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16th July 2008

The Hon Julia Gillard
Minister for Education
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Julia,
Congratulations on becoming our Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Employment, Workplace Relations, Education and Social Inclusion.

I would like to introduce the Australasian Association for Progressive and Alternative Education (AAPAE). We are people who are passionate about the value and place of diversity in education and the central role of learner choice and responsibility for their own learning.

We applaud the articulation in your recent articles and speeches in the Sydney Morning Herald May 29, 2008 of the recognition that diversity is a basis of strength, of the desire to change the education focus from the public, private divide, the need to focus on the needs of each student and combine that with social and educational equity, the need to have a serious conversation about the substance of curriculum and that schools need to become more flexible and innovative in the way we teach.

In quoting Professor John Hattie's conclusions from his analysis of studies examining the effects of different educational interventions on student learning. "It is what students bring to the table that predicts achievement and secondly what teachers know, do and care that is very powerful," you indicate an awareness that the relationships in the community of co-learners and the qualities and strengths they bring to this are fundamental to successful learning. What they do together at the table, and the equality of this fundamental relationship, which by implication includes the parents, is the essence of real learning and it is in that we place our confidence and our efforts.

The previous government placed many requirements on our learners linked to the Quadrennial Funding for 2003/2008 and gave very little notice of these. Many were contrary to the educational philosophies and practices of alternative, democratic, progressive schools and learning places. Through AAPAE's negotiations with the Minister he continued to allow individual parents the right to withdraw their children from standardized tests and "other requirements under the new legislation where there are concerns that run counter to alternative educational philosophies" (Letter from Office of Minister of Education, Science and Training 8th Feb 2005)

As you consider this next round of funding and embark on the review of the funding model in 2010/2011 we would like our interests and concerns to be recognized and addressed in these consideration.

We seek the continued right for our schools to value and acknowledge explicitly what each learner brings to the table through implementation of diverse curricula including, emergent, negotiated and natural learning.

We seek policies and implementation of assessment and accountability processes which recognize individual difference and learning styles, enable collaboration and co-operation rather than competition and which reduce rather than increase the comparisons between students and schools which often results in low self esteem, constricted learning and fearful parents and communities.

We seek funding which focuses on the needs of the individual and provides equity of access and is not dependent on requirements contrary to the philosophy of our diverse school communities.

In addition to the individual right of parents to withdraw their child from testing and any educational process which conflicts with their educational philosophy we seek the re-establishment of the right of exemption for whole school communities.

Your colleague Jenny Macklin in a speech to the Communities in Control Conference 16th June 2008 spoke of schools, preschools, child care centres and playgroups as places where parents and families could be used more inventively to reach out to the isolated. Community organisations are already central in the fight against social isolation. They are at the very frontline. Our schools and communities are ideal places for fulfilling this important role and we would like to be able to continue to do this and to provide education which is about the valuing and nurturing of positive human diversity, enabling the unique contribution that each individual can make to their community and the whole of our society.

Thank you for considering our views and we look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,
Cecelia Bradley (President AAPAE)

Related Websites
www.aapae.edu.au
www.idec2006.org
www.idec2007.org
www.idec2008.org

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