



20 August 2014

Dear School Council President,

The Australian Education Union (AEU), Parents Victoria, Victorian Principals Association, Victorian Student Representative Council and the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) as members of the Education Equity Coalition, are writing to you about the Victorian Government's decision to cut the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) from 2015 and to encourage your school to support the campaign for funding for a genuine replacement to the EMA.

More than 200,000 Victorian school students – almost one quarter of all students – currently receive the EMA, which helps low-income families meet school costs such as books, uniforms, excursions, camps, and IT equipment.

From 2015, this targeted support will no longer be available to support individual students and families. As part of the commitment to the Better Schools funding, the Victorian Government announced that the EMA would no longer be paid to families but would be redirected towards equity funding. In a context where Victorian public school communities are yet to be provided with clarity about the quantum of funding available to schools and whether additional funding is to be made available, we believe such funding should not come at the expense of specifically targeted support for low-income families.

The Education Equity Coalition is campaigning on this issue and brings together stakeholders from across schools, community organisations, students and families who are concerned about the Government's decision and its impact.

In the lead-up to the Victorian State Election our Coalition is calling on all parties to commit to a genuine replacement of the EMA – targeted assistance for families to ensure all children can participate fully in the range of educational opportunities available to them, regardless of their financial situation.

There are a number of ways you may consider supporting the campaign:

- VCOSS has developed the *Cover the Costs* campaign website to raise public awareness about the changes and to encourage individuals, agencies and schools to call for a better deal for families. Go to vcoss.org.au/cover-the-costs for information about the impact of the changes and for ideas about how you can take action.
- Use the information on the *Cover the Costs* website to promote the campaign in your school newsletter. Encourage families and school staff to write to local MPs.
- As a school council write to families receiving the EMA to let them know about the Coalition State Government's plan to cut the EMA.
- Consider whether your school council president and/or principal would be willing to talk to local or state media about the importance of the EMA and the impacts of the cut on families in your school community or write about it as a blog post on the *Cover the Costs* website.
- Write to your local MP to raise the issues citing the specific issues experienced by your school.
- Seek a meeting with your local MP to discuss the importance of the EMA at your school and the impacts of the cut on families in your school community.

To ensure all children and young people are able to participate at school we want all parties to commit to funding targeted support as soon as possible to deliver greater certainty to families, schools and community services.

Thank you for your support.

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