at home.³³ In Victoria, a 2016 study of classroom teachers reported working an average of 53 hours per week, and leading teachers reported working an average of 55 hours per week. These results have since been validated by another 2021 survey of over 10,000 Teachers in Victoria which again found that on average, they work 53 hours per week.³⁴ Most recently, AITSL’s latest Australian Teacher Workforce Data has again confirmed that teachers work an average of 53 hours per week.³⁵

Average hours worked per week in 2022



The consistency of these results across states and across teachers of all levels of experience in both primary and secondary schools, clearly indicates that work in schools simply is too great in volume and intensity to be undertaken in the time available at school, and it is no surprise that less than one third of teachers say that they “have the time to do my job well.”³⁶

³² Australian Education Union, *Op. cit.*, 2023

³³ McGrath- Champ, S., Wilson, R., Stacey, M. & Fitzgerald, S., (2018) *Understanding Teaching in Schools*, the Foundation for Teaching and Learning: 2018 Report to the NSW Teachers Federation, Sydney, p. 14

³⁴ Australian Education Union Victorian Branch, *State of our School Survey Results: Survey of Victorian Public School Staff*, conducted Feb-March 2021, retrieved from

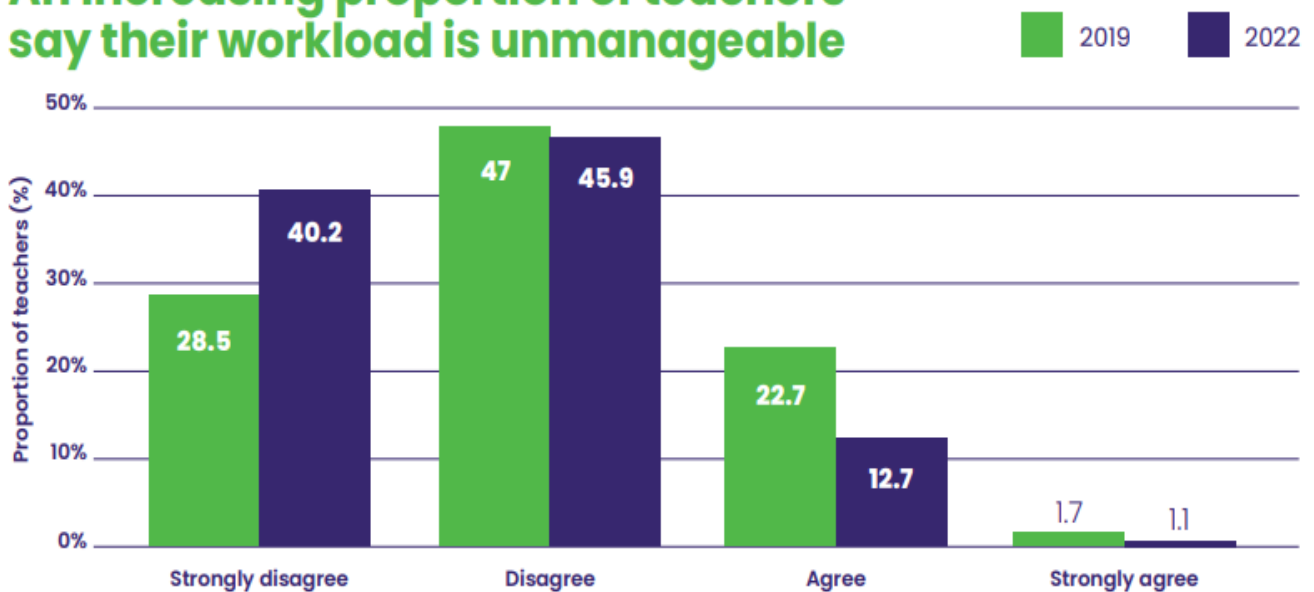
https://www.aeuvic.asn.au/sites/default/files/vgsa/210430%20State%20of%20our%20SchoolsFINAL.pdf?_t=1619736721

³⁵ AITSL, *Australian Teacher Workforce Data: Key Metrics Dashboard*, 2023

³⁶ NSW People Matter Employee Survey 2020, retrieved from <https://www.psc.nsw.gov.au/reports-and-data/people-matter-employee-survey/pmes-2020>

In addition to excessive working hours, a large majority of teachers report significant workload intensification and sustainability concerns. The chart below shows the findings two national surveys of teachers conducted by Monash University in 2019 and 2022. Over the last three years the proportion of teachers who say their workload is not manageable has increased from 75% in 2019 to 86% in 2022, and the percentage who strongly disagreed with the proposition that their workload is manageable increased to 40% from 28% in 2019.³⁷

An increasing proportion of teachers say their workload is unmanageable



In the 2021 Victorian workload survey, only 14% of teachers said that their workload is often or nearly always manageable, and only 15% felt that they often or nearly always had a good balance between home and work. 84% of teachers indicated that their workload at some stage has had a negative effect on their home life, and most alarmingly, 49% teachers in all schools indicated that their workload often or nearly always adversely affected their health.

The workload burden on teachers in Australia is immense, and the general acceptance of teachers working up to the equivalent of two additional days per week for sustained periods of time and indeed often on a permanent basis, and being swamped with additional tasks only tangentially related to their practice, is one of the factors most frequently cited by teachers as the reason for burn out and attrition. This has been confirmed once again in this Review's Initial Consultation Surveys Results which have found that 74.2% of teachers said that reducing teacher workload was one of the most important factors to help improve student outcomes³⁸ and 80.0% said that it was one of the most important investments that governments could make to retain teachers.³⁹

³⁷ Longmuir, F., Gallo Cordoba, B., Phillips, M., Allen, K.A. & Moharami, M. *Australian Teachers' Perceptions of their Work in 2022*, Monash University, 2022), p. 24, retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.26180/21212891>

³⁸ Department of Education: *Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System – Initial Consultation Surveys: Summary Analytical Report*, 2023, p.7.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.21

A teacher from the NSW Teachers Federation workload study describes the experience:

