



ACT Council of P&C Associations Inc.

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Mr Andrew Barr MLA
Minister for Education and Training
ACT Legislative Assembly
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P&C COUNCIL 2008-09 BUDGET SUBMISSION

Dear Minister

On behalf of P&C Council, I am writing to provide a submission as part of the ACT Budget process for 2008-09.

Council's priorities for the next Budget are set out below.

1. **Safe Schools Taskforce and student well-being**

Council calls upon the Government to provide **significant, new and ongoing** funding to implement agreed initiatives arising from the findings of the Safe Schools Taskforce. The funding needs to be underpinned by services aimed at the well-being of *all* students.

This includes adequate resourcing for both mainstream and alternative settings/units in every sector (preschool, primary, high school and college) to meet the needs of two groups of students identified by the AEU as requiring assistance: those exhibiting extreme behaviours at school and those disengaged from school or at the point of dropping out.

While the details of establishing alternative settings will need to be worked through with all stakeholders, Council believes that the success of the initiative will depend on it being supported by adequate numbers of school counsellors. In particular, additional school counsellors or educational psychologists will be required for the assessment of, and development of individual learning plans for, every student entering an alternative setting/unit. A student should not enter an alternative setting without a full assessment and plan.

Addressing the needs of these students will be of significant benefit to all students in government schools.

Council calls for additional funds for pastoral care in schools, through a range of initiatives (not just limited to continued efforts to fill vacant school counsellor positions). These include:

- a scholarship program for the training of school counsellors, including payment of HECS fees in return for service within the ACT system. This would be a bonding system for undergraduate students entering, or partially through, a study program that would lead to appropriate qualifications. (Council understands that the DET professional

development fund will fund part or all of a study program for current employees training to be school counsellors and strongly supports this initiative);

- the engagement of pastoral care workers who might not necessarily have the dual qualification required of school counsellors;
- development of pastoral care skills within school communities, for example, support for additional professional development days for "pastoral care" teachers at high schools and colleges.

Council would like to remind the Government that it is yet to honour its 2004 election promise that:

"Labor will provide in excess of an additional \$12million in funding for an increased focus on pastoral care, student support and student welfare. It will create a new Student Support Program for high schools to support student needs – every government high school in the ACT will, on average, benefit from the additional resources of at least 2 full-time professional staff".

It is not clear whether the promised "2 full-time professional staff" are to be teaching staff or other professionals (such as school counsellors), but in any case, this promise remains unfulfilled, and the need for additional staff in high schools remains. This would also need to be in addition to restoring the average of two teachers lost by high schools as a result of the implementation of the teacher Enterprise Bargaining Agreement.

2. Class sizes

Council acknowledges the Government's implementation of smaller class sizes in Years K-3. Council would like to see an extension of the benefits of smaller class sizes to students in higher year levels.

In line with Council's long-standing policy, we call upon the Government to fund a phased and targeted decrease in class sizes above Year 3, so that class sizes do not exceed 25 in Years 4 -10. This initiative would be targeted, at least in the first instance, at schools with a high need, such as those with larger numbers of students who are disadvantaged and/or with literacy and numeracy results at the lower end of the spectrum. The recommended class size of 25 is consistent with Australian and overseas research on class sizes, and is in line with a set of class size standards originally established by the Commonwealth Schools Commission in 1984. Council notes that other jurisdictions in Australia have moved to set reduction targets for Years 4-10, for example, Queensland has reduced class size targets in Years 4-10 from 30 to 28 in 2007.

This is an initiative that will benefit all children in ACT government schools, and will also support the Government's implementation of the Safe Schools Framework and other programs, such as measures to improve literacy and numeracy and the promotion of public education in the ACT. It could also work to improve the recruitment and retention of teachers in ACT government schools.

3. Increase funding for ACTION Buses

Council calls on the Government to provide increased funds to ACTION buses to ensure that it meets the needs of government school children. In particular, we ask that the Government provide sufficient funds to ACTION to:

- implement the recommendations of Council's submission to the Legislative Assembly Standing Committee's Inquiry into ACTION buses; and
- implement the recommendations of the Inquiry report.

