



School roads unsafe

An alarming majority of parents consider roads around our schools unsafe, regard traffic volumes as unmanageable, and find parking, pickup and set-down at school difficult. These are the disturbing results of a survey conducted by Council in response to recent member concerns.

While 70 percent of parents surveyed found both parking and set-down 'difficult', the most alarming result was the perception of safety, or lack of it, around ACT public schools. Nearly two-thirds of respondents say their school car parks and set-down areas are unsafe to some degree. Between 10 and 50 percent of parents believe these areas are 'very unsafe', depending on the school.

Half of Wanniasa Hills Primary parents surveyed rated roads as 'very unsafe'. "It's chaotic," said their P&C President Greg Hall. "There is nowhere to drop-off and only enough car parks for staff so parents double park, triple park or park illegally. There's such a crowd of cars, the kids can't see to cross safely."

Alarmingly, most parents (70%) have themselves witnessed an accident or near miss around their school, with half of those surveyed having done so more than once.

"Clearly, Council is very concerned about the results," said Council President Viv Pearce. "They confirm what we have suspected for some time – that a clear strategy is needed to address these concerns and that student safety is in jeopardy."

"Parents express a deal of frustration around this

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Cars parked in the pick-up zone at Gordon Primary, and stopped in the no-stopping zone, force a student to leave the safety of the curb to get to her vehicle.

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From the President



Amanda Bichard

I have been Acting President for the last few months as Viv Pearce has been enjoying a much-deserved holiday overseas. While I have been attempting to fill her shoes, Council has continued to work on issues arising in our schools.

The biggest of these at the moment is the traffic and parking difficulties around our schools. In response to member concerns, we established our school traffic survey which gathered an unprecedented number of responses. The results are clear – most parents believe that the roads and car parks around their schools are not safe, as discussed in our front page story.

Obviously, the issues are complex and vary from school to school. We would like to see a Ministerial Taskforce established to find possible solutions. We believe that a careful cross-government approach is needed, to make sure that those looking after ACT roads, schools, buses and walk-to-school programs are working together.

The role of homework, particularly in primary schools was also raised by members at a recent meeting. In response to this we have arranged for Leanne Wright, Director of Teaching and Learning at the ACT Education Directorate, to address our next meeting and answer your questions. See our back-page story for details.

A concern at some schools is access to preschool for next year. Is your school having a problem with limited preschool places and parents being sent instead to neighbouring preschools? Please let us know so that we can discover the extent of

the issue.

While on the topic of preschools, the Federal Government has announced that funding which pays for an additional three hours of preschool a week for four-year olds will continue for 2015, but is uncertain beyond that. Without this funding, ACT preschools will revert to 12 hours a week (funded by the ACT Government). What do parents at your school think? How important are the additional three hours a week? Please let us know with a quick email or by coming to our next meeting. Our contact details are on page 11.

The Federal Government has also released its Review of the Australian Curriculum. Our office is currently examining the details, but it has been widely reported in the media as finding that the curriculum is overcrowded, particularly in the primary school years. The review also comments on specific teaching methods (eg phonics, and exploratory learning of science) and criticises the three ‘cross-curriculum priorities’ identified in the curriculum (an understanding of Asia, indigenous issues and sustainability). Council is concerned about the lack of political balance in the review panel, the timing of the review (before the curriculum has been fully implemented) and any ‘back to the drawing board’ approach over-riding what has been a carefully considered and consultative approach to developing the curriculum. Council can see no need for a major overhaul and is satisfied that possible over-crowding, which we have raised in the past, has been addressed.

Finally, I recently had the pleasure of attending a symposium which looked at how to embed excellent partnerships between parents and schools into the way all schools work in Australia. You can read more on page 3. •

Shaping home-school partnerships

In September, Council representatives attended a symposium focusing on the importance of parental engagement in education. Communications Officer, Janelle Kennard, reports on what was a fascinating two days.