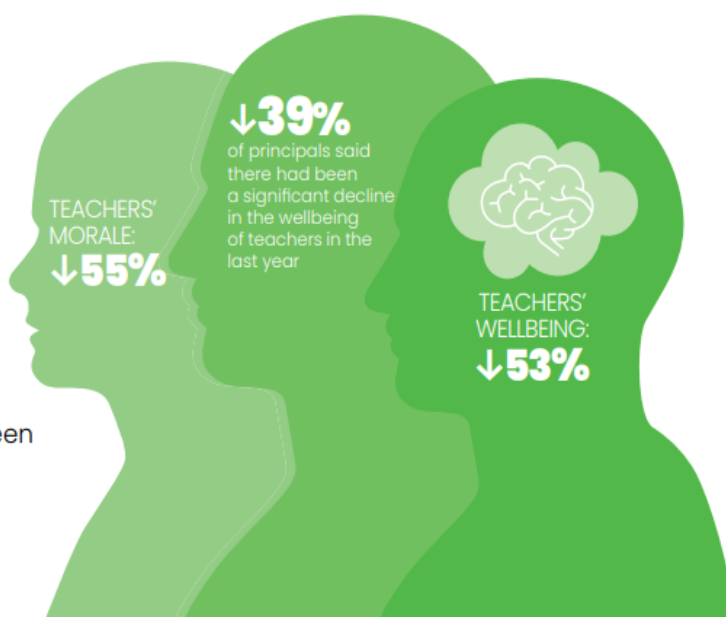
“I am currently on leave from the Head Teacher position and am working as a classroom teacher. This decision was due to excessive work hours, averaging 80+ hours per week in term and 50+ hours in "holidays" as a Head Teacher for 6 years. The stress of this unsustainable workload left me physically exhausted and mentally drained. Total burn out. Having been working as a classroom teacher for a year, I still feel unable to resume my duties, although I am gradually recovering. I felt there was no real support for me in [the] couple of years building up to this decision. I was told to re-prioritise, but when I did, I was continually instructed to do things I had prioritised at a low level”⁴⁰

Funding inequity has a profound impact on staff wellbeing and morale

Chronic underfunding, teacher shortages and the unequal distribution of resources in schools are impacting on teachers' workloads, morale and wellbeing.

In the 2023 State of Our Schools survey, almost 40% of principals said there had been a significant decline in the wellbeing and morale of teachers in the last year.

A majority of teachers also reported significant declines in teacher wellbeing (53%) and morale (55%).



As recently noted by Professor John Buchanan: “It is possible we are degrading the environment and habitat of all teachers, putting in jeopardy their capacity to survive.”⁴¹

There are numerous policy levers that Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments have available to reduce teacher working hours and workload intensity and to curb the current unacceptably high levels of teachers being driven out of the workforce.

Both levels of government have the opportunity in the next NSRA to ensure that workload relief measures are put in place and guaranteed through a commitment to funding to public schools to 100% of the SRS linked to workload reduction. This would immediately enable schools to hire many more thousands of additional teachers and to reduce class sizes and individual workloads, for example through the provision of additional release time to teachers and by allowing protected time for teacher driven collaboration on curriculum and lesson planning.

⁴⁰ McGrath-Champ, S. et al., Op.cit., p 35

⁴¹ Buchanan, J. (2020). Challenging the deprofessionalisation of teaching and teachers: Claiming and acclaiming the profession. Springer.

Eliminating excessive compliance measures and allowing teachers time for collaboration is key to retaining teachers

The next NSRA could reduce attrition by reducing the demands of compliance and administration work that is required of teachers. Mandating curriculum materials will not alleviate workloads but will merely add another layer of compliance activity. The following quotes from a Monash University study of teachers' perception of their work demonstrate the frustration that teachers feel with the culture of compliance that currently exists in schools:

- *“Teaching has become about data collection rather than the student as a person.”*
- *“I don't ever want to be complacent, and I don't want to work in a job that is so overloaded with administration protocols that it takes away from what I am there to do.”*
- *“It's not the profession I want to remain in. I became a teacher to educate and inspire students, not to push agendas and collect data⁴².”*

Teachers are clearly at breaking point, and providing teachers with more time for planning and collaboration is essential to retain the expertise that exists in the profession.

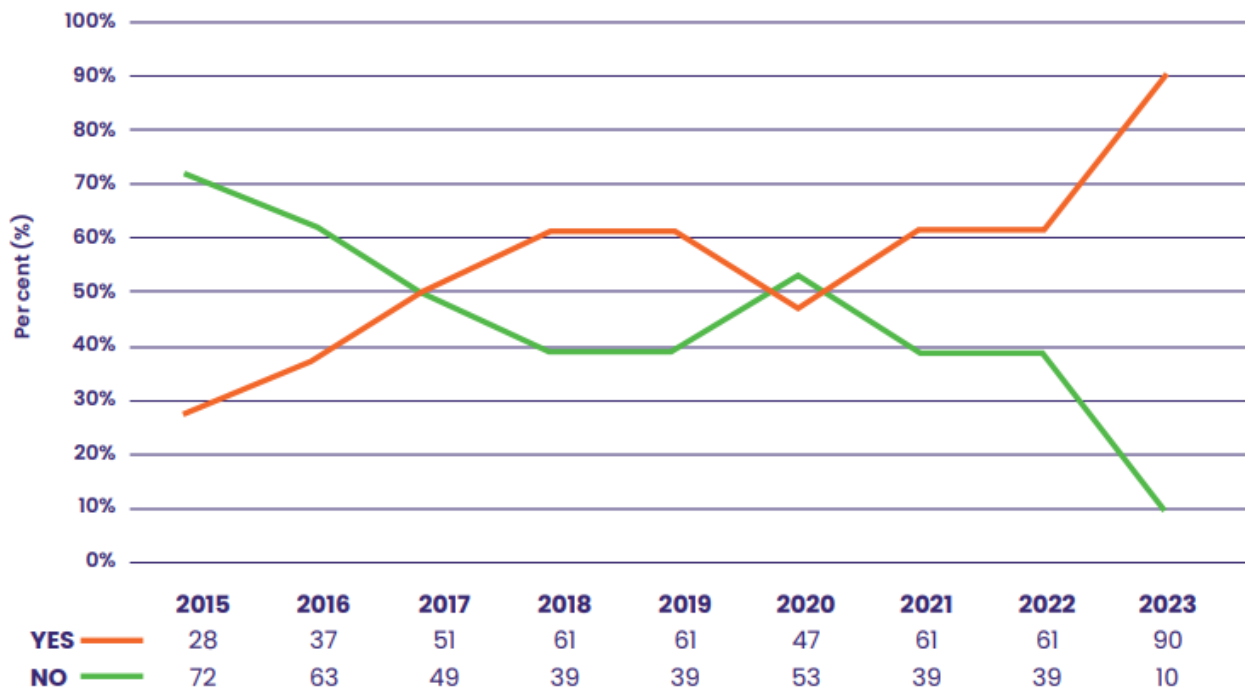
There are numerous policy levers that Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments have available to reduce teacher working hours and workload intensity and to curb the current unacceptably high levels of teachers being driven out of the workforce. Both levels of government have the opportunity in the next NSRA to ensure that workload relief measures are put in place and guaranteed through a commitment to funding to public schools to 100% of the SRS and with the implementation of strategies linked to workload reduction. This would immediately enable schools to hire many more thousands of additional teachers and to reduce class sizes and individual workloads, for example through the provision of additional release time to teachers.

