



## Vote 1 ACT public schools

**Council is gearing up for the ACT election, writes Policy Officer Maclaren Wall.**

The 2016 federal election is now well and truly over, but that doesn't mean Council's lobbying efforts are done for the year. On October 15 Canberrans will once again go to the polls, this time to elect members of the ACT Legislative Assembly.

Council has been meeting with politicians from all major parties, ensuring that public education will be a major issue in the lead up to the election. Our future well-being as a territory depends upon the development of a public school system of the highest quality, recognising the human and educational rights of all children.

This year Council will be focusing on five main themes which we believe represent the most pressing issues for parents, P&Cs and public schooling in the ACT. These are themes which recur again and again in our general meetings with school delegates.

### **Support for every student**

Council strongly believes that we need to provide for the maximum development of every student, without distinction. We're asking for the full and unconditional implementation of all recommendations outlined in the *Expert Panel Review into Students with Complex Needs and Challenging Behaviours*, including an adequate ratio of school psychologists. We'd like a funded

*Continued on page 3*

ACT public schools need	How the major parties deliver		
	Greens	Labor	Liberal
Support for every student	B-	B-	B-
Safe school roads	B-	B-	B-
Strong parent bodies	B-	B-	B-
Better facilities	B-	B-	B-
Co-ordinated management	B-	B-	B-

***Our Education Report Card will help parents assess the major parties on their public education credentials. We're asking P&Cs to help us distribute these widely, once we have finished grading our politicians!***

### **Inside this issue**

From the President	p. 2
Planning for more students	p. 4
Getting grants	p. 6
Youth focus on sustainability	p. 7
At our P&C	p. 10
Welcoming migrant parents	p. 12
Dates to remember	p. 12

# From the President



John Haydon

This issue of ParentACTion contains stories about Council's election lobbying and a very successful forum held jointly with the ACT Principal's Association on how best to cater for the needs of migrant and refugee children in schools.

Schools need funding to operate and the political decisions at the federal and territory level largely determine the funding available, so our lobbying is important. You may not be aware but Council meets once a term with the ACT Education Minister where we are able to raise any issues of concern, for example road traffic safety around schools, the maintenance of school buildings, the provision of specialist teachers, and so on.

We also have a separate program of meetings, also once a term, with the senior executive of the Education Directorate, when we are able to raise issues with the executive, seek answers to questions and provide feedback on what we understand to be the views of parents and carers.

Our minutes of both meetings are provided to Council's executive and to those school-delegates attending Council General Meetings.

Council greatly appreciates both opportunities to put forward your point of view, and indeed we could not really fulfil our role as the representative of parents of carers of ACT school students without such access. So how do we decide what issues and points of view to put forward?

Most but not all of the issues we raise come from our regular meetings with delegates from the various schools. These are held twice each term and open to all parents to attend (check the back page for upcoming meeting details). If you have any particular concerns please inform

the office and we will consider them for additions to the appropriate meeting agenda.

Another important mechanism in our ability to put forward the views of parents is Council's comprehensive policy document. This outlines Council's position on a whole range of education issues and arenas and is a living document, built up over time in response to agreed positions for Council to adopt. This is invaluable when we are asked, either in meetings or by the media, where we — and parents — stand on a particular issue, or our reactions to new developments or Government policies.

This essential policy document is currently under review and all schools are invited to be part of the process. We'll be discussing updates and changes to our policy at our next General Meeting (August 23) and then deciding and ratifying changes at our annual Policy Conference, this year to be held on October 25 (for meeting details see the *Dates to remember* on the back page). Why not come along and have your say?

Turning to the forum on migrant and refugee children (see the back page for the full story), there is substantial diversity in all our schools: students from overseas backgrounds, indigenous students, students with disabilities, with learning difficulties, students gifted with special talents, and students with challenging behaviour. By meeting the particular needs of these groups we actually help all students in the school by making for a more harmonious learning environment.

I congratulate Vice-president Viv Pearce for her unstinting efforts in organising the forum and for her tireless efforts to help the various groups above. ●

# Vote 1 ACT public schools

*continued from front page*

program to attract and retain specialist teachers (including those who focus on music, art, science, literacy, numeracy and teacher librarians) and the continued implementation of the Gonski school funding arrangements. Government should also investigate whether an assets test should be applied to extremely wealthy private schools receiving government support.

