

*SAPPA's purpose is to provide advocacy and support for primary school leaders and to promote and influence primary education, including the development of policies and practices within the Department for Education and Child Development (DECD).*

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## Equitable Funding for Australian Government Primary Schools

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The South Australian Primary Principals Association (SAPPA) believes that there is a growing realisation by all members of the Australian community that the primary years of schooling are critically important in building a high-quality national education system across our nation. **The benefits of early and sustained intervention, based on identified individual differences and needs of students beginning their formal schooling, is beyond question. There is a fundamental need for a well-resourced public school with highly qualified teachers in every community.**

To enable Australia to be productive and competitive in an increasingly well-educated world, we need to learn from, adopt and adapt the emphasis of successful systems such as those in Ontario, Canada and Finland. **These systems value early and sustained intervention as the best investment in the future.**

Historically, there have been many funding anomalies in Australia that have had a negative impact on the way in which schools with primary students have been resourced. It is only in the last five years that the concept of funding according to student need, irrespective of age, family background, the community in which students live, or school that they attend, has started to make a positive difference to learning and educational outcomes for **all** students. **Needs-based funding is sector-blind and student-focused and has the potential to move all schools closer to the Australian Schools Resourcing Standard. This potential must be realised.**

The 'Gonski' Review of School Funding unequivocally found that schools were funded neither fairly nor equitably when the lens of student need was applied. Some commentary on the findings of the Review has centred on the perceived inequity between government schools and schools in the independent and Catholic systems, but the findings apply just as much to schools **within** the three sectors of Australian schooling as they do to schools **across** the three different sectors.

**SAPPA believes there needs to be an urgent national education forum that openly addresses the cost of schooling students in different age cohorts, as well as the *dividend* of educational investment.**

In the current resourcing system, even in those states and territories implementing some form of the 'Gonski' funding methodology, the *cost* of educating a secondary student is set at a higher level than that of a primary student.

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This reflects two things:

1. Historical anomalies that saw funding being deployed in an attempt to remediate the later years of a schooling system that was not seen to be producing the desired student outcomes; and
2. The fact that it does cost more to *open the doors* of a secondary school than those of a primary school with similar enrolments.

**SAPPA believes that equitable funding for Australian government primary schools is broadly defined as the resourcing which is currently needed for schools to be funded as closely as possible to the Australian Schools Resourcing Standard. In SAPPA's view, there is a noticeable disparity between funding of schools with a predominantly primary cohort, compared to schools with a predominantly secondary cohort.**

The concept of how much it costs to *open the doors*, legitimately reflects the complexity of curriculum choice and diversity that must be offered in secondary schools, the associated staffing to deliver this curriculum, the need for increasingly specialised teaching and learning spaces including, for example, Science and Technology laboratories. **SAPPA believes, however, that this cost can and should be accommodated in the concept of a 'Base Grant' that differentiates between schools of different complexity, irrespective of whether they are primary or secondary schools.** The cost of *opening the doors* of a school should not include historical staffing anomalies and inaccurately calculated administrative costs, for example. The cost of a small, less complex secondary school should not be greater than a larger, more complex primary school. The expenditure of funds to meet student needs should not be based on *shoe size*. For example, it costs no more to employ a speech therapist or an instructional leader for Year 8 or 9 students than it costs for Year 2 or 3 students. Indeed, it can be argued that the *dividend* is far greater, the earlier the intervention. It can also be argued that sustained support through the primary years can limit student disengagement which can prove extremely costly for both the education system as a whole and for society into the future.

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