



Australian Secondary  
Principals' Association

# ASPA Policy Briefing 2025





## 1. Supporting Principal Wellbeing and Leadership

**ASPA calls for the redesign of the contemporary principalship, to create a more sustainable and fulfilling profession. This should incorporate existing association research, principal feedback and informed by experience across jurisdictions.**

Research into the financial and systemic costs of student and principal turnover will highlight the importance of investing in principal well-being and support.

Unrealistic expectations regarding principal availability contribute to burnout and stress. Clearer boundaries and communication protocols are needed.

Many principals report feeling a lack of trust in their supervisors at the system level. Effective leadership and support from education departments and governing bodies are crucial for creating a positive

and sustainable work environment for principals.

Examining current leadership models and incorporating principal feedback can lead to more effective and supportive structures.

Implementing change at a manageable pace, informed by best practices from other sectors, can reduce stress and improve the effectiveness of reforms.

Highlighting the rewarding aspects of the principalship can attract and retain talented individuals in the profession.

Including principals in the development of professional standards ensures that these standards are relevant and effective. Improved pay and working conditions recognise the demanding nature of the role and contribute to greater well-being and reduced workload.

**ASPA advocates for a comprehensive, nationally funded strategy to address principal wellbeing, including readily accessible support services.**



A dedicated national strategy supported by all state, territory and federal Education Ministers with allocated funding is essential for a substantial and consistent approach to principal well-being. Measurable outcomes will ensure accountability and allow for adjustments to the strategy over time.

Specific programs targeting the mental health challenges faced by principals could include stress management training, access to counselling services, and recognition by education systems that peer support networks are practical and highly valued by school leaders.

Professional Supervision programs should be funded to provide contextually appropriate services to practising principals to support their efficacy as they do in other frontline service professions.

Creating a positive and supportive work environment is vital for well-being. This includes addressing workplace bullying, excessive workload, and lack of resources. School-based well-being services provide direct and immediate support within the school setting.

**ASPA advocates for strengthened authority for principals to manage school community safety, including the ability to restrict access for individuals exhibiting unsafe, threatening, or violent behaviour, supported by a public awareness campaign promoting respect for school staff.**

Granting principals the authority to restrict access for individuals exhibiting unsafe, threatening, or violent behaviour is essential for maintaining a safe and orderly school environment.

Public awareness campaigns can help to shift community attitudes and promote respect for the vital work of school staff. Such campaigns should emphasise the unacceptability of abusive behaviour towards educators.

**ASPA calls for reducing the administrative burden on principals through fit-for-purpose staffing arrangements and efficient systems and processes, allowing them to focus on the leadership responsibilities that best support learners.**

Principals currently face a heavy administrative workload, often beyond what would be expected of leaders in similar-sized organisations, detracting from their leadership and educational oversight responsibilities.

Ensuring schools have adequate and appropriate staff and support to handle the complex administrative duties involved in running contemporary schools, tailored to the specific needs of each school, will make a difference. This might include HR, WH&S, administrative assistants, business managers, and other support roles.

Streamlining administrative processes, such as incident reporting and accessing support services, will reduce principals' time on administrative tasks. This could involve simplifying paperwork, digitising systems, and improving communication channels.

The ultimate goal is to enable principals to dedicate more time and energy to their primary role: leading their school community, improving educational outcomes, and supporting teachers and students.

**ASPA seeks high-quality, differentiated professional learning opportunities for principals, including mentoring, and funded sabbatical options.**

High-quality professional development tailored to the evolving demands of the principalship is necessary. Mentoring programs can provide valuable support and guidance from experienced principals.

Training for early-career principals should equip them with the skills to navigate the growing complexities of the role, including financial management, legal responsibilities, and community

engagement.

A structured plan for developing future school leaders is essential for ensuring a pipeline of qualified and prepared individuals ready to take on the principalship.

Offering flexible work arrangements, such as job sharing and part-time/co-principal roles, can improve work-life balance and attract a broader range of

talented individuals to the profession.

Greater local decision-making autonomy empowers principals to make decisions that best serve their school community. Funded sabbaticals provide opportunities for rejuvenation and professional growth. The right to disconnect after work hours protects principals from the constant demands of the job and promotes healthy boundaries.