Council is also calling for school liaison officers to assist in engagement in schools with high numbers of migrant families and a central pool of funding for interpreters in schools.

## **Better school facilities**

Many of our schools are starting to show their age. Council believes the standard of public school facilities and services in the ACT needs to be significantly improved across the board so that no school is left behind. We're lobbying for an acceleration of the public school maintenance program so that within two years, all schools are brought up to the same standard of facilities and presentation. IT infrastructure is also an important issue and Council is calling for further investment in infrastructure and equipment, including funding devoted to ongoing maintenance costs and computer procurement.

## **Safe school roads**

Almost every parent has witnessed dangerous behaviour on and around the roads near ACT schools. Council believes that traffic congestion around our schools needs immediate action. The safety of students needs to be a priority.

We're asking for strategies to be developed and implemented that ensure schools have adequate infrastructure in place to deal with these issues. Council is specifically calling for funding for a trial of supervised school crossings and further funding for other traffic and road safety measures around schools (including calming measures and flashing lights/signs).

Importantly, Council wants more of a focus on ensuring that each arm of government consults

the community when planning changes to schools or the urban environment. Many of the problems faced by schools (lack of parking, poor traffic flow) could have been dealt with early in the planning process.

## **Strong parent bodies**

P&Cs play an important role within schools. Finding and retaining volunteers is the greatest problem facing P&C associations and Council believes that more can be done to help P&Cs to continue to make a positive impact on public schooling in the ACT.

We are calling for a strategy to boost volunteer numbers in schools, improved funding for encouraging parent participation in school decision making, strategies to connect suitably qualified volunteers with P&Cs to help manage the complexities of the association as a small business, and using school administrative staff to provide backroom support for P&C associations.

## **Co-ordination and management**

Sometimes, reality does not match up with theory. Government agencies need to talk to each other more so that ACT schools continue to be the best in the nation. Accordingly, we need to radically rethink the way schools are managed. Council is calling for centralised direction from the Education Directorate on matters of common concern for all schools, rather than being devolved to school principals under the autonomy model. Safe guards need to be in place to avoid loss of teacher quality and education standards which can fall behind in the autonomous model.

Council also thinks inter-directorate coordination needs to be improved. Sometimes schools and parent bodies need to make multiple representations in order to attract the attention of government. This needs to change.

Other than these matters, Council will continue to promote views in line with our official policy.

*Continued over the page*

# Vote 1 ACT public schools

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## Report cards

As always, Council will be releasing an official 'report card' on the major parties, assessing their policies in line with Council's priorities. We're also organising posters and online resources to further inform voters. We're asking P&Cs to help us distribute these to reach as many parents as possible. Keep an eye on the mail – we've sent you a form to fill in to tell us how you can help, or find it on the election page of our website.

## Have your say, ask your questions!

To ensure that our public school system gets the attention it deserves, all parents are invited to attend our **Election Forum on September 1** (see back page for details). This is a 'Q&A' style event where you can ask candidates from the Liberals, Labor and the Greens your pressing questions about schools in the ACT.

For more information on how your P&C can get involved during the election, check the election page on our website or contact the office. ●

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# Planning for more students

**School capacity and crowding have recently been hitting the headlines. Directorate staff spoke at Council's last meeting to explain how schools plan for new enrolments and manage their numbers, reports Council's Communications Officer, Janelle Kennard.**

Many public schools across central Canberra, Belconnen and Gungahlin are feeling the enrolment pinch, with parents at some schools concerned about overcrowding, large classes, and school spaces such as libraries and staff rooms being used for classes.

Projections of each school's expected enrolments over the next few years were released by the ACT Government last month. According to the figures, four schools are expected to exceed student capacity in the near future: Giralang Primary School, Gold Creek Junior School, Harrison Junior School and Telopea Park Senior School.

Long-term enrolment pressure has also been felt at Garran where the P&C has actively campaigned for more room, and parents at Hawker are concerned about class sizes and future planning.

Garran Primary School will receive a demountable classroom after almost two years of struggling to house its students. The school has

been at capacity for some time, with at least one class reported to have 37 students and classes being taken in the staff room or library.