The next NSRA could also reduce attrition by reducing the demands of compliance and administration work that is required of teachers. It could include commitments to decouple the NSRA measurement framework and performance indicators from NAPLAN and ensure that no new initiatives in relation to assessment, reporting, evaluation and accountability are imposed on teachers and principals, and that any new initiatives are not introduced without extensive prior consultation and negotiation with the teaching profession via its union, the AEU.

⁴² Longmuir, *Op. cit*, 2022 p.28

Increased complexity without increased reward drives teachers out of the profession

Principals - Has your school had teacher shortages in the last year?



The chart above, from the 2023 State of our Schools survey, shows just how acute the national teacher shortage has become, particularly since 2020. Supporting qualified teachers who have left the classroom to return and helping those who are considering leaving to remain could go some way towards alleviating the crisis, however significant and permanent changes to the working hours and workload intensity and improved salary structures for all teachers would be required to encourage qualified teachers who have left the profession to return to the classroom.

Teacher salaries in Australia are considerably flatter throughout their career than in most comparator countries. *Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators 2022* shows that whilst the OECD average salary at the top of the salary scale is 1.6 times the graduate salary in Australia, the average is 1.4 times starting salary.⁴³ This means that unlike most OECD countries where experienced teachers continue to be rewarded through pay progression well into their careers, in Australia a teacher can spend most (and potentially up to three quarters) of their career at the top of the salary scale without access to pay progression.

⁴³ Retrieved from OECD Statistics Education and Training

Over time, and over the last two decades in particular, the complexity of teachers' work has increased significantly. The frequency of practise changes to comply with policy changes, increased administrative and data requirements and increasing numbers of students requiring additional support have all increased whilst salaries have not. The 2021 independent inquiry *Valuing the Teaching Profession* made the following observations on the increased challenge inherent to teaching in recent decades and found that increased complexity has not been met by improvements to pay:

“The Panel is of the view the evidence from teachers and experts is persuasive in arguing that ... there has been a markedly significant change in teachers' work. All aspects of the work of teachers has grown in volume and complexity.”⁴⁴

“At the same time as these increases in work, complexity and responsibility there has been a decline in the relative position of teacher salaries alongside that of other professions and a reduced attractiveness of public sector teaching as a career; this being a contradiction that needs urgent attention by way of a significant upgrade in teacher salaries and an improvement in career options.”⁴⁵

Further, the Inquiry's Chair the Hon. Dr Geoff Gallop sounds the alarm on the short and medium term impact of the imbalance created by the failure of teaching's pay structures to keep up with the demands of the profession.

“Taken with the fragile and inadequate staffing mechanisms currently in place, the salary levels in place and projected for the next three to five years are dangerous for the public standing of the profession, and for the quality of education available to the students of the state's [NSW] public schools.”⁴⁶

All teachers should have the opportunity for salary progression throughout their careers. Incentives or the promise of a special status and elevated pay for a select minority will not address the issue.

The next NSRA must acknowledge that teacher's work, and in particular the work of teachers in public schools, is increasingly complex, and in recognition of this it must encourage state and territory governments to extend current salary scales to allow *all* teachers access to salary progression throughout the careers whilst remaining in the classroom, whilst putting in place measures to assure teachers that have left that the workload concerns that drove them out will be addressed thoroughly and permanently.

A number of time relief and workload initiatives have been implemented in NSW in recent months. While helpful, they constitute only an important first step and much more will be required to comprehensively address teacher workloads. In addition to removing unnecessary administrative requirements and genuinely listening to teachers' views about the workload challenges and what work needs to be simplified and/or removed, new and increased funding to provide additional release time to teachers on an ongoing permanent basis and employ additional administration and support staff will be essential.

⁴⁴ Gallop, G., Kavanagh, T. & Lee, P., *Valuing the Teaching Profession: An Independent Inquiry*, 2021, p.126

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p.9.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p.133.

An instructive case study is the rollout of new curriculum changes in NSW. To support ongoing curriculum and syllabus development and implementation, in addition to specialist support that is structurally organised and embedded across the public education system, namely an expanded non-school based teaching workforce, it is essential that significant additional release time is provided.

Teachers need time to do their jobs well and achieve positive student outcomes. Significant increases in overall funding will be required to enable permanent and substantial increases in release time for teachers, to enable them to plan for and to work together to implement effective teaching and learning strategies aligned with the curriculum, and juggle the many existing demands and growing complexities of their work.

This can only be achieved in the next NSRA through the full funding of the SRS and all student based loadings and by providing the resources across the entire system that give teachers the time and space necessary to devise and implement innovative approaches.

