

# Schools Community Fund



Our children spend a significant part of their daily lives at school. It is where kids make friends, develop their social skills and learn life skills as well as getting an education. The well-being of children at school is of critical importance. Our schools should be places of nurturing, creative, and respectful learning environments. Schools need to be safe spaces to encourage learning and social development.

The Greens are proposing a Schools' Community Fund which would:

- Employ a person/s to build stronger school communities and assist students with matters other than learning.
- Provide grants of up to \$60,000 for three years for around 2,000 schools at a cost of approximately \$125 million a year.
- Replace the national chaplaincy program and initially target those schools that can demonstrate a particular need. If indeed the program is successful we would hope to extend it beyond the first 2000 schools.

This program would enable public schools to apply for funding to provide important student well-being and support services in their schools, according to the needs of their student body, geographic area and their existing staff.

## BACKGROUND

We all know our teachers do not just teach the academic curriculum but are often called upon to deal with a range of social, behavioural and health issues. Principals too can find themselves overwhelmed with the needs of their student body and administrative issues. Principals and teachers need assistance in supporting their students, connecting with parents, and dealing with all the issues that fall outside direct teaching and learning.

Schools are also important places in our community. They bring people together and can provide a focus point for community activity. The Australian Greens would like to see our public schools in the heart of their local communities.

# Schools Community Fund



## THE GREENS PROPOSAL

### The Schools' Community Fund

The Greens propose a program where public schools can apply for funding to provide important student well-being and support services in their schools. We recognise schools will have different needs depending on their student body, geographic area and their existing staff.

Some schools might need a student counsellor, whether they already have one or not. Other schools might find a youth worker with community building skills is more appropriate for their school community. Another school might need a person to liaise with external agencies such as community welfare departments, fosters agencies, or other non-government support agencies. Other schools may wish to develop stronger relationships with parents and the broader community.

We do not believe we know what is best for individual schools. It is principals, teachers, parents and students who know their schools best and what would add the most value to their school community.

The program would allow schools to employ a person or persons within a framework focused on assisting students with matters other than learning and building stronger school communities. The program would be sufficiently flexible that schools could decide what they needed within that framework.

People could be employed full time or part time and even shared between local schools. For example a primary school and secondary school in the same local area could share a community liaison officer to connect with parents and the broader community and to sell the benefits of their local public schools.

### Grants

The Schools' Community Fund would provide for grants of up to \$60,000 for three years for around 2,000 schools at a cost of approximately \$125 million a year.

The program would initially target those schools that can demonstrate a particular need. If indeed the program is successful we would hope to extend it beyond the first 2000 schools.

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### Replacing the chaplaincy program

The Schools' Community Fund will replace the Howard era National School Chaplaincy program. The Australian Greens are disappointed the Rudd Government decided to prolong the chaplaincy program rather than extend it to provide schools with the support they actually need. The Government extended the program without evaluating it, with an evaluation beginning only in March 2010.

The chaplaincy program is a limited ideological program that provides too little to schools to make the difference in creating the best school environments for our children. The fact that so many schools, around 2,700, subscribed to the chaplaincy program is a testament to the genuine need in schools for caring, support and community building roles.

The \$165 million over three years of the school chaplaincy program can be used to much better affect through the Greens' Schools' Community Fund. Schools are able to continue to employ staff currently funded under the chaplaincy program, if that best suits the school's needs.