

Budget Submission 2015-2016



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 represent over 60,000 parents in 85 ACT public schools.

ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations | ABN: 53 870 517 949 | 100 Maitland Street HACKETT
Tel: 02 62415759 | Email: contact@actparents.org.au | Web: www.actparents.org.au



ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations

The parent voice on public education

To: ACT Budget Consultation
Treasury Directorate
GPO Box 158
CANBERRA ACT 2601

13 October 2014

To Whom It May Concern,

On behalf of the ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations (Council), I am writing to provide a submission to the 2015-2016 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,

Vivienne Pearce
President

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
Canteens	5
School Traffic, Transport and Road Safety	6
Active and Sustainable Travel	6
Road Safety	7
Improving bus services to ACT Schools	8
Teaching	9
Teacher Librarians	9
Specialised Teachers	9
Online Learning	9
School Infrastructure	11
Preschools	12
Vocational Education and Youth Training Programs	13
Supporting CIT	13
Supporting School-Based RTOs	13
Government/Non-Government Partnerships	14
Stakeholder Council	14



Prepared by Maclaren Wall (Policy Officer)
Approved by Council Executive

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. This year our submission focusses on six main areas: canteens, school traffic & parking, teaching, preschools, infrastructure and vocational education and youth training.

Council recommends to the Treasurer that funding be allocated towards:

CANTEENS

- The conversion of college and high school canteens to 'café' style facilities
- The implementation of a student driven and low cost healthy lifestyle education campaign in colleges and high schools

SCHOOL TRAFFIC, TRANSPORT AND ROAD SAFETY

- Research into safety and traffic management around schools
- The reintroduction of the Walking Bus Program
- Improving the road and traffic infrastructure at schools which are currently experiencing road safety issues
- Implementing a system-wide survey of public school parents in order to attain solid numbers regarding intent to travel on public transport

TEACHING

- The employment and professional training of teacher librarians
- The retention and hiring of specialised teachers
- Online learning subscription services such as 'Mathletics' and 'Reading Eggs' for all ACT students

INFRASTRUCTURE

- The renovation and refurbishment of ACT schools

PRESCHOOLS

- Retaining 15 hours of free preschool a week in the ACT

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND YOUTH TRAINING

- The on-going predominance of CIT as the leading VET provider in the ACT
- School based RTOs in order to assist them in retaining RTO status
- Government and non-government VET partnerships
- The establishment of a VET stakeholder council

Canteens

Over the past couple of years a significant amount of time, money and effort has been put into improving school canteens in the ACT. However, evidence obtained by Council has suggested that colleges and high schools are still facing many difficulties. Council believes ‘café’ style facilities are the answer.

Over the past year or so, Council has been busy implementing several changes to the way in which canteens are run in the ACT. Thanks in part to government funding, electronic point of sale systems have been offered to canteens all across the ACT, along with membership to the Healthy Kids Association and the provision of online ordering arrangements with FlexiSchools. Colleges and high schools are facing an uphill battle when it comes to attracting and catering to older students. Increasingly students are electing to purchase food from outside the school grounds: from Subway, McDonalds, 7/11 and other outlets instead of their school canteen.

This trend will only get worse once sugary drinks are banned in every ACT school. Instead of using the school canteen, students will merely walk down the road to the local shops in order to buy food and drink.

At Granville Boys High School in NSW, a café facility was set up in order to bring the school community closer together. The program has enjoyed extremely successful results. Hospitality students help run the café, which has emerged as the social heart of the school. Council would like to see money and resources allocated towards the conversion of college and high school canteens to ‘café’ style facilities. Not only will this make canteens more competitive, it will also open up many vocational, community and social opportunities for the school community.

It is evident that traditional education programs that are designed to encourage healthy eating and drinking do not work. Council would also like to see funding directed towards a pilot campaign in high schools and colleges, aimed at getting students to think about healthy eating and drinking in an innovative manner. Such a program would be driven by students (through the use of a poster campaign/competition etc.) and would be inherently different to a traditional outreach campaign.

Policy costings	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	Total
Canteen conversions	\$2m	\$1m	-	-	\$3m
Education campaign	\$0.25m	-	-	-	\$0.25m

School Traffic, Transport and Road Safety

Council calls on Treasury to make funding arrangements to address the issues of school road safety, traffic and school bus services. Council recommends that Treasury views student transport as a single issue requiring a whole of government response.

This year Council has surveyed parents and community members in order to get an understanding of the various issues surrounding school transport and road safety. Data from Council's traffic survey indicates that most schools are affected by parking and traffic issues. Problems reported include: unsafe car parks and roads, speeding cars, insufficient parking, inefficient 'kiss and drop' zones, unsafe school crossings and narrow roads.

