

Submission to the Productivity Commission

in response to the study

Education and Training Workforce: Schools

August 2011

Prepared by the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations

**The ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations is the
collective voice of parents of children in ACT government schools**

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Education and Training Workforce: Schools

Dear Secretariat,

On behalf of the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations (Council) I would like to provide this submission to the Productivity Commission's commissioned study on the Education and Training Workforce: Schools. We appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback.

The ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations is the peak body representing Parents' and Citizens' Associations (P&Cs) in government primary schools, high schools and secondary colleges in the ACT.

It is a representative organisation whose objectives are to foster a quality public education system, to provide support services for affiliates, and to make representations to the government on behalf of parents/carers in government schools. It plays a particularly important role in promoting parent participation in schools and the system as a whole.

Council's submission to this inquiry is based on Council's policy, consultations with P&C Associations and results from Council surveys.

The attachment to this covering letter sets out the points we would like to put forward in line with the terms of reference for the Inquiry. Council raises a number of issues for the Productivity Commission to consider in response to the questions raised in the *Schools Workforce: Issues Paper* (Productivity Commission 2011).

Please contact me on (02) 6241 5759 if you have any questions about this submission.

Yours sincerely



Jane Tullis
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Important Additional Note for Consideration by the Productivity Commission

Council notes that the Terms of Reference narrowly defines who should be considered as a part of the Schools workforce by the Productivity Commission (2011, p. 23). While acknowledging this constraint, Council urges the Productivity Commission to consider, at the very least, the impact that a change in the current level of volunteers working within schools will have on the workload of paid staff within the school and demand for additional paid employees. Consideration of the role of the volunteer workforce on schools should include, but is not limited to, the role of P&Cs in schools, teacher's aides, canteen workers, uniform shop volunteers and volunteers running after school activities, etc. By not including a review of the short, medium and long term effects of variations in the volunteer workforce in schools will lead to a significant misrepresentation of future workforce implications in schools.

Introduction

In order to provide feedback to the Education and Training Workforce: Schools review, The ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations (Council) has structured its feedback by addressing the questions raised in the *Schools Workforce: Issues Paper* (Productivity Commission 2011) that have been deemed to be of most relevance and/or concern to Council.

Our submission is structured under the same headings used in the *Issues Paper*. The question which is being addressed is stated above each response through our submission.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback and we look forward to your report later in the year.

Responses to Questions Raised in the *Issues Paper*

SECTION 3 Why is the performance of the schools workforce important?

Student Outcomes

Q *Which avenues for reform are most promising for reducing educational disadvantage and improving education outcomes more generally? How important are workforce-related changes relative to other initiatives directed at enhancing children's learning potential?*

The most significant reform in Australian education that offers the opportunity to seriously address the increasing educational disadvantage and educational achievement gap of Australian students is the potential for funding reform following *The School Funding Review of Australian Schools*. The current system of funding of Australian schools lacks transparency and consistency and fails to adequately address the different needs of students. Student educational and social outcomes should be the driving factor in determining funding priorities and the system of allocating funds between schools. Unfortunately, this is currently not the case.

It has been well reported that the achievement gap in Australia, between students of low and high socio-economic backgrounds, is increasing (for example Adelaide Declaration Review Steering Committee 2007 and McGaw 2007). Research shows that students from low socio-economic backgrounds are years behind their peers and are less likely to complete Year 12 than students from a high socio-economic background (Cobbold 2011, p. 2).

Directed funding to schools that educate the most disadvantaged students can allow schools to better develop programs that appropriately address the distinct needs of the student population at the school, as well as offer teachers improved support and professional development to assist in addressing the challenges associated with educating disadvantaged students. Such support will help to attract quality teachers to schools where they are most needed.

Unfortunately, the current funding model allocates funds to non-government schools based on the level of funding to government schools which critically ignores the growing differences

between the student populations and the socio-economic status of students between the sectors.

Use of the Average Government School Recurrent Costs (AGSRC) in determining funding to non-government schools means that if greater funding was provided to low socio-economic students, the majority of whom are in government schools, this would also lead to a proportional increase in funding to all non-government schools regardless of the level of disadvantage. The consequence of such a funding distribution would have the reverse effect, resulting in greater student achievement gaps between low and high SES students.

