

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCING MODELS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES - OVERVIEW

“A good education is not a cost but an investment”

1. BACKGROUND

The issues related to funding of students with disabilities are a major area of concern for teachers, educational leaders and parents/carers. All state/territory education have undergone or underdoing reviews of resourcing models.

2. KEY UNDERSTANDINGS

2.1. *Cost of Education*

The cost of educating students with disabilities who have special education needs is inevitable, greater than that of students generally, wherever the education takes place. (*Jenkinson, 2001*).

2.2. *Equity*

The concept of equity requires the provision of additional resources to enable students with disabilities who have special educational needs to participate in education on an equitable basis with the majority of students (*Cormack, 1997a*). Equity does not necessarily mean equivalence of funding, but it does imply the provision of adequate resources to ensure equal opportunities for learning. For some students, intensive support needs may mean a high level of resources to achieve equity; for others the need may be reduced.

3. WHAT ARE THE CONCERNS?

3.1. *Definition of Disability*

There is currently no nationally agreed definition of students with disabilities between State/Territories and the Australian Government. This leads to difficulties in terms of comparison of funding models and service provision across Australia. Families with children with disabilities can experience difficulties in accessing educational services when they relocate between States and Territories.

3.2. *Changing Nature of Disability*

There is increasing evidence of a changing nature of disabilities. There is evidence of an increasing incidence of students with disabilities. (*Carpenter 2006*) has identified a number of issues related to this increase (iodine deficiency and intellectual disability, poverty, alcohol and drug patterns during pregnancy). A

number of areas of disability have been noted for the increase in incidence internationally (eg autism, mental health).

3.3. "Capped" Funding Levels

Some of State/Territory Education Departments are exploring the option of tailoring their resources models to ensure budget risk is minimised. This involves "capping" of budget allocations and leads to actual reduced allocation to students as numbers increase (see 3.2).

4. WHAT ARE THE ATTRIBUTES OF A GOOD RESOURCING MODEL?

ASEPA has had a Resourcing Model Working Party investigating possible models since 2006. This working party has identified the following attributes of a good resourcing model.

4.1. *Allocation Based on Student Need.*

The allocation of resources to schools/programs must be based on the individual needs of each student. Currently States/Territories use a variety of instruments/student teacher ratios to reflect student needs. The student need allocations should be same no matter where the program is being delivered. There is a need for national research in this area.

4.2. *Contextual/Situational Allocation*

In addition to the individual student allocation there is a need to provide an allocation based on the context/situation of the student eg students in isolated areas.

4.3. *Transparent Models*

The model must be transparent to school leaders/staff and parents/carers. This will enable schools to plan with certainty and parents/carers to be aware of resource allocations/needs.

4.4. *Adjustment Timelines*

Adjustment timelines for loss or gain of students must ensure quality programs are maintained and student's needs are met. An adjustment period on a six monthly basis is recommended.

4.5. *Accountability for Funding and Student Outcomes*

The cost of funding programs for students with disabilities is inevitably greater than that of students generally. Resources provided for students with disabilities must be seen as "targeted" funding and must be delivered to programs supporting those students for which it is intended. All schools and systems must have in place accountability processes which ensure "targeting" occurs.

Demonstrating outcomes for students with disabilities is an area for continued research. Often generic tests (eg literacy) do not take into account the learning of all students, particularly those with disabilities and high support needs.

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