Engaging parents in their child's schooling and learning is now considered an integral part of school improvement. This was made clear at the Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau's National Symposium, held in Melbourne.

The Federal Government's school improvement plan includes "engaging parents in education" as one of its four key areas. The symposium gave Australia's peak parent organisations the chance to discuss, with experts and parents, what is important in this arena at a time when Federal policy is still being shaped.

Home-school partnerships

Canadian expert Joseph Flessa discussed how students flourish when there is an effective partnership between schools and home, with respectful and trusting relationships between staff and families. In schools which are welcoming places for parents, effective at communicating and well connected with other community institutions, students are ten times more likely to improve in maths and four times more likely to improve in reading than those in schools which are weak on these aspects. Having a genuine partnership between home and school also increases student motivation and participation, and teachers can draw on the relationship as an important resource to enhance learning.

Breaking down barriers

While it is obvious that schools and families are both educating children, they do not necessarily work together. The boundary between home and school can, instead, be a wide expanse. In her inspirational welcome to country to open the symposium, 'Aunty' Diane Kerr spoke of her personal experience of feeling inferior when

entering a school as a parent and grandparent.

In this area, we need to change the way that schools think, to assume that parents have good reasons for not coming into schools. Only then we can understand what stops them from coming in and engaging with the school.

Those at the symposium agreed that schools must make a conscious effort to actively invite and welcome parent involvement. They also need to develop programs that encourage, support and enhance the role of parents in their children's learning and provide parents with the knowledge and skills to support student learning at home. Examples include parent workshops, information sessions, or even 'Podcasts' explaining classroom methods (see for example the podcasts available in the 'Learning' section of the Fraser Primary School website).

We heard that schools need to build a foundation of trust and respect, connect parent engagement strategies to learning objectives, and reach out to parents beyond school. The more welcome parents feel in schools, the more likely they will be to engage in their children's education and ensure their success.

Sharing power

Many examples of effective parent engagement given at the symposium involved schools sharing power and decision making with parents. While some parents may need help to acquire the necessary skills to engage in this way, allowing parents to set the agenda and develop the school's parent engagement strategies might be the best way to enhance parent-school partnerships.

Setting policy

There was broad agreement at the symposium that the role of government policy is to move Australian schools on from the current situation, where we have a handful of 'shining examples' (see box on page 4) of excellent school-parent partnerships, to a more institutionalised

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Shaping home-school partnerships

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and reproducible ability to form these partnerships in all schools.

Currently, both Federal and ACT Governments have commissioned studies in this area with a view to forming policies, guidelines and resources to embed parental engagement as a corner-stone of school practice. So now is the time for parents

to have input into what we want to see. Council here in the ACT, and ACSSO (our national counterpart) federally, are staying closely involved with the process.

Transcripts, videos and resources from the symposium are available on the Bureau's website: www.familyschool.org.au. •

'Shining' examples

Specific 'shining examples' of programs to help form strong home-school partnerships are many and varied around the world.

In Ontario, Canada, each school is required to establish a Parent Involvement Committee. These parent groups provide advice on how to communicate with parents, and develop initiatives to help the school engage more parents. Grants are available to turn ideas into reality and since 2006, 15,600 projects worth \$24 million have been funded. The projects are tailored to the school's individual needs and challenges and, according to Prof. Joseph Flessa, these concrete, tailored interventions do make a difference to parent engagement.

In some parts of the world—such as Shanghai and some US states—home visits are part of a teacher's job! At Madison Park Middle School in Arizona, teachers take a 'community walk' prior to the start of the school year. Teachers visit the homes of their students, let them know school start times, make sure they have everything they need, and answer any questions. They also leave a door hanger with school contact details. This early, personal contact has improved attendance, sharply reduced lateness, and made parents feel more comfortable and welcome.

In some Victorian Catholic Schools, parent Board members are encouraged to 'create deep conversations between parents and educators'. One tool is regular 'learning walks' where a group of parents walk through the school and observe it as it is working on the day. They are then asked: what did you see, what did you feel, what are you wondering?

