



ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations

The parent voice on public education

Mr Andrew Barr
Chief Minister & Treasurer
ACT Budget Consultation
Treasury Directorate
GPO Box 158
CANBERRA ACT 2601

24 October 2017

Dear Andrew,

On behalf of the ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations (Council), I am writing to provide a submission to the 2018-2019 ACT Budget Consultation.

Council is a non-profit, non-government representative organisation whose objectives are to foster a quality public education system, provide support services for affiliates and make representations to government on behalf of parents of government school students.

I would be more than happy to meet with you to discuss our submission in more detail. If you have any questions about the attached submission, please do not hesitate to contact our office.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Haydon'.

John Haydon
President

Budget Submission 2018 - 19



**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 85 ACT public schools.

ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations | ABN: 53 870 517 949
Maitland House, 100 Maitland Street HACKETT

Tel: 02 6241 5759 | **Email:** contact@actparents.org.au | **Web:** www.actparents.org.au

Executive Summary

The ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations (Council) is a non-profit, non-government representative organisation whose objective is to foster a quality public education system, provide support services for affiliates and make representations to government on behalf of parents.

Education is inextricably linked to positive economic, social and cultural outcomes for individuals and the community in general. There also exists a strong correlation between education and health: low education attainment rates have been linked to poor health outcomes.

In general Council has been supportive of the government's focus on education and notes the record-high levels of funding committed to the education system in recent years. However, a number of indicators are pointing to a decline in absolute student performance and while the ACT remains competitive against other jurisdictions in Australia, this is only to be expected given the Territory's high socio-economic status and the lack of regional or rural areas. Flat-lining of student performance as seems to be the case in the ACT, is of very serious concern in a competitive globalised world.

This year our submission focusses on quality teaching and learning of every student, every day and; building community connections and social capital in ACT public schools.

Council recommends the Chief Minister allocate funding towards:

1. Council requests the Government's provision be accelerated to provide 10 new school psychologists to ACT public schools in 2018.
2. Council recommends social workers be employed to cover the shortage of psychologists in ACT public schools (see below).
3. Council calls for the funding of a social worker in every ACT public school to improve student well-being and create valuable partnerships between schools and families to improve student outcomes and student behaviour.
4. Council recommends funding for the provision of qualified teacher librarians in every ACT public school.
5. Council calls for funding to ensure the provision of quality teaching and learning of the arts, music and languages in all ACT public schools by qualified specialist teachers.
6. Council requests adequate funding to ensure the recommendations of the *Schools for All Report* are delivered in every ACT public school.
7. Council recommends that dedicated funding for compulsory professional development on inclusive education be provided for all public school teachers and school leaders.
8. Council recommends that the Government continue to fund 15 hours of preschool for all ACT public students.
9. Council recommends the Government purchase and deploy demountable classrooms for schools nearing capacity in the short-term, until more permanent solutions to capacity can be addressed.
10. Council calls on the Government to ensure funding for adequate planning for new schools within development areas.
11. Council requests the Government fund the cost and installation of a school fence according to the school communities' decision. At the same time, Council calls on the Government to support the decisions by school communities not to fence their school.

12. Council recommends the Government to fund a \$100,000- expansion of the P&C volunteer pilot project. Enabling Council to provide coordination, recruitment and management of volunteers for P&Cs, to ensure building of social capital and community connections through all ACT public schools.
13. Council requests the Government continue to fund community programs that provide positive contributions to school communities.

Quality Teaching and Learning of Every Student, Every Day

Social and Emotional Well-being at School

School Psychologists

Council embraces the appointment of 20 additional school psychologists in ACT schools. However, the strong demand for access to school psychologists in public schools is such that only students with complex and challenging behaviours readily access support. Feedback to Council, identifies that large numbers of students with less visible issues such as anxiety are left without access to appropriate psychological support within the school system. Subsequently, parents and carers must rely on external sources of support, which while available are prohibitive due to cost and removed from the educational setting. For example, private psychologists are unable to easily observe the student within the educational setting, then provide corresponding advice to teachers.

