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Western Australia

Public School Funding Redistribution Bill 2017

Explanatory Memorandum

The gap in the quality of education in Western Australia is growing wider with the disparity in funding and resources between schools especially those in lower socioeconomic communities becoming increasingly obvious. One in every four Australian students fails to complete a Year 12 Certificate or vocational equivalent and nearly 30 per cent of Year 7 students fall behind in international reading benchmarks. Furthermore, only 43 per cent of students in very remote areas complete Year 12 compared with the 78 per cent of students in major cities. These alarming statistics can be traced back to the growing inequity in the financial resources available to different Public Schools.

To combat this, the Education and Training Committee has created the Public School Funding Redistribution Bill 2017, which will make all public school fees compulsory for all students in Public Schools in Western Australia. This will replace the current model, under which school fees are classified as voluntary contributions. This current model has proved ineffective with as few as one in 25 parents paying fees at some Western Australian Public Schools, with the unpaid fees for Year 11 and 12 students hitting \$12 million in 2012. The massive disparity in the payment of voluntary contributions amongst schools creates a growing gap between them, both in academic results and available funds. Schools where a majority of guardian/s cannot or do not pay their fees are suffering from an increasing inability to provide crucial learning resources. In comparison, schools where a vast majority of student's guardian/s can afford to pay their fees and do so, have access to an increased amount of resources that are able to be used to further the education of their students.

Under the Public School Funding Redistribution Bill 2017 the Department of Education will collect 25 per cent of the total of the now compulsory Public School fees payed and put them into a School Education Support Pool (SESP), from which funds will be used to reimburse low income households who pay the now compulsory school fees. The remainder of the funds in the SESP will then be able to be accessed by Public Schools through grants approved by the Department of Education, designed to provide additional funds to support schools, especially those with a low Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA). In doing so, the Public School Funding Redistribution Bill 2017 is able to provide a more equitable funding system for schools in a way that does not negatively affect lower socioeconomic households, and ensures that the schools which need the most financial support are able to access it. This Bill reinforces the fundamental idea that all students enrolled in Public Schools, regardless of their socioeconomic circumstances, should have access to the highest quality of education possible.



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Western Australia

A Bill for —

An Act to improve public school funding via non-voluntary payment of school fees from which a portion will be collected in a pool to support households who could not afford the payment of the fees and to ensure low ICSEA schools receive more equitable funding.

Part 1 — Preliminary

1. Short title

This Bill may be cited as the *Public School Funding Redistribution Bill 2017*.

2. Commencement

This Bill commences on the day on which this Act receives Royal Assent.

3. Interpretation

In this Bill, unless the contrary intention appears —

“**ATO**” means an abbreviation for the Australian Taxation Office.

“**Grants**” refers to money that can be accessed by schools from the School Education Support Pool to help improve school services and enhance the learning experience of students. Applications must be made through the Department of Education.

“**Guardians**” refers to the legal guardian/s of a child enrolled in school in Western Australia.

“**Households**” refers to the child’s guardian/s place of residence.

“**Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA)**” refers to the index created by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) specifically to enable meaningful comparisons of National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) test achievement by students in schools across Australia.

“**P&C**” refers to Parent & Citizens’ Associations which are established under the School Education Act 1999. A P&C may be known by a different name but must be officially recognised by the school.

“**Public School**” refers to a school that is wholly owned and operated by the Government of Western Australia, including Public Independent Schools.

“**Reimbursement**” refers to a sum of money that will be paid back to the guardian of a student who has made the compulsory school fee. This money will be taken out of the School Education Support Pool and its value be dependent on the guardian’s annual income.

“**SESP**” means an abbreviation for the School Education Support Pool. This pool will contain the school fees that have been collected by the State Government and will be administered by the Department of Education.

Part 2 — Administration

4. Administration of Program

This program will be administered and overseen by the Department of Education.

Part 3 — Public School Fees

Division 1 — Establishment of Compulsory Public School Fees

5. Compulsory Payment of School Fees

- (1) All school fees for both Primary and Secondary Public Schools will be compulsory commencing at the start of the 2018 calendar year.
- (2) The following fees are those that are considered compulsory –
 - (a) Base voluntary contributions;
 - (b) Specific fees of subjects undertaken by the student;
 - (c) Student support services contribution;
 - (d) Information communication technology contribution;
 - (e) P&C contributions; and
 - (f) Any additional fees deemed necessary for schools by the Department of Education.

6. Adjustment of Fees

Any adjustments that Public Schools make to fees must be approved on an individual basis by The Department of Education.