Council welcomes funding allocated in the recent ACT budget to expand schools with increasing enrolments including Harrison School, Neville Bonner Primary, Palmerston Preschool and Amaroo School.

To better understand how the public school system anticipates changes in enrolment and plans for school capacity to match student numbers, Council invited Robert Gotts, Director of Planning and Performance at the Education Directorate to address our last General Meeting. Parents at the meeting were also able to ask Robert questions about capacity, enrolments and planning at their schools.

From what we heard at the meeting, it is clear that despite parent frustration, the Directorate is working to balance demand and capacity across the school system and try to ensure school enrolments are within capacity. They aim to have just the 'right' number of school places – not too few (they must provide free and open school places to all who wish to attend and preferably in the child's neighbourhood) and not too many (this would be expensive, according to Robert).

Robert gave a comprehensive presentation on the information, statistics and considerations the Directorate use to predict school enrolments and also how school capacity is managed.

### **Predicting enrolments**

Public school enrolments are increasing – up by 15% in the past five years – and are likely to continue to increase. The Directorate uses a range of information to predict future enrolment numbers including birth data, land releases, house sales, transport routes, and building Development Applications. They work with land development and planning authorities to determine how schools will be impacted by urban growth. The enrolment predictions are later compared to actual enrolments so that predictions can be checked and improved.

The team also analyses enrolment data to understand the movement of students into and out of the public system, from one Canberra region to another, and so on. This helps them to better understand changes to enrolment and improve plans and predictions for the future.

### **Planning for enrolments**

Robert told the meeting that land is reserved for possible school sites very early in the suburb planning process. Existing schools work with the Directorate to make adjustments ahead of predicted enrolment booms in order to manage their enrolments and capacity (see below).

The planning team also work with roads and traffic departments to plan parking and crossings or overpasses around new schools (taking into account where students for that school are likely to live).

### **Managing capacity**

Capacity figures for each school have recently been updated to include all learning spaces and all students. This included a change to the definition of capacity to match all enrolments, including, for example, special units where fewer students occupy a teaching space. The specific

capacity for that unit is now counted, whereas previously students in such units were not counted in the school's capacity.

If schools come under enrolment pressure, the following steps are taken.

- Implement a School Enrolment Management Plan to guide enrolments, for example, excluding out-of-area enrolments.
- Examine the use of school facilities to ensure space is being used most efficiently, which may include minor works to convert under-utilised areas to classroom spaces.
- Adjust the PEA (priority enrolment area) to reduce the feeder areas for the school, such as has recently happened for Garran Primary where students from O'Malley are no longer 'in area'. Robert stated that this is a long process and involved community consultation in recognition that parents may have secured housing in anticipation of attending a certain school.
- Increase the capacity of the school. If the data projections show that enrolment pressure is likely to be a temporary 'hump' then temporary additions, such as demountables are used. If, however, the enrolment increases are expected to be on-going, permanent changes are made. For example new buildings are constructed, as will now occur in some Gungahlin schools as announced in the ACT budget.
- Construct a new school.

To those listening to Robert's presentation, it was clear that a lot of data analysis and planning is happening for our schools. Council hopes to see things continue to improve and school facilities be well matched to need.

Parents with continuing concerns about school planning or overcrowding are invited to contact Council. We can seek answers to your questions from Robert and other Directorate staff. •

*Find projected enrolments for all schools at:  
[www.education.act.gov.au/school\\_education/enrolling\\_in\\_an\\_act\\_public\\_school](http://www.education.act.gov.au/school_education/enrolling_in_an_act_public_school)*

# Getting grants

Grants are a great income source if you can negotiate the application process. Here are a few tips to help you along the way.

## Get your 'story' straight

Know your project well and believe in it. Read the grant's funding guidelines carefully and make sure your project is a good fit. Craft the story of your project to match the grant. Be sure you're ready to accept a grant and finish the project within the timeframe.

## Dot your 'i's

Each grant has its own application format. Follow this exactly and provide all information needed. If you are not sure, most grants have a contact for questions and some government agencies hold information session on how to apply. Check the due date (late applications are rarely accepted) and leave yourself plenty of time to gather all the information and fill in the paperwork.

## Cross your 't's

Prepare your budget carefully, get quotes and include enough detail to make the granting body confident about how the money will be spent. Check any exclusions (eg most won't fund wages). Include in-kind contributions (such as volunteer time, donated goods), but don't confuse in-kind and dollar funding and be clear what part of your project you are asking the grant maker to fund.

