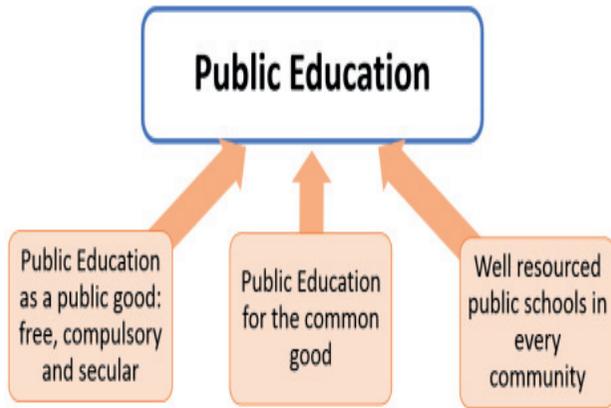


There are three fundamental dimensions of public education:



The AGPPA Paper analyses the dimensions, showing that each is necessary for a healthy system of public education. As the foundation stones of public education, the three dimensions must work together - to neglect one of them is to weaken the whole.

Simply adopting a framework like the one proposed will not cause current policy, or the dominant discourse, to automatically change.

That can only happen through sustained effort and a compelling argument.

Such a framework however, may assist public educators in that effort in at least three ways:

1. A common language by which to talk about and promote public education in the community and to policy-makers;
2. A holistic public benchmark against which to judge many aspects of policy and practice, including funding, curriculum and governance. It also establishes priorities for campaigning;

3. Some approaches to regulating what is expected of private schools for receiving public money. That is, rather than public schools being expected to be more private, private schools should be required to be more public in their actions and make-up.

The AGPPA Paper will contribute to the sustained effort by public educators in public schools to maintain and strengthen the great work they currently do.

Let's collectively put the public back into public education.



Want to find out more?
Go to www.agppa.asn.au



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ARE WE BEING FAIR DINKUM ABOUT PUBLIC EDUCATION?



AGPPA Research Paper *Building our nation through public education*

Public education is a precious community resource which is essential to the life and well-being of our democratic society for all. It has never been as important as now for the whole community to support, nurture and strengthen our public schools and to celebrate the contribution they make to the common good.

Representing over 5,300 Primary School Principals across all Australian States and Territories, the Australian Government Primary Principals Association (AGPPA) has commissioned Professor Alan Reid (University of South Australia) to prepare an Action Paper: ***Building our nation through public education***. The full Paper is available at www.agppa.asn.au.



What Does Our Research Show?

The way we were

Our research analyses what has happened to public education since the decision was taken in the 1960s to commence federal funding of private schools.

The result is a highly stratified education system as a whole.

Public education in Australia has become, at least in part, residualised, fragmented and increasingly privatised.

It did not have to be that way.

If the public funding of private schools had been organised around a needs-based model as was originally intended by the Whitlam Government, then it could have ended very differently.

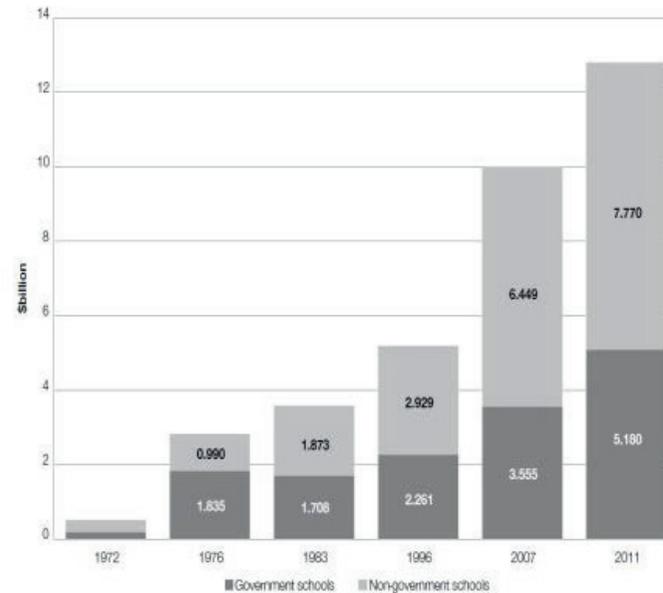
It wasn't and it didn't.

The funding debate came to be dominated by the philosophy of entitlement alongside an ideology of choice and competition in education.

Apart from reducing the funds going to the most disadvantaged school communities (mainly public) and increasing the drift of students from higher Socio-Economic Status (SES) backgrounds to private schools, the consequences have been to widen the gap in educational outcomes between high SES and low SES students and to lower educational outcomes overall.

Yet the policies have been maintained and extended - even while governments assert that they want to lift educational standards.

When all sources of income for schools are taken into account (state and federal funding and income from fees) private schools receive far more per capita funding than public schools.



Trends in Commonwealth recurrent funding of schools, by sector, selected years. Source; Connors and McMorrow, 2015, p.30

Public education advocates have not been mute in the face of this onslaught and for many years have been pointing out the inequities produced by Australia's dysfunctional approach to funding schools.

It seemed that the *Gonski* review might be able to turn things around.

As a nation, we can't let that hope be dimmed by a lack of commitment from either side of politics. The response of public educators has been to argue vociferously for a return to the *Gonski* principles of a 'fair go' for all students based on their learning needs.

The AGPPA Paper argues that the *Gonski* campaign is important, but alone, is not sufficient for the rejuvenation of public education. The problem is that as the current funding methods became entrenched, other influences began to affect the education climate.

The result has been a shift away from the public essence of public education.

Key policy makers began to talk about making public schools more like private schools and there was a gradual move to privatise aspects of schools and the public system. This subtly changed the education debate.

As a result, increased funding to public schools is not enough on its own. It needs to be accompanied by a renewed effort to revive the 'publicness' of public education.

The first step in defending and rebuilding public education is to return to the foundations upon which public education has been built.

These foundations are:

- **A free, compulsory, secular education as a public good.**
- **Benefits for all, for the common good.**
- **Well-resourced public schools in every community.**

Australia must ensure that these foundations inform policy and practice in Australian education and are preserved and strengthened, rather than ignored or diminished. That task demands a strong theoretical foundation which includes, but is not confined to, a fairer funding system.

The way we can be

One way to shift the current public-private debate is to emphasise the foundation principles of public education. Once these are re-established, not only should they inform policy and practice, but they will define the expectations that can be placed on private schools for the receipt of public funds.