Council would like to express its disappointment in the apparent lack of investigation of, and specific recommendations relating to, the needs of government school children in the Inquiry report. For this reason, we ask that the Government look specifically at the recommendations of Council's submission to the Inquiry and develop and fund an implementation plan around these recommendations. A copy of Council's full submission is at Attachment A. Recommendations from Council's submission include that:

- the Government's service agreement with ACTION specifically recognises and funds its role in providing school bus transport for government school students;
- funding be sufficient to allow ACTION to meet the full demand for bus transport for government school children and to meet an agreed set of service standards.

4. Transition issues from *Towards 2020*

Council calls upon the Government to address outstanding transition issues associated with *Towards 2020*, including those relating to school transport, as outlined in Council's submission to the ACTION Bus Inquiry (see Attachment A).

Council calls upon the Government to ensure that sufficient funds are available to meet the transition needs of students and families at schools listed for closure at the end of 2007 and 2008, as well as those students moving from schools that are to become P-2 schools from 2009.

5. Adequate funding for the ESL program

Council calls upon the Government to review the eligibility and adequacy of funding levels for the ACT's English as a Second Language program to ensure that it operates on a full (rather than partial) needs basis.

Currently, the eligibility cut-off point under the program is effectively determined by the funding allocated to the program. This means that instead of being able to provide assistance to all students assessed as in need of ESL specialist support, assistance can only be provided to those of greatest need up to the limit of funding.

Under the program, students are assessed on a Language Performance Rating (LPR) scale which goes from 0 to 5, where students with the lowest LPR have the greatest need and where 4 is the average English level for the age and year level. The guidelines for the

identification of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds for English as a Second Language provision state that "students with a modal rating of below average (LPR 0 to LPR 3.99) are deemed to be in need of ESL specialist support."

The LPR cut-off for eligibility under the program for February 2007 is LPR 1.75 (down from 3.00 in February 1999). Between February 1999 and February 2007, the number of ESL students identified has increased from 2867 to 3485, while the total ESL staffing points allocated have declined from 1498 to 1326.

Council calls upon the Government to meet the needs of all ESL students with a below average LPR (3.99 or less).

6. Continuation of the programs funded by Community Inclusion Grants

Council calls upon the Government to provide ongoing funding for the following education programs that target disadvantaged students:

- CC Cares program at the Canberra College;
- Gugan Gulwan Education Support Program;
- "On Track" program; and
- SPICE (Students Participating in Community Enterprise).

These programs are funded jointly by the Department of Education and the Community Inclusion Fund, with the community inclusion grants due to expire at the end of 2007. Council would like continued funding for the programs to be guaranteed through an ongoing allocation in the Department of Education's budget. The funding should be an addition to the education budget, that is, funds should not be taken from other program areas.

7. Special needs students

In the 2005-06 Budget, the Government provided an additional \$4.153m over four years for students with special needs. The additional funds were to meet the outcomes from the Student Centred Appraisal of Need (SCAN) process. While we understand that this means that an additional \$1m will be allocated in 2008-09, Council calls upon the Government to ensure that an increase of at least this amount continues beyond 2008-09 as part of the Budget base. Council is aware that the number of special needs students has been increasing faster than expected, and therefore an allocation beyond the additional \$1m per year is needed.

Council calls on the Government to commence urgently a consultative review on the delivery of education to special needs students in the ACT, including the SCAN process and its shortcomings.

Council would like to ensure that the needs of special needs students in colleges are not overlooked in determining budget allocations, programs and policies for special needs students.

8. Access to information technology for low income families

In our 2006-07 Budget submission, Council identified the provision internet access for students from low socio-economic backgrounds as an ongoing priority. Council calls upon the Government to address this issue.