In 2010, as part of the review into *Improving ACT Public High Schools and Colleges*, Council surveyed parents with a child at an ACT government school as to what changes they felt were needed to improve their child's schooling. The overwhelming view from parents was that having more teachers with skills in selective subjects would improve their child's schooling with 84% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing with this statement. 74.8 percent of parents either agreed or strongly agreed that having better quality teachers would improve their child's education (Council 2010, p. 32).¹

Specialist teachers have the ability to appropriately address the needs of disadvantaged students and offer skills and knowledge that is simply just not possible from the one classroom teacher expected to be a jack of all trades. Specialist teachers can offer the necessary remedial assistance for disadvantaged, disengaged students or students requiring extended learning, for example EAL (students with English as an additional language, gifted and talented students and students struggling to meet literacy and numeracy benchmarks).

Unfortunately, schools are increasingly struggling to find teachers with specialist skills to fill positions and, more often than not, it is specialist teachers who are cut at times when governments undertake cost-cutting measures, this has been evident in the efficiency dividend measures of the ACT for the 2010-2011 financial year.

In pursuing a one percent efficiency dividend in the ACT Education and Directorate's Budget, six Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal Numeracy and Literacy Officers and one English as a Second Language Officer were disbanded; their responsibilities were to be covered by a small number of

¹ Results from a survey conducted by Council in August, 2010. The survey was completed by 316 respondents, 98.5 percent of whom were parents of a child attending an ACT public school.

Generalist Officers. Such actions are concerning to Council and demonstrate that governments are increasingly out of touch in understanding the pressures that are currently facing teachers and classrooms across Australia.

At the same time, schools need to be able attract high quality teachers. Inadequate remuneration, lack of support for staff and increasingly demanding workloads are causing quality teachers to leave the education sector and discouraging new teachers from joining the teaching profession. This is evident year after year in responses to the Australian Education Union's (2008) *National New Educator Survey*. In 2008, 68.3 percent of teachers with one to three years of teaching experience noted workload as being one of their biggest concerns of being a teacher, 66.1 percent said behaviour management and 62.9 percent mention pay.

One of the most important areas of reform would be introducing adequate remuneration to teachers that recognises the important role teachers have in educating Australia's future. Remuneration packages to teachers should encourage excellence and continuity of teaching.

The teaching profession must compete for high achieving university graduates who are easily enticed into more highly paid professions. This can only be overcome by promoting the teaching profession as a worthwhile, fulfilling and engaging profession where teachers will be supported and their hard work will be appropriately rewarded.

Internationally, countries such as Finland, have worked to improve the quality of teachers by:

- Moving to a five-year degree; in Australia, only The University of Sydney currently has a five-year degree option for teachers,
- Making teaching an appealing profession for graduates by creating better pay and conditions similar to what would be expected for a five-year university graduate with a law or engineering degree,
- Removing fees for university degrees in teaching.

These strategies should be considered as viable options for Australia in improving teacher quality in our schools.

Government schools also need to compete with the competitive remuneration packages being offered by other schools to skilled and quality teachers. In order to attract the best quality teachers, a school must have the resources to offer competitive salaries to its teachers.

It is not surprising that the teacher salaries of teachers from non-government schools are hard to source. However, anecdotally, Council is aware of private schools offering teacher salaries significantly greater than that of public schools as well as providing individual contracts and additional bonuses such as superior superannuation and greater salary increases in-line with career advancement.

In the ACT, government schools not only have to compete with non-government schools to attract the best quality teachers, but ACT salaries fall short in comparison to the salaries of NSW government school teachers.

Figures from the beginning of this year show that a teacher teaching in the ACT for 4 years will be on a salary of \$55,327 compared to a NSW teacher with the same experience who is on \$58,829 per year.

Comparatively, a School Leader B in the ACT receives \$91,769 compared to \$97,543 in NSW and a School Leader C in the ACT earns \$98,077 compared to \$113,889 in NSW. In the ACT, teachers can easily cross-the-border to Queanbeyan or other close-by NSW border towns and cities.

In addition, attracting high quality teachers is even more difficult for schools in remote areas or schools where the conditions of teaching are considered as unappealing or seen as more difficult by teachers. Often these schools have the most educationally disadvantaged students who are in need of quality teachers with low staff turn-over. It is often the case that high quality teachers are pooled into schools servicing “low risk” students from more advantaged backgrounds (Commonwealth of Australia 2003, p. 68).

Greater incentives need to be offered to attract good quality teachers to teach the students who are most at risk. Remuneration that encourages high performing teachers to teach in our most disadvantage schools should be considered to address the growing achievement gap between students.

Ultimately, schools need to be able to both attract and retain appropriately qualified staff to eliminate disadvantage and improve the educational outcomes for all Australian students.

SECTION 5 Further improvements in schools workforce outcomes

Balancing Supply and Demand

Q What are the key factors, whether across the board or specific to particular areas, that may contribute to current or future workforce shortages? Are all of these factors amenable to action?

