



Victorian Budget 2009

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Special Edition

Wednesday 6 May 2009

On Tuesday 5 May 2009, the Victorian Treasurer, The Hon John Lenders MLC, delivered the 2009-10 Budget. The main focus of the Budget was on the provision of jobs during the economic downturn. In his announcement, Treasurer Lenders reiterated that 'education is the Brumby Labor Government's number one priority' and claimed that 'we are delivering a record budget to our schools and education system to prepare young Victorians for the jobs of the future...Every parent knows the path to a rewarding job is a good education.' In a media release accompanying the Budget, the Minister for Education, The Hon Bronwyn Pike MLA, claimed that 'the Brumby Labor Government is delivering record funding to schools to give every Victorian child the opportunity to have the best start in life. By delivering to the education system new school buildings, the latest technology and more support for teachers, we are providing 21st century students with a modern education and the skills to get the jobs of the future.'

Treasurer Lenders announced an increase of \$1.7 billion in funding for education in the Budget, although much of this amount included funding provided by the Australian Government through the *Building the Education Revolution Program* and *National Partnerships*. After the 2007 Victorian Budget, Treasurer Lenders, the then Minister for Education, had claimed that 'the Bracks Government understands the importance of non-government schools in Victoria's education system' and that 'we understand all students in need require support'. Nonetheless, for the second year in a row, none of the new funding programs announced by Treasurer Lenders provide additional assistance for independent and Catholic schools. Budget targets for 2009-10 included with the Budget have indicated that the Victorian Government expects that funding for non-government schools will fall by \$4.5 million, from \$476.4 million in 2008-09 to \$471.9 million in 2009-10. The main reason for the decrease in total funding for non-government schools is the \$13.7 million reduction in funding provided to non-government schools under the *Grants to Upgrade Needy Non-Government Schools Program* in 2009-2010. Other funding for non-government schools increased by \$9.2 million in line with indexation and enrolment growth in the sector.

Government school capital upgrades

Continuing on from the Victorian Government's previous commitment to upgrade every government school in Victoria, the 2009-10 Budget included \$402 million to rebuild, renovate or extend 113 government schools, in addition to funding provided by the Australian Government. The funding included:

- \$128 million for 20 school modernisation projects
- \$92 million for 10 school regeneration projects
- \$47.3 million to construct replacement schools
- \$31 million to purchase land for the construction and expansion of schools
- \$25.1 million to construct four new schools in Donnybrook, Point Cook, Berwick and Wyndham Vale
- \$24 million to continue the construction of the two selective entry government schools in Berwick and Wyndham Vale
- \$19 million to replace 400 old portable buildings with newer relocatable classrooms
- \$16 million to update 18 small rural schools
- \$12 million to build three specialist science and mathematics centres
- \$7.6 million for 46 small schools to modernise or upgrade existing facilities.

Treasurer Lenders stated that 'not only will this help to prepare young Victorians for the jobs of the future, it will also create thousands of construction jobs across the state right now when we need them most'. Minister Pike stated that the funding was 'focused on building better schools, building the economy and building jobs in tough global economic times'.

Support for Government School Teachers

Following the announcement in 2008 of the new enterprise bargaining agreement between the Victorian Government and the Australian Education Union, the 2009-10 budget included an additional \$1.17 billion that had been allocated to improve teacher quality. While most of this money was linked directly to increased teacher salaries, Treasurer Lenders indicated that it would also be used to provide more support for teachers and students, by increasing planning time for teachers and tuition time for secondary school students. The Budget also included \$57.7 million to enable the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to continue to employ 200 teaching and learning coaches and 50 Ultranet workers.

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Other schools funding

The Budget has also provided:

- \$38 million to introduce educational reforms required to implement targets agreed to by the Council of Australian Governments in areas such as literacy and numeracy, teacher quality and indigenous education
- \$15.2 million to meet the increased demand for the VET in schools program. It is not clear whether any of this funding will be made available to students in non-government schools
- \$7 million to invest in computers in government schools
- \$2.5 million to continue the *Community Engagement Project*. The project was introduced under the 2008 Budget to inform parents and the communities about 'leading-edge teaching practices' in Victorian government schools.