7. Payment of Fees

- (1) The payment of fees must be made to the school which the individual child is attending.

- (2) Guardian/s must pay through one of the following methods –
 - (a) A total sum payment to the school; or
 - (b) Partial payments over a period of time.
- (3) The amount of each partial payment and their frequency will be determined by the school after consultation with the guardian/s who choose this option.
- (4) The total payment of fees must be made 15 days prior to the final day of the school year.
- (5) It is the responsibility of the school to monitor and ensure the payment of fees.

Division 2 — Consequences of Non-Payment

8. Failure to Make Payment

- (1) If the full payment of fees for a child is not received 15 working days prior to the final day of the school year, the school will send out a reminder letter detailing the amount owed and declaring that the remainder that must be paid 5 days prior to the final day of the school year.
- (2) If the full payment for a child is not received 5 working days prior to the final day of the school year, the remaining fees will automatically be collected from the income of the guardian/s of the child by the Australian Taxation Office (ATO).

9. Continual Non-Payment of Fees

If an individual has had school fees automatically deducted by the ATO for more than two consecutive years, they will be ineligible for any reimbursement of money paid as school fees, for the current and subsequent years.

Part 4 — Collection of Fees from Schools

10. Collection of Fees by the Department of Education

Every time a payment towards a compulsory school fee is made to a school 25% of the payment will be collected by the Department of Education.

11. School Education Support Pool

These collected fees will be placed in the School Education Support Pool (SESP), which must be used as outlined in Parts 5 and 6.

12. Management of the School Education Support Pool

The SESP will be managed by the Department of Education.

Part 5 — Reimbursement of Fees to Support Households

13. Amounts Allocated to Households

- (1) Every year a maximum 50% of funds from the SESP can be used to reimburse the guardian/s of students.
- (2) When a student's guardian/s makes a school fee payment they will receive a receipt that can be presented to Centrelink at any time to receive reimbursement.

14. Amounts Allocated to the Department of Education Grants

The remainder of the funds in the SESP will be allocated directly to schools through grants administered by the Department of Education under the conditions specified in Part 6 of this Bill.

15. Allocation of Funds to Households

- (1) Reimbursements shall be allocated in accordance to the combined income per annum of the guardian/s residing in the same household as a student.
- (2) Households with a combined income in the following brackets must be reimbursed the percentages as stated below. That is a household with a combined annual income of –
 - (a) \$0 – \$27,300 will receive 100% of each child's fee;
 - (b) \$27,301 – \$55,500 will receive 75% of each child's fee;
 - (c) \$55,501 – \$75,000 will receive 50% of each child's fee;
 - (d) \$75,001- \$90,000 will receive 10% of each child's fee; and
 - (e) \$90,001 and over will receive no reimbursement.
- (3) If the percentage of funds allocated to reimburse families from the SESP is insufficient, the Western Australian State Government must provide the remainder of the money required.

16. Adjustment of Reimbursement

- (1) The Department of Education will be able to adjust the combined income brackets and value of reimbursements at their discretion where appropriate.
- (2) Given the adjustment of any reimbursements, it must always be the case that households in the lowest income bracket have 100% of their children's fees reimbursed.

17. Excess Funds

Any excess funds after the reimbursement of households must be added to the SESP. This will make them available to schools through the grant system specified in Part 6 of this Bill.

Part 6 — Redistribution of Fees to Support Public Schools

18. Administration of Grants

Eligible schools will be able to apply for grants from the remainder of the SESP in a process administered and overseen by the Department of Education.

19. Eligibility for Grants

- (1) All Western Australian Public Schools are eligible to apply for grants.
- (2) Schools with lower ICSEA values, in the previous calendar year, will have their application for grants prioritised.

20. Applying for Grants

The process for the allotment of grants is as follows –

- (a) Schools must fill out an application pertaining to the grant.
- (b) Schools must send applications before the end of the school year.
- (c) The Department of Education will review the applications and make an informed decision as to whether the allocation of the grant is appropriate.
- (d) Schools whose applications have been approved will receive the allocated funds at the beginning of the subsequent school year.

21. Conditions of Grant Distribution

- (1) Once funds have been allocated they must only be used for the pre-approved initiatives, clearly specified in the schools application.

- (2) Once the specified use of the grant funds has been fulfilled, any remaining funds must be returned to the SESP.

- (3) Schools that do not comply with the conditions of the grants set by the Department of Education will not be eligible to apply for grants in the remainder of the current calendar year and the subsequent calendar year.