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Media Release | Pasi Sahlberg Led Research Calls for Urgent Resourcing for Government Primary Schools

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New research calls for full funding of public primary schools by 2025, warning a failure to invest will see widening achievement gaps between students from different backgrounds, a worsening teacher crisis and a decline in teacher and student wellbeing.

The Australian Government Primary Principals Association today released the position paper, *A Better and Fairer Start for All: A case for funding all government primary schools to their Schooling Resource Standard as soon as possible*. The research was undertaken by Pasi Sahlberg (University of Melbourne), Trevor Cobbold (National Convenor of Save our Schools) and Caitlin Senior (University of Melbourne).

The paper says that Australia's school education is one of the most unequal in the developed world with achievement gaps between children from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds as much as equivalent of two years of learning by Year 5. The inequitable distribution of government funding is fuelling those gaps wider rather than helping to narrow them.

It found that between 2009 and 2021, government funding, adjusted for inflation, increased by three times as much per student (\$3,000) for private primary schools as it did for public primary schools (\$1,051). That was despite public schools in 2019 educating 82% of low SES students, 84% of Indigenous students, 82% of remote area students and 76% of the students with disability who require the most support.

Only public schools in the ACT are funded to their Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) – the minimum level required to meet the educational needs of students. The paper suggests that, without change, public schools in all states and the Northern Territory will still be funded at 91% or less of their SRS in 2029.

AGPPA president Pat Murphy said, *"the research makes clear the need to fund all public schools to 100% of their SRS, with primary schools receiving over \$3100 per student less than secondary students. Primary schools need this investment at the commencement of a new National Schools Reform Agreement in 2025."*



“Government primary schools in Australia have enrolled over 65% of students in this country, yet educate over 80% of the socioeconomically disadvantaged students, 76% of high disability students and 82% of remote area students, yet the evidence shows we continue to not fund these students in Australia adequately. You would have to ask why? Why are these students and the schools they attend not worthy of being funded to the minimum standard recommended?” Mr Murphy said.

“Investing in public primary schools is a critical first step in making our education system better and fairer and our nation stronger and more successful. Our most disadvantaged and marginalised students need our state and territory ministers to deliver for them.”

“The early years are universally recognised as the time when investment delivers the highest rate of human, social and economic returns. To ensure a return of this early year’s investment, funding to the middle years of primary schools needs to be sustained. Currently the years 3-6 students in Australia are the most underfunded year levels.”

“The research shows that the negative effects for individuals and societies of compounding disadvantage for low SES students can be mitigated by increasing school funding to the recommended Schooling Resources Standard (SRS).”

“We must invest in the primary school years to create a high performing, equitable education system where all students have their needs fully met from their first year of schooling. The students with the most complex developmental and learning needs are in public schools and we must ensure those who start behind don’t stay behind.”

“Investing in public primary schools would allow principals and teachers to increase the support for students with additional needs, improve results and invest more in working with parents and the community to support student wellbeing and learning.”

“A failure to invest will only see unacceptable learning gaps between students from different backgrounds grow, an increasing exodus of teachers, a decline in student and teacher wellbeing and a worsening national economic position. Most of all, children will be denied the support and opportunities they need to fulfill their potential.”

“This research paper highlights that the level of disadvantage in communities across Australia is pronounced and growing. For government school leaders across the nation, this is not a surprise. Public schools in this nation, have been underfunded for the last two generations. As government school leaders, we are devastated that this continues in a country as rich and prosperous as Australia.



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For the sake of our students, our staff and our communities and the nation we need state and federal governments to act in the national interest on behalf of Australia's future."

*"As this paper asks: 'Why would Australia wait to optimise public investment in school education for all Australian children? All children are our future; their present matters for all our futures.'"
The full research paper can be found [here](#).*

For further information please contact AGPPA President, Pat Murphy on 0421 611 235.