Student mental health and wellbeing must be a priority

The wellbeing of students has a direct impact on their engagement in education and the results they achieve. This makes the provision of well-resourced teaching and learning programs critical. Student wellbeing, mental health and the impact of trauma is a significant and growing issue for schools and has been exacerbated by the difficulties of students and school staff in dealing with both the short- and long-term challenges presented by COVID-19. Similarly, many schools and students are still reeling from trauma and damage caused by the climate driven fires in Victoria and NSW in 2019 and 2020⁴⁷ and unprecedented severe floods in Queensland and NSW in 2022.⁴⁸

Research released in 2021 found seven in 10 parents and carers of young people aged 15-18 reported worsening mental health conditions for their children due to COVID-19.⁴⁹ This year, over 70% of principals reported a decline in student wellbeing and engagement in the past 12 months, with 27% saying there has been a significant decline in wellbeing.⁵⁰ A 2022 survey of over 6000 Australian school students found that wellbeing declines across multiple domains as they progress through from the early primary years to Year 12.⁵¹ The Productivity Commission's Mental Health inquiry found many schools have policies and support systems in place to achieve positive student mental health and wellbeing outcomes, but this is not the

⁴⁷ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-12-21/bushfire-covid-mental-health-corryong-college-vce-top-state/101780328>

⁴⁸ <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/class-on-the-grass-flood-hit-schools-face-years-of-disruption-20220325-p5a7w7.html>

⁴⁹ Biddle, N., Edwards, B., Gray, M. & Sollis, S., The impact of COVID-19 on child mental health and service barriers: The perspective of parents, August 2021, Australian National University Centre for Social Research and Methods.

⁵⁰ Australian Education Union, State of Our Schools 2023, Unpublished survey data.

⁵¹ Buckley Flack, C., Schoeffel, S., Walker, L., Bickerstaff, A., Wellbeing for Learning: Evidence brief on Student wellbeing from a pilot in schools, Pivot Professional Learning 2022

case everywhere.⁵² Principals and teachers report they are left by the education system to navigate through copious wellbeing policies and programs without the support, time and resources to choose and implement the most effective ones. Teachers also report a lack of available support for students identified as at risk of poor mental health or show signs of poor wellbeing. There is a shortage of school counsellors, particularly in rural and remote areas, and not all schools in Australia are funded to have an appropriately qualified (and preferably dual qualified teacher/counsellor) qualified school counsellor on staff. Counsellors report crippling workloads, long waiting lists for assessment of students and a need to prioritise support based on the risk of harm rather than when concerns are first raised.⁵³ The current provision and shortage of qualified school counsellors also means that students are going without disability assessments and early interventions.

In the AEU's State of Our Schools Survey 2023 principals and teachers were asked to identify the extent to which student wellbeing had changed over the past year. The results show a significant and uniform negative impact across these areas. It is worth noting that the declines in student wellbeing and engagement recorded in 2023 exceed those recorded in the 2021 survey, conducted during term 3, at the height of COVID disruption and when NSW, Victoria and the ACT were engaged in extended periods of remote learning.

The survey results showed that:

- 27% of principals said that student wellbeing had “declined significantly” in the last year, compared to 17% in 2021.
- 23% of principals said that student engagement had “declined significantly” in the last year, compared to 18% in 2021.
- 25% of teachers said that student wellbeing had “declined significantly” in the last year, compared to 18% in 2021.
- 23% teachers said that student engagement had “declined significantly” in the last year, compared to 18% in 2021.

An ideal approach to supporting student mental health and wellbeing would be a ‘wraparound’ model of service provision that is already operating in some limited cases. To be successful, such a model must be supported through proper provision of social welfare and public services. This is acknowledged by the ACT Government Education Directorate's own ten-year strategy, *The Future of Education*:

A holistic view of students as people recognises that basic welfare and wellbeing needs, things like nutritious food and physical and mental health support, provide the basis on which learning can occur. Meeting these needs allows the full opportunity of education to be made available.

⁵² Productivity Commission, 2020, Mental Health, Report no. 95, Canberra

⁵³ The Daily Telegraph, Shortage of NSW school counsellors leaving many students without the help they require, November 2022, retrieved from <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/shortage-of-nsw-schoolcounsellors-leaving-many-students-withoutthe-help-they-require/news-story/44d7e7b1f91975b47c5f946c5767dc13>

School leaders have consistently expressed frustration to the AEU at the thresholds set by support services before they will become involved. In particular, one school reported to the AEU that they had been advised by [REDACTED] Services that they would not become involved in a serious and escalating mental health crisis because the student involved was not suicidal and that they expected the school to provide mental health crisis support. While it is acknowledged that this may be a symptom of systemic issues in mental health services across the whole community, it cannot and must not be used to abrogate the responsibility of one public service to another. Schools can and do provide support for student mental health and wellbeing but must themselves be supported by the public services established for that purpose and particularly by the education departments that have fundamental responsibility for the public education system

Staff in all roles in schools are often required to devote significant additional time and resources to meet the needs of their students and their families. Schools are currently called on to devote additional time and resources to attempting to find ways to provide support to students' families that are well outside of any educational role. With limited time and resources, schools are forced to choose between ensuring wellbeing and the work required to implement the best quality teaching.

In addition to properly-funded 'wraparound' support services to schools, the crippling shortage of qualified school counsellors must be addressed by filling existing vacancies and increasing the ratio of school counsellors to students. The Gallop Inquiry in NSW recommended a guaranteed minimum of at least 1 school counsellor for every 500 students to "address the significant increase in student health issues". Provision of school counsellors must be driven by student need recognising student location and concentrations of socio-economic disadvantage.

The above ratio cannot be achieved without significant increases in funding, for example, to offer attractive re-training scholarships for teachers to re-train as qualified school counsellors. As shown in the case study from the ACT, below, shortages driven by excessive workloads are actively preventing innovative new approaches to student wellbeing.

Three case studies of state based positive mental health and wellbeing interventions in schools, and the limitations placed on them by a lack of recourse, are presented below.

Case Study: In the ACT Teacher and School Psychologist shortages hamper innovative approaches to student wellbeing

In the ACT, acute shortages of teachers and psychologists have limited the full expression student wellbeing innovations. They have been partially implemented through programs such as:

- *A pilot of free breakfasts and lunches provided for students at selected schools.*
- *A centralised and multidisciplinary Clinical Practice Team staffed with psychologists, social workers, occupational therapists, physiotherapists and speech pathologists who accept referrals from every public school.*
- *Recent funding of an Inclusive Education Coach program, where teachers with qualifications and/or experience in inclusive education for students with disability will have dedicated roles to support inclusive practice across an entire school.*

The ACT has a particular emphasis on early childhood development, which includes:

- *Community Coordinator positions at preschools that serve vulnerable families, whose roles facilitate referrals between schools and social and/or health services.*
- *A Koori Preschool program offered free to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 3-5 years, where cultural safety frameworks and curricula were co-designed with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.*
- *A Preschool Pathways Partner program which provides targeted coaching on inclusion and transition practices, facilitation of connections between ACT public preschools, families and schools to enhance transitions, and professional learning suited to particular student needs.*
- *A Child Development Service that offers assessment, referral, information and linkages for children aged 0 to 6, where there are concerns about their development. This service also offers early intervention therapy, regular and free drop-in clinics for speech pathology, occupational therapy and physiotherapy, and free Autism Spectrum Disorder assessments for children aged up to 12 years.*

Case study: Mental Health Practitioner Program in Victoria

A primary school teacher from metropolitan Melbourne, says:

“In our State School Primary setting, funding for the Mental Health Practitioner program has been beneficial in terms of.....

