

RESPONSE TO THE BRACKS REVIEW INTO GOVERNMENT SCHOOL FUNDING





MINISTER'S MESSAGE



The promise of the Education State is simple but ambitious: to strive for excellence and equity in our education system. Our aim is to lift outcomes and reach the Education State targets with excellence in teaching and learning as a major driver.

Today we are pleased to announce the next major step in making the Education State a reality – our response to the Bracks Review into Government School Funding.

The Review, led by former Premier, the Honourable Steve Bracks AC, is one of the most significant investigations of school funding in recent times. We are indebted to Mr Bracks for his time, energy and leadership in helping us to continue to build the Education State.

The Review's key finding is that school funding is a powerful tool for improving outcomes for all students but investment, effort and outcomes need to be better aligned. The Review made 70 wide-ranging recommendations that highlight new reform opportunities to improve education

outcomes for *all* Victorian students. Importantly, the Review and its recommendations build on and endorse the Education State vision and ambitions. The Review reinforced that the quality of teaching and targeting funding where it is needed most are the two key elements to improving student outcomes.

The Commonwealth government has confirmed it will renege on its commitment to the final years of the Gonski agreement. This leaves Victorian students almost \$1 billion worse off in 2018 and 2019 than was previously promised under Gonski. This disproportionately impacts our students who need it most. This decision means that the Commonwealth cannot be counted on to pull its weight and share our ambitious agenda. In light of this, Victoria will need to rethink our approach to school funding.

Since the Review was released in April we have been continuing to talk to schools, teachers, principals, parents and community organisations about the Review's findings and recommendations. This response, informed by our consultations, will help set the direction for the next steps in schools reform.

I am proud of the progress that we have made in building the Education State and look forward to achieving our bold ambitions in the coming years.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "James Merlino".

The Hon James Merlino MP

Deputy Premier
Minister for Education



OUR RESPONSE

This response sets the direction for future reform of school education in Victoria. It identifies a number of actions that will be taken immediately to progress the reforms proposed in the Review. There are other recommendations that require further consideration as part of budget deliberations. We will continue our conversation with schools and communities about these recommendations over the next few months.

In responding to the Review we will focus on the following four important reform directions that were major themes in the Review and that build on the Education State schools reform agenda:

- Working towards the **shared goal** of improving outcomes for all students. This goal unites students, schools and sectors and is guided by the Education State targets to focus our efforts across the system;
- Providing **better information for all** about school funding, performance and student outcomes used to encourage collaboration, drive school improvement and strengthen accountability;
- **Targeting funding and resources to students in need** in pursuit of both excellence and equity, allocating resources efficiently and effectively; and
- **Strengthening the school system** by increasing support for schools, encouraging collaboration and increasing capability, accompanied by enhancing school accountability through stronger oversight.

A SHARED GOAL – THE EDUCATION STATE TARGETS

The Review found that tiers of government, school sectors and individual schools were not always united in focusing our combined efforts on improving learning outcomes for *all* students. To address this, the Review recommends that all sectors – government, Catholic and independent – should commit to a shared goal, because the education system is best served when stakeholders share responsibility for all students.

That is why last year we established the **Education State school targets**, which establish a shared goal to improve the outcomes of *all* Victorian students across sectors. We have stated our targets publicly to make our aims clear and hold ourselves to account for achieving them.

We want all schools to share the goal of lifting the outcomes of students, including beyond their walls, to the extent of their resources and capabilities. This may include responsibility for unenrolled, former and prospective students (for example, through transitions) and working with other schools to solve local and shared problems. The next step towards achieving this shared goal is to deepen collaboration within the government school system and to extend it across all school sectors.

EDUCATION STATE SCHOOL TARGETS

There are 10 targets grouped into four areas:

- prioritising **learning for life** with more students excelling in reading, maths, creative and critical thinking, science and the arts;
- **breaking the link** between disadvantage and achievement and keeping more students in education;
- **healthy, happy and resilient** children and young people; and
- **pride and confidence in our schools.**

Reform actions:

The Education State targets will drive action at all levels across our education system and we will encourage schools and the community to work together in pursuit of these.

