



ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations

The parent voice on public education

Minute summary Early Learning Committee Meeting Oct 14, 2021, 7.30pm, online via zoom

Council's Early Learning Committee (ELC) was established in 2018 to continue the work of *Canberra Preschool Society* (1943-2018), representing the parent voice to the directorate and government.

ACT Council of Parents and Citizens [website EL](#), Early Learning Officer [email](#)

Council [Facebook page](#)

1) Open/Apologies

acknowledgement of country

2) Approval of previous minutes - meeting July 29, 2021 [via email](#)

Minutes were confirmed with participants via email.

3) ELC Budget, ELO report

a) Committee terms of reference include

- promoting the importance of preschool education,
- supporting parent engagement,
- supporting EL members of Council, ie parents and parent associations in preschools and primary school
- provide advocacy, advice, submissions, representation on behalf of the committee and Council in support of improved public education.

b) September: **Transition to School: Parent** Forum: third year, well attended approx. 80 registrations and 40 attended. Strong interest in being prepared for school - particularly if first child. ELC and members to promote the forum [recording](#) and resources. Post forum survey for March 2022.

c) [Council media](#) includes fortnightly bulletin *eCommunicator*, subscribe via Council **website**. Recent issue has Covid restriction updates.

[External media has all been Covid related NO External Events.](#)

d) **'Guide to surveys and polls for parent associations,'** responds to the high court finding on social media and participant comments/admin liabilities. The implication being that closed facebook groups that are administered by parent/carer volunteers may find themselves liable for an angry parent venting in the comments. Additional guidelines for administrators required.

e) Council encourage all primary school P&Cs to include the role of **Early Learning Parent Representative**. Outline of Children's Week funding for parent reps to help engage new parents and families.

f) **Feedback provided to** EDU regarding Covid concerns, and returning to school.

g) Early learning stakeholders include **ECA and BeYou – online communities for EL**

practitioners - shared practice examples of implementing parent engagement in EC settings.

h) **Council Annual Report: 2021**

4) ACT Budget – preschool/early learning implications

Oct 6 the ACT [2021-22 Budget](#) was announced by the Chief Minister.

- The ACT 2021-22 Budget included \$12.5 million over four years to continue the ten-year plan for early childhood education 'Set Up For Success'. The funds will support

providers and services that cater for three year old children experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage.

- The funding will also increase the number of scholarships for an early childhood teacher degree from 4 to 12.
- Find the [budget papers here](#).

5) Children's Week Grant Funding – play and network

Children adjust to school through preschool and kindy and we know from research that a sense of belonging is an important factor. Schools and P&Cs often collaborate to run information evenings, playdates, or morning tea to build community and capacity. Some parents will already have an established network but not all will.

Document [CWdoc](#). When do children attend preschool or kindy induction days/mornings at your school? **Confirming the critical role of parents as first educators**

6) EL Covid Safe Return to School

Parents are concerned about the implications of returning to school during the pandemic but relieved that children will be back at school. Many are missing the social element. Mixed responses from relief to genuine concern for vulnerable people.

7) Early learning issues and priorities for parents and carers 2021 -2022

Feedback re preschool education and early primary.

This group really need to get back to school. Learning from home is very difficult for this cohort.

8) Parent Engagement Grants

[Summary of results](#)

9) Transition to School

Resources for parents of preschool and kindy starters. Parent forum held September 16

[Transition to School Parent Forum](#)

10) Announcements

Council's live [online training](#) for P&C's. Financial Review Training for P&Cs 7-9pm, Thursday 21 October

11) Events

Events provide an opportunity to connect with school communities around a theme and to leverage the exposure and interest.

12) October

29 [World Teacher's Day](#)

23-31 [ACT children's week](#)

Next meeting Feb 17, 2022

Meeting end 8.30pm

ACT Budget

- supported transitions for three year olds into four year old preschool aligned to the early years learning framework
- partnering with the Community Services Directorate to connect families to early childhood education and care and working with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to codesign the evolution of Koori preschools
- Continuing the construction of Evelyn Scott School preschool- year 10 (Denman Prospect), a primary school in Throsby and a high school in Kenny
- The Future of Education reaffirms the ACT Government’s commitment to equity in the public education system
- At the February 2021 census, there were 51,153 students enrolled in 89 public schools operated by the ACT Government. Of that figure, 32,214 students were enrolled in preschool and primary school (63.0%), 12,253 students were enrolled in high school (24.0%), and 6,686 students were enrolled in college (13.0%).

Table 19: Accountability Indicators

Output Class 1 - Public School Education	2020-21 Targets	2020-21 Interim Outcome	2021-22 Targets
Early Childhood Education			
a. Number of enrolments in preschool in public schools ¹	4,700	4,679	4,700
b. Number of enrolments of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in preschool in public schools ¹	275	278	275
School Participation			
a. Attendance rate of public school students in year 1 to year 10 ²	92%	90%	92%

How are parents feeling about returning to school?