Many ACT schools are working hard in this area with videos and written resources to help parents understand more about what happens at school and how to help. There are also excellent Kindergarten transition programs in place in many schools where, for example, parents attend information sessions covering the kindergarten curriculum, how parents can help, student management and school and local services.

P&Cs have a role to play too. For parents to truly engage with the school, they need to feel part of a community. P&Cs can run community-building events and activities such as barbecues, family movie nights, and cultural celebrations. When parents and staff get to know each other in a social setting first, they feel more comfortable meeting to discuss a student.

Teacher librarians: superseded or super needed?

Every school needs a teacher librarian, write
Holly Godfrey and Olivia Neilson.

Myth: Teacher librarians are bespectacled old ladies telling children to shush. Who needs that in the digital age?

Fact: Teacher librarians help students and teachers access information. The teacher librarian (TL) is more important now than ever before.

The TL impact

There is a wealth of data, that clearly shows the measurable and significant positive impact TLs have on student learning outcomes. Most importantly, this outcome is independent of students' socioeconomic status.

Skills of a qualified TL

Information literacy

TLs are teachers. With a research project, the classroom teacher focuses on the content being learned (history, science, etc.); the TL focuses on the process (how can we find out what we need to know?). TLs teach:

- Research skills - finding, choosing and using information from the best sources
- Note taking skills - organising information and avoiding plagiarism
- Critical and creative thinking – e.g. creating effective research questions
- Online search strategies – narrowing/broadening a search, analysing search results
- Website evaluation, copyright knowledge, cyber safety and responsible digital citizenship – all essential skills in today's world.

Teachers are NOT teacher librarians. A qualified TL has dual tertiary qualifications in both teaching and information studies. Studies show that the information literacy skills of many teachers and principals are not very strong. Nor are the information literacy skills of many so-called 'digital natives' (people who have grown up with the internet). Finding out what time a movie is showing is NOT information literacy – relevant skills need to be explicitly taught and practised.



Teacher librarians explicitly teach information literacy — a crucial skill for today's students.

Collaboration with staff

Sometimes the best way to help students is to teach the teachers. Through professional development and team-teaching lessons, the TL also teaches the teachers to be more information literate. TLs:

- Cooperatively plan lessons and team-teach with teachers
- Help teachers and students get what they need for teaching and learning
- Work closely with the executive team – TLs have a bird's-eye view across all year levels and subject areas.

Collection management

Budgeting, selecting, purchasing and weeding print and online resources creates a library that supports the teaching and learning needs of the school. Every school has different needs.

The ACT situation: the bitter pill

Over the past 10 years, there has been a decline in the number of qualified TLs employed in ACT government schools as well as a drop in the number of full time TLs.

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Teacher librarians

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This year, less than half of ACT government primary schools (that's 9,000+ students) have a qualified TL. There are now also some high-schools in the ACT choosing not to employ qualified TLs in their libraries.

By contrast, some independent and catholic schools in Canberra employ 4, 5, or even 6 teacher librarians as well as library technicians and library assistants to support them.

These are serious equity issues for students both within the ACT Government school system and between the public and the private sectors.

Where to from here?

Please consider what your children will miss out on if they don't have a qualified TL. Also, consider the issue of fairness. Is it fair that some students in the ACT have TLs while others don't?

Our goal is for the ACT Government to guarantee that all students have access to a full time, qualified teacher librarian.

At their core, these are issues of equity. The ACT Education Act states that "Every child has a right to receive a high-quality education." We would respectfully put forward that this cannot happen in the 21st century without a qualified teacher librarian in every school.

Further Reading

See the article '*Teacher Librarians Improve Student Learning Outcomes*' on Council's website for more information and resources. ●

Holly and Olivia are teacher librarians in the ACT and members of the Australian Education Union's Teacher Librarian Advocacy Group.

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issue. And there is a great deal of concern. Parents are pleading for solutions to be found – before another child is hurt or killed.”