The lack of access to the internet for students from low socio-economic backgrounds is an issue of social equity. Educational and technological disadvantage will be further exacerbated if immediate steps are not taken to address this element of "the digital divide". *Myclasses* is one example of an innovation that, on the one hand, could be used to improve equity of outcomes within the education system or, on the other, could seriously exacerbate existing inequities. Ensuring that all students have access to a computer with a broadband connection will allow the full potential of innovations such as *myclasses* to be realised.

Council believes that the process for addressing this issue needs to involve:

- establishing the broad extent of the need for improved access. Council suggests that schools should conduct a survey within their communities on student access to broadband internet in the home;
- investigating the options for providing student access to broadband internet in the home. Possibilities include establishing a pool of laptops with wireless links owned by the ACT Government, the Department of Education or individual schools, providing funds to directly to schools and/or families through an equity fund; negotiating and funding an agreement with an internet service provider to provide low cost internet services to eligible families; and
- determining eligibility requirements and identifying the low income families that are eligible.

9. PE/Sport in schools and the impact of water restrictions

Council welcomes the Government's recent initiatives in *Get a Move On* aimed at increasing physical education and sport in schools. P&C Council believes that, to be effective, these initiatives need to be supported by a range of measures addressing the ongoing and long-term impact of the drought and subsequent water restrictions on school ovals and playgrounds.

These measures include:

- funding for artificial sports surfaces in schools so that schools can continue to offer a full range of physical education programs and sports without students having to leave their school grounds;
- funding for school transport where classes do need to leave school grounds for PE and sporting activities;

- funding for the regular assessment of each oval used for student sporting activities to ensure student safety and to meet the Department's duty of care requirements;
- funding for the investigation and then installation of bores into schools to lessen the reliance on town potable water supply;
- ensuring that the professional development activities provided for teachers under *Get a Move On*, include learning about different sporting activities that can be conducted in the changed environments.

8. Future workforce needs

Council calls upon the Government to provide funding for a research project to look at the future workforce needs of ACT schools. This includes investigation of the need for, and current shortages of:

- teachers in particular subjects, for example, maths and science;
- relief teachers, particularly quality, experienced and/or specialist relief teachers;
- middle schooling specialists;
- extension English teachers;
- STAs;
- VET teachers; and
- school counsellors.

The research should include an examination of how these workforce needs will be supplied in line estimates of current shortages and future needs.

10. Linking schools with communities

Given that the Government is committed to the establishment of a number of P-2 schools, Council calls upon the Government to adequately fund these schools to ensure the success of the "schools as communities" model.

Council calls upon the Government to continue down the path of linking schools with community services across all sectors - preschool, primary, high school and college.

9. Continued promotion of public education

Council supports the Government's effort in this area, and asks that it continue to promote public education. An important component of this support is the need to effectively address the issues outlined in points 1 and 2 above. Council recommends that the Government's strategy should include building capacity in schools and within regions to effectively and

efficiently promote public education at the school and regional level as well at the system level.

10. Reduced student services due to increased teaching hours

Council calls upon the Government to address the adverse impacts that the implementation of the current teacher Enterprise Bargaining Agreement is having upon student services, particularly in colleges. Details are set out in separate correspondence from Council to the Department – copy at Attachment B.

11. Curriculum Renewal project

It is vital that the Curriculum Renewal project be adequately funded to ensure the full and effective implementation of this work.

12. Council's grant-in-aid

Council asks that the Government increase its annual grant-in-aid to enable it to continue supporting P&Cs in schools, particularly P&Cs that are struggling to maintain their operations. At this point, Council is facing the situation of not being able to maintain its current office staffing levels without a grant increase. The alternative is to reduce our staffing and service levels. (This will be the subject of Council's separate annual grant-in-aid submission to the Department.)

Please contact me if you would like to discuss any of these proposals in further detail. My mobile number is 0408 613 270.

Yours sincerely



Kathleen Barden
President

28 September 2007



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Mr Mick Gentleman MLA
Chair
Standing Committee on Planning and Environment
ACT Legislative Assembly
GPO Box 1020
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Mr Gentleman

On behalf of P&C Council, I provide the attached submission to the inquiry into ACTION buses.

