



Funding Bill heads to Senate

Now or never for school reform, says architect

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Education correspondent

It would be a “tragedy” for Australia if the Senate voted down the Turnbull government’s school funding model, according to Gonski review member and leading education policymaker Ken Boston.

Dr Boston, a former head of the NSW and South Australian education departments, broke his silence on the school funding debate to say the country was on the “threshold of a new deal of historic national importance” and should not allow the opportunity to pass.

The Turnbull government will bring its school funding bill to a Senate vote in the next fortnight and is scrambling to secure the votes required.

“Five years after the release and subsequent emasculation of the Gonski report, Australia has a rare second chance,” Dr Boston told Fairfax Media. “The progressive elements in Australian education need to recognise that their argument has been won.

“There are no grounds for opposition to the schools funding bill in principle, and every reason to work collaboratively towards its successful implementation and further refinement in the years ahead. It will be a tragedy if the school funding bill is voted down in the Senate.”

Dr Boston worked alongside David Gonski on his landmark review of school funding and is assisting the businessman on the “Gonski 2.0” review into improving

educational outcomes.

Mr Gonski gave implicit support to the government’s model by standing next to Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull at a media conference announcing the changes.

Dr Boston, who also ran the British curriculum authority, rejected Labor’s argument the bill should be voted down because it would deliver \$22 billion less for schools over a decade than it has promised.

“The magnitude of what is within reach of being achieved far outweighs any other concern, including the argument that the present amount of funding is insufficient,” he said.

“For the first time, the available funding would be distributed on a sector-blind needs-based principle, using a common assessment tool for individual schools nationally.

“When Labor next forms government, its promised additional \$22 billion would have far greater impact when distributed on the basis of this new funding arrangement, than by being poured into the existing arrangement that has so debilitated Australian education.”



Ken Boston

Labor education spokeswoman Tanya Plibersek last week said the government’s plan was not needs based and not sector blind and would leave needy schools underfunded for too long.

Dr Boston has previously criticised Labor’s implementation of the Gonski review, describing the deals with different states and school sectors as a “corruption” of the report’s vision.

He has also described Julia Gillard’s insistence that no school would be worse off under any changes as an “albatross” around the panel’s neck.

Dr Boston acknowledged concerns about the government’s model. The Catholic sector, for example, had complained about the reliance on socio-economic data to assess parents’ capacity to pay fees.

“In the main these matters arise from failure to implement the Gonski report recommendation to establish a Commonwealth-state national schools resourcing body, which would have addressed them,” he said.