



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
**MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE**

**Education Funding**

**SPEECH**

**Tuesday, 3 December 2013**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Perrett, Graham, MP

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**Mr PERRETT** (Moreton) (15:48): Before I became a lawyer, I was a schoolteacher for 11 years. Even though I taught English, today I am going to do a little bit of history. I am going to run quickly through the history of school funding, just so people understand it. This is a very important topic. The history is troubled, particularly when you look at the Commonwealth's involvement.

Before the socioeconomic status, or SES, model the main focus of the way the states and Commonwealth organised the allocation of money was the average cost of educating a kid in a state school. Then the Howard model came in—the SES model. This model looked at data from each census collection district—about 200 households. Wherever a kid came from, the data for their CCD was looked at and that determined how much money should be handed out to their school. This was for non-government schools. State schools received their money under a different scheme.

The idea behind the SES model was to recognise where the money was. That is a pretty crude analysis of it. It may well have had the best of intentions behind it. On *Lateline* with Steve Cannane last week, the member for Sturt said that he thought the SES model was a needs based model. More than anything, this statement underscored for me that he was the laziest shadow education minister this nation has ever seen. He did not understand the basic premise of the SES model—that was a fundamental misunderstanding.

Irrespective of the reasoning behind it, the SES model did not deliver for a number of reasons. For a start, about 50 per cent of the schools were funding maintained. That means they would have lost money under the SES model except for the Howard government saying that no school would be worse off. So it was a flawed scheme in the first place. What were the results? We saw money flow to the wealthiest non-government schools. I think Mark Latham's spirit was invoked earlier and I have to say that, when I was a candidate in 2004, I was particularly troubled by our education policy—with all respect to those who formulated it in 2004.

Thankfully, we saw the development of the Gonski model, which came out of consultation with stakeholders—7,000 submissions and going out and talking to people—and out of bringing in the best minds, not just from education but from outside it. It came up with the idea of needs based funding. The idea was, 'Let's calculate what you need to educate a kid'. It costs more to educate kids in a state school because state schools have to take a student. The Thallon State School must take the kids in Thallon—and it costs more to keep a kid at the Westmar State School than it does in the middle of Brisbane. I am talking here to the member for New England. He knows these schools. A private school can make a few decisions and normally people sending their kids to a private school are more prepared to put their hand in their pocket. That said, there are Aboriginal schools, some very poor Catholic schools, some very poor Christian schools and schools like the Southside Education Centre in my electorate, which caters for girls who have had babies. There are all sorts of private schools. They are not all Geelong Grammar.

The Gonski model said, 'Let's work out what it costs to educate a kid and then we will give loadings based on whether, for example, the kid has a disability.' It is based on the individual kid, irrespective of the sign above the gate—be it Catholic, independent or state, we do not care. It was a blind education policy in that we did not care what the sign above the gate was. It was brilliant and I commend the Gonski panel for coming up with it. Funding was based on disability, on whether kids were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, on school size and location—it is harder to run a small school like Westmar because of the challenges they face—on whether there are lots of kids with limited English and on whether there is low SES. They were part of the loading. It is not like the SES model that said the richest kid from St George who went to boarding school in Brisbane imported the data from their poor census collection district.

Why did we need to improve the system? Because the current model had been broken. We found that poor kids were up to three years below. As a cooperative federation we needed to come up with a better model. We do have

to have some controls—and it is not command and control; it is about making sure that there is performance and implementation so we can lift the standards across all Australia, which is a good thing. (*Time expired*)