



TASSO SUBMISSION

Inquiry into Better and Fairer Schools (Funding and Reform) Bill 2024

***We're in this together.
We speak as a proud voice for families within the
Tasmanian State School community to
make sure their needs and ideas are heard.***

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgement of Country

Tasmanian Association of State School Organisations pays respect to the Palawa people as the Traditional Custodians and first educators of the land in beautiful Lutruwita, Tasmania.

We pay respect to elders past, present, and emerging and acknowledge their deep connection to country.

We also express our gratitude that we share this land today, our sorrow for some of the costs of that sharing, and our hope and belief that we move to a place of equity, justice, and partnership together.

Acknowledging Parents

TASSO acknowledges parents and caregivers as the first educators in their child's life. We celebrate and honour the diversity of families and recognise the vital role family and community play in supporting children and young people throughout their learning journeys.

TASSO prepared this submission with consideration of insights gained from Tasmanian parents and caregivers. We extend our appreciation to all who have shared their experiences and engaged with our organisation throughout the long history of TASSO.

Committee Secretary
Senate Education and Employment Committees
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Phone: +61 2 6277 3521
eec.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary,

The Tasmanian Association of State School Organisations (TASSO) writes to express our concerns regarding the provisions of the *Better and Fairer Schools (Funding and Reform) Bill 2024*.

TASSO's position is that Government Schools in Tasmania should be funded to 100% of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS), without deductions for accounting loopholes.

Whilst the precise makeup of funding, through the mix of State/Commonwealth share, is a secondary matter for TASSO, we consider it necessary to address given the current and long-standing intergovernmental arrangements, and issues with Tasmania's ability to achieve educational outcomes.

TASSO believes that the Commonwealth's proposed funding floor of 20% of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) is insufficient to provide the quality education that Tasmanian (and Australian) students deserve. It fails to address the long-standing underfunding of the education system, perpetuating existing inequities and limiting opportunities for all learners.

We urge the Committee to reconsider these provisions to ensure a fairer and more sustainable funding model.

The Impacts of Chronic Underfunding of Government Schools Over the Last Decade

1. Inequitable Education Funding

TASSO believes that all children have the right to an education that is free, equitable, and provides every opportunity for success. However, in Tasmania today, education is neither fully free nor equitable, and it fails to provide equal opportunities for all learners.

Over the last decade, inequities have been exacerbated by the unequal distribution of the SRS and support packages at both federal and state levels. This has fostered an ethos that private education is superior and more valued by governments, contributing to a perceived hierarchy within the education system. Parents and students are acutely

aware of the disparities in resources, facilities, and extracurricular opportunities. This division fosters elitism.

In contrast, and further highlighting the inequities within the current system, non-government schools can charge enrolment fees exceeding \$20,000 per annum and still receive generous government funding, with these government contributions causing further overfunding of these schools and further inequity within the system, especially when compared with nearby government schools.

2. Reliance on Parent Fundraising

Our School Associations across Tasmania have been increasingly called upon to provide essential resources to their schools. Fundraising, once a supplementary activity, has become a necessity to cover essentials such as:

- Books
- Playground equipment
- Curriculum resources, including literacy programs, STEM, art, and sports equipment
- Infrastructure maintenance and building
- Furniture

This reliance on community fundraising places an unfair burden on families and further exacerbates existing disparities, particularly in lower-ICSEA areas where the capacity for fundraising is limited, creating "elite" government schools due to their community's background including the ability to fund "extras" that should arguably be basic educational necessities.

3. Overstretched Human Resources

Chronic underfunding has also placed a strain on resourcing at all levels. Educators and allied health professionals are stretched thin, resulting in students missing out on critical educational assessments and interventions that are essential for realising their potential and achieving the educational outcomes they deserve.

We understand teachers frequently complain about burn out and are exiting the profession at an unsustainable rate.

4. State Inequity and Loadings

On many measures, a small number of states' education systems are underperforming, despite providing a greater per-student dollar value from state funds to education than better-performing states. This can be partially attributed to those states bearing a

greater proportion of funding to address demographic issues which differ between states.

As such TASSO considers that the Commonwealth should bear greater responsibility for equality in outcomes (tied to funding), given variation in demographics, through regional/location loadings and adjustments for disabilities and low SEA.

Such adjustments to the distribution (shifting greater funding of offsets towards the Commonwealth) could be considered if the floor was 20% (for the state requiring the fewest loadings/top-ups). Nonetheless we see any 'fairer' formula would necessarily increase the Commonwealth's contribution in Tasmania well above 30%.

Recommendations for the Better and Fairer Schools (Funding and Reform) Bill 2024

We strongly encourage the Committee to amend the Bill to raise the federal funding floor to 25% of the SRS. This increase is essential to provide stable funding, and the resources needed to deliver quality education to all students, regardless of their location or socio-economic status. Ensuring adequate and equitable funding will help close the gap in educational outcomes and build a more inclusive education system.

Additionally, we recommend the removal of the provision in the bilateral agreements that allows for 4% of the SRS to be allocated to depreciation, regulatory bodies, and student transportation. These allocations divert much-needed funds away from direct educational support, limiting schools' ability to deliver core programs and services. Addressing this issue will ensure that funding is directed towards where it is most needed—supporting students and enhancing their learning environments.

The current proposal to place the floor of the federal contribution at 20% for the next decade risks maintaining existing inequalities in our education system. Schools will continue to struggle to meet basic needs, limiting their ability to offer innovative programs and necessary student support. By increasing the federal funding floor and ensuring that funds are allocated directly to student support, we can build a stronger, fairer, and more effective education system.

We appreciate the Committee's consideration of our submission and are available to provide further information if needed.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive 'M' followed by a horizontal line that tapers to the right.

John Allan
President, TASSO

Contact: Jessica Bennett, Operations Manager
manager@tasso.org.au
(03) 6243 7718

About the Tasmanian Association of State School Organisations

TASSO is the peak body representing the parents and communities that form School Associations within Tasmanian government schools, advocating on behalf of their students. We represent School Associations across all Tasmanian government schools. At TASSO, we believe in the value of government education and are committed to ensuring that it delivers the best possible outcomes for all children. We speak as a proud voice for Tasmanian families, ensuring their needs and ideas are heard.