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Submission to the Education (General Provisions) (Helping Families with School Costs) Amendment Bill 2023 inquiry.

Queensland Government (State of Queensland).

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We are making this submission on behalf of the Education Policy and Evaluation Lab (EPEL) based at Queensland University of Technology. EPEL is a collective of education researchers, who work with national and international partner organisations to evaluate education policies and practice.

Contributing members of this feedback are listed below with those willing to be called as witnesses in the *Education (General Provisions) (Helping Families with School Costs) Amendment Bill 2023* inquiry indicated with email contact.

Below we provide feedback on two amendments to the *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006* which we will refer to henceforth as Proposal A and Proposal B.

- Proposal A: Reduce the out-of-pocket expenses associated with extracurricular activities, individual student resources and school uniforms.
- Proposal B: Require the chief executive of the Department of Education to report information on enrolments and costs for each state school to the relevant Minister on an annual basis.

In principle we agree with both proposals but they are not specific enough about what is necessary to fully address the needs of Queensland public school families. We make three recommendations based on research conducted by members of EPEL and their colleagues.

Recommendation 1

In regard to Proposal A we recommend that:

- 1.1 P&Cs should not run essential school-based services for-profit;
- 1.2 Schools should not transfer core curriculum costs to parents;
- 1.3 The government should introduce a donations scheme to support core curriculum provision in schools (with additional loadings for disadvantaged and/or regional/rural/remote schools);
- 1.4 The government should introduce a voucher program to support families to access extracurricular opportunities/programs.

Recommendation 2

In regard to Proposal B we recommend that the amendment include the reporting of:

- 2.1 Income raised by annual P&C fundraising activities and provision of school-based services (including uniform shop, book shop, canteen, OHSC, swim club, etc.);
- 2.2 Income raised by annual 'Student Resource Schemes' (including subject levies, technology levies and other specialist resource/equipment levies);

2.3 Income raised by the annual invoicing of families for core-curriculum provision (including curriculum programs, incursions and excursions); Income raised by annual levies for extracurricular activities (including sporting programs, musical programs, Arts programs, school camps, etc.).

2.3.1 In addition, we would suggest that schools need to account for whether they have a BYOD scheme, and if so, the annual cost of this to parents. Including this income data in school reporting will make transparent the costs of public schooling.

Recommendation 3

Accurate data be collected and analysed that accounts for the private and public spending on public education relative to socio-economic advantage.

Yours Sincerely



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- Dr Peter O'Brien

Recommendation 1

In regard to Proposal A we recommend that:

- 1.1 P&Cs should not run essential school-based services for-profit;
- 1.2 Schools should not transfer core curriculum costs to parents;
- 1.3 The government should introduce a donations scheme to support core curriculum provision in schools (with additional loadings for disadvantaged and/or regional/rural/remote schools);
- 1.4 The government should introduce a voucher program to support families to access extracurricular opportunities/programs.

Recommendation 2

In regard to Proposal B we recommend that the amendment include the reporting of:

2.1 Income raised by annual P&C fundraising activities and provision of school-based services (including uniform shop, book shop, canteen, OHSC, swim club, etc.);

2.2 Income raised by annual 'Student Resource Schemes' (including subject levies, technology levies and other specialist resource/equipment levies);

2.3 Income raised by the annual invoicing of families for core-curriculum provision (including curriculum programs, incursions and excursions); Income raised by annual levies for extracurricular activities (including sporting programs, musical programs, Arts programs, school camps, etc.).

2.3.1 In addition, we would suggest that schools need to account for whether they have a BYOD scheme, and if so, the annual cost of this to parents. Including this income data in school reporting will make transparent the costs of public schooling.

Recommendation 3

Accurate data be collected and analysed that accounts for the private and public spending on public education relative to socio-economic advantage.

Supporting evidence

In what follows we outline the findings of members of EPEL and colleagues who have researched extensively in this area of public concern.

Proposal A

The average 'private income' received by government schools across Australia is \$752 per student each year (see Thompson, Hogan & Rahimi, 2019). This figure includes 'Fees, Charges and Parental Contributions' (FCPs) and 'Other Sources' of private income.

FCPs increase with school ICSEA, from an average of \$299 per student in very disadvantaged government schools to an average of \$745 per student in very advantaged government schools.

Other sources of private income do not appear to be dependent on school ICSEA, and average \$318 per student each year in the government school sector.

However, this figure does not account for the fact that P&Cs are one of the biggest contributors to schools' 'other sources' of private income through direct cash contributions. Data from P&Cs Qld (the peak body representing Queensland's 1,250 state school P&C associations) indicates that less than 40% of P&Cs donated directly to their schools through the transferral of funds from the P&C to a school bank account.

The concern here is that P&Cs run essential school services to generate this income and purchasing power for their school. This means a school canteen, book shop, uniform shop, and OHSC service are run for profit (not as cost neutral) (see Hogan & Thompson, 2023). Our research shows that P&Cs generate tens of thousands of dollars in profits each year, and that this money is not transferred to schools as a cash contribution. Instead, the majority of P&C funds are used to purchase items on behalf of the school, including school infrastructure projects (e.g. playgrounds, halls, sheds, shade sails, gardens, school signage and sporting facility maintenance), school events (e.g. excursions, camps and graduation ceremonies), and teaching and learning resources (e.g. teaching materials, technology and sports equipment). Parents are financing this through the inflated costs of food, uniforms, resources and OHSC care. Proposal A should therefore consider the equity of P&Cs running profitable school-based services.