## 2. Ensuring Equitable and Effective School Funding and Regulatory Models



### **ASPA calls for full and transparent funding of all schools to 100% of the School Resourcing Standard.**

ASPA believes all schools should receive funding equivalent to 100% of the School Resourcing Standard asap. This standard represents the minimum calculated funding required to provide a high-quality education for all students.

Funding should be allocated directly to schools. The design of the Student Resource Allocation methodology should be revisited, and school leaders empowered to make decisions about how best to use resources to meet the needs of their students. This avoids diverting funds to system administration or other non-school-based costs.

Funding practices should be transparent and equitable, ensuring that all students and staff have access to the resources they need, regardless of their school's location or demographics.

### **ASPA advocates for the current definition of ICSEA to be reviewed to better support schools with high concentrations of disadvantage.**

Currently, ICSEA relies on broad socioeconomic indicators, like parental occupation and education, which can obscure localised pockets of disadvantage within seemingly average communities. This can lead to inadequate funding for schools serving highly disadvantaged student populations, even if their overall ICSEA score appears moderate. Furthermore, the infrequent updates to ICSEA fail to capture the dynamic nature

of socioeconomic change, potentially leaving schools with outdated funding models that don't reflect current needs.

A comprehensive review of ICSEA would entail several key changes. First, incorporating more granular data, such as income levels, housing stress indicators, and access to essential services, would provide a more accurate picture of student needs. Second, the review should explore methods for accounting for the *concentration* of disadvantage, perhaps through weighting mechanisms or identification of disadvantage clusters. Third, more frequent updates and the potential integration of real-time data would create a more responsive measure. Finally, the review should consider incorporating indicators that address specific needs, such as those of students with disabilities, Indigenous students, and students from language backgrounds other than English.

Read ASPA's more comprehensive case for a review of ICSEA at Appendix A

### **ASPA advocates for whole of government responses to address the needs of highly complex communities.**

The complex challenges faced by some school communities, particularly those with high concentrations of disadvantage, cannot be effectively addressed by schools alone. These challenges often involve interconnected issues such as poverty, housing instability, health problems, and limited access to essential services. "Whole of government responses," means coordinated action and collaboration between various government departments and agencies (e.g., education, health, social services, housing) to provide integrated support and resources to these communities.

This approach moves beyond simply funding schools and acknowledges the need for a broader, multi-faceted strategy to address the underlying

social and economic factors that impact student learning and wellbeing. By working together, government agencies can create a more cohesive and effective support system that addresses the complex needs of these communities and empowers schools to focus on their core mission of education.

### **ASPA seeks a review of current state and territory funding distribution models to ensure equitable resource allocation across all school sectors, promoting equivalent transparency, accountability, and reporting across all school sectors.**

Schools serving disadvantaged communities and students with disabilities require additional resources to address the specific needs of their student populations. Increased funding will provide equitable educational opportunities.

Transparent government reporting on school segregation, affordability and private school funding will provide valuable insights into the equity and effectiveness of current funding models.

Equitable outcomes demand a level playing field in school funding, with all schools, regardless of sector, adhering to the same funding regulations and reporting requirements.

### **ASPA calls for a permanent national school infrastructure fund, prioritising schools with the greatest need.**

A dedicated national fund will provide a sustainable and long-term approach to addressing school infrastructure needs across the country.

The fund should prioritise schools with the most significant infrastructure deficits, ensuring that resources are directed where they are most needed.

Reliable internet access is essential for modern education. The infrastructure fund should include provisions for ensuring all schools have access to high-speed internet.

### 3. Addressing Teacher Shortages and Elevating the Profession



**ASPA seeks a review of progress of the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan, incorporating feedback from Principal associations.**

Principals are on the front lines of managing the ongoing teacher shortage and have valuable insights into the effectiveness of current strategies. Their feedback is essential for ensuring the Action Plan is relevant and impactful.

Competitive salaries and attractive incentives remain crucial for attracting and retaining qualified teachers, especially in remote and underserved areas.

Removing visa obstacles, financial barriers and recognising prior learning can encourage migrant teachers and career changers to participate, particularly in hard-to-fill specialisations. HECS-free paid training with RPL for mature-age professionals allows individuals to support themselves while transitioning into teaching.

