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MEDIA RELEASE

AEU DEMANDS CORRECTION OF SERIOUS ERRORS IN FISCAL REVIEW'S EDUCATION CLAIMS

The Australian Education Union ACT Branch has written to the ACT Legislative Assembly's Select Committee on Fiscal Sustainability, calling for serious factual errors and misleading comparisons in its interim report to be corrected. The report, prepared by economist Saul Eslake, claims the ACT spends too much on public education without achieving better results. This conclusion relies on selective use of data and measures that are known to produce misleading comparisons for the ACT.

Evidence shows ACT students are among the highest performing in the country

Eslake's student outcomes claim ignores the weight of national and international evidence. In the 2025 NAPLAN results, ACT students achieved the highest mean reading scores in the nation across Years 5, 7, and 9, and performed above the national average across all 20 domains. In the 2022 PISA assessment, ACT students led every other Australian jurisdiction in both reading and mathematical literacy. In the 2021 PIRLS study, ACT Year 4 students outperformed every other jurisdiction — with results comparable to top-performing nations including England, Finland, and Poland. ACT public schools also have the highest Year 10 to Year 12 retention rate in the country: 95.5% compared with a national average of 74.3%.

Instead of this evidence, Mr Eslake relies on a Year 12 certification rate that the Productivity Commission itself flags as not comparable across jurisdictions. It is derived by dividing the number of certificates issued by an estimate of the Year 12 student population rather than the number of students actually in Year 12.

The real problem is how Mr Eslake uses this measure. The certification rate is an all-sector measure. Yet Mr Eslake compares it against government school expenditure only. He is measuring what all schools produce but costing only what public schools spend. This is not a like-for-like comparison.

ACT compared to underfunded systems

The ACT is the only jurisdiction in Australia funding its public schools to 100% of the Schooling Resource Standard — the national minimum benchmark. Every other jurisdiction except the Northern Territory spends less because they remain below that standard. Comparing the ACT to chronically underfunded systems and concluding the ACT spends too much gets the analysis backwards.

The ACT also receives the lowest Commonwealth funding per government school student of any jurisdiction — \$3,562 compared with a national average of \$4,277. The ACT Government compensates for this from its own budget. That is not overspending. It is the predictable consequence of the funding structure.





Deep concerns for where analysis leads if unchallenged

The lesson from the data is not that the ACT should cut education funding. It is that other jurisdictions should follow its lead. Eslake's misrepresentation of education funding in this way is not just inaccurate — it is dangerous. Claims that the ACT spends "too much" on public education risk giving policymakers cover to reduce investment in the very supports that help students succeed.

If these arguments were accepted, the consequences would be felt directly in classrooms. Fewer teachers, larger class sizes, and reduced specialist supports would make it harder for students — particularly those who need the most support — to get the education they deserve.

ACT public education is not a system with money to spare. It is a system sustained by the professionalism, expertise and commitment of the educators who work in it every day. Cutting education funding would not remove inefficiency. It would cut directly into the staffing, supports and learning resources that students rely on every day.

The AEU calls on the Committee to seek independent verification of the Eslake report's claims before finalising its recommendations, and for errors to be corrected before the final report is submitted on 30 April 2026. A full list of corrections identified by the AEU can be found [here](#).

Quotes attributable to Angela Burroughs, AEU ACT Branch President:

"The report's headline finding is now circulating in the public debate unchallenged. That is damaging, because it is not true. The Committee must not base its recommendations on figures that are either wrong or seriously misleading"

"ACT public education is not a system with money to spare. It is a system being held together by the professionalism and goodwill of the people who work in it."

"Students are the ones who would pay the price if this kind of flawed analysis was used to justify cutting education funding."

"Cutting education funding would not trim fat — it would cut into the bone of a system that is already under strain, and it would be students who feel that impact first."

"Public schools are educating growing numbers of students with complex needs, and they rely on the teachers, learning support staff and resources that proper funding provides."

"When other states are still underfunding their schools, comparing them to a fully funded system and saying the ACT spends too much gets the story completely backwards."

"The real lesson here is not that the ACT should cut education funding. It is that the rest of the country should follow the ACT's lead and properly fund their public schools."

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