Council's submission focuses on the terms of reference relating to how well ACTION meets the needs of different segments of the community and principles and key priorities for future service planning.

We provide our comments from the perspective of parents of students in ACT government schools.

Please contact me on 0408 613 270 or Lisa Henderson on 6288 4615 if you would like to discuss any of these issues.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K Barden'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Kathleen Barden
President

18 May 2007

**P&C COUNCIL SUBMISSION TO THE ACTION BUS INQUIRY
MAY 2007**

1. Introduction

P&C Council is the peak body representing Parents' and Citizens' Associations from ACT Government schools.

The purposes of P&C Council include the fostering of an ACT public education system of the highest quality, and making representations on behalf of P&Cs on matters affecting education in ACT Government schools.

School transport, including bus transport, is clearly a matter affecting education in ACT Government schools. It impacts, for example, on the accessibility of education, parental school choice and Year 12 retention rates.

This submission concentrates on meeting the needs of government school students. Council is concerned that in some areas ACTION is not currently meeting these needs. This is based on feedback Council has received from government school parents and students.

2. Transport needs of government school students

The basic transport need of students in government schools in the ACT is that there be an ACTION bus service that provides safe, reliable and timely transport for students to and from their homes to their schools.

Furthermore, ACTION plays a vital role in delivering the Government's obligation under paragraph (d) of section 18 of the *Education Act 2004* to provide reasonable access to public education for all students in the ACT. This must include providing public transport services to enable students to access, at the very least, the government schools in their surrounding neighbourhoods.

Based on feedback from parents and students, Council is concerned that ACTION is not meeting the needs of all students in ACT government schools by:

- not providing school buses for some ACT government schools where there is a demand;
- not meeting reasonable service standards that parents expect for school bus transport, such as minimum waiting times before and after school.

Council understands that a range of factors is likely to be contributing to this situation (funding, planning processes, communication links etc), but would like the causes to be examined and strategies put in place to meet the needs of government school students.

Council is aware of the following examples where the needs of government school students are not being met:

- there is no bus service for Arawang Primary School or Duffy Primary School although both received increased enrolments following the closure of other schools in Weston Creek. The Government promised Weston Creek communities that bus services would be re-routed to meet their transport needs following the closure of schools. Arawang Primary received at least 47 students from schools that were closed at the end of 2006 including Weston Creek, Rivett and Mt Neighbour Primary Schools. A parent survey at the school indicates that there are sufficient student numbers to warrant a dedicated service directly to/from Arawang (the survey results will be set out in the submission from Arawang Primary School);
- similarly, while Stromlo High School has experienced a significant increase in enrolments (over 100 students) it has had no net increase in bus services to the school;
- the need for a service from Flynn to Charnwood-Dunlop Primary School (as promised by the Government to the community of the now closed Flynn Primary School). Forty students moved from the now closed Flynn Primary School to Charnwood-Dunlop Primary School at the beginning of the year;
- an inadequate service between the Woden Interchange and Narrabundah College (not all students can fit on the one bus);
- the need for a morning school bus service for children attending Telopea Park School from the Weston/Woden area;
- the need for an afternoon service that operates as the reverse of the morning service from Higgins to Melba (route 672). Children can catch the bus in the morning, but in the afternoon have to use a different service that involves walking home from a different and more distant drop-off point;
- the bus from Giralang to Kaleen High School (route 452) arrives around 8.15am, more than 30 minutes before the start of school. A later bus arrives only a few minutes before the bell, and can easily be late. The regular route services (52 or 53) are often late or very full and have not turned up on occasion, so they do not provide a reliable alternative;
- the need for the four school buses departing from the front of Lyneham High School to depart at 3.10pm rather than 3.05pm to allow students to reach the departure point in time after the 3.00pm bell. Students frequently miss the bus because the physical size of the school and the number of students does not allow them to get to the bus stop in time;
- the need for a bus to bring students to Lyneham High School from the Belconnen area;

- the community of Tharwa remains without appropriate bus services to the nearest primary schools. The one mini-bus service offered by Kiers does not go to Bonython Primary School where the majority of Tharwa students have relocated. Also, this bus is fully subscribed with high school students. Effectively there is no public transport choice for many of the government school students in Tharwa. Council asks that Government and ACTION work with Tharwa community to rectify this situation. This community was severely disadvantaged by the closure of their local school, and the Government should support the decision by the majority of parents to send their children to Bonython Primary School.