## You've won? Well done!

Now there is a lot to do! Keep careful track of the project, your spending and budget. Most grants need to be acquitted at the end (where you show how the funding was actually spent) so keep all receipts and records well organised. If things go wrong contact the granting body and be truthful. Most will allow a change of use of the funds. Send in your paper work on time – you may want to apply for another grant in future! ●



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# Youth focus on sustainability

**This year's Parliament of Youth on Sustainability heard great ideas from our youngest 'parliamentarians', writes organiser Anne Quinn.**

The ACT Legislative Assembly could seriously consider some of the student proposals to reduce Canberra's ecological footprint that came out of the 2016 SEE-Change Parliament of Youth on Sustainability. That's what student Ministers found out on Wednesday 15 June when they presented the Parliament White Paper and the final six proposals from this year's Parliament to the ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Planning, Environment and Territory and Municipal Services.

The final six proposals were:

- sensor taps in all ACT public places
- vending machine rubbish bins
- more wind turbines
- street light timing changes
- public bikes
- banning 'boutique' plastic bags.

MLAs Joy Burch, Andrew Wall and Alistair Coe considered each proposal, asked the students how the ideas might be implemented, raised issues, compared them to current Government programs, and suggested possible improvements.

The MLAs were enthusiastic about the idea of street light sensors to reduce the amount of time the light were on, and could see the health and ecological footprint benefits of a public bike system. They suggested the possibility of providing rebates for installing sensor taps in every new home; discussed handling different types of recycling for the vending bins proposal; took into account information about prevailing winds in the ACT region when planning the placement of wind turbines; and, suggested introducing a levy on 'boutique' bags as well as making them biodegradable.

These final six proposals were chosen from a total of 66 presented and discussed in May at the Parliament of Youth on Sustainability where 291



**MLAs Shane Rattenbury, Simon Corbell and Nicole Lawder seated with student Ministers**

*Photo credit: Sam Ferguson, St Mary MacKillop College*

school students of all ages from public, independent and catholic schools across the Canberra region gathered at the Australian National University to present their ideas for reducing Canberra's ecological footprint.

The full 66 proposals were considered by year group committees and 16 were chosen to progress to the full Parliament sessions. Student Ministers announced the chosen proposals to the Parliament as well as three members of the ACT Legislative Assembly: the Deputy Chief Minister and Minister for the Environment, Simon Corbell; the Minister for Education, Shane Rattenbury; and the Shadow Minister for the Environment, Nicole Lawder. A last round of voting whittled the proposals to the final six.

This year's Parliament of Youth ran with the help of 72 volunteers, including 33 senior school students (acting as committee facilitators, activity leaders, photographers and camera people), eight ANU students from the Fenner School of Environment and Society, teachers and community members. •

*You can see vox pop videos from the Parliament at <https://youtu.be/5ZBlyc6dSPU> and find more about the program and the student proposals at [www.see-change.org.au/parliamentofyouth](http://www.see-change.org.au/parliamentofyouth).*

# Welcoming migrant parents

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countries before coming to Australia.

“We had kids running around in bullet-proof vests, playing dodge-ball with police!” Leilah told the forum.

Other great ideas for ways schools can connect better with migrant families were also aired by migrant parents, educators and advocates.

- Translate newsletters and notes home wherever possible.
- Use the Translation and Interpreter Service to provide reliable translation and a shared understanding when communicating with families.
- Employ a community co-ordinator/liaison with a special focus on marginalised families such as refugees.
- Summarise the lengthy school newsletter into just one page of dot points and key dates in simple English.
- In newsletters and notes home, include key words in common migrant languages in your community.
- Acknowledge the ‘back pack’ that kids wear every day – their worries about poverty, family still in the old country and so on.
- For each family, know and record which parent/older sibling it is best to talk to in the household.
- Understand that parents may be hindered from helping their kids or advocating for them because they are too nervous to enter the school or explain the problem.
- Link well to the migrant student’s previous education.
- Provide extra support in key transitions, such as from primary to high school and to after-school pathways.

Staff from Companion House also mentioned their four recovery goals — building safety, connections, meaning and dignity — as a platform for learning and thinking of the needs of refugee students.

