



# ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations

*The parent voice on public education*

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

29 October 2019

Dear Andrew,

On behalf of the ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations (Council), I am writing to provide a submission to the 2020-21 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 'Kirsty McGovern-Hooley', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Kirsty McGovern-Hooley  
President  
ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations

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We are the peak body for P&C Associations in the ACT, representing over 60,000 parents in 86 public schools.  
*We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands and waters where we live, work and learn, and pay our respects to elders past, present, and future.*

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# Budget Submission 2020 - 21



**ACT Council of  
Parents & Citizens  
Associations**

*The parent voice on public education*

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for Parent & Citizen associations in the ACT.  
Council represents over 60,000 parents in 85 ACT public schools.

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## Executive Summary

The ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations is pleased to provide the following submission for consideration in the ACT government's 2020-21 budget. Our submission includes 20 recommendations covering virtually all aspects of the Government's Future of Education Strategy.

### Recommendation 1

In addition to supporting measures to prevent and reduce occupational violence, Council calls on the ACT Government to implement all the recommendations of the *Management and Minimisation of bullying and violence in ACT schools* report.

### Recommendation 2

Council recommends the ACT Government allocate additional funds to a joint project between Council and the Education Directorate to scope and develop measures to address violence in schools. Including the development of a universal system allowing all members of school communities to report bullying and violence, as a first priority.

### Recommendation 3

Council believes, additional funding is required for MIEACT to provide the *no labels* program in all public primary and secondary schools.

### Recommendation 4

The ACT Government mandate and fund a qualified teacher librarian for every public school, to support and develop student literacy including a love of reading, as well as supporting student research and assignments. Alternatively, Council recommends the ACT Government fund qualified teacher librarians for schools with higher levels of students from disadvantaged backgrounds to address educational equity and provide these students with access to high quality literacy and reading experiences.

### Recommendation 5

The ACT Government fund real-time and accessible mental health supports to prevent and respond to the needs of students and families.

### Recommendation 6

The ACT Government dedicate funds to investigate and report on the effectiveness of the Child Development Service in providing clear diagnoses for students (by age) compared with Therapy ACT, and the impact of the NDIS on diagnosis and therapeutic access and support for students.

### Recommendation 7

Council recommends the ACT Government amend the Student Resource Allocation (SRA) to include funding for students awaiting diagnosis (bearing in mind this may be occurring much later in a student's life than previously) and those students who are currently undiagnosed. Public schools require additional funding to provide staff resources, training and support for undiagnosed students requiring full time and or, one-on-one eyes on support.

### Recommendation 8

Council recommends the ACT Government amend the Student Resource Allocation (SRA) to include funding for students with dyslexia and other learning difficulties.

### Recommendation 9

The ACT Government allocate needs-based funding for gifted and talented students to resource curriculum adjustments.

**Recommendation 10**

Council recommends the ACT Government fund the development of a strategy to transform and rebuild opportunities for parental engagement in all public schools. Council believes we can continue our valuable partnership and work with the Education Directorate to scope and develop a parental engagement strategy. Additional funding of \$100,000 would be required to employ a project officer at the Council to develop and progress this strategy.

Also, Council encourages the ACT Government to fund a 3-year trial of community liaison officers across 5 public schools.

**Recommendation 11**

Council recommends the ACT Government fund a 3-year trial of community liaison officers across 5 public schools. This trial although a small component of the ACT budget would be a significant investment for the selected school communities.

**Recommendation 12**

Council recommends the ACT Government provide \$120,000 per year to the Council to fund a 2-year trial of the social enterprise model school P&C association.

**Recommendation 13**

Council considers that significant investment is needed in schools with lower socio-educational advantage to ensure all students have access to a broad range of subjects and opportunities to appeal to the entire school community.

**Recommendation 14**

We recommend the ACT Government invest funds to ensure all ACT in-area students have language pathways from primary to high school and college, available to them. Council considers the need to develop and implement 3 year plan for PEA schools to transition to using language pathways between primary, high school and college.

**Recommendation 15**

The ACT Government issue one contract for the provision of recycling services in ACT public schools

**Recommendation 16**

Council recommends the ACT Government classify 3 pm to 4 pm as a 'peak time' for bus services and provide students with 20-minute servicing.

**Recommendation 17**

The ACT Government fund a wholistic approach to early childhood education and care, through targeted paint and play sessions, supported playgroups and libraries ACT.