- *support for principals, leadership, welfare leaders, classroom teachers and educational support staff in regards best practise for working with students in need.*
- *expertise and advice for staff working with students in need.*
- *covering elements of Social and Emotional Learning, RRRR and mental health strategies and approaches in a more effective and appropriate setting.*
- *allows time and space for students with behavioural, emotional and mental health needs.*
- *reduces impact on other students”.*

Case study: Wellbeing Workforce in Queensland State Schools

The purpose of the Wellbeing Workforce Initiative is to increasing the number of wellbeing professionals based in state schools to respond to the increasing complexity of student mental health and wellbeing needs.

The current surge of concern relating to the emerging complexity of mental health and wellbeing of young people in Queensland is well documented. Schools are increasingly being called to respond to mild to moderate mental health concerns and to support referrals for more complex or severe mental health concerns. Australian Education Union Queensland Teachers Union Branch (QTU) school leaders are communicating that student wellbeing needs are increasing exponentially with respect to complexity and vulnerability and that they are struggling to respond without access to additional wellbeing professionals within their school community.

The Department of Education (Queensland) Wellbeing Workforce initiative is responding by providing school-based access to psychologists, guidance officers (with a counselling focus), social workers and youth workers. A component of the Wellbeing Workforce also includes a trial of GP's in schools with secondary enrolments. The intent is for these wellbeing professionals to operate in an integrated and responsive manner with existing school-based staff.

This initiative sits alongside the Queensland Engagement and Wellbeing Survey that is offered to all Queensland state schools to voluntarily participate in to enable school-based data gathering to monitor school culture, student engagement and student wellbeing on an annual basis.

The Wellbeing Workforce implementation commenced in 2022, and whilst the initiative is in initial phases, QTU school leaders and members are speaking very positively about the increased level of support for students, families and school communities.

The initiative has state-wide coverage with even small schools being supported to cluster resources in order to gain access to wellbeing professionals that would previously not have been possible. QTU school leaders and members have noted:

- *Recruitment processes have been successfully coordinated between regions and schools with support for onboarding and ongoing technical supervision.*
- *Take up rates for the school-based services offered are high.*
- *Resulting in more expedited support for students when they need it most.*
- *Greater range of students and families are able to access proactive and appropriate mental health wellbeing support.*
- *The location of school-based wellbeing professionals has enabled bespoke models of wellbeing support that can be tailored to each school's needs and existing staffing resources.*
- *QTU school leaders and members describe the positive impacts of increased engagement in learning.*

An entire generation of public school students have been denied needs based funding

To achieve such whole systemic change requires a recognition that resource levels matter. The OECD report of 2018 PISA data found that “students attending schools with fewer shortages of material resources performed better in reading, on average across OECD countries and in 44 countries and economies [including Australia].”⁵⁴ PISA 2018 also found that across all OECD countries at the system level “shortages of educational materials were correlated with lower mean performance in reading, even after accounting for per capita GDP, across OECD countries, and across all participating countries and economies”⁵⁵ and states that:

*“Ensuring that all schools have adequate and high-quality material resources, and the appropriate support, is key if students from all backgrounds are to be given equal opportunities to learn and succeed at school.”*⁵⁶

The relationship between system quality and system equity has also been found in other contexts (including other subject areas covered by PISA⁵⁷ and relationships revealed through data collected for TIMSS over 20 years⁵⁸). Examining inequity in Australia’s schools requires an examination of how resources are distributed across school systems as a whole.

The AEU strongly asserts that any consideration of the reforms targets to be included in the next NSRA requires a clear consideration of the funding shortfalls, entrenched in bi-lateral agreements that currently situate 98% of public schools below 100% of the minimum Schooling Resource Standard (SRS).

It is now over eleven years since the Review of Funding for Schooling Final Report December 2011 was published. In the Executive summary of the report, the panel concluded that:

“Australia must aspire to have a schooling system that is among the best in the world for its quality and equity and must prioritise support for its lowest performing students. Every child should have access to the best possible education, regardless of where they live, the income of their family or the school they attend. Further no student in Australia should leave school without the basic skills and competencies needed to participate in the workforce and lead successful and productive lives. The

⁵⁴ OECD (2020), PISA 2018 Results (Volume V): Effective Policies, Successful Schools, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/ca768d40-en>. p. 115.

⁵⁵ OECD, *Op. cit.*, p.15

⁵⁶ OECD, *Op. cit.*, p.18

⁵⁷ Sahlberg, P. (2012). *Quality and Equity in Finnish Schools*, School Administrator. Retrieved from https://pasisahlberg.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Qualit_and_Equity_SA_2012.pdf

⁵⁸ Mullis, I., Martin, M. & Loveless, T. (2016), *20 Years of TIMSS. International Trends in Mathematics and Science Achievement, Curriculum and Instruction*, TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center. Retrieved from <http://timssandpirls.bc.edu/timss2015/international-results/timss2015/wp-content/uploads/2016/T15-20-years-of-TIMSS.pdf>

system as a whole must work to meet the needs of all Australian children, now and in the future. The panel believes that the key to achieving this vision is to strengthen the current national schooling reforms through funding reforms.”⁵⁹

The Review of Funding for Schooling Final Report found in 2011 that “current funding arrangements for schooling are unnecessarily complex, lack coherence and transparency” and that there is a “a distinct lack of coordination in the way governments fund schooling, particularly in relation to directing funding to schools based on student need across jurisdictions and sectors.”⁶⁰ The 2011 Review set out a series of recommendations including that all recurrent funding for schooling, whether it is provided by the Australian Government or state and territory governments, be based on a new Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) that would form the basis for recurrent funding for all students in all school sectors, with separate per student amounts for primary and secondary school students and additional funding” loadings that would take into account socioeconomic background, disability, English language proficiency, the particular needs of Indigenous students, school size, and school location.”⁶¹ The SRS was recommended by the Review of Funding for Schooling as “the recurrent resources required to enable students who attend schools with minimal levels of educational disadvantage the opportunity to achieve agreed national educational outcomes”⁶² and was based on the minimum funding required for 80% of students to reach learning outcomes above the national minimum standard in NAPLAN for reading and numeracy.