One parent at Gordon Primary School describes the traffic as “bedlam”. “It’s horrific,” she told Council, “some areas are not safe at all. School speed zones and crossing are not respected, people park illegally and dangerously. The school and P&C, the principal and deputy are doing all they can. I have raised the issues with politicians and government departments but their response was a real cop-out. Nothing has been done.”

“There is a lot of goodwill from parents and school staff to address these problems,” said Ms Pearce, “but the ACT Government needs to allocate resources and provide a tool-kit of solutions which schools can employ for their particular traffic issues.”

Council has submitted a range of suggestions to improve school traffic to the ACT Government as

part of the budget consultation process.

“We are calling on the ACT Government to view school road safety as an issue requiring a whole of government response – a co-ordinated approach from ETD (Education and Training), TAMS (Territory and Municipal Services) and Health. Accordingly, we call for a Ministerial Taskforce, made up of key stakeholders, to be appointed to address the difficulties and dangers our survey has highlighted. We would also like to see specific funding for making roads around schools safer,” said Ms Pearce.

Council has also asked the ACT Government to conduct more research, focussing on traffic management and road safety around schools so that the best solutions can be found. Funding was also requested for a volunteer-based walking-school-bus program.

“Part of the issue which cannot be overlooked is that around two-thirds of students are getting to

school by car. Better bus services and programs which help motivate walking and riding to school are part of the solution. This includes improving pedestrian safety around schools.”

The most commonly requested change from surveyed parents was for more parking. The lack of parking is deterring some parents from attending school events, engaging with the school, and even from volunteering.

Parents at Miles Franklin Primary School describe parking at the school as ‘woefully inadequate’. “There are 500 students and 47 staff at the school, but only 75 parking spaces.” said Allison Reid, P&C President of the school. “We also need space for staff employed by the P&C for services like Out of School Care and the canteen.”

“The P&C and school staff try to encourage people to walk and ride to school as an alternative. We would also like to encourage parents to look at alternative places to park where students then walk the remaining distance to school – a kind of “park and walk” system. However, due to liability issues in suggesting locations, we are still waiting on the go-ahead to promote this idea. This is something that could be promoted by the Department for all schools, not just for ours,” said Ms Reid.

“I would also like to see the ACT Government partner with an organisation like the NRMA for a well-publicised driver-behaviour awareness program specifically focusing on school zones and school car parks,” she said.

“But our biggest problem is with the drop-off and pick-up zone which is currently part of the car park. The space is tiny and often drivers don’t obey the signs, meaning the whole traffic flow is interrupted and causes aggravation. We need a separate, specific area for pick-up and drop-off to improve the traffic flow and increase safety. In the meantime we would like to see this area supervised by a traffic warden with the authority to move drivers on so that parents do not park in these areas,” Ms Reid said.

The survey results show that schools need better pick-up and set-down areas. “In some cases, roads need to be changed and pull-off bays added, but supervision is also called for. This would require staff to be allocated, or a program which involves volunteers or senior students. Good examples already exist in other cities which could be used here,” said Ms Pearce.

Surveyed parents reported dangers around school crossings, saying some are unclear, parked over, misunderstood or ignored. Around half of those surveyed called for improvements.

“We believe there is a need to make the crossings much more visible,” said Patrick Daley, P&C Vice President at Garran Primary. “There is also an urgent need for additional signage to make drivers aware that they are approaching the school crossings, the need for speed bumps before the crossings to slow cars down, and barriers or roadside fencing that make it impossible for parents to park in the ‘no parking’ areas near the crossings.”

“A new School Traffic Taskforce together with various government departments need to sit down with representatives from each school and work through solutions to their traffic issues on a school-by-school basis,” Ms Pearce said. “There really is no other choice when it comes to the safety of our children.”