Confident in returning:

The big comfort that college level students and their families have is that these students have access to vaccines. Many of the other comments here reflect the situation for younger students who don't yet have access to vaccines. Let's hope that changes as soon as possible.

Some reservations:

I'm really comfortable with the plans to return to our Primary School. They are going to great efforts to 'bubble' cohorts of students and maintain Covidsafe hygiene practices. I do worry about the drop off/pick up process when parents aren't allowed to enter the grounds except in a car. Traffic around our school is bad at the best of times...

Thanks for your post seeking feedback. My concerns (other than the fact children aren't immunised) are lack of proper handwashing facilities in classrooms (hand sanitizer is really a poor 2nd option to good handwashing) and sun protection now that it is proposed students will spend more time outside.

access to rapid antigen testing and test themselves before school everyday in the UK - when is Australia getting access to these testing kits? We (Australia) seem to be so far behind yet we've had so much time to prepare for this?

Not at all comfortable:

Incredibly anxious and sad. Online learning has been a daily challenge, but every school drop off and pick up when we're back at school I'll wonder if today is the day one of the kids gets sick.

No safe guards for families that have people that are immune compromised/chronically ill, will keep my child at home, but what additional help can be provided? I've heard nothing so far, there was obviously no proper planning before doing this and I really worry about what the community is going to look like in the near future.

I don't feel primary schools are capable of preventing the spread of the delta variant should a case occur.

I share the concerns of the others regarding the return to school. And another major concern I have is that we have a new baby due which means if kids are at school and bring covid home (which seems inevitable) it is extremely concerning that they will pass it on to a newborn.

Specific questions:

I'm Wondering what ventilation and CO2 monitoring will be available, particularly in the older schools in the inner north

If there is one case would be expect to go into a 14 day quarantine, as was our experience in August for Harrison School?

Gap fee waiving

On 13 October Department of Education, Skills and Employment announced that the Gap fee waiving, and additional allowable absences will be extended to align with the easing of restrictions on ACT education and care services.

Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) services can waive the gap fee for families who keep their children at home until 1 November 2021. This is to coincide with when the ACT Government allows all primary school-aged children to return to face-to-face teaching.

Early learning services in the ACT can waive the gap fee for families who keep their children at home until 25 October 2021. This includes Centre Based Day Care, Family Day Care and In Home Care.

Gap fee waiving is a business decision for services. However, if your service is getting business continuity payments from DESE, you must waive gap fees.

Gap fee waiving helps parents keep their children enrolled without having to pay for a service they are not using.

Additional allowable absences

Families using OSHC services in the ACT can continue to access additional allowable absences until 1 November to coincide with when the ACT Government allows all primary school aged children to return to face-to-face teaching.

Families using early learning services in the ACT can continue to access additional allowable absences until 25 October 2021. This includes Centre Based Day Care, Family Day Care and In Home Care.

This means families will not use up their 42 allowable absences.

Please visit DESE website for addition information at: [COVID-19 in the ACT: gap fee waiving and more absences available - Department of Education, Skills and Employment, Australian Government \(dese.gov.au\)](https://www.dese.gov.au/COVID-19-in-the-ACT-gap-fee-waiving-and-more-absences-available)

14 October 2021

CECA recognises that this is a difficult time for providers, service leaders, educators, children, and their families with the evolving COVID-19 situation in the ACT. This CECA Update includes information, tools and resources to support the ACT education and care community at this time.

Lifting restrictions

On the 27 September 2021, the ACT Government announced amendments to Health directions that will remove restricted access to education and care services from 25 October 2021. With a graduated return to out of school hours care for preschool, kindergarten and years 1, 2 and 6 on 25 October 2021, and years 3, 4 and 5 on 1 November 2021.

[Health Guidelines for Schools and Early Childhood Education Services \(including OSHC\).](#)

Face masks mandatory in the ACT

The use of face masks is mandatory in the ACT if you are aged 12 years or over. The ACT Government has directed that masks must be always worn upon leaving home. This includes educators working in an education and care service.

Stay at home if unwell

If anyone is feeling unwell, even if symptoms are mild, it is important that they get tested and stay at home. Stay at home means that individuals should stay at their home until fully recovered.

Drop off and pick up of children

Procedures should be updated to minimise the amount of time that parents and carers spend at drop off and pick up of children and to reduce the need for them to enter the service. Hand sanitiser on arrival and departure is recommended. Contact should also be minimised between parents/carers and educators at the service and facemasks should be always worn by parents/carers and educators.

Ventilation and grouping of children

Risk assessments and everyday practice should consider ways to reduce the length of time that children and educators spend indoors, how indoor space is used, ventilation and grouping arrangements during children's play, learning and routines. Combining of groups should be kept to a minimum and casual playgroup arrangements should not take place at this time to help reduce unnecessary risk.