The 2011 Review concluded that adherence to the full SRS was essential for fairness and equality of opportunity in education, and the SRS and its six additional loadings were subsequently established in the Australian Education Act 2013 (the Act) and came into effect in 2014.

Over the last decade the SRS, as it regards public schools, has been politically recast as an aspirational standard for which slow and incremental progress towards 95% of that minimum is deemed to suffice. By the time the next NSRA comes into effect at the end of 2024 an entire generation of public school students will have completed their schooling without their schools having the benefit of the minimum funding required.

This underfunding of public schools, the concomitant failure to address concentrations of disadvantage in education, and the resulting neglect of an entire generation of Australian children is not an anomaly or an oversight. It has been deliberately instituted and systemically maintained by successive Federal Governments and has been embraced by all state governments and the Northern Territory through the glacial pace of improvements to jurisdictional contributions to the SRS and through their willingness to write off \$2 billion a year of funding meant for public school classrooms and students in unjustifiable additional depreciation allowances.

⁵⁹ Australian Government, *Review of Funding for Schooling – Final Report*, 2011, p.15

⁶⁰ Australian Government, *Ibid.*, p. xiv

⁶¹ Australian Government, *Op. cit.*, p. xiv.

⁶² Australian Government, *Op. cit.*, p.153.

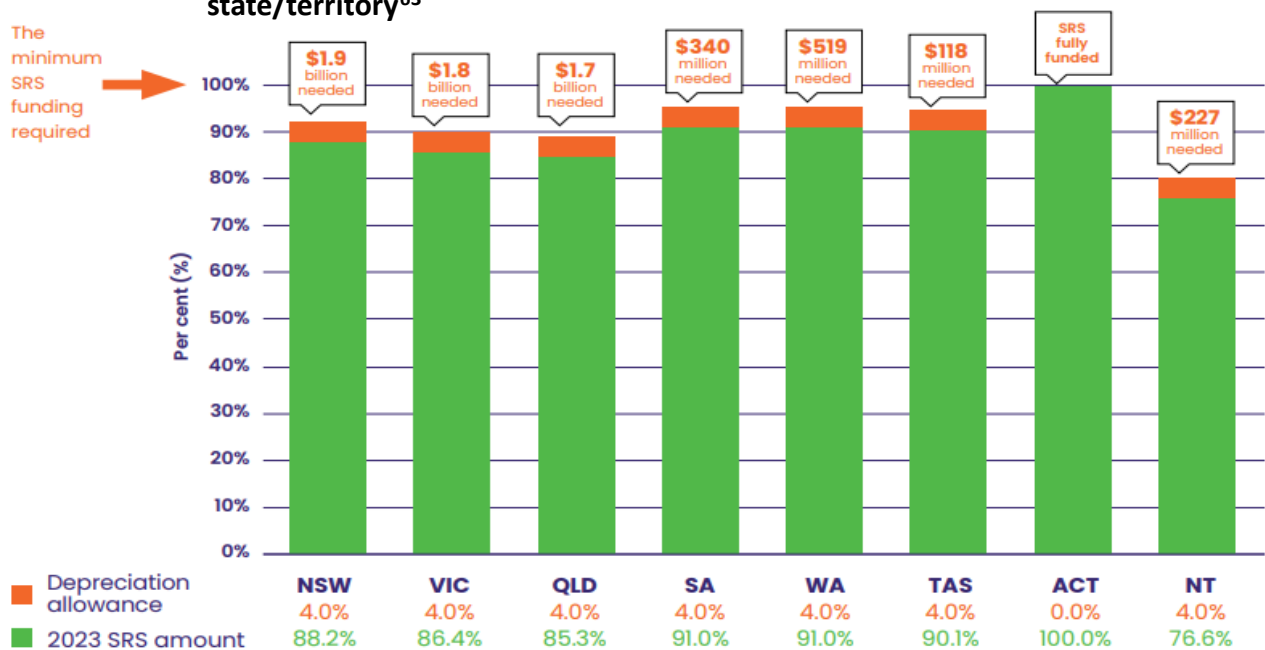
In 2017, the Act was amended to change Commonwealth funding arrangements and effectively dismantle the co-ordinated needs-based approach to schools funding initiated by the 2011 and implemented by the by the *2013 Act*. In the five years since the 2017 *Amendment* there has been further destruction of the original aims and focus of the 2013 Act. \$3.4 billion of additional funding was provided to private schools over ten years from 2020 to accommodate the transition to the Direct Measure of Income in the calculation of parental capacity to contribute, and the euphemistically named \$1.2 billion “Choice and Affordability Fund”, announced as one of the first acts of the Morrison Government in September 2018, demonstrate that the former Government’s funding priorities were neither needs based nor sector blind.

In addition, the failure of the previous coalition Commonwealth Government to honour National Education Reform Agreements (NERA) signed by states and territories in 2014 resulted in public schools not receiving \$1.9 billion of funds that were expected under these agreements in 2018 and 2019, and the replacement National School Reform Agreement and bi-lateral funding agreements signed by states and territories in late 2018 and early 2019 locked in structural underfunding of Australia’s public schools until 2024.

That entrenched, deliberate and systemic underfunding will now continue as a result of the current Federal Government’s extension of the NSRA for another year.

The combined impact of all these changes, along with 4% of SRS depreciation write offs that the previous government allowed jurisdictions to make in their individual funding agreements, have resulted in public schools in Australia being underfunded by more than \$20 billion since the last NSRA was agreed in 2018 and by \$6.6 billion dollars in 2023 alone.