**Recommendation 18**

Council recommends the ACT Government develop a strategy to protect schools from vandalism, including CCTV and fencing (where CCTV and fencing is supported by the school community).

**Recommendation 19**

The ACT Government fund a cross-directorate approach in regional and town planning to include planning for new schools.

**Recommendation 20**

Council calls on the ACT Government to require developers within or nearby school zones to submit a parking and traffic management plan to identify how the risks to students and families will be mitigated, prior to approval.

## Excellence in education

Council recommends the ACT Government supports budgetary initiatives to provide all public education students with an excellent experience of education. Council strongly considers the following initiatives will provide an excellent education for all public school students, irrespective of their postcode.

## Addressing school violence

For students, staff and families, bullying and violence in our public schools remains a critical concern. Bullying and violence in schools is a sensitive and complex issue which can affect all members of school communities. For this reason, it is critical that all members of school communities are supported through targeted opportunities to work together to reduce and better respond to violence in schools. The cost of bullying is estimated to cost Australian schools \$2.3 billion dollars (*National Centre Against Bullying, 2018*).

Council recognises the ACT Governments' significant investment to address bullying and violence in schools. So far, the largest contribution of funds is directed to the prevention and reduction of occupational violence in schools. While Council supports these measures, we believe a more wholistic approach for strategies to reduce and better respond to violence in schools, for all members of school communities is required.

Council is especially concerned that some students subjected to bullying and violence and their families have received poor responses from schools and the Education Directorate, which has resulted in additional and unnecessary trauma.

### Recommendation 1

In addition to supporting measures to prevent and reduce occupational violence, Council calls on the ACT Government to implement all the recommendations of the *Management and Minimisation of bullying and violence in ACT schools* report.

### Building Strong and Safe Communities for Learning

Council thanks the Education Directorate for the opportunity to work collaboratively to explore how together, we can reduce and better respond to violence in schools. We believe the human centred design approach and analysis of different user perspectives were invaluable tools, allowing participants from a broad cross-section of school communities to sensitively develop understanding and empathy for the alternate user perspectives of bullying and violence in schools. Through this experience, participants were then able to identify the current challenges and develop ideas to reduce and better respond to violence in schools.

Council considers the collaborative approach between organisations and the human centred design approach, together with a strong commitment to change, will result in the reduction and better responses to bullying and violence in schools. However, we note that the complexity of bullying and violence in schools, which in our opinion will require the implementation of a range of measures.

Council is committed to continue to work collaboratively with the Education Directorate to ensure measures are put in place to reduce and better respond to violence in schools.

## **Recommendation 2**

Council recommends the ACT Government allocate additional funds to a joint project between Council and the Education Directorate to scope and develop measures to address violence in schools. Including the development of a universal system allowing all members of school communities to report bullying and violence, as a first priority.

### **No Labels**

Council values the significant contribution that the MIEACT (mental health and wellbeing education and training) *no labels* program delivers into selected secondary schools and colleges. Council understands this program challenges students' perceptions of their own behaviour, identifying bullying and bystander behaviours, and fundamentally changes the way students engage with each other. Council appreciates that students develop patterns of anti-social behaviour early in their education and believe provision of the *no labels* program in public primary schools in addition to selected secondary schools and colleges would be beneficial in reducing bullying and violence in schools.

## **Recommendation 3**

Council believes, additional funding is required for MIEACT to provide the *no labels* program in all public primary and secondary schools.

## **Student centred learning**

Council considers, schools where students are the central focus, deliver excellence in education.

### **Qualified Teacher Librarians**

Council strongly believes that excellence in education requires qualified teacher librarians in every public school to promote student literacy and support teachers with resources across the curriculum. Council understands that qualified teacher librarians are generally found in public high schools and colleges, however are rare in public primary and rarer still in early childhood schools. Anecdotal evidence suggests that schools with higher socio-educational advantage are more likely to have qualified teacher librarians compared with their counterparts. Council strongly believes that a student's postcode should not determine the quality of education they receive.

Furthermore, Council considers that students from disadvantaged backgrounds such as those from lower socio-educational advantage, by far have a greater need for additional assistance with literacy skills in the early years. Research shows that students from disadvantaged backgrounds start school approximately 12 months behind their peers, a learning gap which often persists throughout a students' entire schooling. Council believes that primary and early childhood schools should all have access to a qualified teacher librarian.