There is also a need to examine the safety implications of school students using route buses in terms of road and pedestrian safety, for example:

- students using the route bus from Woden to Telopea Park School need a safe crossing on National Circuit;
- students travelling from the Causeway to Telopea Park School need safe crossings to the west of the school because they disembark in Griffith.

Council recognises that this is not an issue solely for ACTION. It requests that ACTION works with Department of Transport and Municipal Services to identify and address safety black spots such as these.

Parents are also concerned about student safety around bus interchanges. Council is aware that ACTION is examining this issue and implementing strategies to address interchange safety. These strategies should be pursued as a priority.

Other safety issues relate to:

- the need for drivers to comply with safe passenger load limits (and the need for a clear process for drivers to follow in situations where the number of passengers exceeds the safe load limit. Not picking up school students or asking students to give up their place on a bus have their own implications for student safety); and
- the need to consider the safety of primary school children and children with special needs when they are travelling on buses with older children.

3. Issues and strategies

3.1 Role of ACTION in providing school bus transport

P&C Council believes that the role of ACTION in providing school bus transport for government school students should be specifically recognised and funded in the Government's service agreement with ACTION. Funding levels should ensure that ACTION is able to meet the full demand for bus transport for government school children. This includes the provision of services to enable students to access, at the very least, the government schools in their surrounding neighbourhoods.

Funding levels should also ensure that ACTION is able to meet an agreed set of service standards for government school bus services (service standards are discussed further under section 3.7).

The agreement should establish the priority of government students travelling to school as part of the Government and community's commitment to public education and to maintaining high retention rates to Year 12. This should ensure, for example:

- that students not be required to give up their place on a bus to allow other commuters to board (leaving the students to walk to school);
- that college students are not accorded lesser priority because years 11 and 12 are seen as non-compulsory years of schooling. College students need to be able to arrive at their classes on time. Arriving late to school is disruptive for the students but also for others whose classes are interrupted by their late arrival. Also, students can be failed in a subject if they miss too many classes, adversely affecting their Year 12 certificate results;
- that government school students are accorded at least equal priority as non-government school students (explored further in section 3.2);
- that there is consideration of the needs of college students (and increasingly students in Years 9 and 10) with vocational training or work commitments requiring bus services throughout the day.

Ensuring the availability of school bus transport should form part of the Government's program of promoting government school education in the ACT. It also links with the Government's strategy for reducing the ACT's greenhouse emissions. Increased use of school bus transport would reduce car travel to schools, while also providing the potential for parents to leave the car at home and use public transport to travel to work.

Strategies to increase the number of government school children travelling to school by bus, including through the provision of adequate funding to ACTION, will deliver savings in other areas; specifically, it will reduce the need for spending on measures to relieve traffic and parking congestion around schools. This will also improve safety around schools and contribute to social equity goals (providing a more economical transport option for disadvantaged families).

3.2 Government and non-government school service provision

As stated above, Council believes that government school students should be accorded at least equal priority as non-government school students when it comes to bus transport services. ACTION needs to be able to publicly demonstrate that this is the case by reporting against a set of indicators, for example, information needs to be publicly available to show ACTION expenditure for the government sector compared with the non-government sector. Monitoring systems need to be in place to provide this information. Council believes that there should be public accountability on this issue, and that any subsidies or assistance to the non-government school sector should be easily identifiable in the interests of transparency.

3.3 Schools Transport Liaison Committee

Council strongly supports ACTION's move to re-establish the Schools Transport Liaison Committee to provide advice, information and guidance to the Department of Territory and Municipal Services and ACTION on the transport needs of ACT government and non-government schools. Council is currently considering a draft terms of reference for this Committee, and Council looks forward to its representation on this group.