“Unfortunately, instead of learning from current difficulties, we see the mistakes being repeated in new schools. Council representatives involved with the planning group for the new Coombes Primary were very disappointed to see poorly planned parking and drop-off facilities. Our representatives pointed out these flaws, but they have not yet been re-designed,” she said. “We have the information now to feed into design and get this right. Why is it ignored?”

You can find the results of the traffic survey on our website: www.actparents.org.au. Thanks to all who filled in the survey. The response (over 1100 public school parents) was amazing. ●

Private schools not better than public

Four academic studies in the past year have found that the quality of private schools in Australia is not better than public schools. The studies found that students' test scores are closely related to their socio-economic status (SES – a measure of a family's education, income and occupation). Once differences in SES are taken into account, there are no significant differences between the test results of private and public schools.

A study published by Flinders University academics concluded: "the observation that non-government schools achieve higher scores than government ones is not the result of an inherent higher quality of non-government schools. It is rather the result of the more privileged high SES students self-selecting into non-government

schools and taking their existing advantage with them."

Meanwhile, other studies have shown that public school students perform better at university. Barbara Preston reported in *The Conversation* that "on average, graduates of state schools receive the same marks at the end of first-year university as students of private schools who had tertiary entrance scores around three to six points higher."

Further, University of Canberra researcher Jennifer Chester reports that, after controlling for other variables, there is no difference in employment rates or income levels between those educated in public and private schools. •

School fences thwart vandals

Most ACT public school grounds are now fenced and schools are reaping the rewards.

Over the past few years the ACT Education and Training Directorate (ETD) has run a concerted program to install security fencing around the perimeter of schools. Currently, three quarters of schools have been fenced with several more to come before the end of this financial year.

The program has had a dramatic effect on school vandalism. In 2009, 300 attacks by vandals caused \$606,000 worth of damage. Last year, that figure had more than halved to \$240,00 (in 146 incidents) and the first six months of this year saw only 22 incidents costing \$80,000.

Repairing damage done by vandals comes out of a school's budget, so fewer attacks mean more money for schools to spend on education resources.

School sites with a high incidence of vandalism or those with high value items at risk of being stolen or damaged were prioritised to be fenced first.

The department also considered how close a school is to public places and how easy the grounds are to access.

Amanda Bichard, acting Council President, congratulates the Directorate on their sustained commitment to fencing schools.

"It is a wonderful result. Less vandalism means schools are saving money on repairs so that there are more resources for the students. We are also pleased that parents and the school community is part of the process. That way, the community as a whole gets what it wants," she said

If a school wants a security fence it should lodge a request to ETD's Infrastructure and Capital Works Branch who will consult with the school about fence design and placement and create a concept plan for community discussion. The fence can go ahead once the Principal, School Board and P&C are happy to support the plan.

Schools wanting a fence can contact ETD's Mark Neathercote: mark.neathercote@act.gov.au. •

Canteen expertise

Council is finding more ways for canteens to share and enhance their expertise.

Council's partnership with the Healthy Kids Association (HKA) has been of great assistance. Council paid for P&C-run canteens to be HKA members, giving them access to canteen business advice, workshops and a new ACT-specific section of the HKA website (www.healthy-kids.com.au). Council will again fund membership next year.

Several schools have had HKA business reviews which find ways to improve canteen operations and profits. HKA then assist with implementing the changes. In one case, a canteen saw sales double within 18 months of the business review!

Workshops run in September by HKA were also widely acknowledged as a great success and very useful for participants, who all agreed that they could use the information to improve their canteen. The workshops, which looked at running the canteen efficiently and compliance issues, will be repeated next year. Keep an eye on Council emails and publications for details.

Nutrition Australia also has helpful workshops and training (email act@nutritionaustralia.org or call 61622586). An accredited Food Safety Supervisor's course will run on November 25 and on December 8, a free menu workshop will conclude with a food-safety information session for others involved in the canteen.