## **Recommendation 4**

The ACT Government mandate and fund a qualified teacher librarian for every public school, to support and develop student literacy including a love of reading, as well as supporting student research and assignments. Alternatively, Council recommends the ACT Government fund qualified teacher librarians for schools with higher levels of students from disadvantaged backgrounds to address educational equity and provide these students with access to high quality reading experiences.

## More supports for more students

Despite significant investment by the ACT Government in school psychologists to support students, many students needing additional support are unable to access it at school.

### Mental Health

Anxiety is one area, which concerns parents and carers and is used here as an example. Parents and carers are concerned by the increasing number of students with anxiety, particularly in early primary school. Feedback to Council suggests that students suffering anxiety are generally unable to see their school psychologist due to high levels of demand and the need to prioritise cases based on severity. Although services such as anxiety programs may be offered through child and family health centres, these programs often have long waiting lists of six months to one year. Parents and carers are often forced to seek the services of private psychologists, where costs can be prohibitive at around \$200- per session. In addition to costs, services of private psychologists can be difficult to access and often have three to six month waiting lists or closed books. In less than one year, a student has had three private psychologists due high transition rates.

Council contends that provision of early and real time access to supports for students is desperately needed for parents and carers and schools. Council recognises that waiting for services often results in increasing challenging behaviours at home and at school, and often requires additional school resources. Council believes early identification and access to the supports will prevent a large portion of challenging behaviours in schools.

### **Recommendation 5**

The ACT Government fund real-time and accessible mental health supports to prevent and respond to the needs of students and families.

### NDIS and diagnosis

Feedback to Council suggests that the introduction of the NDIS may have the unintended consequence of delaying diagnoses to an older age. Anecdotal evidence suggests that under Therapy ACT a larger number of students were diagnosed prior to or around the time of starting school. Under the NDIS, parents and carers are reporting students being diagnosed with a global developmental delay prior to starting school, yet, may receive an Autism diagnosis at ages 9-10. At the same time, the *Australian Early Development Census* of 2018 is showing significant increases in the number of students starting school in the ACT, who are vulnerable across one or more domains and undiagnosed. For these reasons, Council remains concerned that undiagnosed students or those diagnosed with global developmental delays are unable to access specifically targeted services and supports to meet student needs. Council appreciates it is difficult for schools to provide the appropriate supports without a clear and specific diagnosis.

### **Recommendation 6**

The ACT Government dedicate funds to investigate and report on the effectiveness of the Child Development Service in providing clear diagnoses for students (by age) compared with Therapy ACT, and the impact of the NDIS on diagnosis and therapeutic access and support for students.

### Students with complex and challenging behavioural needs

All of our public schools have a small number of students with high, complex and challenging behavioural needs. Council believes that some students are not receiving specific and targeted supports in schools, for not having a diagnosis. As outlined above, the lack of a diagnosis may be due to difficulties navigating the ACT health system or access to the NDIS. In any case, Council contends that students with high, complex and challenging behaviours need specific and targeted supports to ensure all students receive an excellent education.

#### **Recommendation 7**

Council recommends the ACT Government amend the Student Resource Allocation (SRA) to include funding for students awaiting diagnosis (bearing in mind this may be occurring much later in a student's life than previously) and those students who are currently undiagnosed. Public schools require additional funding to provide staff resources, training and support for undiagnosed students requiring full time and or, one-on-one eyes on support.

### Learning difficulties

Council is concerned that students with dyslexia and other non-funded learning difficulties are missing out on vital supports, preventing students from reaching their academic potential or at the very least preventing them from reaching the expected level.

#### **Recommendation 8**

Council recommends the ACT Government amend the Student Resource Allocation (SRA) to include funding for students with dyslexia and other learning difficulties.

### Gifted and talented students

Council considers that gifted and talented students often require adjustments to their curriculum. These adjustments are funded from a school's general revenue. However, some schools do not recognise gifted and talented students or provide adjustments for them. Similar to students with disabilities, gifted and talented students require needs-based funding to ensure appropriate curriculum adjustments are made.

#### **Recommendation 9**

The ACT Government allocate needs-based funding for gifted and talented students to resource curriculum adjustments.

## **Communities for learning**

Communities scaffolded around schools to support students to assist them reach their potential.

