



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2023-2024

Mr Mark Parton MLA (Chair), Ms Jo Clay MLA (Deputy Chair),
Mr Michael Pettersson MLA

ANSWER TO QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE DURING PUBLIC HEARINGS

Asked by MR PARTON on 17 July 2023: the Australian Education Union took on notice the following question:

Ref: Hansard Transcript UPT 17 July 2023 p 88

In relation to: Psychologist to student ratio

THE CHAIR: ... Your budget submission includes among its recommendations that the government needed one to 500 psychologists to student ratio. How far shy are we of that and are there—sometimes we feel silly being the committee that is examining the budget because we do not have intimate knowledge of every mind of it. And so sometimes we ask questions that maybe you are aware of but we have not had a look at. Is there movement in that space to get to that ratio level?

[Angela Burroughs]: The answer to the Member's question is as follows: –

We do not have access to the current number of school psychologist vacancies in the Education Directorate – that might be a question better posed to Directorate officials. What we know from our members is that the ratio is getting worse not better. We know from members that 18 schools began 2023 without a school psychologist. That is one in five ACT public schools. At the start of term 3, there are now 20 schools without an allocation of a school psychologist. When this happens, the work to meet the needs of students falls to teachers and school leaders.

While the Directorate's Clinical Practice team receives referrals from schools to help out where needed, there is real advantage to a psychologist being embedded within every school. They can get to know the students and community, collaborate with and advise teachers, and run preventive programs to try to improve student mental health.

We know that psychologists are in short supply across Australia, but we do believe the Government could do more to attract school psychologists to work in ACT public schools. Our school psychologist members have told us that they want proactive attraction and retention measures, and that they want an independent review into School Psychology Services to make sure we understand the needs of schools and the efficacy of existing supports. We put these claims forward in bargaining but the Education Directorate deemed them outside the scope of an Enterprise Agreement. This is why we highlighted the need for more psychologists in our Budget submission.

Approved for circulation to the Select Committee on Estimates 2023-2024

Signature: 

Date: 20 July 2023

By the President of Australian Education Union ACT Branch, Angela Burroughs