Access to psychological support at approximately \$180- per session (with a possible Medicare rebate of \$80-) is a financial barrier for parents and carers struggling to make ends meet. Further, advice from providers outside the public-school system can be less effective. Feedback demonstrates that students without psychological support within the school setting are unable to learn to their potential, decreasing academic performance and increasing the need for behaviour management.

Recommendation 1 -Council requests the Government's provision be accelerated to provide 10 new school psychologists to ACT public schools in 2018.

Shortage of school psychologists

Council is informed that there is a shortage of suitably qualified school psychologists. School psychologists regularly help ACT public schools identify and meet student needs improving both student outcomes and student behaviour. Hence, Council considers school psychologists extremely valuable.

Recommendation 2 – Council recommends social workers be employed to cover the shortage of psychologists in ACT public schools (see below).

Community Services – Social Workers

With high demand for access to school psychologists, Council considers the need for student support within schools to remain unanswered. Research shows that students perform better when they feel supported within their school community. Council believes that adequate and early support of students unlocks their potential for learning, improving student performance and behaviour.

Often student performance and behaviour is inhibited by issues students are facing. A large focus of teacher training is teaching and learning. Feedback to Council suggests that teachers are not always adequately equipped to manage student well-being. Social workers regularly work with individuals, families and communities to assist and improve well-being, address barriers impacting on well-being, create inequality, injustice and discrimination. Hence, Council considers that social workers have the adequate expertise to take responsibility for student well-being within ACT public schools. Council believes that funding for the provision of a social worker in every school would relieve teachers and executive staff of this function, providing a more consistent form of care similar to that of a case worker. Subsequently, teachers and executive staff will be able to clearly focus on the quality teaching and learning of every student, every day. Council considers that placement of a

social worker and the focus on the teaching and learning of every student by executive staff will provide significant improvements in student performance.

Feedback to Council suggests that a small minority of ACT schools form valuable partnerships with families for learning. Research shows that schools that engage parents in students' learning directly enhance student outcomes. Council believes that social workers, proficiently trained in building relationships and partnerships between families and schools, through shared goals will improve student outcomes. Furthermore, social worker's established knowledge of other support services (for example, services provided by the Community Services Directorate and the Health Directorate) will provide students and families with accessible support when required.

Recommendation 3 – Council calls for the funding of a social worker in every ACT public school to improve student well-being and create valuable partnerships between schools and families to improve student outcomes and student behaviour.

Specialist Teachers

Teacher Librarians

Both International and Australian research demonstrates a positive relationship between well-resourced libraries, qualified teacher librarians and improvements in student literacy in schools. However, not all ACT public schools provide a qualified teacher librarian. Council believes that qualified teacher librarians and well-resourced libraries in every ACT public school would positively improve literacy and learning outcomes for students. Furthermore, there is significant research which highlights the importance of early learning for literacy and numeracy for students experiencing disadvantage. The *Hidden Disadvantage Report in the ACT* (October 2017) found that over 7867 children were living in low income households in the ACT. Council believes that a qualified teacher librarian and a well-resourced library in every ACT public school provides critical access to literacy development opportunities for students and their families experiencing disadvantage and hidden poverty.

Recommendation 4 – Council recommends funding for the provision of qualified teacher librarians in every ACT public school.

Art, Music and Languages

Council believes that quality teaching and learning for every student, every day should encompass all areas of the Australian Curriculum by qualified specialist teachers. Feedback to Council suggests that some ACT public schools no longer provide art, music and or languages by qualified specialist teachers. Subsequently student experiences and outcomes vary greatly across the ACT. Council believes every ACT public student should learn all areas of the Australian Curriculum from specialist teachers qualified to do so.

Recommendation 5 – Council calls for funding to ensure the provision of quality teaching and learning of the arts, music and languages in all ACT public schools by qualified specialist teachers.

Inclusive Education

Council strongly supports the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Article 24)*, particularly in terms of implementation, compliance, measuring and monitoring.

Schools for All Recommendations

Council continues to support the Government's implementation of recommendations of the *Schools for All Report* in all ACT public schools.

Recommendation 6 – Council requests adequate funding to ensure the recommendations of the *Schools for All Report* are delivered in every ACT public school.