Last year, the government created the School Policy and Funding Advisory Council (SPFAC), with representatives from the government, Catholic and independent school sectors to advise the Government on regulatory, policy and funding issues that affect both government and non-government schools. As recommended by the Review, a new member will be appointed to the Council to represent the common interests of all Victorian students. This role will advocate and promote improving outcomes for all students. It will seek out and highlight opportunities for collaboration between sectors.

Our local model of support for schools will play a key role by brokering relationships, encouraging collaboration and spreading best practice. Guided by the Framework for Improving Student Outcomes (FISO), local communities will be helped to work together to lift student achievement and to reach the targets.

The Government will continue to look for effective ways to encourage collaboration between schools and across sectors, but that does not include introducing any mandatory contribution to a Learning Partnerships Scheme.

None of this can be achieved without the hard work and commitment of our highly skilled teachers, principals and school workforce. We will do more to recognise and support our principals and teachers who are leading efforts to work together to overcome shared challenges and improve outcomes for Victorian students.

Taken together, these actions will focus effort at a system, regional and local level and across all sectors to work together to improve the outcomes of every student.



BETTER INFORMATION

The Review found that information regarding how school funding is allocated and the relationship between school funding and student outcomes is not easily accessed or well understood by parents, the community, schools and Government. This results in good practice not being shared openly and widely between schools and opportunities for learning and improving school performance not being consistently taken advantage of. Barriers to information also undermine accountability and confidence in our education system.

There is a huge opportunity to better use information about what works.

Reform actions:

The next major step in our reform agenda is improving access to information across Victoria to support improved school performance.

The Andrews Labor Government will significantly increase the scale and scope of public access to education performance information. It is often said that “what gets measured gets done”, so we want to make sure the system focuses on the most relevant measures like measuring the impact that a school has on student learning.

We want parents, communities and schools to clearly understand how funding is allocated and why. We want principals and teachers to know what is making the biggest difference to student learning and to be able to learn from their colleagues across the state about how to do it best in their context. A school funding website will be developed to provide clear explanations of government school funding as recommended by the Review.

Taken together, these reforms will provide all parents, communities and schools with a greater understanding and visibility of how all our schools are performing and going about the task of school improvement.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

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We want principals and teachers to know what makes the biggest difference to student outcomes.



TARGETING FUNDING AND RESOURCES TO STUDENTS IN NEED

The Review recognises that Victoria has been a leader in school funding reform in Australia and the Labor Government in 2005 was the first jurisdiction to introduce a needs-based funding allocation to schools. The Review also supports the changes made last year to increase equity funding to our schools.

The Review strongly advocates that the Commonwealth commit to the remaining years of Gonski funding and highlights that the decision to step away from this has a significant impact on all schools; particularly the government school sector. The Review recommends that funding be more closely linked to student need.

The Andrews Labor Government agrees with the Review's principles of strengthening funding arrangements based on need and a simpler and more transparent funding system. We also agree that school funding should be seen as an investment in our future rather than an expense.

It is now clear that Gonski funding will not be delivered by the Commonwealth Government as they originally committed. In these circumstances the Review recommends that we need to consider how we can strengthen arrangements to support students without the support of the Commonwealth.

We are proud of the steps already taken to simplify how funding is allocated and to better target money to where it is needed most. This Government is committed to ensuring that needs-based funding continues and that we focus on addressing disadvantage and need.

FUNDING FOR NEED

Central to our Education State reforms is a massive investment in equity funding for the most disadvantaged students, including a 70 per cent increase in Victorian government needs-based funding to help break the unacceptable link between disadvantage and poorer outcomes.

We have also released the Government's response to the Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD) Review immediately accepting 21 out of 25 recommendations. The four recommendations in the PSD Review that relate to funding will be considered alongside the funding recommendations in the Bracks Review into Government School Funding as part of the 2017/18 budget.

Reform actions:

There are recommendations in the Review about school funding arrangements that will need to be considered as part of 2017/18 budget deliberations. We will talk to schools and communities about these recommendations over the next few months and will make decisions on these recommendations as part of the budget process. We will direct funding to where there is greatest need, supporting principals to use proven initiatives that lift student outcomes through the Framework for Improving Student Outcomes (FISO).

This will be delivered alongside the funding certainty provided to Catholic and independent school students through the *Education and Training Reform Act*, that guarantees them funding equivalent to 25 per cent of that provided to government school students.