Offering flexible work options can help retain experienced teachers and leaders, accommodating their changing needs and priorities.

Ensuring all schools meet minimum standards for facilities, staffing levels, and resources is essential for creating a positive and supportive work environment for teachers. This can also improve teacher morale and retention.

**ASPA advocates for a renewed strategy to elevate the teaching profession and public education, incorporating feedback from Principal associations.**

A revitalised strategy is required to enhance the status of the teaching profession and public education as a whole. This involves advocating for policies and initiatives that not only improve teacher recruitment, training, and retention, but also address systemic issues impacting the quality of public education. Principals, as frontline leaders in education, possess invaluable insights into the practical challenges and opportunities within schools and classrooms. Their input is essential for developing effective strategies that genuinely address the needs of teachers, students, and the broader education system.

[Read ASPA's Strategy ideas at Appendix B](#)





## 4. Improving Secondary Curriculum Pathways and Assessment

### **ASPA calls for curriculum frameworks that value and include diverse pathways.**

Schools should have the flexibility to adapt the curriculum to meet the specific needs and interests of their students, including culturally responsive approaches. This recognises that a one-size-fits-all approach does not effectively serve all students. Removing some system-wide mandates, such as compulsory languages in Years 7 and 8, allows for greater flexibility and responsiveness to local contexts.

While a minimum standard ensures all students receive a foundational education, flexibility based on local needs allows schools to tailor their programs to best prepare students for their future pathways.

### **ASPA advocates for reducing barriers in the delivery of high-quality VET courses, including recognising a teacher qualification as equivalent to Certificate IV in Training & Assessment.**

Expanding the availability of vocational training courses and simplifying qualification pathways for vocational teachers can address skills shortages and provide students with more diverse career options. Recognising existing teaching qualifications can streamline the process for qualified educators to teach VET courses.

### **ASPA advocates for a review of tertiary admissions procedures, promoting greater equity and consistency across Australia, ensuring assessments are culturally sensitive and that ranking students is not a school responsibility.**

Considering a wider range of assessment methods, such as skills-based assessments, can provide a more holistic view of student capabilities. Encouraging universities to explore alternative admission processes can create more equitable access to higher education.

### **ASPA calls for a more flexible secondary education system that caters to the diverse needs and aspirations of all students.**

Preparing students for lifelong learning requires a focus on developing essential skills, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration. Placing greater value on these skills and general capabilities recognises that success extends beyond academic achievement.

Further research and exploration of different school models ([Big Picture Education](#) for example) can provide more effective learning environments for students who do not thrive in traditional mainstream settings.

Increasing funding for more university places can help to reduce financial barriers and improve access for students from diverse backgrounds.

Providing useful career education resources to students from year 8, and providing linkages and incentives for more industry involvement in career

education and work experience will better prepare students to make appropriate career choices.

Collaboration with organisations like [AAFIE](#) can provide valuable insights and support for creating more flexible and inclusive education systems.



## 5. Promoting Inclusive Education and Student Wellbeing

**ASPA advocates for increased research, resources and jurisdictional collaboration to address student health and well-being concerns.**

Ensuring equitable, reliable access to support services for students with disabilities across all states and territories is crucial for promoting inclusive education. New strategies to promote more inclusive school environments should include regulatory incentives for the non-government sector that reduce the burden on public schools.

More research is needed, along with sharing jurisdictional information on vaping and other student health issues that affect students learning and engagement.

A national review of the impact of school segregation on students is needed given the increasing concentration of disadvantaged students in some schools and regions.

ASPA does not support the 2023 Disability Royal Commission recommendation to phase out special schools, highlighting the importance of considering the diverse needs of students with disabilities and their families.

Student involvement in educational decision-making processes is important because it empowers students, giving them a voice in shaping their learning experiences and fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility.



## 6. Accountability and Long-Term Planning:



**ASPA advocates for bipartisan support for long-term education planning, independent of political cycles, and a more holistic approach to measuring school success that considers student wellbeing, diverse learning pathways, and a broader range of outcomes beyond standardised test scores.**

Education requires long-term vision and stability, transcending the fluctuations of political cycles. Stable, long-term plans provide a consistent framework for educational development, allowing for sustained progress and preventing disruptions caused by changing political priorities.

