

# Information for P&C Council Delegates



## **ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations**

*The parent voice on public education*

ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations is the representative body  
for Parent & Citizen associations in the ACT.  
Council represents over 60,000 parents in 89 ACT public schools.

# Welcome to Council Delegates

---

Congratulations on your election as the Council delegate for your P&C association and welcome to Council!

This booklet is designed to help you with your new role. We have included information to help you represent your P&C and parents at your school, as well as background about Council and the services we offer to P&Cs.

More details about running P&Cs can be found in our extended booklet of Information Sheets (available at [www.actparents.org.au](http://www.actparents.org.au)).

Please contact our office if you have questions about your P&C or your role as Council delegate. If you would like to meet with office staff, please call to arrange a meeting time.

We hope you enjoy your time with Council and please know that your volunteered time is valued. Council looks forward to working with you throughout the year.

# Table of Contents

---

About Council .....	4
Creating Change.....	6
The Role of Council Delegates.....	7
What to expect at Council Meetings .....	8
Council policy.....	10
Raising concerns constructively .....	11
Glossary of terms.....	13



The ACT Council of P&C Associations (Council) is the peak body for P&C associations in public schools in the ACT. All P&Cs are members.

We are a representative organisation whose objectives are to:

- foster a quality public education system
- provide support services for our member P&Cs and
- make representation to government on behalf of parents in government schools.

Council is a truly grass-roots organisation and is guided by the consensus of members. Council provides a structure through which parent views are consolidated. This allows all P&C associations to participate in the discussion of system-wide matters, and to inform these discussions with their experience within specific school contexts.

## Council structure

Each member P&C elects delegates to Council. These delegates meet at regular Council meetings to discuss issues of concern, voice the views of parents at their schools and receive information of interest to parents to relay back to their school community.

The Executive members of Council are elected from these delegates at Council's Annual General Meeting in November. The Executive are responsible for the work of Council between general meetings. All major decisions taken by the Executive are referred to a general meeting of Council for ratification.

## Council activities

The activities of Council include consultation with members, advocacy and representation, lobbying government, information dissemination, supporting P&Cs, and research and policy development. These are discussed in more detail below.

### Consulting and representing parents/Lobbying government

Council gathers the views of members and then represents their views and interests to government and in the media. We make representations to government through:

- regular, direct meetings with the Minister for Education and senior officials in the Education Directorate (EDU) to raise issues and have input into emerging policies
- making formal, written submissions to official inquiries and government bodies, including the ACT annual budget.

Our members are also involved in many decision-making groups and government panels and committees where they represent parents. Examples include the Disability Education Reference Group (providing parent input on disability issues), and the School Transport Liaison Committee. Representative roles like these provide an interesting insight for parents and a unique opportunity to have your say. Any delegate can nominate for these representative positions.

In representing parents, Council is guided by a formalised set of Council policies, rather than the personal opinion of individual Executive members. These policies on a huge range of issues have been agreed to at Council meetings over the years. This allows Council

representatives to present the consensus view of members to the media and government.

### **Informing parents**

As well as providing information of interest to parents at its regular meetings, Council's magazine and newsletters are a major source of information on current educational issues, developments in educational policy and the work of Council. *ParentACTion* magazine is distributed once a term to all ACT public schools and available electronically on our website ([www.actparents.org.au](http://www.actparents.org.au)). Our fortnightly ebulletin 'Council Communicator' is sent to P&C office-bearers and delegates at all schools. Members of the community can also subscribe via our website.

### **Helping P&Cs**

Council assists P&Cs with all aspects of running their associations and engaging parents via:

- an extensive range of information and resources, detailed information sheets, templates and pro-formas, all provided on our website. They assist with running meetings, attracting volunteers, applying for grants, running canteens and much more
- free training workshops for P&C office bearers
- providing insurance at below market rates
- advocating to resolve school issues.

### **Research**

Our research forms the basis of submissions, policy development and information for parents about changing practices in schooling.

### **Connecting nationally**

Council is an affiliate of the Australian Council of State Schools Organisations (ACSSO) which is the national government-school parent organisation. ACSSO represents the interests of public-school parents throughout Australia to government and committees at the federal level. Through our membership, Council can lobby and comment on federal educational issues.



Council responds to delegate concerns and represents parents to successfully bring about change.

