



Acclaim, but will Gonski fly?

Caroline Milburn, *The Age*

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ONE of the remarkable feats of the Gonski report on school funding is something that has been impossible until now — a truce in the bitter feud between public and private school lobby groups.

Since it was released last week, the report has won acclaim from teacher unions, principals and parent groups that have spent decades sparring over the carve up of public money for government, Catholic and independent schools.

Other key groups, such as parents of disabled children, have also applauded the report's central theme — the creation of a Schooling Resource Standard containing the amount of per-student funding needed for a high-quality education, plus extra financial loadings targeting disadvantage.

The review, headed by the Sydney businessman David Gonski, says an extra \$5 billion should be injected into the new funding system to reverse the slippage in Australia's school performance.

The task now facing the federal government is immense. It recently navigated the shoals of hostile state governments, the federal opposition and a sceptical education community to introduce a national school curriculum.

School funding reform, with its much higher price tag and emotional baggage, is likely to be harder to pull off. Education asked school sector representatives for their views on the Gonski report — and what lies ahead.

BILL DANIELS

Executive Director, Independent Schools Council of Australia

What's your opinion of the Gonski report and its proposed funding model?

The report shows that Gonski has listened to the sector's concerns and understood the circumstances of independent schools.

The difficulty for the sector is that it is impossible to tell, without access to detailed modelling, the impact of the proposed funding model on individual independent schools.

Most independent schools cannot rely on a system authority to guarantee their financial stability, so they rely on stable, predictable government funding for long-term financial planning.

The federal government's time frame for progressing the outcomes of Gonski is highly optimistic, so the uncertainty surrounding future funding arrangements for independent schools will continue for some time.

Can the different school sectors and levels of government find enough common ground to enable the Gonski funding model to be introduced?

Initial reactions from school education stakeholders show there is a willingness to work together. The challenges will lie in the work of the proposed national schools resourcing body and the development of an agreed Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) drawing on schools across all three sectors.

A large amount of work will also need to be done to get national agreement on the eligibility of students for the SRS loadings targeting disadvantage.

Nominate the biggest obstacles in the path towards a negotiated outcome.

The biggest obstacle won't emerge from within the schooling sector, it will come from Commonwealth-state relations. The Gonski funding model requires a big injection of funding from both levels of government. In a tight fiscal environment a commitment to significant extra funds across nine governments is a big ask.

The funding model also requires state and territory governments to cede their discretion over the amount of their own resources directed to school education funding, something states have shown themselves reluctant to do.