Figure 1 Current Schooling Resource Standard % additional investment required by state/territory⁶³



⁶³ Calculated from bilateral funding agreements and Commonwealth resourcing and SRS values provided in Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment Question on Notice No. SQ20-000151

The legacy of this entrenched underfunding is that, on average, every public school student in Australia is missing out on \$1,800 of funding every single year. In an average class of 23 students⁶⁴, this amounts to \$41,000 per year that is not available for specialist support with literacy and numeracy, English language support, and specialist support and timely assessments for students with disability.

The AEU submits that the proper funding of public education through a needs-based, sector-blind model that incorporates full funding of the SRS is essential for fairness and equality of opportunity in education. As such, it should be seen by governments as an essential and responsible investment rather than viewed in a reductionist way as a cost that must be contained, or one that can be bargained away through the inclusion of depreciation, transport costs and the costs of regulatory bodies in funding meant for the classroom.

The AEU strongly urges the Review Panel to consider the impact of this recurrent funding shortfall on the ability of public schools to comply with the reforms and targets it is considering recommending for the next NSRA, as well as their ability to ensure ongoing staffing and resources for the delivery of intensive learning and support programs for students.

Whilst the NSRA highlights that “constitutional responsibility for school education lies with States and Territories”⁶⁵ in practicality public school funding has long been a shared responsibility between the State and Territories and the Commonwealth. The 2011 Review found that “There is an imbalance in the provision of funding to government and non-government schools by the Australian and state and territory governments. In particular, the Australian Government could play a greater role in supporting state and territory governments to meet the needs of disadvantaged students in both government and non-government schools.”⁶⁶ and that properly funding and resourcing public education is essential to ensuring fairness, equity, opportunity in this country, and that the achievement of these aims is a shared responsibility of both Commonwealth and State/Territory governments. Its recommendations included:

Recommendation 8:

The Australian Government, in collaboration with the states and territories and in consultation with the non-government sector, should develop and implement a new funding model for schools based on the principles of:

- *fair, logical and practical allocation of public funds*
- *funding in response to need*
- *funding from all sources must be sufficient*
- *support for a diverse range of schools*
- *driving broader school reform*

⁶⁴ Zyngier, D, *Report card for Australia’s national efforts in education*, retrieved from <https://www.aare.edu.au/blog/?p=5000>

⁶⁵ National School Resourcing Board, *Terms of Reference — Review of needs-based funding requirements for approved system authorities*, p.1

⁶⁶ Australian Government, *Op. cit.*, p. xxix

- *partnership between governments and across sectors*
- *transparency and clarity*
- *value for money and accountability.*⁶⁷

Recommendation 12:

*The schooling resource standard should be used by the Australian Government as the basis for determining its total recurrent funding for government and non-government systems and schools and for the allocation of that funding across systems and schools. It should also be adopted by the states and territories to guide their total recurrent funding for government and non-government schools and the allocation of that funding to individual non-government systems and schools.*⁶⁸

The AEU urges the Review Panel to orient the next NSRA towards the findings and recommendations of the 2011 Review. Doing so would provide the system with the resources it needs to instil equity in Australian schools, provide students in public schools the support they deserve and would provide teachers with the time and space required to do their jobs.

Conclusion: Investing in what works for a Better and Fairer Education System

The AEU recognises that the NSRA Review Panel has considered the depth of resource inequity and segregation between economically advantaged and disadvantaged schools.

However, we note that both the Panel and Minister Clare have sought to prioritise students from disadvantaged backgrounds and students in priority cohorts in the suggested reform directions for the next NSRA.

As the AEU has shown throughout this submission, it is not only economically disadvantaged schools and students, or students in priority cohorts that are being held back by the failure of governments to meet 100% of the SRS. The potential of all public school students is being hampered by attempts at piecemeal reforms and limited, small scale and short term initiatives. These attempts at partial solutions fail to recognise that the system cannot function at its full capacity without the resources it requires.

Similarly, the teachers are leaving the profession because they do not have the resources or time they need to do their jobs. Removing their professional autonomy through mandating curriculum materials and imposing direct instruction methods will not solve the problem of crushing workloads for teachers. Enabling teachers with the time and space to collaborate and learn from each other, and to develop innovative practices that meet their student's needs are key to the success of system wide improvement in Australia's schools.

⁶⁷ Australian Government, *Op. cit.*, p. xxii

⁶⁸ Australian Government, *Op. cit.*, p. xxiii

Shortcuts to systemic change do not work and partial reforms yield partial results. As such, the Review’s aims to develop a “better and fairer education system” based in equity for all students cannot be achieved while public schools remain underfunded by \$6.6 billion a year.

For every child to reach their potential, all governments must commit to the full funding of public schools. The AEU urges the Panel to make strong recommendations that the next NSRA should prioritise eliminating these inequities across school systems and between school systems by requiring all governments to fulfil their obligations to fund public schools to 100% of the SRS and to ensure that recurrent funding is spent in the classroom.⁶⁹

The table below provides a list of positive and transformative initiatives across eight key areas that could be realised by ensuring that the next NSRA guarantees that public school students in Australia receive true needs-based funding to 100% of the SRS.

| Aim | <u>Solutions to deliver a Better and Fairer Education System</u> |
|---|---|
| Providing more one-on-one support for children | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reduce class sizes. ▪ Establish a permanent small group or individual tutoring programs in every school, to be delivered by qualified and accredited teachers. ▪ Increase access to qualified specialist staff in all schools such as literacy and numeracy coaches, disability support, behaviour support and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers. ▪ Increase the number of trained education support staff in the classroom. |
| Giving principals and teachers time | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cut administration and compliance workloads. ▪ Provide more time for teachers to plan lessons and collaborate with colleagues. ▪ Increase system-wide support for teachers and principals to meet the needs of students with higher needs. ▪ Ensure the wellbeing of principals and teachers is foremost in any workforce strategy and that all proposed policies and reforms are the subject of broad consultation with the teaching profession to minimise potential workload increases. |

⁶⁹ Expert Panel for the *Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System, Consultation Paper*, July 2023, p.15.