Recent examples of Council's lobbying efforts and successes include:

- **Covid-19 response:** Council heard the views and experiences of delegates and parents following the move to remote learning during the covid-19 pandemic. Particular concerns around schools' communication to parents on the range of new procedures and hub-school model were passed on the Education Directorate resulting in improved.
- **More school librarians:** We asked for more school librarians in the 2020 election. The government has committed to scholarships to train 20 new teacher librarians.
- **Air Quality:** Council worked with the Education and Health Directorates on guidelines for managing bush fire smoke. We were successful in having the guidelines published.
- **Hazardous materials in schools:** in the 2020 ACT Election, Council raised the issue of hazardous material in schools and sought a commitment to remove hazardous materials. Our call for expert-led management resulted in the establishment of an Expert Advisory Panel.
- **Parent Engagement Grants:** In response to requests to increase P&C's capacity to engage and upskill more parents from their school communities, the Education Directorate announced grants worth \$800,000 for P&Cs in 2020.
- **Access to school psychologists:** Council was instrumental in the government decision to employ 20 additional school psychologists in public schools, following complaints by school P&Cs.
- **Addressing violence in schools:** By taking parent concerns repeatedly to the Education Directorate, we were able to drive the creation of a joint project aimed at reducing and better managing violence in schools. This work is ongoing and we expect changes to be implemented in schools.
- **ACT Education Directorate complaints handling process:** Council has pushed for improvements in the way the Directorate responds to complaints and communicates with complainants. EDU has now reviewed its complaint management process.
- **Whole school approach to relationships and sex education:** Council is part of a coalition working to develop a new approach to teaching respectful relationships and sex education in our schools.
- **More youth and social workers in schools:** Council strongly advocated to increase the numbers of youth workers and social workers in schools, leading to improvements in this area.
- **Better bus/tram service for schools:** We secured improvements for school travel in the ACT's reviewed 2019 Bus Network.



# The Role of Council Delegates

The delegate is a vital link between Council and the broad base of parents' opinions on the education of their children. Delegates relay information between Council and the P&C. As such, delegates keep their school community informed of what is happening at Council and in public education. They also keep Council informed about parent views and issues at their school so we can effectively advocate for parents to government.

It is important that delegates attend both their own P&C association meetings as well as Council meetings.

Each ACT P&C elects one (primary schools) or two (high schools and colleges) delegates to Council. P&C associations can also appoint an alternate delegate so that if delegates cannot attend a Council meeting, the P&C is represented by another parent.

To keep up with Council happenings we recommend that as well as attending meetings, you read our publications. You will automatically be subscribed to our electronic bulletin ('Council Communicator') when your P&C returns its Office Bearers Contact form after your own P&C AGM, informing us that you are their nominated delegate.

## What does the Council Delegate do?

### Gather Issues

Delegates need to gather issues from their school communities and bring them to us for possible action. We suggest that a standing item on your P&C agenda should be created so that parents can bring concerns for delegates to pass on.

### Attend Council meetings

Council delegates attend the regular meeting of Council. At these meetings they report on issues at their school. Meetings are advised by email to delegates and the meeting schedule is available on the calendar on our website. See page 8 for more information on types of Council meetings.

### Report Back

Keep your P&C informed of Council activities. Council meetings also include a range of announcements and new information of interest to parents and P&Cs, from grants to training opportunities, which delegates can pass on to the benefit of their association.

### Collect information for Submissions and Policy Consultations

Council often seeks parent feedback on current issues and the delegate is an essential link to your school community. Delegates may also assist in gathering information for writing submissions or commenting in government policy.



# What to expect at Council Meetings

Council meetings are mostly kept informal and informative and involve whole group or small group discussions. One Council general meeting per term is a 'Hot Topics' meeting. A 'Hot Topics' meeting allows more time for discussing those issues which are most important to P&Cs currently. Council will call for agenda items prior to each meeting. Delegates are welcome to submit any school issue they would like to raise.

At Council meetings we encourage delegates to consider the needs of everyone who comes to the meeting by:

- focusing on issues not on personalities
- keeping the discussion on track
- listening to all members' points of view
- avoiding speaking at great length
- feeling free to ask for explanations
- avoiding private conversations while someone else is speaking
- by arriving on time to avoid the meeting going over time.

Sometimes a formal vote is needed at a Council meeting for either a particular motion, or to elect Council representatives and Executives.

## Voting rights at Council meetings

Only delegates (or appointed alternate delegate) of affiliated associations (P&Cs who have paid their membership fees) can vote at Council meetings.