Proposal A should further consider the effects of the 'shifting' or 'transfer' of core curriculum costs to parents (see Hogan, 2021). Common examples of this include technology costs associated with BYOD programs and stationery supplies and/or 'book lists'. Increasingly, schools invoice parents for the costs of core curriculum provision that has been outsourced to specialist providers, including for instance, swimming programs, STEAM resources, online learning subscriptions, and a large number of incursions and excursions that are considered compulsory to attend (see Cowan et al., in press).

The New Zealand Ministry of Education has sought to reduce this expense to parents by introducing the 'Donation Scheme'. Schools that opt into this scheme receive an annual donation of \$150 per student in exchange for not asking parents/carers for any further donation (with the exception of overnight camps). A similar government funding scheme in Queensland for incursions, excursions and other educational programs would improve equity and access to educational opportunities and enhance student outcomes.

This would also ensure there is no 'undue' commercial influence in government schools. A case study conducted by Enright et al. (2020) of a Queensland government school evidenced that the sponsorship of a school's rugby league program (with cash contributions) and VET education (with student work placements) by the local McDonald's franchise had reciprocity of advertising

on the rugby league uniform, the school's electronic notice board, the newsletter, in school classrooms and the school's rule was known as the 'Macca's Rule': "Turn up on time, in uniform and ready to do whatever your supervisor tells you to do. Always try to do a bit extra and add more value to your work. Understand your order, and don't deliver a cheeseburger without cheese. You'll get it back and be asked to do it again!" The fact that this school was a disadvantaged school, with limited access to FCPs and an active P&C fundraising committee, accentuated their need to rely on unscrupulous philanthropy.

We understand that access to commercial programs and providers is a significant concern for disadvantaged and/or regional, rural and remote schools. This concern is accentuated when it comes to accessing extra-curricular programs outside of formal school hours. Easing the financial stress associated with these costs has been addressed in part by government programs and philanthropic grants. 'Sporting Schools' – designed to increase student's participation in sport – is a funded partnership between the Australian Sports Commission and 35 national sporting organisations that bring sporting experiences to schools, and generate opportunities for students to further engage in club sport participation (see Hogan & Stylianou, 2018). While these opportunities increase access to sports programs and clubs, further needs to be done to support ongoing membership costs. Voucher programs like that offered by the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal for low income families in regional and rural locations (see Hogan & Williamson, 2022) to support 'back to school' costs, are a useful way of supporting access to extracurricular opportunities.

The effectiveness of the Queensland government funding extra-curricular programs is already evident through the success of the instrumental music program. The director of the Queensland Youth Orchestra has referred to Queensland as a musical 'talent factory' and connects that success to the Instrumental Music Scheme started in 1972 that vastly reduces the cost of instrumental music instruction in Queensland public schools.

(<https://inql.com.au/arts/music/2023/09/19/queenslander-our-young-musical-talent-factory-play-their-own-state-of-origin/>). This success could be replicated in ensuring other extracurricular programs and opportunities receive adequate government funding.

Proposal B

My School data displays school financial information. However, what constitutes private income – that is 'Fees, Charges and Parental Contributions (FCPs) and Other Sources – is difficult to understand, and as stated above, does not include the fundraising (and independent purchasing undertaken) by P&Cs. This makes it extremely difficult to understand the net financial position of Queensland government schools. Without accurate income data, the Queensland government cannot equitably meet their school funding obligations.

Concern about the quality of data informing this inquiry

The data Dr McMahon has collected, while compelling, is not an accurate representation of the current funding landscape for three reasons:

1. Parent contribution is only one factor in understanding the state of school funding in Queensland and the survey should be improved on and replicated by a third party skilled in socio-economic surveys.
2. There was insufficient demographic data on who responded to the survey distributed by the Green Party. Our concern is that the survey was completed by members of the public sympathetic to Green policies. Green electorates are some of the most prosperous in Queensland. For instance, within Dr McMahon's electorate there are government schools charging upwards of \$3000 per year in parental contributions, uniforms, resources and stationary (see Hogan and Barnes, in press). This is not representative of parent contribution across the state.
3. The data presented by Dr McMahon should have been cross-referenced against ICSEA standards which are readily available via CSV on the MySchool website. This would give the data some granularity of the parent contributions against socio-economic advantage, providing a more accurate picture of parent out-of-pocket expenses. For example, a parent contribution of \$150 is very different in a very advantaged school versus a very disadvantaged school. ICSEA still does not account for the diversity of socio-economic advantage within schools themselves, but it is one readily available metric that would better inform the Parliamentary Committee.

*Declaration of interest: Dr Naomi Barnes is a member of the Queensland Green Party. While willing to be called as a witness, other members of EPEL have less of a conflict of interest. Dr Barnes would prefer that Queensland public schools be fully funded and bipartisan in political agreement.

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