Our School Canteen Stakeholders Working Group has also met three times this year and discussed all aspects of running canteens, exchanged expertise and enjoyed the input of staff from other related organisations, such as Nutrition Australia. By popular demand, a new Council sub-committee for Canteens will be formed so that canteen committee members can share information, work together to solve issues on a school-by-school basis, and discuss menu ideas, employment matters and canteen promotion. It may also act as a future co-operative for bulk purchasing. To get involved, contact our office: contact@actparents.org.au. •

Community Forum for migrant families

Companion House and Council have teamed up to host a forum for migrant and refugee families to share knowledge about our schools, getting involved and supporting education at home. All are welcome to participate in this annual information exchange between schools, parent groups, teachers and newly formed communities.

There will be a chance to discuss and share supportive programs in locals schools and communities, barriers to engaging with teachers and parent's expectations of schooling.

The free forum will run from 6 - 8:30pm on Wednesday November 12 at the Cook community hub (41 Templeton Street). A light meal, including vegetarian options, will be provided. Call 6251 4550 for more information. •

Healthy Schools Network

A new website providing a 'one stop shop' for ACT primary and secondary school teachers wanting to tackle school health and wellbeing issues was launched in October.

The website, found at healthyschoolsact.com.au, is a collaboration between 15 respected local not-for-profit groups working in the area of student health and wellbeing. The new site makes it easier for teachers to find information about resources and programs which are available to help their students. With so many excellent resources available, it can be hard for time-pressured teachers to keep up. The new site solves this problem, providing a single point of access. •



At our P&C...

Communicating well with parents is crucial to a P&C's work. Harrison school's P&C President Angela Lewis explains how their P&C Facebook presence has become a central part of their communications.

The Harrison P&C enjoys a strong and open relationship with the Harrison school and this extends into a cooperative approach to our communications with parents. We use our networks to pass on urgent school information and the school helps with P&C announcements. Together, we focus on what parents want and try to create something to fill that need.

The Harrison P&C uses a multitude of media to communicate with parents. We have our own website plus the school's website, school newsletters, flyers sent home for key events, and importantly, Facebook.

Facebook is a key tool

Facebook has become the primary method for quick and timely communication with parents as well as the way we communicate within the committee for organising our day to day activities.

For our **internal communications** we use closed Facebook groups. These are easy to create and once set up, anyone in the group can see the conversations that are happening between members. It replaces those long email threads where half a dozen people use "reply to all" to keep everyone in the loop. All our sub-committees discuss, plan and manage the nitty-gritty of their activities through these groups. We have separate closed groups for people working on our canteen, uniform shop, Art Show, Fair, plus one for the executive team. To keep an understanding of things that are going across the P&C, the school Principal and P&C executive are members of all groups.

We find the internal groups fast, easy and convenient. As P&C president, I can check how things are going on a particular activity when needed, rather than being bombarded with



Facebook is an integral part of Harrison School's P&C. Check out www.facebook.com/HarrisonSchoolP&C

emails, or having to find time to catch up with sub-committees.

Our open, public Facebook page for **providing information to parents** is also a great success. In a school of 1500 students, we have over 500 families following our posts. We use it for reminders of events and meetings, calls for volunteers, directing parents to detailed information on the school or P&C website, and must-know information about the services we offer (changes to the uniform shop, canteen and so on). The school also relies on it for quick notices to parents.

We do not use it to ask for opinions or discuss issues as this can quickly get out of hand, but we do have active sharing and commenting and parents can post questions. This needs to be monitored to provide timely replies.

Our Facebook page is the best way to provide 'live' updates to parents. This is great for things like "the bus from camp is late – pick up at 6pm now, not 5".

In making our live Facebook feed for parents a success, several things are important:

- **Share the load.** All committee members have access to post to the feed. This means that the uniform shop manager can post directly about the uniform shop and so on, without taking up someone else's time.
- **Ensure everyone has a clear, shared vision** of what we are trying to achieve and the sorts of information we wish to share.
- **Have written guidelines** to make it clear

About us

ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations
is the representative body for
Parent & Citizen Associations in the ACT.