Aim**Solutions to deliver a Better and Fairer Education System**

| | |
|---|---|
| Improving opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and youth are given a significant voice in education policy and delivery.▪ Reinstate and provide funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Consultative Bodies.▪ Increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers, principals and education support personnel in the education workforce.▪ Ensure that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in remote communities have access to public secondary school provision in their community.▪ Increase the number of specialist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language teachers in public schools to increase access to education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.▪ Resource the provision of cultural competencies and responsive teaching practices for the teaching workforce and education support personnel. |
| Improving student wellbeing | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Increase school counsellors to a minimum ratio of 1:500 students in primary schools and 1:250 in secondary schools.▪ Boost school wellbeing teams with qualified social workers, nurses and Aboriginal health workers.▪ Provide greater guidance and system-wide support in implementing proven early intervention and wellbeing programs. |
| Helping every student with disability succeed | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Increase the number of qualified teachers and education support personnel, particularly those who have qualifications in working with students with disability.▪ Provide more time for teachers to consult with students and family/carers, develop and implement individual education plans and classroom adjustments to teaching and learning programs.▪ Give teachers time to collaborate with their colleagues, specialist teachers and allied health professionals and undertake professional learning.▪ Increase allied health support in schools to ensure rapid response to student needs.▪ Improve system-wide support and ongoing professional development to help principals, teachers and learning support teams.▪ Prioritise purpose-built learning spaces and school facilities such as modified bathrooms and playgrounds. |

| Aim | <u>Solutions to deliver a Better and Fairer Education System</u> |
|--|--|
| Overcoming disadvantage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase the number of qualified educational support personnel and specialist staff (speech pathologists, psychologists and counsellors) in all schools. ▪ Provide additional parent liaison and qualified support officers for schools. ▪ Provide additional wrap-around teaching and learning support and extra-curricular services. |
| Resourcing regional, rural and remote schools | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide a curriculum guarantee to ensure that rural, regional and remote students can learn the same wide range of subjects as their peers in urban settings. ▪ Provide paid practicums, accommodation and relocation costs for pre-service teachers to support rural and remote placements. ▪ Provide greater support for early career teachers with full resourcing of mentoring, induction and ongoing professional learning. ▪ Provide effective systemic support for regional, rural and remote schools to ensure that they are supported with frameworks for leadership, staffing, curriculum development, student wellbeing, early intervention and teaching and learning. ▪ Deliver improved attraction and retention provisions via industrial agreements to attract and retain experienced teachers, including Initial Teacher Education bursaries, forgiveness of HELP debts, relocation and accommodation subsidies, access to high quality professional development, leadership opportunities and country incentive programs. |
| The public schools our children deserve | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Full funding of a minimum of 100% of the SRS for all public schools. ▪ A permanent Commonwealth capital fund of \$350 million a year indexed in line with rising costs and enrolments. ▪ A commitment by all governments to invest in new and upgraded public schools and facilities. |

AEU Recommendations to the Review to Inform and Better and Fairer Education System

The AEU recommends that the next National School Reform Agreement must:

1. Explicitly state that all governments must meet their obligations and responsibilities to ensure that Australia's public education systems are properly resourced to 100% of the SRS.
2. That all SRS loading data is made accessibly available and is reported against the full SRS loading amount.
3. That approved authorities are required to report the allocation of actual SRS loading funding to individual schools against each school's entitlement.
4. Implement whole system solutions to the whole system issues that public schools face. These solutions must place the teaching profession at the heart of NSRA and allow teachers to drive reforms with adequate systemic support.
5. Institute a significant and urgent reduction in teacher workloads and increase the time available for collaboration and meeting the rapidly rising needs of students.
6. Acknowledge that teacher's work is increasingly complex and encourage state and territory governments to extend current salary scales to allow teachers access to salary progression throughout their careers whilst remaining in the classroom.
7. Acknowledge that to attract high quality candidates into teaching it is necessary to invest in appropriate salary structures that reward teachers' experience and expertise and to provide teachers with the time to do their jobs.
8. Invest to build the capacity of the teaching profession and increase system support for teachers so that they have the time to collaborate and innovate.
9. Avoid strategies such as direct instruction and mandated approaches to curriculum materials that de-professionalise teachers.
10. Involve the teaching profession at all stages of the development of curriculum materials and ensure that teachers themselves have ownership over the implementation of any new curriculum materials.
11. Establish permanent small group or individual tutoring program conducted by qualified teachers in every school so that all students can access the one-on-one support they need.
12. Decouple measurement frameworks and targets from NAPLAN and ensure that no new initiatives in relation to assessment, reporting and evaluation are imposed on teachers and principals.

13. Emphasise that systems must focus on meeting the individual needs of every child and recognise that equity of outcomes cannot be achieved without equity of resourcing.
14. Recognise that significant investment to 100% of the SRS is required for all students, and that this is the key to lifting outcomes for students in priority cohorts including students with disability, First Nations students, those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and students in rural and remote settings.
15. Review loading mechanisms for students with disability, informed at every stage by the teaching profession, to determine the real costs of ensuring that all students with disability have funding certainty can access a high-quality education regardless of learning environment. This must include the provision of adequate in-class education support personnel, personalised lesson plans and vital equipment.
16. Address the decline in teacher wellbeing through workload reductions and concrete actions to limit top down interventions which increase administrative and compliance work.
17. Address the student wellbeing crisis through ensuring that there is a minimum of one qualified counsellor available per five hundred primary school students, and one counsellor per two hundred and fifty secondary school students.
18. Support a 'wraparound' model of service provision for student mental health and wellbeing with increased integration between schools and allied health professionals to ensure effective early intervention and rapid response to student needs. This should include provision for additional staffing and where possible, colocation of primary and allied health services and social support services with schools.
19. Ensure that all targets and reporting approaches are informed by classroom experience. These must be transparent in terms of their intent, their relationship to the curriculum, and in what is being measured and how it is being measured. A successful and useful assessment and reporting framework must:
 - a. Support inclusive teaching and learning practices.
 - b. Inform the teaching and learning cycle and to provide teachers, students and parents with information about the progress and achievements of students.
 - c. Form an integral component of the ongoing planning and modification of educational programs and practices and the targeting of specific resources.
20. Consider the impact of the long term recurrent funding shortfall on the ability of schools to comply with the targets that will be set out in the NSRA, as well as their ability to ensure ongoing staffing and resources for the delivery of intensive learning and support programs for students.