Voting rights are the same at General, Special, and Annual General Meetings and at policy conference. Each registered delegate is entitled to one vote. Please note that even if you are a registered delegate for more than one P&C, you are still entitled to only one vote. If a P&C's full complement of delegates is not present at a meeting, then the P&C's registered alternate delegate(s) may vote to make up the difference.

## Council Meetings

### General Meetings

General meetings are held twice each school term, on the fourth Tuesday of the month. They start at 7pm and end at 9:30 sharp. A standing agenda item 'Issues from Schools' enables delegates to raise matters on behalf of their own school communities for discussion and possible action.

Delegates are responsible for representing the views of their P&C association at these meetings.

General meetings provide an excellent opportunity to hear the voices of parents from across ACT public schools. All parents and carers are welcome at Council meetings where they can exchange information and benefit from the knowledge of others.



A range of educational and school issues are discussed at meetings and there is often an invited speaker to address the meeting on a key issue.

### **Policy Conference**

Council policy is formulated at the annual Policy Conference in Term 3 which provides a forum to discuss new policies, update others and review interim policies decided by Council in responding to new developments and issues. There's more about the Policy Conference at page 10.

On behalf of their P&Cs, delegates are required to consider any amendments or new policy statements and vote at the policy conference.

### **Council's Annual General Meeting**

Council's Annual General Meeting (AGM) is held on the fourth Tuesday in November. Council Executive officers are elected at these meetings to direct the activities of Council. Council delegates are eligible to be elected to Executive positions at this meeting, and also nominate for the various government panel and committee positions available as parent representative.



Council's Policy Document outlines our official position on key education directions. Council policy

- represents the collective views of P&C associations throughout the ACT
- reflects the values and concerns of the members of P&C Council
- guides the activities of Council and its representatives
- makes representative and authoritative responses possible
- guides the position of our delegates to ACSSO (Australian Council of State School Organisations) which is the national organisation of parents in government schools;
- informs the community of the views of this Council.

The document is on our website: [www.actparents.org.au/index.php/about-us](http://www.actparents.org.au/index.php/about-us). Printed copies of the policy document are also available from our office.

No P&C association is bound by the policies of P&C Council. They may, however, wish to consider them when making decisions on local school or system issues.

## Policy Conference

Formation of Council policy is a continuous process, responsive to emerging educational issues. The annual Policy Conference in September is the forum to discuss new policies, update others and review any interim policies which may have been decided by the Council Executive in response to new developments.

Members can provide amendments to Council's policy document in the lead up to the Policy Conference. P&Cs will be asked to consider new or amended policies, via their delegate, and these will be debated at the annual Policy Conference.

Amendments will be ratified at the Policy Conference through a formal voting process.



# Raising concerns constructively

Problems and concerns do arise in schools and delegates can be a focal point for parent comment. It is worth remembering that most issues can be dealt with at the school level. Only some will need to be taken further via Council.

Use this as a guide to help parents with issues and to know at what point to bring issues to Council.

## Raising concerns with a teacher

You should raise any problems you may have with the learning program or your child's wellbeing with their classroom or subject teacher. This gives the teacher a chance to respond and, if necessary, work with you to resolve it. Remember that teachers will be more prepared to listen and to act upon problems and concerns if they know they are supported. This means you have a responsibility to help and to give credit when it's due!

### Step 1: Get a good grasp of the problem

Before you visit the school, work out what it is that is really bothering you. Concentrate on describing the problem clearly. This will help you decide whether approaching the teacher is warranted. The teacher will respond best when your facts are correct and you show your willingness to be part of the solution. 'Shooting from the hip' only encourages defensiveness.

### Step 2: Arrange an interview with the class (or subject) teacher

Any problems deserve more than a few hurried words before the bell goes, so make an appointment. Mentioning the reason for the appointment is not only courteous but also promotes efficient use of valuable time by giving the teacher an opportunity to prepare for the meeting in the same way that you have.

### Step 3: Discuss what's bothering you

- Don't leave the teacher guessing. Observe the social niceties but remember the real purpose of your visit. A friendly, relaxed, but business-like manner will work best.
- State your problem calmly and clearly.
- Show that you want to be part of the solution by expressing your concern and asking what can be done.
- Avoid intimidating behaviour such as shouting, aggressive body language, sexist or racist language, making threats, etc. Work at staying calm and objective. This can be hard to do where the welfare of your child is concerned.
- Listen at least as much as you talk. You might learn something new!
- Keep an open mind.
- Expect to compromise. Summarise agreed actions so that you and the teacher understand the important points in the same way.
- Arrange a follow-up meeting if necessary.

