



Support for public system is essential



Russell Boyle

CANADIAN writer and intellectual John Ralston Saul said public education was the most important element in maintaining a democratic system.

"Highly sophisticated elites are the easiest and least original thing a society can produce," Mr Saul said.

"The most difficult and the most valuable is a well-educated populace."

Public schooling is the only chance most Australian children have to improve their lot in life.

Australia needs its education ministers to more vigorously support our

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public schools and to more vociferously articulate the social and economic imperatives of providing all children with equal access to a quality, life-enriching education.

The Federal Government supports the expansion of the private sector, especially through the proliferation of low-fee, taxpayer-assisted private schools.

Victoria's 27 wealthiest private schools will receive an additional \$91.2 million of federal funds over the next four years.

I can point to 21 Victorian public schools, mostly in low socio-economic areas, that have a much greater need for this money. And I can provide data, already in the public domain, that unequivocally demonstrates the urgency of this need.

Education is a public benefit. Just as there always will be an unequal distribution of income, wealth and power, so,

too, will there be inequality in education. But an equitable level of financial support for public education is a precondition for social stability. One way for the Government to ameliorate educational inequality is to enshrine equity in educational funding.

Another is by actively encouraging parents to support, rather than abandon, the nation's public schools.

Russell Boyle is an education consultant and writer. His VCE school performance database contains all VCE school performance data published by the *Herald Sun* since 1996.