

Federation to mount schools funding campaign for next federal poll

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In the wake of Turnbull Government legislation that cuts public education funding, Federation has resolved to mount a major campaign on schools funding issue for the next federal election.

“We’re going after them. We’re not going to put up with this,” Federation President Maurie Mulheron told Federation Annual Conference today (Monday). “The reduction in funding will not hurt people in Macquarie Street, it will hurt kids in schools.” His recommendation to mount the election campaign was adopted by the conference, held at the International Convention Centre (ICC) in Sydney’s Darling Harbour.

Delegates voted in favour of the recommendation to develop and implement the most comprehensive schools funding campaign possible for the next federal election, which may be held as early as next year. The campaign will intensify in targeted federal electorates and in the lobbying of crossbenchers in the Senate, Mr Mulheron told the conference.



Federation will allocate resources and take the campaign to the Australian Education Union (AEU) for rollout across the country. Federation will continue to pressure all political parties to restore a needs-based, sector blind funding model that ensures all public school students’ needs are met, he said. “We are not going to rest until that is achieved,” Mr Mulheron said.

For the next phase of the schools funding campaign, Federation will provide paid advertising and social media, as well as training and resources for Federation Representatives and workplace committees, principals, parents and community members to maximise support. “Community members will be trained in media skills,” Mr Mulheron said. “This campaign will fight and use resources right up till the next election.”

The foundations for this next phase of the campaign will be built in the second half of the 2017 school year, for full implementation early in 2018 to prepare for the federal election. The campaign must engage individuals and communities across all electorates and involve intensive local action, Mr Mulheron told delegates.

The campaign will build on current momentum earned by the Gonski campaign. “The movement we have created has woken a sleeping giant,” Mr Mulheron told the conference.

The campaign is needed because this year’s Turnbull Government legislation on schools funding unilaterally terminates all National Education Reform Agreements and dismantles the needs-based schools funding model. As a result, all private schools across Australia will automatically receive 80 per cent of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) from the Commonwealth, regardless of need. By contrast, public schools will receive only 20 per cent of the SRS from the Commonwealth. So these are “completely arbitrary levels determined by the Education Minister”. This inequity will lead to many rich private schools receiving large increases in funding over the next six years, Mr Mulheron said. Currently only one-third of independent schools receive less than 20 per cent of their SRS entitlement, he said.

Previous funding agreements with the states are also unilaterally terminated, which means that billions of dollars due from 2018 will not be delivered. “The NSW agreement was unilaterally torn up with the passage of

this Bill," Mr Mulheron said.

For NSW schools, this is estimated to be a loss of approximately \$1.5 billion over the next four years. Under this system, less than one per cent of private schools will actually have their funding decreased on a yearly basis, he added. The recommendation was amended by Federation Vice President Joan Lemaire for the union to demand that the NSW Education Department develop a funding framework for the system to ensure that funding is allocated to support teaching and learning.

Another amendment on creating community and media support for students with disabilities was also carried.

Federation will continue to work with the Australian Education Union (AEU) in the national election campaign, as well as the peak NSW principal and parent organisations, other community organisations such as Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG), Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA), Ethnic Communities Council (EEC) and Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO), and Unions NSW and the ACTU.

The union will campaign to ensure all major state political parties, including the NSW Coalition, maintain their commitment to a sector blind, needs based funding model up to and beyond the next federal and state elections, Mr Mulheron said.