

Media release

For immediate distribution

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NGO leaders unite for disadvantaged students, calling on COAG to act

Fifteen of Australia's leading non-government community organisations united for the first time today to sign an open letter to COAG calling on state, territory and federal governments to put aside their political differences and put students first.

Convened by the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA), 'NGO Leaders for Educational Opportunity' includes representatives from FYA's Centre for New Public Education, The Smith Family, Mission Australia, Brotherhood of St Laurence, ACOSS, Public Education Foundation, Anglicare and others.

As debate rages around Julia Gillard's proposed National Plan for School Improvement, the NGO Leaders are urging COAG members to step up and see the issue through to resolution.

"This cannot go on any longer. We cannot lose sight of what's at stake here – the students and their future," said Ricky Campbell-Allen, Director of FYA's Centre for New Public Education. "Failure to act will see hundreds of thousands of disadvantaged young people let down."

Meeting on the third anniversary of the announcement of the Review of School Funding, the group was joined by Kathryn Greiner AO, expert panel member of the Gonski Review.

"The Prime Minister's announcement of the acceptance of the Gonski funding model for education in Australia is akin to the nation building time of the Snowy River scheme," said Ms Greiner. "The question Australians need to ask themselves is 'Can we afford *not* to have the Gonski recommendations implemented?', and the answer, simply, is no."

According to recent data from the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI), one in five Australian children are developmentally vulnerable when they start school. The relationship between Australian children's low socio-economic backgrounds and their educational outcomes is stronger than in other high performing OECD countries.

"All Australian Governments have a commitment to supporting young people to realise their full potential," said Dr Lisa O'Brien, CEO of The Smith Family. "Currently, significant numbers of young Australians, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are not achieving key educational outcomes."

Case study

Dulcie is an Indigenous grandmother who looks after her three grandchildren, Isiah (10), Jasmine (14) and Samuel (16). When Isiah started preschool he couldn't read or write. He was identified by the school as a child who needed extra educational support. Because of funding from The Smith Family, Isiah's reading and writing has improved – but he is still a long way behind other children his age. Dulcie believes that more support should be provided to disadvantaged children like Isiah, so they can start school on an equal footing with other children. This can only happen if more educational support is given to the kids who need it most.

-- Ends --

A copy of the letter, a photo of the letter signing and sound bites from attendees are available at

<http://bit.ly/XBfpqa>

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NGO leaders unite for disadvantaged students, calling on COAG to act – continued

Available for interviews:

- Dulcie Ritchie, referred to in case study
- Kathryn Greiner AO, expert panel member of the Gonski Review
- Ricky Campbell-Allen, Director, Centre for New Public Education
- Hon. Verity Firth, former NSW Minister for Education and Training and CEO, Public Education Foundation
- Dr Lisa O'Brien, CEO, Smith Family
- Robert Milliner, Chair, Foundation for Young Australians
- Cassandra Goldie, CEO, ACOSS
- Kasy Chambers, Executive Director, Anglicare
- Martin Thomas, General Manager, Advocacy and Social Policy, Mission Australia
- Mandy Burns, CEO, Ardoch Youth Foundation
- Jayne Meyer Tucker, CEO, Good Beginnings Australia

NGO Leaders for Educational Opportunity:

- Anglicare
- Ardoch Youth Foundation
- Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS)
- Beacon Foundation
- The Benevolent Society
- Brotherhood of St Laurence
- Dusseldorp Skills Forum
- Foundation for Young Australians
- Good Beginnings Australia
- Mission Australia
- Public Education Foundation
- The Smith Family
- Social Ventures Australia
- St Vincent de Paul Society
- UnitingCare Australia