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School resources suffer as wealthy families gifted laptops

Principals have slammed an initiative which has seen many wealthy families pocket much needed school resources.

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Classrooms have been stripped of laptops and iPads in a state government directive for schools to gift thousands of devices to students.

Principals have slammed the initiative where families, many wealthy enough to buy the electronic devices, have been handed class sets that had been given out on loan during remote learning.

Students returned the technology after [remote learning](#) but on December 17 Education Minister James Merlino directed schools to return devices to all families — even if they were not disadvantaged.

Australian Principals' Federation Victorian acting president Tina King said the edict was “causing resourcing issues” for some schools.

“They may be using them for robotics and STEM, and if they issued devices to students there could be gaps, and if they don't have the funding, they can't backfill,” she said.

The decision has also led to a tech shortage hitting 4100 new tutors. Principals, who now have “no spare devices” are campaigning for funding for tutors, who require tech to teach students under the catch-up initiative.



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A \$24.5m fund will be spent replacing devices, but schools say they would be left hundreds of dollars out of pocket as they were reimbursed through a depreciation scale.

If schools have a 2-3-year-old laptop worth \$800 new, they would be reimbursed \$380 at best towards a new computer.

Ms King said the initiative was welcomed “but there have been unintended consequences”.

“The timeline has been short and there has not been consultation to make the initiative successful,” she said.

Mr Merlino defended the move, saying the pandemic exposed a digital divide.

“I have a responsibility to address it and ensure no student, particularly those who are disadvantaged, falls behind,” he said.

“While I understand this may be challenging for some schools as this change is made, the immediate needs of these students is our first priority to ensure every child has access to the devices they need to continue to learn at home.”

Some principals have claimed the raid on devices could impact their ability to do NAPLAN online. But Mr Merlino said the department would work with schools to ensure they could do the test online.

Principals who spoke to the Herald Sun said primary students didn’t need devices at home to complete work.

“If I send home the 140 laptops by February 12, as directed, I then have to order new computers,” a principal said.

“If we try and go out there and buy these laptops and iPads, we are looking to April before we can get them.

“We are going to have at least 1000 primary schools all trying to get them at once.”