STRENGTHENING THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

Continuing to strengthen the performance of our school system is an essential step. We need a strong school system that is continually improving to ensure that every student has access to a great school and no student falls through the cracks. This means working together to ensure that all schools continue to improve and strive for excellence, regardless of where they are on their journey. Importantly, this will include a continued focus on supporting and developing our school workforce and achieving excellence in teaching and learning.

The Review highlighted a need to improve our system and school governance, increase the effectiveness of school performance management and strengthen the capacity of our school decision makers. Principals have also told us that they wanted greater support and to work collaboratively with other schools across the system.

That is why we are reinvigorating existing government school networks to operate as 'Communities of Practice' for our teaching professionals. Through our regional support model we are supporting and enhancing the quality of on-the-ground, day-to-day teaching and learning practices. The model is place-based with support tailored to the local context. From 2016, \$82.2m has been provided to support this model including an additional 150 staff.

Great teaching requires time – to prepare, collaborate and plan – and time to share great practice through on-the-job learning. We are supporting the establishment of 'Professional Learning Communities' across Victoria that enable teachers to work together to create a strong learning culture.

Reform actions:

We will work with all schools in all sectors to embed culture and practice that drives the improvement of student outcomes. This means supporting more collaboration throughout the system, and providing targeted support to struggling schools when and where it is needed most.

We will work with all sectors to promote and support schools that have improved their teaching and learning practices and who are willing to share this good practice and collaborate with others. We will also create new resources to support collaboration between schools that builds on the 'Communities of Practice' networks.

We will strengthen the relationship between schools and the community, building on our existing evidence-based approach to foster community engagement in learning, which is a critical part of our model for system improvement. We will broaden school council composition to provide a perspective on how a school is working with its community. At the same time, we will provide more support to school councils so that they can help their schools and principals in strategic decision-making.

The Review also proposed that schools should adopt alternative governance models, for example, where there is an unproductive level of competition for enrolments or where schools are struggling to deliver access to a contemporary curriculum. We will continue to talk to schools about how we can simplify the process to enable consideration and implementation of models such as federations. We will also look at how we can provide more timely and effective support to schools considering collaborative governance options.

Taken together, these reforms will mean that there is a stronger line of sight for what works and increased sharing of learning practices between schools. There will be stronger capability at all levels, including regional and school workforces and school councils, to make strategic decisions about the use of funding. Government will have the information it needs to identify and support schools that face different challenges.

NEXT STEPS

This response to the Review sets the high level direction we will take in progressing school education reform in Victoria. We are starting work now to implement a number of the recommendations in the Review. We will also continue talking to the community and to schools as we make decisions on a number of the remaining recommendations.

Making Victoria the Education State is a long-term and large-scale priority. Our commitment recognises that education is the fundamental building block for success in life. The Education State reform agenda is geared towards an education system that fosters excellence and equity in equal measure and schools that improve outcomes for every student in every community, regardless of background or postcode. In short: an education system where all genuinely does mean all.

We're building from a solid base – but it will take time and a concerted effort to get to where we want to go. We are focusing on delivery and staying the course. Our targets will ensure we stay focused on what matters.

We will also continue to work with the Commonwealth government to ensure we achieve a funding outcome that gets the most for our ambitious reform agenda.

Additional action is also required to ensure that we are able to meet the Education State targets and provide a high quality education for all. While we get to work on the recommendations of the Review, we will continue to explore how we can:

- support schools to strengthen their succession planning, develop the capabilities of their leadership teams in using evidence and proven coaching and feedback methods, build a culture that is focused on improvement, and strengthen the induction of new teachers into the professional learning culture of their school;
- improve the health, wellbeing and engagement of Victoria's school-aged children and young people;

- improve the outcomes of the 25 per cent of students who live in rural and regional Victoria, including through new Regional Partnerships. We will need to attract and retain high quality teachers and principals and raise standards for rural students (a particular focus will be getting more rural students to complete Year 12); and
- attract, retain and develop a high quality science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) workforce. We will support and encourage more students – including girls and other under-represented groups – to excel in STEM.

This is a unique opportunity for all of us but most importantly for our students. It is unique that a whole state is focused on an ambitious reform program like 'the Education State'. It's an opportunity that won't come around again.

By working together on the Education State and investing in our children, young people and teachers, we can become world leaders in education and drivers of innovation in Australia. By working together, we can all be confident in Victoria's future.

