

Students with disabilities left behind

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As new reports highlight the growing funding gap between public and private students, research during the pandemic reveals that parents of students with a disability felt their children had been “left behind by Australia’s education system” during the crisis.

But despite the challenges and uncertainty of lockdown for teachers, principals and families around the country, a NSW survey by E-Lab of more than 1000 parents has given the state’s public primary school teachers “an A+” for the support and resources they provided during the lockdown, indicating they now had a greater respect for the profession.

It has been established through many sources that the pandemic has exposed inequities in society, with the disadvantage gap in education proving the most profound.

The latest analysis of Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) data by lobby group Save Our Schools (SOS) shows private school funding over the past decade has grown up to nine times faster in real terms than public school funding.



ACARA’s figures reveal that funding per student in public schools, in the decade from 2009 to 2018, increased by \$583, while at independent and Catholic schools the increase was as much as \$2520.

This data comes as research by Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) over the COVID-19 period revealed 61 per cent of the 700 parents surveyed nationally said their disabled child had received inadequate support during remote learning.

More than half of parents said students with disability during the term 1 period of remote learning:

- did not have regular contact with their school to ensure the learning was accessible
- received learning materials from their school that were inaccessible
- were not adequately supported in their education.

Deputy President Henry Rajendra said COVID-19 has exposed the immense value of the work of teachers, and that the pandemic had revealed the inadequacy of funding for students with disability.

“This has become clear through challenges such as complicated student health profiles, the central role of health procedures in support settings, the lack of access to embedded allied health, the limited protective measures and inequity of access to technology,” he said.

“Our students also face difficulties such as possible health risks, challenging home learning environments and

upended routines.” The E-Lab survey of parents from a diverse range of socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds — and translated into Arabic, Dari, Assyrian, Indonesian and Chinese — showed the efforts of teachers and principals during the pandemic was “held in high regard”. The research by E-Lab director Dr Adam Fraser and Dr John Molineaux, of Deakin University, found:

- 91 per cent of parents reported they had a greater level of respect for teachers after the lockdown
- 98.5 per cent were satisfied with the communication they received from the school during that period
- 99.7 per cent of parents were satisfied with the work of their child’s teacher
- 96.6 per cent felt supported by the school during home schooling
- 86.8 per cent said their child was moderately to highly engaged in learning during remote learning.