Skills Funding

The Minister for Skills and Workforce Participation, The Hon Jacinta Allan MLA, announced that an additional \$120.9 million would be allocated under the Victorian Government's skills and employment package. While most of the funding was allocated to employment initiatives, it also included \$66.9 million to introduce a new student management system for Victoria's TAFE network and \$3 million to plan and design an Aviation Training Academy based at Tullamarine Airport.

Early Childhood Funding

Treasurer Lenders indicated that the Victorian Government would allocate \$13.6 million to employ additional staff in kindergartens, in response to increases in the demand for places. The funding will provide 4000 additional places in Victorian kindergartens.

Children's Health and Protection

The Minister for Community Services and Mental Health, The Hon Lisa Neville MLA, announced that \$160.8 million would be allocated to reforms to Out of Home Care to support vulnerable children who were not able to live with their families. This funding included additional home care placements for children removed from their families, recruiting 100 new live-in carers, expanding therapeutic treatment services for traumatised children, increases in the capacity of the after-hours child protection emergency and crisis response telephone service and additional sexual assault counselling services for children. Minister Neville also announced that \$21.3 million would be allocated to establish the *Early in Life* program, which would provide mental health diagnosis and treatment for children and adolescents. Included in the package will be the creation of two *Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services in Schools Early Action* teams. \$9 million has been allocated to reform early intervention and ongoing support services for children with disabilities and developmental delays. Finally, the Victorian Government allocated \$8.3 million to implement its new *Autism State Plan*. The plan provides additional access to mental health services for people with autism spectrum disorders, particularly children and adolescents, as well as additional support for pre-school and school-aged children. It is unclear to what extent non-government schools and students will have access to these services.

Volunteering

The Premier, The Hon John Brumby MLA, announced that \$9.3 million would be allocated to promote a volunteer strategy for community organisations. The strategy would promote community participation, particularly among young people, by running an awareness campaign to promote community participation, by providing resources to community organisations to attract volunteers and by creating a single online access point for volunteering.

Responses to the Budget

Media Release, The Hon Martin Dixon MLA, 06/05/09; Media Release, Association of Independent Schools of Victoria, 05/05/09; Media Release, Catholic Education Office, 05/05/09; The Age, Paul Austin, 02/05/09; The Age, Miki Perkins & Paul Austin, 04/05/09; The Age, Miki Perkins, 06/05/09

Both AISV and the Catholic Education Office (CEO) expressed their concern that the Victorian Budget had failed to acknowledge students in non-government schools. AISV's Chief Executive, Ms Michelle Green, indicated that 'the state government's claim that it is taking action on education to support all Victorian families in tough economic times does not ring true'. Ms Green announced that 'it is important that teachers and students in all Victorian schools – government and non-government – are provided with modern teaching and learning facilities. But the Victorian Government is ignoring the fact that independent schools receive only a fraction of the capital funding that governments invest in government schools...The state government should be following the lead of the federal government, which is allocating stimulus funding for schools that roughly matches percentages of enrolments in each sector – government, Catholic and independent.' AISV and CEO are continuing to negotiate with the Victorian Government over the details of the 2010-2013 quadrennial funding agreement for non-government schools. The Director of Catholic Education, Mr Stephen Elder, stated that CEO was seeking a contribution from the Victorian Government equivalent to an average of 25 per cent of the cost of educating a student in a Victorian government school and pointed out that the Victorian Coalition had already made a commitment to increase funding for Catholic schools of it won the 2010 state election. Ms Green stated that 'AISV looked forward to working with the Victorian Government and the Education Minister, Ms Pike, to deliver every child, every opportunity in education, irrespective of the school they and their parents choose.' The Shadow Minister for Education, The Hon Martin Dixon MLA, criticised the Victorian Government for including Australian Government funding initiatives in the Victorian Budget announcements. He stated that 'I've never seen an education budget document that is so full of references to Commonwealth initiatives, Commonwealth funding and Commonwealth programs. It's almost a preview of next week's federal budget.' Mr Dixon also noted that the Victorian Government had 'failed to match the Victorian Liberal Nationals Coalition's \$390 million pledge to improve funding for Catholic schools. Up to 25 per cent of Victorian children attend Catholic schools, and this budget provides no support for needy schools, students with disabilities, or information technology in Catholic schools.'