

Proposed Education Bill: Impacts for the Northern Territory What will it mean for the Territory?

There is potential for today to be the day Northern Territory student's needs are disregarded by a majority of federal Senators.

It has not been lost on many that the government's current proposal would be damaging to the Northern Territory resulting in us transitioning down from our now 23.77% of the school resourcing standard (SRS) to 20.8%. This is the misguided belief that funding all schools the same 20.8% provides equity. We counter this with equal does not result in equity.

Proposed increases over a long period of time are so unremarkable they would not even keep up with inflation. This is not investment in education for the Northern Territory.

A true student needs based funding model would provide for this country's most disadvantaged schools. Schools with indigenous students living in the remotest parts of the Northern Territory, with English as a second, third or fourth language. Disadvantage that the majority of this country's students do not face. Disadvantage levels that decision makers today will not have seen nor understand.

In remote communities, it is common for up to 90% of children to have hearing loss due to the health crisis of Otitis Media (middle ear infection). In urban classrooms, it is typical for up to 50% of indigenous children to suffer hearing loss.

For decades, successive governments have failed to understand that in education, resources need to be provided in our schools to ensure our high rates of hearing loss students are equipped with the communication tools they need to learn.

This includes the employment of local Aboriginal people as teacher aides and teachers in the classroom as an incredibly effective way to incorporate local sign language to communicate with students who already grapple with English coupled with poor hearing.

With over 34,000 students in government education the Northern Territory has schools with unique challenges.

We know that lower educational outcomes come from factors such as remoteness and high proportions of indigenous students.

Almost 70% of our schools are classified as remote or very remote and 40% of our school population are indigenous.

Almost half of NT government schools have an indigenous enrolment of 95% or higher.

The Northern Territory has one of the most socio-economically disadvantaged populations in Australia. In 2015 the average Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage for NT Government schools was 758, compared to a national average of 1000.

Of the 100 most disadvantaged schools nationally, 54 are in the NT.

44 per cent of NT students live in remote or very remote locations, compared to 2.2% nationally.

The question surely must be; What does the Northern Territory need to provide a quality education for every student equal to the quality other students receive in Australia?

It should be this question and not, here is 20% of the SRS do your best NT.

The Northern Territory does not generate the income from our low population base needed to fund the high costs of delivering remote education.

Federal funding is our only hope to ensure equity in education for Territory students. To ensure that every Territory student has an opportunity of a future.

It is unreasonable to expect the Northern Territory to fund more than 65% of the SRS when it is unable to generate more income.

An actual student needs based funding model would see the federal government commit 35% of the SRS.

Anything less means our children are seen as less and destined to never having their educational needs met.

Table 1: Estimated proportion of the SRS that will be publicly funded in 2027 (%)

	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	ACT	NT	AUS
Commonwealth	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20
State*	70.1	65.3	70.9	73.6	94.7	80	96.8	65.8	72.6
Total public funding	90.1	85.3	90.9	93.6	114.7	100	116.8	85.8	92.6

The Coalition Government are passing off an additional \$35.6M as additional funding to recognise our higher need.

This funding is not part of the school resourcing standard. Senator Nigel Scullion advised this is “to accelerate evidence-based reforms to improve outcomes for vulnerable students”.

We don’t know what this looks like and will not know until the end of the year when the federal review on teacher quality and program recommendations is finalised.

This money is not for individual student need nor will it adjust and account for our growing student numbers each year. It must not be counted as contributing to the federal governments student needs based funding.

Please do not consign our children to further disadvantage; to an ever-widening gap; to attendance strategies with no adequate resources when children arrive at school; to continued hearing loss with no resources to help them hear their lessons.

True student needs based funding model of 35% of the School Resourcing Standard from the federal government would provide for these urgent educational needs for our students.

Our indigenous students deserve a future and a chance to shine.

“Education is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world” Nelson Mandela

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