



**strong schools • strong communities**

**COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOL ORGANISATIONS**



# **Public Education Position Paper**

## STUDENT NEEDS BASED FUNDING MODEL

[Student Needs Based Funding](#) is based on the principle that every child should have the same chance to receive a high quality education. This means extra resources go directly to the schools with the greatest need.

Children in disadvantaged areas of the Territory are many years behind those of the same age who live in urban areas.

[Student Needs Based Funding](#) will improve the education that all NT children receive and ensure schools can better support children with higher needs, such as those with special needs and from remote areas.

### [All impacts on a child's education outlast terms of government](#)

In 2014 a per-student needs-based funding model was developed based on research by expert education consultant, Professor Stephen Lamb. [Professor Lamb confirmed to COGSO that although a model was developed, 'Territory government's education funding' was not enough to meet student need.](#)

Based on education funding which was not enough to meet student needs, Global School Budgets were rolled out in Northern Territory schools from January 2015. We have been struggling to meet student needs ever since.

- Will you *and/or* your party fund schools based on enrolment and not attendance?
- Will you *and/or* your party commit to an independent audit of NT education expenditure within six (6) months from the election?
- Will you *and/or* your party provide the NT an education funding model which is simple, fair, transparent and demonstrates what it actually costs to educate a child?
- Do you *and/or* your party fully support the Gonski reforms to properly resource our schools?

## STAFFING IN SCHOOLS

The NT government refused to sign up to Gonski in 2013/14. Instead, the government accepted a lesser amount of \$272.5 million for the NT to spend on government schools for 2014 to 2017, with ‘no strings attached’. The NT government has admitted that part of the federal funding has been used on infrastructure - building new schools.

The Gonski funding was specifically for “more individual attention in the classroom ... extra specialist teachers in areas such as literacy and numeracy ... greater support for children with disabilities or special needs ... additional training and classroom support for teachers”.

### **Our schools have suffered staffing cuts with 100’s of teaching positions cut & 100’s of school support positions cut**

Our schools have reported losing most of their student support positions: Transition Aides, Teacher Assistants, Tutors, Special Education Support Assistants, Inclusion Support staff, Language Teachers, Librarians, Special Needs Co-ordinator, IT staff.

- Will you *and/or* your party commit to reversing the last three years of cuts to teaching positions from our schools?
- Will you *and/or* your party commit to returning Teacher Assistants, Tutors, Special Education Support Assistants (SESA) and investing in all other support positions needed in schools?
- Will you *and/or* your party commit to reducing class sizes in Primary, Middle and Senior classes?

## EARLY YEARS

The Northern Territory is required to operate under the ratios and framework of the national body Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACEQA).

Improved National pre-school educator to child ratio commenced in the NT on 1 January 2016.

### Children aged 3 to 4 years of age - 1 educator to 11 children

Improved educator to child ratio is a key factor in delivering quality education and care.

Pre-school children leave pre-school at the end of a year having been supervised with their physical, social and emotional needs met by one (1) educator for every eleven (11) students.

Only 42 days later, these same children enter Transition, with one (1) teacher, often without a support staff member in the classroom, for up to twenty-seven (27) students.

Children at this age present with many physical, social and emotional needs, including basic toileting.

A transition aid is required in every transition class to support the transition teacher and up to twenty- seven (27) young children.

- Will you *and/or* your party commit to funding a Transition Aid for every transition class?
- Will you *and/or* your party ensure through regulation that all transition classes are staffed with a Transition Aid to cover, at the very least, all student contact time?
- Will you *and/or* your party commit to reducing class sizes for transition classes?

## AUTISM SPECTRUM STUDENTS

- Will you *and/or* your party acknowledge that three (3) Autism Advisors in the Department of Education to service the entire Northern Territory, including non-government schools, is grossly inadequate?
- Will you *and/or* your party resource additional Autism Advisor positions to meet the needs of children on the autism spectrum?

## TIMELY ACCESS FOR STUDENTS TO SPECIALISTS

- Will you *and/or* your party agree with families that waiting over a year for access to specialists is not meeting children's needs?
- Will you *and/or* your party return specialists; Speech Pathologists, Psychologists, Occupational Therapists etc. to the Department of Education to improve timely access?

## SCHOOL BASED CONSTABLES

- Will you *and/or* your party return School Based Constables to schools and not require them to be operational police officers?



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## STUDENT WELFARE OFFICERS

- Will you *and/or* your party support one, full-time, qualified Counsellor for every 200 students across our schools ensuring welfare services are available to students in public schools?
- Will you *and/or* your party ensure small schools have access to the same qualified Counsellors?

## GLOBAL SCHOOL BUDGETS

- Will you *and/or* your party fund all sick leave when a staff member goes over the sick leave allocated in the formula?
- Will you *and/or* your party fund all relief teachers when a staff member goes over the sick leave allocated in the formula?
- Will you *and/or* your party fund automatic exceptional circumstances funding when a staff member goes over the sick leave allocated in the formula?
- Will you *and/or* your party fund all staff professional development centrally and not from school budgets?
- Will you *and/or* your party fund all additional add-ons placing pressure on school budgets, for example replacing the sand in sandpits which is recommended every year?
- Will you *and/or* your party fund all public liability insurance for schools centrally and not from school budgets?

## DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The new Education Act 2015 enables school councils under Section 119 (1) to

- (i) determine fees that may be charged for the provision to a student of any approved materials, services or facilities not covered by section 75(2) that a parent of the student chooses to have provided to the student;

A sound analysis of school funding needs, requires a clear understanding of what 'free instruction in the standard curriculum' means and what it costs to provide it.

Providing this understanding is the role of the NT Department of Education.

- Will you *and/or* your party implement strategies to improve financial governance in schools required to manage Global School Budgets?
- Will you *and/or* your party ensure policy, practices, guidance and training are provided by the Department to school councils, principals and business managers on efficient and best practice for determining fees to be charged to public school parents?
- Will you *and/or* your party conduct regular reviews of public school parent payment policies and practices, ensuring intervention where practices are identified as breaching legislation or policy requirements?

## STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY (SWD)

Funding must be available to ensure every student, wherever they live in the Territory, has access to the best education and care. Every child, regardless of where they go to school must receive the resources and support they need to achieve their very best. This includes funding that meets the support needs of students with a disability.

The Special Education Support Program (SESP) was to be an additional resource available to students with a disability and additional educational adjustments.

The issue is allocating a program amount which should be a needs based amount per student.

The budget for the program in 2015-2016 is \$5.1M

The budget for the program in 2016-2017 is \$5.1M

This budget amount for students with a disability is grossly inadequate.

A further issue in funding a fixed, annual amount is the amount does not increase as the number of students with a disability increase.

The Department of Education needs to calculate and provide [what it actually costs to educate a child with a disability and additional educational adjustments](#).

In addition, new applications for Special Education Support Program (SESP) are only determined by the Department of Education twice a year, term 2, and term 4.

A student with a disability commencing at the start of a school year would not have their application for SESP resources considered for eighteen (18) weeks.

This same student, when approved, would then have a small amount of funding provided to their school twenty-five (25) weeks after commencing the school year.

The Department must then adjust what resourcing it can provide schools as the number of students with a disability numbers increase.

- Will you *and/or* your party provide publicly available information on the number of students with a disability in our schools?
- Will you *and/or* your party review the 'Special Education Support Program' (SESP) in consultation with staff, schools and key stakeholder groups?
- Will you *and/or* your party fund students with a disability based on a need based formula calculated by what it actually costs to provide educational adjustments?



## STUDENT BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT

page 1 of 3

When concerns arise about a student's behaviour, or when a student is displaying chronic patterns of challenging behaviour, a more targeted response is required which includes support measures for our schools.

All students must have access to the most effective and accurately implemented behavioural practices and interventions possible.

School Wide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS) provides an operational framework for achieving these outcomes. More importantly, SWPBS is a decision making framework that guides selection, integration and implementation of the best evidence-based behavioural practices for improving important academic and behaviour outcomes for all students.

The School Wide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS) team was cut from the Department of Education

- Will you *and/or* your party fund Positive Behaviour Programs and a Team with adequate resourcing to support all schools?

## DATA COLLECTION

Government should have data available which records instances and severity of challenging behaviour and behaviour management responses, as reported by students, teachers, non-school based staff and the school community.

Government should ensure a Student Online Case System is available as a referral and data system for schools to support the case management and service delivery for students referred to Student Support Services. The data provided in this system would facilitate more effective interventions and ensure accurate record keeping.

Quality data would also [enable government to be responsive to the resourcing required for Student Support Services and schools.](#)

- Will you *and/or* your party instigate a centralised database for instances of students with a disability, students with hearing loss, students with structured intervention and students with extreme behaviour?
- Will you *and/or* your party evaluate the integrity of data currently collected?
- Will you *and/or* your party respond to the data with the resourcing required for Student Support Services and schools?

## STRUCTURED INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

page 2 of 3

Where students repeatedly demonstrate challenging behaviour, schools require specialist student support staff to implement more structured intervention strategies including:

- Assessing the behaviour with the student, their family and relevant wellbeing professionals.
- Developing Behaviour Support Plans and/or Education Adjustment Plans.
- Engaging appropriate support services or alternative learning or behaviour management options such as [Positive Learning Centres or Re-Engagement programs](#) to undertake assessments and/or provide specialist support.

Re-engagement programs operate outside mainstream school settings and provide tailored education and support for children and young people who are disengaged, or have been identified as at risk of disengaging, from mainstream school.

They provide an opportunity for disengaged or at-risk children and young people to achieve positive education and wellbeing outcomes through engagement in a tailored and supportive learning environment.

Our [Positive Learning Centres and Re-Engagement Centres](#) achieve strong results for our children. Many students have successfully integrated back in to their schools.

These Centres are under resourced and unable to meet the demand for the number of students requiring their intervention and specialist services.