Parents are extremely concerned and in some cases alarmed at the general state of school traffic, transport and road safety around ACT schools. Schooling is not only about school buildings and facilities, teachers and curricula. How a student will get to and from school are important factors considered by parents when choosing a school.

Active and Sustainable Travel

Treasury should make funding available to promote the use of active travel to and from school, as well as increasing infrastructure that supports active travel.

An increase in students utilising active modes of transport will help to address the issues of road safety and bus services discussed below. Various sustainability and economic issues make walking, bicycle riding and bus travel much more desirable from a societal point of view than using a car to travel to school.

Council calls on the government to reinstate funding to the Walking School Bus program (previously administered by the YWCA Canberra). This effective and popular program is currently used by several schools in the ACT. The program addresses traffic concerns whilst encouraging healthy active travel habits and fostering a sense of school community.

Policy costings	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	Total
Walking School Bus Program	\$0.1m	\$0.1m	\$0.1m	\$0.1m	\$0.4m

Road Safety

Council recommends a targeted increase in the budgets of TAMS and ETD to allow them to make roads around schools safer. Council also believes that a research report should be commissioned, focussing on traffic management and road safety around schools

Over the past couple of years there has been an increased police presence around school zones. However, this is only a temporary solution and fails to address some of the real traffic and road safety issues that schools face. Ensuring students are provided with a safe environment in which to travel to and from school is a major responsibility of the government. The ACT has a good record in ensuring students get to and from school safely. However as reflected in Council's school traffic survey, near misses around ACT occur frequently. The issue of road safety around ACT schools is often raised at P&C and Council meetings. Parents express concerns about:

- drivers speeding through school zones
- lack of pick up and set down facilities
- drivers failing to stop at flagged crossings
- unsafe car parks and narrow roads
- insufficient parking

The budget for TAMS should be increased to allow TAMS to address the concerns expressed above, especially in schools which have urgent and/or historical problems that need to be addressed. Solutions to these problems may include:

- more appropriate signage around school zones, such as flashing lights, to warn motorists unfamiliar with the area of the school zone and to remind local residents to observe the speed limit.
- increased drop off and pickup facilities so that parents can quickly set down and pick up their children without blocking local streets or school car parks and risk their children being hit by other parents' cars.
- more appropriate crossings for schools such as raised pedestrian crossings or traffic lights on busier suburban streets.

Additionally, Council strongly believes that TAMS should be provided with funding to commission a research report on school traffic management and road safety. Other governments around the world have used such reports and have enjoyed great success.

Improving bus services to ACT Schools

Council encourages the Treasury to provide ETD with the necessary funds to carry out a survey determining students' travel intentions.

Council has had a long history of bringing this issue to the attention of the government. It is vital that a survey be properly funded and carried out. While ACTION is provided with the address of every school student in the ACT by ETD, they need to know in addition about the travel *intentions* of students in order to design an optimal network. This information can be provided by a simple survey that students or their parents can complete. Council urges ETD to communicate with ACTION about their needs and to undertake the necessary survey.

ETD currently makes obtaining travel intention information the responsibility of individual schools. They are only rarely fulfilling this role because of a shortage of administration resources and because they do not see it as a core function. Council would like to see ETD receive additional funding to allow their school planning section to undertake a widespread survey of student travel intentions. The survey could be undertaken as part of a student's re-enrolment documentation.

Policy costings	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	Total
Survey of student intention to travel (once every four years)	\$0.1m	-	-	-	\$0.1m

Teaching

Teacher Librarians

Council believes that adequate funding should be provided so that there is at least one qualified teacher-librarian in every ACT school.

In a society that is increasingly dependent on information technology, teacher-librarians are an important aspect of modern day education. Council believes that there should be at least one teacher-librarian in every ACT school. Currently this is not the case.

Funding should be provided for actual teaching positions and should also be directed towards the professional education of teacher-librarians.

Specialised Teachers

Council urges Treasury to dedicate additional funding to the education budget for the implementation of a specialist teachers retention and training policy. Funding needs to be allocated system-wide in order to ensure that schools are hiring specialised teachers.

Anecdotal evidence has suggested that schools have been slowly cutting back on the number of specialist teachers in schools (especially music, drama, visual arts, physical education and dance teachers). NAPLAN has shifted the curriculum focus to literacy and numeracy. While these are extremely important aspects of the curriculum, Council also sees other areas as crucial to a student's education. Council has received feedback from parents who are concerned that teachers with a curriculum specialisation are not remaining in the public school system. Private schools are able to offer specialist teachers a salary package that cannot be matched in the public system.

In addition to retention of specialised teachers, funding should be used to train existing teachers to specialise in curriculum areas that are lacking specialised teachers.