A broader approach to evaluating schools is also required. Relying solely on standardised test scores and the ATAR is no longer best practice. We should acknowledge the validity of diverse learning pathways and strengthen our focus on supporting students to demonstrate the capabilities and dispositions that will help them succeed and thrive.

Understanding community expectations for education is fundamental to shaping effective educational systems. A comprehensive review of these expectations can inform the development of an organisational framework that aligns with community values and goals, ensuring that

education serves the needs of all stakeholders.

**ASPA advocates for a common, fair funding and regulatory framework for all schools, subject to resourcing and regulation via an authority at arms' length of Government**

A common, fair funding and regulatory framework for all Australian schools is essential for ensuring equitable educational opportunities for every student, regardless of their location or background. Such a framework would establish consistent standards for resource allocation and regulation to all three school sectors (Catholic, Independent, Public) in all states and territories, minimising disparities and promoting fairness across the education system.

Administering this framework through an independent authority, operating at arm's length from government safeguards against political interference and prioritises the best interests of students. This independence fosters transparency and accountability, ensuring that funding decisions are based on objective criteria and educational needs, rather than private interests and political agendas. Ultimately, this approach creates a more stable and equitable education system that can better serve all students.

## 7. Collaboration and Communication



**ASPA calls for the establishment of formalised policy networks in each jurisdiction to enhance communication and collaboration between principals' associations and education departments, ensuring meaningful consultation on policy decisions.**

Formalised policy networks between principals' associations and education departments are crucial for creating effective and responsive education systems. These networks facilitate open communication and collaboration, ensuring that the practical expertise and on-the-ground experience of school leaders inform policy decisions.

Meaningful consultation with principals allows for the identification of potential challenges and opportunities, leading to more effective and well-implemented policies. This collaborative approach fosters a shared understanding of goals and priorities, ultimately benefiting students by creating a more cohesive and supportive learning environment.

**ASPA advocates for 'One' National Teacher Registration Board to streamline registration processes, improve interstate teacher mobility, and enhance data sharing between jurisdictions.**

A unified system would streamline the current fragmented registration processes, reducing administrative burdens for both teachers and schools. This streamlined approach would also improve teacher mobility between states and territories, allowing educators to more easily relocate to areas of need and addressing teacher shortages across the country. Critically, a national system would enhance data sharing between jurisdictions, enabling more effective screening processes and closing loopholes that allow individuals deemed unsuitable to teach in one jurisdiction to gain employment in another, thereby improving child safety.

# Appendix A:

## Why a review of ICSEA is necessary and what it entails

The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) is a valuable tool for understanding the socio-educational context of Australian schools and distributing funding accordingly. However, its current definition has limitations when it comes to supporting schools with high concentrations of disadvantage. A review could consider several changes to better address these limitations:

### 1. Granularity of Socioeconomic Factors:

ICSEA currently uses broad measures like occupation and education levels of parents. While informative, these can mask pockets of extreme disadvantage within a seemingly average community. A review could explore incorporating more granular data, such as:

- **Income data:** Including actual income data, perhaps sourced from tax records (with appropriate privacy safeguards), could provide a more precise picture of family resources.
- **Housing stress indicators:** Measures like rental affordability or homelessness rates within the school's catchment area could highlight the impact of housing instability on students.
- **Access to essential services:** Considering proximity and access to healthcare, childcare, and social services could reflect the challenges faced by families in disadvantaged areas.

**2. Concentration of Disadvantage:** ICSEA currently doesn't explicitly account for the *concentration* of disadvantage. A school with a moderate overall ICSEA score might still have a significant cohort of highly disadvantaged students, whose needs are not adequately addressed by current funding models. The review could investigate:

- **Weighting for concentration:** Applying a weighting factor to the ICSEA calculation for schools with a high proportion of students from the lowest socioeconomic quartiles. This would acknowledge the compounding effect of concentrated disadvantage.
- **Identifying 'clusters' of disadvantage:** Developing a methodology to identify geographical clusters of disadvantage, even within relatively affluent areas, to ensure appropriate resource allocation.