### **Parent engagement and community liaison officers – assisting to build the public perception of schools**

Research shows that strong parental engagement supports students in reaching higher educational outcomes. Council appreciates that levels of parental engagement varies from school to school and within each school community. We also recognise that the role of parents has changed over time, and more students come from households where both parents work. At the same time, we recognise that the model for parents to engage with schools is largely unchanged from 30 years ago, where a stay at home carer was more common. Feedback to Council identifies that parents are

struggling to balance their work and family commitments. It is particularly difficult to engage with schools in the traditional manner, especially during school hours. Council considers that modern working families should have the same opportunities to engage in their students' education. Council believes that it needs to be easier for parents and carers to engage with schools, and that a variety of opportunities need to be explored. Some examples would include the capacity for video conferencing technology for parent teacher conferences, access to technology which allows parents to see what's happening in the classroom remotely, as well as structured opportunities to engage with staff outside of school hours. We also recognise that parents and carers often feel unqualified to engage with education staff and at times intimidated by the experience. We believe that our public schools need new and easier ways to engage with parents, particularly hard to reach parents.

### **Recommendation 10**

Council recommends the ACT Government fund the development of a strategy to transform and rebuild opportunities for parental engagement in all public schools. Council believes we can continue our valuable partnership and work with the Education Directorate to scope and develop a parental engagement strategy. Additional funding of \$100,000 would be required to employ a project officer at the Council to develop and progress this strategy.

Also, Council encourages the ACT Government to fund a 3-year trial of community liaison officers across 5 public schools. Council understands that community liaison officers perform an integral role in connecting schools and their staff with families and students and the broader communities. Currently, only early childhood schools have community liaison officers. Council believes the connections provided by community liaison officers in school communities are invaluable in building social capital. Community liaison officers provide families with an alternative point of contact within a school and conversations which are less intimidating. Our work with the Education Directorate on the *Building Strong and Safe Communities for Learning* project identifies many difficulties that parents have engaging with and navigating school systems. We also recognise that school leadership staff tend to engage on a more formal level with families and are busy. Community liaison officers are essential to support cultural changes in school communities from the grass-roots up. Community liaison officers often work closely with school P&Cs to promote targeted events and activities of interest to the school community, fostering social capital and partnerships between school and home. Council suggests that a trial be conducted in 5 public schools with the greatest need, to boost parental engagement and school culture.

### **Recommendation 11**

Council recommends the ACT Government fund a 3-year trial of community liaison officers across 5 public schools. This trial although a small component of the ACT budget would be a significant investment for the selected school communities.

### **Social enterprise model**

Council has developed proposals for the establishment of a number of school P&C associations as "social enterprises". A trial of the social enterprise model P&C is planned and a basic requirement for the trial is the employment of a Volunteer Manager to oversee the trial and assist the trial P&Cs to recruit the required parent volunteers. It is envisaged that the trial will take up to two years and on successful completion will be expanded to include further school P&C associations. The outcome of this process will be greater numbers of P&C associations being volunteer lead rather than

managed, with greater self reliance and renewal leading to a more supportive and engaged school community. Funding of \$120,000 would be required for this project to employ the Volunteer Manager and assist the trial P&Cs.

### **Recommendation 12**

Council recommends the ACT Government provide \$120,000 per year to the Council to fund a 2-year trial of the social enterprise model school P&C association.

## **Systems supporting learning**

Supporting the learning of public school students by embedding well-considered systems, policies and procedures.

### **Postcode education, opportunities and pathways**

To support the learning of all public school students in the ACT, Council considers that a number of systemic changes are required. Firstly, Council firmly believes that every student has the right to an excellent education irrespective of where they live in the ACT. However, a significant number of parents and carers feel that their local public school provides them with very limited opportunities compared with other public schools. Parents and carers are aware that schools offering a greater range of subjects and opportunities for students are often located in higher socio-advantage suburbs. While Council supports the neighbourhood model of schooling and priority enrolment area policy in the ACT, we strongly feel that students from lower socio-advantaged areas should not have less opportunities than their advantaged peers.

### **Recommendation 13**

Council considers that significant investment is needed in schools with lower socio-educational advantage to ensure all students have access to a broad range of subjects and opportunities to appeal to the entire school community.

#### Language Pathways

Parent and carer feedback highlights the need for consistent language pathways between local primary school, high school and college. Currently students attending their in-area PEA primary school may learn one language, arrive at high school and be required to learn a different language. The lack of language pathways creates additional challenges for high school teachers having to cater for students with 7 years of language experience, while other students have to start from the beginning. Potentially this could be addressed with streaming, however some of the high schools may not have sufficient student numbers to support this approach.