Ageing Workforce

The vast majority of teachers are relatively older and are not being replaced by a new cohort of young teachers. In the last 20 years, the median age has increased by ten years (Commonwealth of Australia 2003). There is a risk that when these older teachers retire there will be a significant shortage of experienced and high performing teachers to maintain current staffing levels. While Government initiatives can encourage more people into the teaching profession, there is still a large number of teachers, particularly early year teachers, leaving the profession.

Lack of Qualified School Counsellors and Psychologists

Counsellors and psychologists provide vital services in schools and are key for providing the necessary support to students by helping students cope with mental health, academic and social issues. According to the American Psychological Association (2010), trained psychologists and counsellors perform many vital functions, including:

- Helping teachers improve classroom management and provide quality instruction to assist students in achieving high academic standards,
- Assisting students and their families to overcome personal problems or disabilities that affect students' academic achievement and relationships with peers, family members, and others,
- Responding to mental health needs of students, staff and families related to incidents of school violence, crime, accidents, terrorist activities, or other traumatic events in the school and community,

- Working with teachers and other staff to develop and implement targeted or school-wide programs to improve school functioning, school safety and student mental health,
- Offering information and guidance on post-secondary education and training options and assisting students and their families in meeting the financial requirements for post-secondary education.

The NSW Deputy State Coroner, in the Coronial Inquest into the death of Alex Wildman, recommended that any school with an enrolment over 500 should have a full-time counsellor (MacPherson 2010). Council wholeheartedly endorses the Deputy Coroner's recommendation.

Unfortunately, there is a current shortage of the number of qualified counsellors taking up positions in Australian schools. The reasons behind why schools are struggling to attract and/or retain trained counsellors need to be investigated and Governments need to provide adequate funds to ensure every school has access to a qualified counsellor or psychologist. It is not enough to rely on other services such as the National School Chaplaincy Program.

Having insufficient counsellors in schools requires classroom teachers to make up for this shortfall in meeting the welfare needs of students, thus creating greater workload demands and stress for classroom teachers. Expecting overworked teachers to provide additional services, such as lower-end counselling, will, in all likelihood, affect the quality and extent to which schools can adequately cater for the welfare of all their students.

Decline in Male Teachers

Schools in the ACT and around Australia have experienced a growing decline in the number of male teachers in school classrooms. This decline has been most pronounced in the primary years of schooling.

ACT government schools have the smallest proportion of male teachers in classrooms in the country (Strachan 2010). Unfortunately the teaching profession is often not viewed as a profession of choice due to its lack of prestige and low salary expectations. This is particularly the case in the areas of Maths and Science, which traditionally have been largely dominated by males, but where higher paying occupations are available elsewhere. In addition, male teachers

have the added hurdle of overcoming negative social connotations of males working with young persons.

It is beneficial for students to have access to role models of both sexes. The absence of male teachers in some schools means students may not have the opportunity to discover the benefits associated with having male role models in the classroom and school environment. Students may also not experience the individual qualities, teaching styles and other important dimensions that male teachers can bring to the profession. A school environment comprising various types of teachers and school staff can assist in widening student's experiences and learning.

The teaching profession needs to be seen as an attractive and viable option for both men and women. Council believes that this can be achieved by improving teacher remuneration and ensuring teachers are provided with the necessary support to enable them to meet the growing demands present in classrooms in schools.

Job Design and Innovation

Q Are the roles of and relationships between different school workers appropriate to meet current and emerging needs? In what ways might changes in job design be useful?

Roles and Responsibilities of the Classroom Teacher

Schools are struggling because of tight budgets and teacher shortages to provide appropriate numbers of support teachers and teacher aides to address the individual and diverse learning needs of students. Classroom teachers need support to handle the paperwork that they must deal with due to a lack of administrative resource assistance. This will also provide teachers with more time to ensure greater communications with parents and the school community.

Anecdotal reports from parents and teachers have noted the high level of administrative work expected of teachers which unfortunately greatly detracts from what a teacher can do in class. Council sees this as a critical problem and one that must be addressed in order to improve outcomes for students and create positive working environments for teachers.

In addition, as noted earlier, as schools struggle to provide the appropriate number of teacher's aides and specialist teachers for students, the classroom teacher is often left to make up for the shortfalls in qualified specialists.

There are important developments currently occurring in schools as to how lessons are taught, especially incorporating technologies which can assist and extend student learning. However, in order for a teacher to take full advantage of the opportunities that technology can have for enhancing student learning, they need professional development that will equip them with the appropriate skills as well as time to develop new class material that takes advantage of the technology.

Training and Professional Development

Q Is sufficient attention paid to professional development – not only for classroom teachers, but also principals and other school workers? What specific changes, beyond those already in prospect would be appropriate?