It was clear from participants’ feedback that the

greatest barriers to schools engaging better with migrant families were access to interpreters and a lack of staff time. However, Kathy Ragless, Companion House Director, later explained that Australia has a very good professional interpreter service that can provide on-site and telephone interpreters, often without notice.

“It is a great pity that this service is rarely used by schools,” she said. “Interpreters are trained to communicate accurately across languages without adding or leaving out information. This is crucial for any conversation involving any aspect of student welfare. Enlisting an interpreter also shows respect and a willingness to engage as equals.”

Parents also have a role to play. One school pairs migrant families with a buddy parent who acts as a friendly contact point and helps with translation, such as a quick text to say “it’s ‘muft’ day tomorrow — that means the kids don’t need to wear uniforms.”

As one parent present put it, “just ask ‘who’s for coffee’ and this can help so much! Migrant parents often won’t ask the school for help because in their country the school is the boss! But if a parent extends a hand, they can ask them what to do.”

P&C members who came to the forum left inspired and determined to look into what their P&C and school could do differently to be more welcoming and better engage migrants in the school community.

The top tip of the day, however, seemed to be summed up by Ros Phillips, who runs the Refugee Bridging Program at Dickson College: “Make someone in the school accountable for the welfare and wellbeing of refugee students. Then, give them the time they need to properly engage parents and to advocate for each student.” ●

*The Translation and Interpreter Service (TIS) can be contacted on 131 450.*

*Further resources from the forum are available by contacting the Council office.*



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# At our P&C...

**Paul Magarey has organised a school bike ride at Lyneham Primary for the last five years. Here he tells how it has become a major fundraiser, as well as a highlight in the school's calendar.**

We call our annual whole-school bike ride the Tour de Lyneham and we try to make it like the Tour de France – parents and staff with bells and whistles all along the circuit and chalk graffiti on the paths. A few times, we've had a parent out there in the Lyneham wetlands blowing a trumpet. The kids are certainly entertained, as they ride, by the antics of the parents. It's a carnival atmosphere.

I've run the last five Tour de Lyneham rides and it gets bigger and better every year. A parent who wanted more exercise, Michelle Baron, came up with the idea seven years ago and ran the first few events after convincing the P&C a school bike ride was a good idea. It started as a ride around the oval, but we soon expanded to a circuit around the Lyneham Wetlands and beyond. This year the juniors rode around the Lyneham wetlands, students in year three and four rode to the botanic gardens and the year fives and sixes went to the museum.

This year, we made just under \$10,000. This mostly comes from sponsorships raised by the students themselves, with some money coming from running a sausage sizzle on the day (we also



*The juniors ride off, under close supervision.*



*A mass of riders head for the botanic gardens.*

serve fruit for morning tea). We send home sponsorship forms with all the kids in week six of first term so the kids can ask people they know to sponsor them before the ride in week 10. To motivate everyone to get sponsors and promote the event, we offer prizes to the students who gather the most sponsorship. In the past, to make it more equitable, we had a raffle where there's a ticket for each \$5 you collected in sponsorship money, but there were complaints from parents of students who'd raised lots of money who lucked out on the raffle. We make sure there are good prizes – bikes, scooters, balls and so on – and promote them well. This year we also got half-price vouchers from an indoor trampolining centre, so every child who brought back their sponsorship form got one of those as well.

We also talk up the event by getting guest speakers to visit the school. I interview them in front of the kids and ham it up for a bit of fun. We've had the local bike mechanic who was also a member of the Australian downhill mountain

# About us

ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations  
is the peak body for  
Parents & Citizens (P&C) Associations  
in the ACT.

We represent over 60,000 parents and carers  
in 86 ACT public schools.

## About our magazine

*ParentACTion is a free journal published four times a year. It is available online, plus hardcopies are provided to all ACT public school P&Cs and school boards, the ACT Legislative Assembly, senior ACT Education Directorate staff, public education organisations, the media and interstate parent associations.*

*Contributions, advertising and feedback are always being sought. Contributions can be emailed directly to the Editor, Janelle Kennard, at [jkennard@actparents.org.au](mailto:jkennard@actparents.org.au).*

*Views expressed in this journal are not necessarily those of the ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations.*

# Our Executive

President:	John Haydon
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Secretary:	Cecilia Shlegel
Treasurer:	Amanda Bichard (acting)
Committee:	Andrew Bidwell, Debra Burnett, Sharon Ding, Melissa Hankinson, Kirsty McGovern-Hooley, Adam Miller.