### **Recommendation 14**

We recommend the ACT Government invest funds to ensure all ACT in-area students have language pathways from primary to high school and college, available to them. Council considers the need to develop and implement 3 year plan for PEA schools to transition to using language pathways between primary, high school and college.

### Recycling

Despite several initiatives to reduce waste for a sustainable future across the ACT, Council believes that public schools are left to organise their own recycling contracts. Council suggests that a centralised recycling contract would be a sustainable way to reduce waste in schools, while also proving more efficient.

#### **Recommendation 15**

The ACT Government issue one contract for the provision of recycling services in ACT public schools.

### Transport to and from school

The new public transport network rolled out across Canberra, promised to deliver 20-minute servicing. We appreciate that 20 minutes servicing across all routes may not be required. However, Council strongly believes that classifying the hour from 3 pm to 4 pm as a 'peak time' may assist in providing 20-minute servicing and assist with crowding on popular routes. We know that many students have been racing out of school, across roads to catch a bus rather than wait 30-40 minutes.

#### **Recommendation 16**

Council recommends the ACT Government classify 3 pm to 4 pm as a 'peak time' for bus services and provide students with 20-minute servicing.

### Early learning

The 2018 *Australian Early Development Census*, which measures how young children develop up to the point of school identifies a trend of significant increases in the numbers of children who are developmentally vulnerable in the ACT. Council does not understand how this can be the case in the ACT with approximately 70% of all children attending some form of education and care, and the requirements of the National Quality Framework. Anecdotal evidence suggests there may be a correlation between the change from Therapy ACT to the NDIS, whereby students are presenting to school without diagnoses, and potentially being diagnosed at an older age.

Along side the introduction of 3-year-old preschool, Council would like to see a more strategic approach to supported parental engagement for the early childhood years. Council envisions targeted expansion of parent and play sessions, and supported playgroups with opportunities for parents to softly engage with early childhood educators in a comfortable and welcoming space.

Council also considers that our libraries could increase their collection of bilingual books to encourage readers and their families to access books in their spoken language.

#### **Recommendation 17**

The ACT Government fund a wholistic approach to early childhood education and care, through targeted parent and play sessions, supported playgroups and libraries ACT.

### **Learning environments**

Quality learning environments make public schools places students want to be, promoting student engagement and excellent education.

### **School security – CCTV and other measures**

School communities want their schools to be safe places, valued and supported by the whole community. Unfortunately, some public schools in the ACT are subject to repeated vandalism, which costs the school financially and destroys the morale of the school community. Some school communities have had 12-13 major incidents of vandalism within a very short period of time, despite having been fenced. These communities are asking for assistance from the ACT Government to ensure that their public school is recognised as a valuable space and protected accordingly.

Feedback from school communities indicates that parents and carers are frustrated that public school grounds and facilities appear less important than private school grounds. Private schools can fence their grounds without undertaking extensive public consultation, where public consultations can stop public schools from installing fencing irrespective of the associated risks. Council believes that public school grounds and facilities are valuable to the community and worthy of protection.

#### **Recommendation 18**

Council recommends the ACT Government develop a strategy to protect schools from vandalism, including CCTV and fencing (where CCTV and fencing is supported by the school community).

### **New schools – planning**

Council appreciates the commitments made by the ACT Government to build new schools to meet the growth in demand. However, Council remains concerned that schools are not really considered as part of regional and town planning. Town planning documents for Tuggeranong and Belconnen towns, only mentions schools once. Council believes that regional planning must use a cross-directorate approach to ensure that schools are planned at the same time developments are released. This would include setting aside Government owned land for public schools prior to selling the land off and then purchasing it back.

#### **Recommendation 19**

The ACT Government fund a cross-directorate approach in regional and town planning to include planning for new schools.

### **Urban infill and brownfield developments**

Areas around schools are identified as higher risk areas, as indicated by the lower school zone speed limits of 40 km per hour. Development sites within or nearby school zones, place students at risk due to the additional traffic and parking, especially during peak times.

#### **Recommendation 20**

Council calls on the ACT Government to require developers within or nearby school zones to submit a parking and traffic management plan to identify how the risks to students and families will be mitigated, prior to approval.