- Will you *and/or* your party ensure every region has access to a Positive Learning Centre and Re-Engagement Centre?
- Will you *and/or* your party develop a plan for Positive Learning and Re-Engagement for students unable to access regional or urban centres?
- Will you *and/or* your party ensure every Positive Learning Centre and Re-Engagement Centre is provided an adequate, permanent location?
- Will you *and/or* your party ensure every Positive Learning Centre and Re-Engagement Centre is resourced to be able to place every student referred?
- Will you *and/or* your party meet with Centre staff/parents to discuss their requirements to meet demand for the ongoing provision of services?

## EXTREME BEHAVIOUR FUNDING

*page 3 of 3*

Schools may apply for **short term**, program specific, Extreme Emergency Behaviour (EEB) funding for students who do not have a formal diagnosis and have complex support needs. Funding is only available for a school term, for a maximum of two terms.

Extreme Behaviour Funding for ten (10) weeks is grossly inadequate.

The road to diagnosis for families is long and can take several years.

There are some families who do not seek a diagnosis for their children.

**These are students with extreme behaviour and complex support needs – *with only short term* support available.**

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Schools are under resourced to support these students and their emotional, social and educational needs.

Under resourcing students with extreme behaviour also impacts on the emotional, social and educational needs of other students in the class and school.

School Councils regularly report students in their schools with extreme behaviour causing disruption, physical and/or verbal assaults on teachers, school staff and/or fellow students.

School Councils advise that children with serious and extreme behaviour are presenting at an increasingly younger age impacting on both Pre-Schools and Primary Schools in addition to our Middle and High schools.

- Will you *and/or* your party ensure there is funding available for schools, calculated on a needs based method, for every child with extreme behaviour and complex support needs?
- Will you *and/or* your party acknowledge that for varying reasons, (cultural/denial/cost/access) not all families will seek a diagnosis and these children require funded support?
- Will you *and/or* your party ensure Extreme Emergency Behaviour (EEB) funding is provided for the entire period of student need?

## STUDENTS WITH HEARING LOSS

page 1 of 2

COGSO highlights this important health and education issue to raise awareness and request appropriate strategies and funding to meet the needs of our most disadvantaged students.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) reports in 2014-15 audiology services saw **2,421 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander** children and young people in the Northern Territory.

Hearing loss was present in almost half (46%) of the children.

Of 46% - 31% had loss in both ears (bilateral loss). 16% had loss in one ear (unilateral loss).

The rates of loss were highest in the 3-5 - year age group with 55% of children showing hearing deficiencies.

**When children are unable to hear properly; when English is not their first language; they will not learn; the gap of disadvantage will widen.**

Each year Australian Hearing provides demographic information on the numbers of children and young adults currently fitted with/using hearing devices.

**In addition to the above, the number of children in the Northern Territory who have been fitted with hearing aids and/or cochlear implants**

49 children aged 0-4 years (*birth years 2010-2014*)

529 children aged 5- 17 years (*birth years 1997-2009*)

57 children aged 18-20 years (*birth years 1994-1996*)

**499 of these children identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander**

**For children and young adults under 26 years of age in the NT fitted with hearing aids and/or cochlear implants, the average hearing loss in their better ear:**

Up to and including mild hearing loss 533 (75.4%)

Moderate hearing loss - 121 (17.1%)

Severe hearing loss - 24 (3.4%)

Profound hearing loss - 25 (3.5%)

Unknown - 4 (0.6%)

## STUDENTS WITH HEARING LOSS

*page 2 of 2*

In a longer term analysis, from July 2012 to June 2015, it was reported that from the **4,371 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander** children and young people who received audiology services in the NT: **45% had hearing loss**.

In any year, at any time, almost half of the children tested have a hearing loss.

Reports show that for students with even mild hearing loss, listening in the classroom and learning in a group environment becomes more challenging.

This would have some impact on behaviour and learning outcomes. Persistent and ongoing hearing loss in children can impact on literacy, learning, education, behaviour and communication skills.

## FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS

Audiology Australia highlights the importance of good classroom design/acoustics and the need for funding for installation and ongoing maintenance of classroom amplification systems as well as supporting the knowledge base of school staff to be aware of ear/hearing health issues and management of hearing loss in the classroom.

The funding for any recommendations for a student and their hearing loss is **expected to be funded by schools out of their existing budgets**. This can include recommendations for acoustic modifications and the introduction of Soundfield amplification systems (including installation, training, maintenance etc.).

The initial purchase for a Soundfield system has an approximate cost of \$2,000 each.

There is a need to provide additional hearing specialists to support schools; there are presently three (3) staff based in Darwin to service the Northern Territory.

- Will you *and/or* your party fund recommendations for acoustic modifications, training and purchase of equipment from the Department and not school budgets?
- Will you *and/or* your party provide additional hearing specialists to support schools?
- Will you *and/or* your party establish a memorandum of understanding with the Department of Health to share data?
- Will you *and/or* your party establish an audit of all classrooms to investigate sound field amplification and acoustic treatment of classrooms?

## MINISTERIAL PUBLIC EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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*A high level public education advisory group reporting to the Minister should be established.*

*This group would champion public education and provide advice to the Minister and would include parent representation.*

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*OUR SCHOOLS*

*OUR KIDS*

*OUR FUTURE*

*Fair, Simple & Transparent education funding*