

Keep ministers up to the mark

Sustained lobbying will be required in the lead-up to the COAG meeting set down for next April given school funding beyond 2017 is on the agenda, Federation President Mulheron says.

The federal government is refusing to commit to its share of funding for the final two years of six-year Gonski agreements with states and territories – worth \$3.9 billion to schools in 2018 and 2019 – and is seeking to negotiate a new four-year deal effective from 2018.

Mr Mulheron said the Turnbull government would need to rely on the states and territories capitulating on their support for the Gonski model to make its desired changes to federal school funding.

“Any attempt to change the Australian Education Act – the architecture for the Gonski funding model – is unlikely to get through the Senate given the ALP, Greens and the Nick Xenophon Team’s commitment to the Gonski model,” Mr Mulheron said.

Senator Nick Xenophon expressed his commitment in a letter to Australian Education Union Federal President Correna

Haythorpe, stating: “I look forward to working with you and your members to ensure Gonski funding is defended and maintained for the future of Australia’s children.

“We believe the needs-based funding model of Gonski is critical to be maintained and it would have retrograde effects for the future of our children if it is wound back.”

NSW Education Minister Adrian Piccoli has described the federal government’s planned funding cuts as “a war on fairness”.

“The Commonwealth proposes to cut \$2.1 billion from NSW schools ... breaking the Gonski agreement NSW signed in good faith on behalf of all children,” he told the NSW Primary Principals’ Association’s annual conference on October 19.

“Some of the money they propose taking away from NSW will be given to other states, which are already closer to the Schooling Resource Standard than we are, and the money they take and give to other states would only come from government schools – schools that can least afford reduced levels of funding.”

Campaigning needed to ensure pro-Gonski states stay strong: Mulheron

“Budgets are moral documents – they lay out in numbers what our country is. This is a country built upon equality of opportunity. Education is where we can best provide this opportunity. Children do not get to choose who their parents are. We can, however, choose the type of society we wish to be,” he also said.

State and territory education ministers, bar Western Australia, have been vocal in their opposition to the federal government’s proposal.

Mr Mulheron said campaigning is needed to ensure they stay strong on their current position. “Teachers will be encouraging NSW Premier Mike Baird and Education Minister Adrian Piccoli to maintain their stance, and will be taking the issue directly to federal Coalition MPs, particularly in vulnerable seats,” he said.

Mr Mulheron said full implementation of the Gonski model was vital to ensure that all schools transition to the schools resource standard established by the

Gonski Review, by the end of 2019.

Last month, the NSW Education Department announced how Gonski dollars will be allocated to school budgets and system-wide programs for 2017. By the end of next year only 36 per cent of Gonski funding would have been delivered to schools.

The Chair of the 2011 Review of Funding for Schooling, David Gonski, who recently contributed \$750,000 to the charity, Schools Plus’s Pioneers of Philanthropy program, which plans to direct \$5.25 million towards students in disadvantaged schools over five years, emphasised that philanthropy did not reduce government responsibility for funding education.

“I do want to make one point very clearly: the Pioneers believe strongly their donation is not a substitute for government funding, not a way to let governments off the hook or an attempt to improperly influence the operations of schools,” Mr Gonski wrote in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (October 24).

Mr Mulheron agrees, saying Federation does not believe schools should have to rely on charity or donations.

— Kerri Carr