



CATEGORIES

Education policy, educational reform

TAGS

Budget 2015, Stewart Riddle

May.18.2015

How the budget fails public education and what could be done to fix it

By Stewart Riddle

Once more we have a government short-changing public education.

Make no mistake about it, despite promising a 'unity ticket' with Labor on school funding prior to the 2013 election, this government has dumped the Gonski reforms to school funding.

Worse, school funding is facing a frightening \$30 billion black hole from 2018 if something isn't done soon. Simply tying school funding to indexation is not just bad policy, it's negligent. As a result, public education in this country is being put to a silent, slow-tortured death.

There are serious equity issues in our system, which I [wrote about](#) on this blog last year.

The reframing of equity to a notion of quality is a political movement that has consequences for those who are least advantaged in our current system. According to the Productivity Commission, disadvantage is most likely to be experienced by students who are from rural, remote and low-socioeconomic areas, are Indigenous or have disabilities, learning difficulties or other special needs. The problem is compounded by students who have multiple factors of disadvantage.

The insistent focus on quality rather than access and resourcing is a mistake. Funding the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership \$16.9 million to improve 'teacher quality' is a political stunt, particularly when considering that the same institution faced a \$15 million cut last year.

As a result of this misguided focus on quality rather than equity, the neediest students continue to miss out. For example, there is no real increase in disability loading, promised by the coalition before the 2013 election. This means that about 100,000 students will miss out on essential support, while those that currently receive support only have confirmed funding for two more years.

The budget tinkers around the edges while making little meaningful difference to educational outcomes. Think, for example, of the highly controversial school chaplaincy programme, or the ongoing investment in Independent Public Schools.

A further example of misplaced priorities is in the lack of investment in public schooling in NT, while simultaneously continuing to subsidise private schools who take Indigenous boarders to the tune of \$5 million over the next two years.

Consider that 85% of Indigenous students attend public schools, with many of these being in rural and remote regions, which have some of the highest levels of disadvantage. While taking a handful of students out of their communities and providing them with private boarding school experiences will no doubt help those individuals, it does little to alleviate the very real disadvantage of the remaining majority.

If we are serious about closing the gap in Indigenous education, then tinkering about the edges is largely meaningless. Closing the gap requires the addressing of multiple aspects of socioeconomic disadvantage, including education, health, employment, incarceration and housing. A \$21 million Direct Instruction literacy and numeracy package is not going to make any significant impact, as Allan Luke [pointed out](#) previously on this blog.

Furthermore, nearly 600,000 children (17.7% of all children in Australia) currently live below the poverty line. That figure is simply horrifying and its effects on access to housing, quality food and education cannot be understated.

Yet we continue to perpetuate a system where the haves continue to succeed, while the have-nots are left behind. The gap between those most advantaged and those most disadvantaged is widening. This is a problem for us all.

So, if Christopher Pyne wants to fix it, what can be done?

- First and foremost, the government should provide funding certainty for schools and commit to the full funding reforms of the Gonski review, reversing the push back on states to fund the shortfall from 2017.
- Provide the full disability loading that was promised prior to the 2013 election.
- Cancel the school chaplaincy programme and redirect the money towards student counselling and support services. Just imagine if we were to have 3000 school psychologists instead of religious ministers being paid to work in schools!
- Redirect the funds for the Independent Public Schools initiative towards support for disadvantaged students.

We need the political will to move outside of the blame and rhetoric, which encourages small-minded thinking and reactive policy-making tied to electoral cycles.

We need to shift the discussion from a short-term-gain-now view of education that puts politics ahead of children, and instead move to a discussion of what it would take to provide a meaningful education for every single student in our schools.

We need a seismic shift in education policy.

But if this year's budget is any indication, such a change is not coming any time soon.



Dr Stewart Riddle lectures in literacies education at the University of Southern Queensland. His research includes looking at the links between music and literacy in the lives of young people, as well



as alternative schooling and research methodologies. Stewart also plays bass guitar in a rock band called Drawn from Bees.

Stewart is a member of the English Teachers' Association of Queensland management committee and edits their journal,

Words 'Worth.

Share This Article



One thought on "How the budget fails public education and what could be done to fix it"



Josey De Rossi

May 18, 2015 at 10:57 am

Thanks for the good analysis of detail Stewart. I keep asking 'who do they think they're fooling'. Is that us? Surely not!

[REPLY](#)

Leave a Comment

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked *

Name *

Email *

Website

Your text



Notify me of follow-up comments by email.

Notify me of new posts by email.

POST COMMENT