

**Input to the *Need to Succeed* Symposium, Sydney Oct 2014.
Jesse Rowan, parent and
Chairperson, Broulee Public School P&C Gonski Sub-Committee**

Broulee Public School is a small public primary school on the NSW mid-south coast. Its P&C Association has recently formed a Gonski Sub-Committee to lobby systematically in support of the full 6 years of Gonski funding to be reinstated by the Federal Government. Believed to be the first school to have made this decision, Jesse Rowan, the committee's Chairperson and Vice President of Broulee Public School P&C, has some ideas for other parents and P&Cs who may wish to get active in showing their support for needs-based funding.

Ricky Campbell-Allen, Director, Centre for New Public Education, asked Jesse several questions on stage at the symposium.

1. Ricky: Describe Broulee Public School and how the issue of school funding has impacted on your school.

Jesse: Our school has a strong culture of collaborative consultation and involvement with its parents and educational community; we have great leadership, talented teachers and a switched-on, hard-working P&C. In 2013 Broulee Public was awarded the highly contested 'Director-General's Award for Excellence in Leadership and Innovative Programs' and is also recognised internationally for its lighthouse programs in digital technology.

Our P&C, like so many others, works hard to raise extra funds for resources which we believe should be basic in all schools. We have supported the school in purchasing a range of resources and equipment, but in particular in the school's investment in technology by contributing funds to purchase computers and iPads.

Broulee PS is engaging all children in their learning by using technology in creative ways to encourage higher order thinking skills. A Gifted and Talented program challenges our top performing students.

The school has shown reasonable performance in NAPLAN testing, and so struggles to find funding to continue the programs we know would work to help more children succeed. We are average, with very few higher socio-economic families. Our school has some indigenous children, and some who have learning difficulties.

Like other schools, Broulee has many other children who are under-performing, and as they go through school they get left behind. Their academic performances would be boosted by expanding our existing literacy and numeracy programs. We did not receive a huge amount of Gonski funding this year, but were looking forward to the full Gonski funding to be able to make a real difference in educational outcomes for our students.

The school started a trial of the MultiLit literacy program in 2010 for about 20 students in Years 3-6 whose reading was seriously behind their peers. MultiLit is a research-based remedial reading and spelling program from Macquarie University. Students chosen for the MultiLit program receive **one-on-one** tutoring, and the results, which are carefully measured over the past few years, have shown astounding improvements.

The school has continued and gradually expanded the program, but every year it is a struggle

to find enough funding to continue it. We can only afford to target children in severe need. The school has introduced a MiniLit program for Year 1 and 2, and would like to be able to extend this to Kindergarten, as we know that the earlier that children with special learning needs are picked up and supported, the less it will cost in the long run, in both economic terms and in the children's emotional costs on their personal learning journey.

Success breeds success. We want to extend these programs to more children who are under-performing, and also do similar programs to lift performance in numeracy. Social skills programs would also contribute to lifting learning outcomes. The full Gonski funding would allow our schools to do so much more.

From Broulee's experience, it seems that helping disadvantaged students has a flow-on effect for other students too – less bullying, less discipline problems, more time spent on task, greater success, happiness and well-being to all the children in our school.

2. Ricky: What action has your P&C taken regarding the issue of needs-based school funding?

Jesse: I have been involved as a member of this P&C for over 7 years. I wrote one of those 7000 submissions to the Gonski Review Panel. Over the years I wrote many letters on behalf of our P&C to politicians. I was invited to attend the AEU's Gonski Lobby Event in June this year in Canberra. This gave me an experience of uniting with teachers, principals, parents, indigenous people and union representatives from all over Australia in support of public education. My disappointment that Dr Peter Hendy (our federal representative for Eden-Monaro) refused our request to speak to his government on our behalf led me to further action, and to our P&C forming the Broulee PS P&C Gonski Sub-Committee with myself as Chairperson. The Committee includes one other parent and two experienced and excellent teachers.

One of the roles of a P&C Association is to lobby governments on behalf of parents to increase the quality of public education. The P&C Association Handbook and By-Laws state that P&Cs should 'promote the interests of public education'. We are urged to play a role in our democratic process. The Handbook states, 'P&C Associations are ...free to engage and lobby political parties and organisations on a wide range of issues. P&C Associations, however, are non-party political.'