### 3. Dynamic and Responsive Measurement:

Socioeconomic circumstances can change rapidly. A static measure like ICSEA, updated only every few years, might not capture these shifts. The review should explore:

- **More frequent updates:** Increasing the frequency of ICSEA calculations to reflect changing community demographics and economic conditions.
- **Real-time data integration:** Exploring the feasibility of integrating real-time data sources, where appropriate and ethically permissible, to provide a more dynamic picture of student needs..

**4. Addressing Specific Needs:** ICSEA is a general measure of disadvantage. A review could consider incorporating indicators that reflect specific needs, such as:



- **Students with disabilities:** Including data on the prevalence of disabilities within the school community to ensure adequate funding for support services.
- **Indigenous students:** Incorporating specific indicators relevant to the needs of Indigenous students, recognising the unique challenges they face.
- **Language background other than English (LBOTE):** Considering the proportion of LBOTE students and the resources required to support their language acquisition.

**5. Transparency and Consultation:** The review process should be transparent and involve extensive consultation with key stakeholders, including:

- **Schools and educators:** Gathering input from schools experiencing high concentrations of disadvantage to understand their specific challenges and resource needs.
- **Communities:** Engaging with local communities to ensure the measure accurately reflects their socioeconomic realities.
- **Researchers and experts:** Drawing on the expertise of researchers in the fields of education, sociology, and economics.

By addressing these areas, a review of the ICSEA definition can lead to a more nuanced and responsive funding model that better supports schools with high concentrations of disadvantage and ultimately improves educational outcomes for all students.

## Appendix B:

### ASPA strategy to elevate the teaching profession and public education.

A renewed strategy to elevate the teaching profession and public education, could involve several key components:

- **Competitive Compensation and Improved Working Conditions:** Addressing teacher shortages and burnout requires competitive salaries and improved working conditions, including reduced administrative burdens, manageable workloads, and access to high-quality professional development opportunities. This could involve increased funding for public education, targeted incentives for teachers in high-need areas, and innovative staffing models.
- **Enhanced Initial Teacher Education and Ongoing Professional Development:** Strengthening teacher training programs to equip educators with the skills and knowledge needed to address the diverse learning needs of today's students is crucial. This includes focusing on evidence-based pedagogical practices, inclusive education strategies, and culturally responsive teaching. Ongoing professional development should be readily accessible, relevant to classroom practice, and aligned with school improvement goals.

- **Greater Teacher Autonomy and Professional Recognition:** Empowering teachers with greater autonomy in curriculum design and pedagogical approaches can foster a sense of ownership and professional pride. Recognising and valuing teachers' expertise through leadership opportunities, career pathways, and public acknowledgement of their contributions can enhance the status of the profession.
- **Community Engagement and Collaboration:** Building strong partnerships between schools, families, and communities is essential for creating supportive learning environments. This could involve initiatives to increase parental involvement, establish community partnerships, and foster open communication between schools and families.
- **Addressing Systemic Inequities:** Acknowledging and addressing systemic inequities within the education system is critical for ensuring that all students have access to quality education. This includes targeted support for disadvantaged schools, equitable resource allocation, and culturally responsive teaching practices.
- **Streamlined Administrative Processes and Reduced Bureaucracy:** Reducing administrative burdens on teachers and principals can free up valuable time for teaching and learning. This could involve streamlining reporting requirements, simplifying administrative procedures, and providing schools with greater flexibility in managing resources.
- **Data-Driven Decision Making and Accountability:** Using data to inform decision-making at all levels of the education system, from individual classrooms to system-wide policy, can improve outcomes for students. This includes developing robust data collection systems, providing schools with access to relevant data, and using data to evaluate the effectiveness of programs and initiatives.
- **Investment in School Infrastructure and Resources:** Ensuring that schools have adequate resources, including modern facilities, technology, and learning materials, is essential for providing quality education. This could involve increased funding for school infrastructure, equitable resource allocation, and support for schools in acquiring necessary resources.

By focusing on these areas, a renewed strategy can create a more supportive and effective education system that attracts, retains, and empowers high-quality teachers, ultimately benefiting all students.