Compulsory Inclusive Education Professional Development

Currently teachers and school leaders choose to participate in inclusive education professional development. Enrolment data suggests the number of students with disabilities are increasing and looking for mainstream education with support. Given this trend, Council strongly believes that all teachers and school leaders complete compulsory inclusive education professional development. Council believes that compulsory inclusive education professional development will increase understanding within the teaching profession, increase the Education Directorate's compliance with the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Article 24)* and reduce discrimination. Leading Learning 4 All Champion Training is an example of inclusive education professional development.

Recommendation 7 – Council recommends that dedicated funding for compulsory professional development on inclusive education be provided for all public school teachers and school leaders.

Early Childhood Education

Preschool

ACT public preschool is a significant first step in a school students journey. For many students, including those experiencing disadvantage and the effects of hidden poverty, public preschool is the first experience of formal education. Council believes that preschool is extremely valuable in providing strong foundations for learning and transition to school.

Recommendation 8 – Council recommends that the Government continue to fund 15 hours of preschool for all ACT public students.

School Infrastructure and Planning

Capacity and Planning

Feedback to Council demonstrates that capacity and planning of new ACT public schools remains a concern of parents and families. Currently schools within the Gunghalin, Belconnen, the Inner North (along the tram line), Molonglo Valley, Woden and Weston Creek are all at or nearing capacity. Council acknowledges the Government's commitment for capital works to increase capacity at some schools. However, Council believes that careful planning is required to ensure that all students are able to access local neighbourhood public schools, particularly for students experiencing disadvantage and or effects of hidden poverty.

Recommendation 9 – Council recommends the Government purchase and deploy demountable classrooms for schools nearing capacity in the short-term, until more permanent solutions to capacity can be addressed.

Recommendation 10 – Council calls on the Government to ensure funding for adequate planning for new schools within development areas.

Fencing of Schools

The Education Directorate has asked school communities to advise whether they would like their school fenced or not. Council considers that school communities are best placed to make decisions of the needs of their schools.

Recommendation 11 – Council requests the Government fund the cost and installation of a school fence according to the school communities' decision. At the same time, Council calls on the Government to support the decisions by school communities not to fence their school.

Building Community Connections and Social Capital in ACT public schools

Volunteer Recruitment Project

Council research shows that P&Cs provide approximately \$3-5 million dollars of additional financial support to ACT public schools. In addition to funds, P&Cs provide valuable services to schools building social capital and community through fun events such as Giralang Primary's 40th Birthday world record breaking attempt for the largest number of people playing musical statues. Furthermore, effective P&Cs build highly valuable intangible connections and social capital within school communities. Extensive research has proven the value of being part of communities as improving the health and well-being of individuals. Volunteering for a P&C provides the opportunities for parents, carers and citizens to make connections within their community. For lots of P&C volunteers, undertaking a committee position provides valuable skill development prior to entry and re-entry to the paid workforce.

Feedback to Council shows that while some P&Cs are easily able to find volunteers, some P&Cs are struggling to do so. Council has been working with these P&Cs to assist them with finding volunteers through a pilot project. This project enabled a P&C to recruit volunteers through Centrelink Voluntary Work Organisation. This experience was described as mutually beneficial, fulfilling a need for the P&C and skill development, increase in confidence and work readiness for volunteers. However, the process to register as a voluntary work organisation is onerous for P&Cs with an already limited number of volunteers. Council is requesting additional funding to expand the volunteer pilot project and coordinate the application, recruitment and management of volunteers for P&Cs. Council believes this project will support the community connections and social capital provided by P&Cs, in addition to assisting volunteers with entry and re-entry to the workforce (providing volunteers with skill development, confidence and work readiness).

Recommendation 12 – Council recommends the Government fund a \$100,000- expansion of the P&C volunteer pilot project. Enabling Council to provide coordination, recruitment and management of volunteers for P&Cs, to ensure building of social capital and community connections through all ACT public schools.

Community Programs

A number of valuable community programs operate through ACT schools to ensure that students feel safe and included, and can access appropriate well-being and support. Council believes that every student has the right to feel safe, included and supported in their school community. For this reason, Council supports the Safe and Inclusive Schools program, and other community groups and programs which directly and indirectly support school communities such as KidsMatter, MindMatters, and Menslink.

Recommendation 13 – Council requests the Government continue to fund community programs that provide positive contributions to school communities.