Some of the activities our Gonski Sub-Committee has been doing are:

- writing letters to MPs
- meeting with MPs (Labor and Liberal so far) at their community meetings
- preparing our website to share resources such as links, letters to politicians, reports, submissions – [link to our website to come](#)
- starting a Scoop-it site to share articles and news about the political situation regarding Gonski reforms -

<http://www.scoop.it/t/p-c-s-for-gonski>

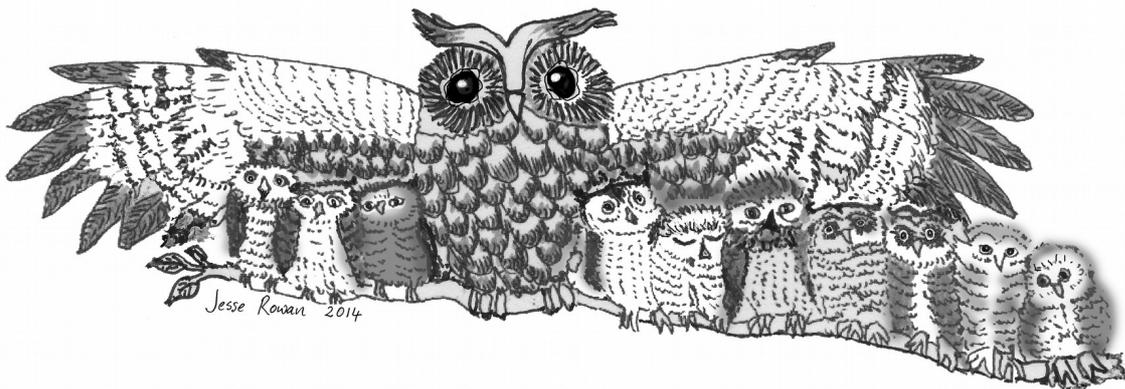
- writing to P&Cs in our surrounding area inviting them to our website and to respond online with contact details so we can join for group submissions to the PM or Education ministers and to share ideas, skills, support and encourage each other.
- writing media articles and school newsletter articles (under P&C heading)

3. Ricky: If parents take action in the funding debate, will they be listened to?

Jesse: Every voice speaking out contributes, but uniting as a P&C can make our voices more powerful. If enough P&Cs were to stand up in support of needs-based funding, politicians would have to notice. P&Cs are made up of people with various political beliefs, and if they can all reach agreement and act together on this issue, that is a powerful voice.

We don't have to convince people to change their voting habits; it's more important for us to show politicians from all parties that education funding is an election issue that they ignore at their own risk. However, in 'bellwether' electorates like ours (Eden-Monaro) where the representative won the seat by a narrow margin, we should be able to convince them to act on our behalf.

Parent and P&C Association voices are important in this funding debate, too. P&C members (which can include teachers) spread our wings wider than just our own children to support all the children in our schools, especially those who come from disadvantaged families. We know that by helping everyone succeed, we are making schools a better place for our own children too. The benefits in using education to lift disadvantage extend to the whole society.



4. Ricky: What tips would you offer those who want to show their support?

Jesse: Inform yourself to the point where action will flow. Look at the Broulee PS P&C Gonski website (above) for sources of background information, links and ideas. Just start with one idea and begin. It's not as difficult as it seems, and you get more efficient with practice. Aim to do a couple of things well, and just carry them through.

- Set up a Google Alert on relevant keywords (eg. education, Gonski, Piccoli, Pyne, education funding) and subscribe online to the Sydney Morning Herald.
- Sign the petitions in support of Gonski and encourage other parents to do so too.
- Write Media releases and Letters to the editor for local papers (and submit these to national papers, for not much extra work) - about the difference Gonski funding could make to our schools and our children's outcomes. Refer to our website for helpful links on writing for media and MPs.
- Read media releases and submissions from AEU, NSWTF, and state P&C organisations to become aware of and respond to the most critical issues - write your

P&C responses in words that reflect your own tone and your P&C's own voice.

- Write to MPs (Education Ministers, Shadow Education Ministers, the Prime Minister) to let them know your P&C's views on education funding.
- meet with any MPs who come to your area (state and federal, all parties) and represent your views at their community meetings – this also helps educate the public on the issue.
- Let your principal, teachers and parent body know what you are doing as a P&C - perhaps short paragraphs in your school newsletter under the banner of the P&C, to remain separate from the school. This will help other parents and our community to understand the difference needs-based funding would make for our children and their schools.
- Remember that every document that your P&C needs to read to approve will in fact be informing them, too!

Lastly, time ran out at the Symposium before I had the opportunity to say:

**Australia is in a caring crisis.
Let's make our politicians care about education funding.**

We must not let our apathy, lack of awareness or our busy-ness stop us from letting our politicians know that we want them to fund education according to need.

Jesse Rowan
Chairperson
Broulee Public School P&C Gonski Sub-Committee
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