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

About our magazine

ParentACTion is a free journal published four times a year.
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ACT Government School Boards and P&Cs, public
education organisations 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. Views
expressed in this journal are not necessarily those of the
ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations.*

what to post and what not to post (eg no advertising).

- **Check posts carefully.** We use our internal Facebook groups and honest feedback to refine posts that we will send to parents so that they are appropriate. Remember that it is easy for people to misinterpret what you write, so be clear and careful of intimation.
- **Terminate or delete inappropriate discussions or comments.** Problems are rare, but there is a need to be vigilant.
- **Put the most important information at the top of a post.** Capture the right audience in the first couple of words so that parents know quickly whether to read on or not, and put the important facts first. Don't make people read right through a post only to discover it doesn't apply to them.
- **Mix it up.** We provide variety and the odd bit of fun and colour. Having different people posting helps.
- **Keep it up.** A lull in activity will mean parents go elsewhere for the information.
- **Use feedback to further refine** the type of information to post and to understand our audience. Facebook gives excellent, instant feedback through 'likes' and 'reach' to tell us how many people saw a post and what parents like to see.

Facebook is definitely not an add-on for us anymore, but an integral part of the way we work. It fits well with our overall plan for our communications. It can be a lot of work, but if it is used well and embraced fully by the P&C it becomes self-sustaining and a valuable tool.

Angela Lewis
P&C President, Harrison School

Editor's note:

Because of the nature of social media, P&Cs should carefully manage their social media presence. This should include a written policy or set of guidelines for users to follow. Council can provide a template for your own policy/guidelines. Please contact our office. •

Our Executive

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Dates to remember

12 Nov **Community Education Forum for migrant families**

6.00pm - 8.30pm
Cook Community Hub
41 Templeton Street, Cook.

25 Nov **Council AGM & General Meeting**

7.00pm - 9.30pm
Hedley Beare Centre
51 Fremantle Drive, Stirling.

20 Dec **Council office closes for 2013**

26 Jan **Council office opens for 2014**

24 Feb **Council General Meeting**

7.00pm - 9.30pm
Hedley Beare Centre
51 Fremantle Drive, Stirling.

Homework: What is it good for?

A new report has questioned the benefits of homework, prompting Council to investigate.

A Victorian parliamentary inquiry into the impact of homework on student learning has concluded that homework in primary schools has little impact on the academic performance of students. The report states that there is strong evidence and general agreement on the lack of learning benefits.

For secondary students, the case is not as clear, with the balance of evidence pointing to “some academic benefits” from homework. The need for teachers to provide timely and meaningful feedback to students on their homework is crucial. Without such feedback, the learning benefits of homework are reduced.

The report does, however, note some benefits from homework. Homework can help parents to understand the progress their child is or isn't making and can therefore make parent-teacher interviews more meaningful and useful. For primary students, homework may play a role in preparing students for high school and beyond.

This sentiment was echoed at Council's September meeting where parents cited reasons they valued homework, including learning organisational skills, a chance for parent-child interaction, and a way of parents keeping up with what is taught at school.

However other parents, and the inquiry's report, note disadvantages associated with homework which may outweigh these benefits. In particular, homework reduces the time available to spend on physical and recreational activities, artistic



endeavours, and family and community engagement. In addition, homework can heighten inequities between students, as differences in support and resources at home can affect the quality of the homework and the ability to complete it. Homework clubs, according to the report, are vital for addressing this inequity. The report also found that homework is often poorly adapted for those with learning difficulties.

Many parents feel that, given the lack of academic benefits in primary school, and questionable benefit in secondary schools, homework inflicts an unnecessary pressure on students and tension in families, as parents attempt to 'police' homework.

What does this mean for homework in ACT schools? At Council's next meeting, a guest speaker will present the Education Directorate's position and discuss the pros and cons of homework. Everyone is welcome to come along to discuss and debate this important issue. The meeting will be held on Tuesday November 25 as detailed in the *Dates to remember*, above. ●