

ACT Council of P&C Associations Inc

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To: All P&C Delegates, P&C Presidents & Secretaries

Report on P&C Council General Meeting 24 Aug 2021 (attended by 64 people)

This report is issued after Council meetings to assist delegates in reporting back to their P&C associations and to inform parents generally about the activities of P&C Council.

Notices:

- **Students with additional needs remote learning forum - 3pm Thurs 26 Aug via zoom**
 - **Transition to School – webinar for parents of children starting preschool & kindy in 2022 - Thursday 16 September 7pm – via Zoom**
 - **P&C Financial review/audit Workshop via zoom – 7pm Thurs 21 Oct 21**
1. **Update & discussion of current COVID situation & concerns.** Communications from EDU, Health & Minister's office, with Gold Creek School P&C & others was good and timely. Council assisted in promoting the pop up clinics & in scheduled testing for the schools.
 2. **P&C businesses as employer & business solvency, including canteens & OHSC.** An overview was provided of the issues facing P&Cs as employers in this COVID period & the conditions under which they may be classed as insolvent & unable to trade. Relevant industrial, Fair Work references and possible small grants were noted, plus Council's attempts to obtain a clear direction from EDU, ACT Health or the Minister to temporarily close unviable P&C businesses.
 3. **Home learning & supporting parents with online learning.** *Parent circumstances:* multiple children, additional challenges, sole parents, limited resources, concerns about finances/health, juggling work at home and home learning, inadequate home infrastructure with new devices, software and desk space. Separated parents - child moving between houses, difficult for home learning. *Online material & teachers:* need to model the material & make daily living a part of curricular content, otherwise just filling in time if they're not school relevant. Teachers doing an amazing job, sending out daily messages at seven o'clock in the morning, reviewing hundreds of kids comments on all the different apps but is it sustainable?
Screentime and devices: Concern about long periods on screens, children adapting a device for learning when previously for playing games, Wi Fi connection for five separate devices required for some homes, can't monitor software on Chromebook - doesn't give feedback, the online learning environment starts with very low base, not setting a high benchmark & unequal in terms of home study spaces, devices, document access, parent child ratio, AD children, & no extra time for those learning, leading to unintentional discrimination by parents. *Resources from the education website:* Existing resources, no real themes or links or classes, might suit high school but not in terms of class and curriculum, everything we've been getting for primary is on the device and even the PE, you watch it on your iPad. Students need to be assigned tasks, put away devices and do something else then come back. *Social media and Additional needs:* Consider there are parents/carers of varying ages from different backgrounds that don't have social media. Really hard for an eight year old with ADHD to focus, planning is very stressful & not the best thing for mental health. *Information forums:* Information sessions, lots of information & public health experts from ACT health, really helped people understand just how complex some of this information is. The general vibe from the school is more relaxed & more focused on, wellbeing, do what you can - if you can't do it don't worry. *FB closed Groups and parent network:* are important for sharing useful info but must not degenerate into "whing" sessions, must be constructive. *Returning to school:* Prefer staggered return to school, greatest needs of families with the youngest children.

4. **COVID management for school clusters and community.** Communications from all authorities must be strong, official & quick. Parents need to understand the terms for the various contact levels & what action each requires. The online forums for schools on FAQs & live questions were very successful, well presented & appreciated by parents. P&C involvement in the process & their expectations largely depend on having a close & good relationship with the school Principal & their willingness to communicate. CECA was helpful with primary schools. Testing was prioritized but initially there was confusion over who should be tested & when, plus there was no monitoring those presenting for testing at the pop up clinics. The school P&Cs found having a closed Facebook group to discuss & be briefed on communications & issues, was extremely useful.
5. **Canteens.** Canteen operators were faced with some complicated decisions about continuing to remain open when there were few students at school & putting the canteen's viability at risk but also considering their staff. Council will check with the NSW Federation of P&C associations to see how they are handling the issue of school canteens. Staff were seriously concerned about the risks of continuing work in the canteen in the current COVID outbreak. P&Cs want Council to talk to the relevant Ministers to get a clear direction for canteens about closure & the financial support available to them & staff via grants. There are five or six canteens that are in immediate & precarious financial situations & not being registered for GST are not eligible for the ACT small business grants. The Council's weekly Communicator enewsletter on COVID is a valuable source of information for the P&Cs.
6. **Out of Hours School Care.** Two P&C managed OHSC services had close contacts attend & were required to close but parents wanted to see official information on the need to close the services. Operators are using separate staff teams to minimise risk. Most P&C services are currently financially stable. They are concerned about being able to return to full service if their casual staff have found other employment. It is challenging for them to stay open with such small numbers of students attending. CECA have also been helpful. Staff wellbeing concerns about their risk to exposure of the delta strain of COVID. OHSC service providers support vaccination priority which can be given to their staff.

7. **Vaccination issues**

Varying opinions on vaccination in the general community are also represented in school communities. It would be extremely difficult for the Council to reach a clear consensus on whether to support vaccination of all students. Already, we are seeing differences in opinions about seeking priority for all involved in schools including students, or should we be advocating for vaccinations at all. Council Executive's position on this is that we should take the advice of the ACT Chief Health Officer. It was noted that the ACT Chief Minister has announced 16 to 19 year olds can register for the Pfizer vaccine, but stocks were not yet available for them. It was also noted that there are currently no vaccines approved for use in younger children. Our three college P&Cs have written to the ACT government, requesting priority vaccinations for all college students as well as teachers, school and supporting staff. Council has been approached by a number of people seeking Council's support for specific occupations or groups to receive priority for vaccinations. After discussion, a motion was passed that Council write to the ACT CHO (Chief Health Officer), Health and Education Minister requesting that the current vaccination schedule be reviewed, to ensure the schedule is appropriate to address the outbreak of the delta strain of COVID, with relation to schools.

8. **What next?** The following questions were asked of the members.

- For your P&C, what is the biggest concern?
- Right now, as a parent, what is your biggest concern?
- Looking ahead, as a parent, what is your biggest concern?
- If home learning continues longer term, how would you feel? What would you need?
- What conditions would need to be met before you'd be comfortable with a return to school?

9. **Next meeting.** Next General Meeting is 7pm 26 Oct after the Policy Conference, via Zoom.