### Step 4: Carry out the action you agreed to take

Depending on what was discussed, the sooner you start on an agreed course of action the better. Be patient with your child and the classroom teacher - changes don't happen overnight. Most meetings with the teacher result in satisfactory outcomes.

## School-based concerns

Occasionally you may want to address your problem or concern to someone other than the classroom teacher. This may be the case when:

- you have already approached the classroom or subject teacher but no satisfactory resolution could be arrived at
- you believe that it is a school rather than classroom matter or your problem or concern is not about a member of the school's teaching staff
- the matter relates to student wellbeing or social issues.

In secondary schools, there are other staff members you might contact such as a pastoral care teacher, year co-ordinator, student welfare officer or subject co-ordinator. The above steps recommended for meetings with class teachers still apply in these situations. Some additional suggestions are:

- try to get the problem resolved at the lowest possible level of authority
- involve as few people as possible, but having support can be helpful
- avoid discussing the issue with others while your child is present
- aim for a co-operative, problem-solving approach. (This does not mean that you should minimise the importance of your problem or concern or be less tenacious in your efforts to do something about it. You can be determined and reasonable at the same time.)

Using these avenues will help you to resolve most of your school-based problems and concerns in a satisfactory way.

Alternatively, concerns of a less personal nature (not specific to just one student) can be brought to P&C meetings for discussion with parents and principal. If the meeting is unable to resolve the issue at the school level (for example, it is dependent on system-level policies, not able to be changed by the school) the P&C may decide to refer the issue to Council via the Council delegate.

## Council addresses concerns across the school system

Council is a strong advocate for parents and represents their concerns at a system level to the relevant Minister and government Directorate. At each Council General Meeting, a place is reserved on the agenda for parents, usually through the school's council delegate, to voice concerns from their school community. Parents should first bring an issue to their P&C meeting which may then resolve to bring it to Council.

## Complaints resolution

If your concern is not adequately addressed, however, the ACT Education Directorate (EDU) has a formal complaints resolution process. The best avenue is to submit your complaint to Families & Students, Complaints & Feedback [Education Directorate Contact Form](#) (via Access Canberra) or phone [\(02\) 6205 5429](tel:0262055429). Be clear about the problem and what your ideal resolution is. Give as much information as possible.

### What happens to a complaint?

It is EDU's policy to assign an independent officer to examine your complaint who will speak with the school. If you don't think the person dealing with your complaint is independent, you can ask for your complaint to be assigned to someone else. If the complaint is resolved, but not satisfactorily, you can apply in writing to have the resolution reviewed. EDU are required to keep your complaint private.

# Glossary of terms



Every field has its own jargon and schools are no exception. Here are some acronyms you may encounter in Council documents and at meetings.

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Term</b>
<b>ACARA</b>	Australian Curriculum Assessment Reporting Authority
<b>ACER</b>	Australian Council of Educational Research
<b>ACSSO</b>	Australian Council of State School Organisations
<b>AEU</b>	Australian Education Union (teachers)
<b>AITSL</b>	Australian Institute for Teaching & School Leadership
<b>APFACTs</b>	Association of Parents and Friends ACT (Independent schools parent body)
<b>AST</b>	ACT Scaling Test
<b>ASQA</b>	Australian Skills Quality Authority
<b>ATAR</b>	Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (replaced UAI in 2009)
<b>BSSS</b>	Board of Senior Secondary Studies (responsible for the accreditation and certification of Years 11 and 12 courses)
<b>CIT</b>	Canberra Institute of Technology
<b>COAG</b>	Council of Australian Governments
<b>DET</b>	Department of Education and Training (Federal)
<b>EALD</b>	English as an Additional Language
<b>EDU</b>	Education Directorate (ACT)
<b>GSEC</b>	Government Schools Education Council
<b>IECB</b>	Indigenous Education Consultative Body (ACT)
<b>ILP</b>	Individual Learning Plan
<b>NAPLAN</b>	National Assessment Plan—Literacy and Numeracy
<b>OSHC</b>	Outside School Hours Care
<b>PBL</b>	Positive Behaviours for Learning program
<b>PIPS</b>	Performance Indicators in Primary Schools
<b>UAI</b>	University Admissions Index (formerly Tertiary Entrance Score)



**ACT Council of  
Parents & Citizens  
Associations**

*The parent voice on public education*