3.4 Policy for the Provision of School Bus Services

Part of the role of the School Transport Liaison Committee should be to establish (or renew) as well as oversee a policy on the provision of school bus transport, taking into account the findings of this Inquiry. Council is aware of a previous document entitled *ACT Government Policy for the Provision of School Bus Services* (copy attached); however, we are not certain of the current status of this policy. Council believes that such a policy, agreed between stakeholders, should be in place and publicly accessible.

The policy should cover, for example:

- the process for matching school bus services and demand (see section 3.5);
- the conditions for schools having a dedicated service or a route service;
- a process whereby school communities can request a dedicated bus service;
- the priority of school students on regular route services;
- service standards for school bus transport (see section 3.7);
- indicators to demonstrate that government school students are accorded at least equal priority as non-government school students (as per section 3.2); and
- travel safety.

3.5 Matching of school bus services and demand

School communities needs to be confident that a process is in place to ensure the best possible matching of government school bus services and demand. The School Transport Liaison Committee could have a role in documenting the current process, examining its effectiveness and making any recommendations for change.

To make the process more effective, there may be a need to strengthen the role of schools in more accurately establishing the school bus transport needs of their communities, and communicating these needs to ACTION (through the School Transport Liaison Committee). Each school should have a funded school transport liaison officer to undertake this, as well as other roles (such as providing bus information to the school community and identifying safety concerns).

Part of establishing demand is ensuring that each school community is aware of the public transport options that are available (both dedicated and regular route services). This includes providing the relevant information to parents and students at the start of, and during, the school year. Many schools already make sure that this happens. A bus map for the ACT that shows dedicated and route services for government schools would be useful.

The process of establishing demand should also include a feedback loop from bus drivers to ACTION management to report instances where school children using route services are not picked up or have been asked to give up their place on a bus because of passenger load limits, or where timetabling issues have led to late runs and missed connections.

Council requests that there be a system whereby ACTION takes immediate action to address any situations where school communities identify the need for a bus service (dedicated or regular route service), but this cannot be met within ACTION's existing constraints. Such action may include advising the Government that there is a need for modification of those constraints.

School communities should be surveyed about their bus transport requirements at appropriate intervals. It is important that, from time to time, surveys include non-users to establish the reasons why they might not use school bus services. Measures for improvement or further service standards may emerge from such a survey.

Council also believes that there is a case for trialling bus services where demand is emerging or close to the critical mass needed for a dedicated service. The trial would allow communities an opportunity to demonstrate and/or build the required critical mass. A case in point is the need for a school bus service for children attending Telopea Park School from the Weston/Woden area. There are currently two well-patronised buses in the afternoon from Telopea Part School to Woden, but no service in the morning. In this case, with such a strong indicator of demand, a trial service would establish whether or not there is a critical mass of students for a dedicated service.

There should be effective communication mechanisms in place between the ACT Department of Education and Training (DET), the Department of Transport and Municipal Services (TAMS) and ACTION to ensure the exchange of all information relevant to the provision of student bus services.

3.6 Restructuring of ACT Government Schools under *Towards 2020*

The matching of services and demand for 2007 has been made particularly difficult for ACTION by the Government's *Towards 2020* changes, many of which were implemented in the final weeks of 2006. Council believes there was a failure on the part of Government to work with ACTION to ensure adequate forward planning to cope with the *Towards 2020* school closures and changes – many of the examples given in section 2 reflect this. As such, Council believes there is a need to check that the current school bus services reflect the changes to school enrolments and student travel patterns that have resulted from *Towards 2020*.