## Life members

Grant Battersby, Pam Cahir, Trevor Cobbold, Graeme Evans, Joan Kellett, Ian Morgan, Richard Scherer.

# Contact us

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## Office hours

9.30am - 2.30pm Monday to Friday.  
Closed public holidays and school holidays.

biking squad who did crazy stunts for the kids and told us he rode better without his glasses on because he couldn't see what danger he was facing; a parent who held the world record for the 24 hour mountain bike race who demonstrated (not in reality) how to go to the toilet while on his bike; and ACT bicycle police who had sticky tape holding their back lights together and who also joined us for the actual ride for some of the way.

The hardest part of running the Tour de Lyneham is organising the volunteers, though it is a lot easier since I discovered the website [volunteersignup.org](http://volunteersignup.org) which is a great tool for getting your rosters sorted. We continue the fun with the names for the various volunteer rolls – the 'fruit bats' cut up the morning tea, the 'coffee mugs' get drinks for all the adult volunteers and the 'big spenders' go and buy supplies. We even assign someone the task of being roving photographer for the day.

We have a designated first aid officer along the ride and a lot of parents to go along to ensure safety – one adult rider for every 10 students – so it is a challenge to get enough helpers. For three years now, we've had students from Lyneham High School come to help as part of their community service which has really solved our volunteer worries.

We now hold the ride on the last day of the term. This fits well with the school as a fun activity to end the term, and the end of term one is a good temperature for the ride.

We ask parents to fill in an evaluation survey each year and have had some great feedback for more improvements. Next year we are looking to link the event to the curriculum – for example, maths regarding the sponsorship money or amount of CO<sub>2</sub> saved by riding, and the mechanics of bikes. Along the way we've developed a project plan for running the event which we are happy to share with any other P&Cs that want to give it a go in their school too. ●

# Dates to remember

**Aug 23 Council General Meeting**  
7.00pm - 9.30pm  
Centre for Teaching and Learning  
51 Fremantle Drive, Stirling

**Sept 1 Election Forum**  
Meet the candidates, question the policies  
7.00pm - 9.30pm  
Centre for Teaching and Learning  
51 Fremantle Drive, Stirling

**Sept 26- Oct 7 Term break - Council office closed**

**Oct 15 ACT Government Election**

**Oct 25 Policy Conference & General Meeting**  
7.00pm - 9.30pm  
Centre for Teaching and Learning  
51 Fremantle Drive, Stirling

## Welcoming migrant parents

Principals, teachers, parents and social-service providers from across Canberra came together in June to explore ways of creating a sense of belonging at school for migrant and refugee parents and students in a unique forum.

Council partnered with ACT Principals Association and Companion House — a community organisation assisting survivors of trauma — to present the forum. It was a terrific event, with a great turnout, a broad cross section of attendees and lots of positive, practical discussion.

“We all know the importance of a strong partnership between parents and schools for a high quality education for students, but there are cultural and language barriers which prevent this happening for migrant and refugee students. Families can feel ... isolated within the school,” said Viv Pearce, Council Vice-President, in opening the forum.

During the panel discussion that followed, some excellent ideas and points arose.

“We noticed that migrant and refugee parents were under-represented at school events,” said teacher and panellist Leilah Ayton, the Multi-cultural Liaison Officer at St Francis Xavier Primary School.

To address this the school held a dinner specially for migrant families. Students decorated the hall



*Principals and teachers listen to the experiences of migrant parents at the forum.*

and gave a short speech and then parents and teachers chatted informally while eating together, and explored how the school could help.

Parents reported that it was hard for them to help with homework, so the school developed an after-school program. Once a week teachers, and older students as mentors, work one-on-one with migrant students for 20 minutes each on literacy skills. Then there is afternoon tea and help with homework. The program is conducted jointly with a neighbouring school and funded, in part, by the P&Cs of the two schools.

The program also organises special activities to address particular needs. For example, local police visited to make connections with students who had witnessed police brutality in their

*Continued on page 8*