Online Learning

Council calls upon the government to allocate funds for the provision of online learning aids such as 'Mathletics' and 'Reading Eggs'.

The utilisation of online learning aids such as 'Mathletics' and 'Reading Eggs' has increased significantly. In some cases, P&C Associations have been called upon to fund these online subscription services. Council believes that these online services have become core curriculum tools and should therefore be funded by the ETD. With a system-wide approach, schools should be able to

negotiate a reduced rate of subscription. The funding of these services also complements the ACT Government's digital strategy and the Government's commitment to improving the information and technology infrastructure in schools.

School Infrastructure

Council calls upon the government to fund a system-wide projects consisting of small scale capital works projects in ACT schools.

Council has welcomed the government's commitment to refurbishing schools in the Belconnen region, however many other schools across the ACT are in need of renovations and improvements (especially those over 20 years old).

The school environment plays an important role in a student's learning and their overall results at school. Poor infrastructure, buildings and amenities have a negative impact on a students learning and can make schools undesirable. It also leaves the government open to claims of negligence should any students or staff suffer injury as a result of poor maintenance or the worn-out state of school infrastructure.

Targeted funding should be delivered system-wide to undertake programs such as the following:

- upgrading existing classrooms or building new ones where necessary
- upgrade furnishings and equipment
- renovate existing infrastructure (including painting, new carpet etc.)
- deliver play area upgrades including trees, play equipment and soft fall surface
- refurbish toilets, change rooms and shower blocks
- provide new rainwater tanks and school gardens
- creation of shaded areas (through shade cloths and covered areas)

Council sees each of these upgrades as vital. It has been Council's experience in the past that much needed upgrades and refurbishments have been delayed due to a lack of funding available to ETD.

Additionally, if adequate funds are provided to these refurbishments early, the cost of maintaining the infrastructure will be cheaper in the long run.

Preschools

Council urges the Government to provide funding for 15 hours of free pre school funding a week.

As of yet, the Federal Government has not renewed the National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education. Currently the ACT Government provides funding for 12 hours of free preschool a week, with the Federal Government providing funding for an additional 3 hours. Should the Federal Government decide to not renew the agreement, Council calls upon the ACT Government to fund the Federal Government's share, ensuring that free preschool hours will remain at 15 hours a week.

Evidence has shown that attending preschool has a significant effect on the literacy and numeracy outcomes of students later on in their education. In order to provide the best possible start for our students, 15 hours of free preschool a week needs to be retained.

Vocational Education and Youth Training Programs

Supporting CIT

Council believes that CIT should remain as the predominant VET provider in the ACT. CIT should be provided with adequate funding so that its core offering is not diminished by private RTOs.

Private (non-school based) RTOs make an important and worthwhile contribution to VET. However Council believes that we have to be cautious on a number of fronts.

It is very important that private RTOs do not cherry pick courses, leaving CIT to become unviable over time. CIT must remain the predominant VET provider in the ACT. It is recommended that safeguards are put in place to protect its position.

Additionally, CIT has certain community obligations which do not extend to Private RTOs. These community obligations can include teaching students with learning difficulties or disabilities. This can only be done with is sufficient critical mass to justify advertising the cost over a large number of students.

Supporting School-Based RTOs

Council believes that adequate funding must be provided to school-based RTOs to assist them to maintain their RTO status.

Many school-based RTOs are very fearful of losing their registration as a consequence of minor or unintended breaches. The loss of registration, as has been the case in two instances recently, highlights the burden school-based RTOs have to deal with in terms of ongoing compliance.

The unintended consequence of the loss of registration for a school-based RTO has a catastrophic effect on both the RTO and the students studying VET courses.

Accordingly it is recommended that adequate funding is given to school-based RTOs to maintain key aspects and requirements of their registration.

Government/Non-Government Partnerships

Council believes that partnerships across government and non-government schools should be considered to maximise the utilisation of tax payer funded VET facilities.

School-based RTOs, particularly where there is trade training, have significant establishment costs in relation to their facilities, sometimes running into millions of dollars.

Excellent examples exist where government and non-government schools co-operate to deliver excellent outcomes. An example of this is Black Mountain School and Merici College: where Black Mountain School students travel to the Braddon campus of Merici and are able to gain hospitality qualifications.

It is recommended that geographic partnerships should be considered between government and non-government schools for the purposes of maximising the utilisation of predominantly taxpayer funded facilities.

Stakeholder Council

Council believes that funding should be provided for the establishment of a representative council of key stakeholders.

VET is a huge sector, with many stakeholders. Council believes that a representative council of key stakeholders (providers, parents, students, academics etc.) needs to be established in order to coordinate outcomes across the sector.

Such a council would require administrative/secretariat support which should be fully funded by the government.