

AUSTRALIA SHOULD SEIZE RARE OPPORTUNITY ON SCHOOLS' FUNDING

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Australia's education system is riven with inequity and disadvantage due to a failed funding model, argues a new report released by the Centre for Policy Development.

Losing the Game: State of our schools in 2017, by CPD's Education Fellows and former school principals Chris Bonnor and Bernie Shepherd, analyses *My School* website data to demonstrate major deficiencies in how we invest in schools. It follows their seminal 2016 CPD report *Uneven Playing Field: The State of Australia's schools*.

"The latest data reveals the playing field in Australian schools is even more uneven. We are entrenching inequity by under-investing in needy schools and over-investing in large numbers of advantaged, well-performing schools. That over-investment costs about \$5 billion a year" says co-author Chris Bonnor.

"The first Gonski reforms were not fully implemented. Inequity in our schools grew, and as a result disadvantaged students were worse off and our national performance suffered. The Turnbull Government's 'Gonski 2.0' process gives us a rare, second chance to fix past mistakes."

"We call ourselves an egalitarian country, but our schools are segregating into a social hierarchy. More advantaged kids move to higher-performing schools and disadvantaged students are left behind – literally in a class of their own" says Mr Bonnor.

Government funding to non-government schools has grown to the point where it nearly matches funding for similar schools in the government sector, which educate the majority of more disadvantaged students.

"Since 2011, government funding to non-government schools has increased by about 6 per cent a year, twice the rate to government schools" said Mr Bonnor. "Private schools take huge amounts of taxpayer money but have fewer obligations to the broader public. Public obligations on schools should be consistent across the board".

Mr Bonnor said the principles and objectives of the Commonwealth Government's *Australian Education Amendment Bill* are strong. "We simply can't afford to squander this opportunity, even if important amendments are necessary so the legislation can truly deliver on the promise of revitalised needs-based funding."

"Two things need to be urgently included in the bill. First, additional funds should be fast-tracked to disadvantaged schools first, where they will make the most difference and are desperately needed. Second, the Government should establish a National Schools Resourcing Body, as proposed by the original Gonski review, to ensure fairness, accountability and transparency in how public money is distributed and spent across the whole system. These changes are widely supported by policy analysts, advocates and peak bodies. We are heartened by recent media reports that the Education Minister is open to them."

For the second Gonski Review to be successful, the authors argue the Review panel must examine all resourcing inefficiencies that create inequality and compound disadvantage in Australia's schools. This includes the different obligations existing between government and non-government schools even though both receive significant taxpayer money.

Chris Bonnor is available for interview.

Full report available here: <http://cpd.org.au/2017/06/losing-the-game/>

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