In delivering the *Towards 2020* proposal, the Minister for Education and Training committed to ensuring that there would be bus services to transport students from closed schools to their receiving schools. The Government, through ACTION, must honour this commitment. Council is aware of instances where this commitment has not been honoured to date, for example:

- the Flynn Primary School community was told by the Government that it would be possible to have an ACTION bus from Flynn to Charnwood-Dunlop School. No bus service has been established so far;
- when a number of primary schools in Weston Creek were closed, the Government assured concerned parents that bus services would be made available to students forced to relocate to schools further away from their homes. In fact, there is no dedicated bus service to and from Arawang Primary School or Duffy Primary School, and only one bus service to Chapman Primary School that goes to Kambah rather than through the Weston Creek region.

Some aspects of the *Towards 2020* plan are still to be implemented over the next two-three years, and need to be taken into account in service planning. This includes further school closures, the establishment of P-2 schools, and new schools in West Belconnen, Harrison and Gungahlin. Bus transport should be considered as an integral part of the planning for these new schools. The planning process provides an opportunity to establish services and infrastructure in a way that will encourage students to travel to school by bus.

3.7 Service standards around school bus services:

The School Transport Liaison Committee should work to establish a set of service standards for government school bus services. Services need to be reliable for the safety of students and to encourage patronage.

Service standards should include:

- a minimum waiting time after school finishes before the arrival of the bus service;
- a minimum waiting time before school commences;
- minimum waiting times at bus interchanges on popular connections;
- already established standards, such as safe passenger loads.

The Government's funding and service agreement with ACTION should be based around the meeting of these service standards. The establishment of the service standards will most likely require changes to service provision to meet the standards.

3.8 Student Transport Program

Council supports the Student Transport Program, but asks whether it may be possible to streamline application procedures for parents, for example, move from the requirement for an application each term to an application each semester or year. Council also requests that this program be better publicised to potential beneficiaries.

3.9 Principles and key priorities for future service planning

As outlined in the sections above, key principles and priorities for future service planning include the need:

- to meet the full demand for bus services for government school students;
- for government school students to be accorded at least equal priority as non-government school students;
- for strong communication links between ACTION, TAMS, DET, parent organisations, schools and colleges;
- for service planning to be based around meeting service standards for school bus transport covering, for example, safety, reliability and timeliness;
- to actively encourage the number of government school children travelling to school by bus for environmental, budgetary and social equity reasons.

4. Summary of Recommendations

P&C Council recommends that:

- 4.1 the Government's service agreement with ACTION specifically recognises and funds its role in providing school bus transport for government school students;
- 4.2 funding be sufficient to allow ACTION to meet the full demand for bus transport for government school children and to meet an agreed set of service standards;
- 4.3 a set of indicators be developed to demonstrate that government school students are accorded at least equal priority as non-government school students, and that ACTION develop systems to allow this information to be reported to the public;
- 4.4 the School Transport Liaison Committee establish a policy for the provision of school bus services;
- 4.5 the process for matching school government school bus services and demand be reviewed and strengthened where necessary;
- 4.6 a set of service standards for government school bus services be agreed;
- 4.7 the application procedures for the Student Transport Program be reviewed to establish whether they might be made simpler for parents.

**ACT Council of Parents' and Citizen's Associations
May 2007**

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Ms Janet Davy,
Acting Chief Executive,
Department of Education and Training,
PO Box 1584,
TUGGERANONG ACT 2901

Dear Ms Davy,

RE: The impact of the EBA on colleges

The purpose of this letter is to document serious concerns which were raised at a recent Council meeting relating to changes in the provision of education in ACT Colleges that have taken place in 2007 as a result of the enterprise bargaining agreement struck by the government and Australian Education Union in 2006.

Council is concerned that the factors listed below have already diminished the richness of college life for students, and threaten the long term quality of education at our public colleges. The senior secondary college system is widely supported by the Canberra community, and has been held up by the government as a major success story in ACT public education. The recent College Review (2005) confirmed the effectiveness of the system, suggesting that only minor refinements be made - not the significant changes that have in fact taken place since the Review.

Council wishes to draw to your attention the following major effects on students in colleges of the EBA.

Less access for students to teacher time

The requirement for college teachers to increase their face-to-face teaching hours to 19 (from 18) may seem relatively minor; however, it has had a significant negative impact on students. In some colleges it has been implemented as five classes of four hours per week for one semester (20 hours) and in the next semester four and a half classes for four hours (18 hours); this is an average of 19 hours over two semesters. This arrangement is very difficult to timetable. In other colleges, like Lake Ginninderra, teachers have taken on five classes each semester with reduced class times to equal 19 hours.

The first approach results in timetabling problems. The second approach appears to result in a reduction in actual teaching time per subject for students.

Previously, teachers' work included four classes and an additional two hours per registered course or equivalent. This time was used for variety of activities including managing sporting teams and competitions, Dancefest, drama productions, debating, Duke of Edinburgh Awards, art activities, chess competitions and other excursions and outdoor activities that enrich the students' education. Under the new timetabling requirements teachers must undertake these activities in their own time or they are not offered. At a time when other programs have also been lost (including some student services, career counselling and special programs for disadvantaged students), the loss of such enrichment activities is of particular concern.

The increase in teaching hours obviously translates into extra preparation and marking for teachers. More importantly, it also results in a reduction in the time available for teachers to participate in a wide range of critical non-teaching activities that are of significant value to all students. Specifically, this reduces the time to review draft work for assessment and minimises the ability to provide quality advice to students on their progress and their future career directions. Students now have reduced access to teachers during their free periods, and there are often long queues to see teachers.

Staff turnover affects student engagement

Council has been informed that many part time teachers have left the colleges as a result of implementation of the EBA. Anecdotally, the amount of sick leave for teachers has increased across the college system. Since the implementation of the EBA, Council has been advised that the Canberra College has found it more difficult to get relief for technology, hospitality and dance. Classes in these subjects are often cancelled.

It is critical for Year 11 and 12 students to have continuity of teaching staff. This includes longer periods of leave (where it is also essential that relief staff be appropriately qualified). Significant changes in staff, and a lack of qualified staff, is likely to affect the marks of students.

Compulsory attendance during cross-line testing or exam weeks

The EBA requires normal classes to continue during cross-line testing. To make additional hours, the traditional exam week at the end of the Semester has been altered. Previously, students were able to use this time for study, paid work or relaxation.

Instead of students studying and teachers marking in between tests, "sham" lessons have to be run when semester's work is finished. There is little incentive for students to attend, but a failure to attend classes during this period could result in students V-grading.

Council suggests that the operation of the policy on student attendance in college be reviewed in this respect.

We understand that the Department has, for this term, varied the requirement for teachers to make themselves available for classes during cross-line testing. While we welcome that short term measure, there remains a need to address this issue in order to find a sensible solution for the longer term.

Effects on the teaching profession

Council has been advised that the effect of the EBA on college teachers is to have them feel devalued. Anecdotal evidence is that it has increased the loss of highly experienced and talented teachers to other parts of the job market where their skills are more valued. Many teachers feel they are continually under attack and that the many long hours they put in out of school hours are not valued. First year out teachers are the most vulnerable and may be lost permanently to the profession because of the heavy workloads. At the last election it was promised to increase teacher numbers in high schools to ease major problems. This did not happen and we are now faced with a significant reduction of teacher numbers in our very successful colleges.

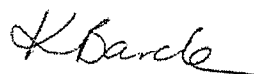
Council is also aware that Colleges experienced teacher losses as a result of the EBA, and were asked to return the teacher computers equivalent to the number of teaching positions lost. Students had sometimes had access to these computers and thus have lost resources.

In conclusion

The practical application of the EBA in colleges has obviously had unintended consequences. The sum of these changes represents a significant change to the senior secondary college system. Council is aware that the apparently minor increase in face to face teaching time required under the EBA at colleges has actually had profound effects on the philosophy and operation of colleges.

Council requests that serious consideration be given to the matters raised in this letter with a view to exploring ways in which you and/or the Department of Education and Training can seek to restore the valuable student services that have been apparently lost due to the EBA. I and other Council representatives would be pleased to discuss this further with you.

Yours sincerely,



President
29 August 2007
cc Mr Andrew Barr MLA, Minister for Education

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