Australian schools are facing a number of innovative changes in the coming years such as the Australian Curriculum and the National Teachers Accreditation. Council feels that the excitement of introducing new developments in education is not being met with the necessary level of professional development for teachers to ensure these good educational innovations can be introduced into schools appropriately. Introducing the National Curriculum into Australian classrooms will place demands on the teacher to develop appropriate lesson plans to teach the material as well as professional development that explains the new approaches to curriculum teaching, such as the cross-curriculum priorities and the general capabilities, so that these new developments in the curriculum can be taught at the standard that should be expected.

It is unreasonable to expect teachers to gain professional development outside of their normal hours. Therefore, there consideration of the availability of casual relief teachers also needs to be considered.

Q Are there non-remuneration conditions of employment that, if changed, would enhance teacher quality and student outcomes?

Teachers can better assist students in their learning when they can attentively meet the needs of the students in the class. Classroom disruptions from disinterested learners can often detract from the learning experiences of other students in the class. For schools where such classroom disruptions are having a negative effect on the classroom teaching, either teachers need to be supported by having a teacher's aide or programs that better meet the needs of disinterested learners need to be established.

Q What makes a quality teacher? How should teacher performance be measured? To what extent can computable performance metrics indicate the 'value added' by a teacher?

It is important to recognise that ultimately teaching is a team effort. While a good teacher can definitely have a positive influence on a class of students, their efforts can only be fully taken advantage of in a supportive school environment.

There is no adequate means of accurately assessing teacher performance in isolation, the idea of assessing 'value added' learning in measuring teacher performance may be enticing, however, there are many implications in its application, particularly as it may currently be determined by using NAPLAN results. Where a teacher can take students will always depend on where they have been; that is their previous learning, their social background and their inherent capabilities of learning, all of these are infinitely variable.

By increasing the high-stakes nature of national testing will only see more focus on the content of the test, rather than the focus on delivering a broad and comprehensive curriculum. Computable performance metrics will only test how well a teacher has prepared a particular class for a certain test. Unfortunately, it will never be that easy to assess a teacher's performance as there is much more to student learning than rote learning for one test.

Value-added measures based on student test results are overly simplified and do not assess the teacher's ability to, for example, encourage student participation in extra-curricular activities, promote student's self-learning and engage the class in a well-rounded curriculum. It also does not account for the team effort of the school community that is required to develop successful learners.

Performance indicators incorporating these elements and take into account the different aspects of what makes a quality teacher have the potential to measure the value-added by a teacher, but such measures cannot be determined by test scores alone, rather teacher performance should only be considered within an understanding of the context of each school as a whole, the student population and the teaching environment within the school.

Q If a well-designed performance-based pay scheme could be implemented, would it significantly enhance teacher quality and student outcomes? What risks and costs are associated with performance-based pay?

There is insufficient research supporting performance-based pay schemes for it to be seriously considered by Governments as a means of improving teacher quality. The first problem with this question is the indication that there ever could be a well-designed performance-based pay scheme, which given the complexities in school and student background and the challenge of being able to ever test student improvement in learning in an accurate way challenges the concept that there ever could be a well-designed performance-based pay scheme.

In either respect, research is inconclusive about the benefits, disadvantages and wider impact of performance-based pay for teachers. As an alternative to performance pay for teachers, Council supports the development of a broad-ranging strategy to encourage people to enter and stay in the teaching profession, including a better pay structure for teachers that address the pay plateau for those who have stayed in the profession for 8 years or more and the development of a merit award scheme. Merit award schemes, as oppose to performance-pay schemes are different in that they provide rewards for teachers for activities such as improving their skills, mentoring or providing professional development to others (P&C Council 2010).

A merit award scheme could be easily developed in-line with the new Professional Standards of Teachers Accreditation, with Government's appropriately remunerating Lead Teachers. Any system of rewards needs to be research-based and negotiated with, and accepted by, the teaching profession.

Q How effective is the current suite of workforce-related initiatives to address educational disadvantage? Should the goal of such policies be greater equality in education outcomes or greater equality of opportunity for all students to realise their educational potential? Does the choice between these two alternatives have implications for the nature of the schools workforce policies that should be employed to address educational disadvantage?

Council believes the driving goal for educational policies and directions must be the goal of creating greater equality of opportunity for all students to realise their educational potential. This agrees with the definition of equity used by the Expert Review Panel for the Review of School Funding to mean that “differences in educational outcomes are not the result of difference in wealth, income, power or possessions...[this] does not intend it to mean that all students are the same or will achieve the same outcomes, but rather that they will not be prevented from achieving their maximum potential because of their background or family circumstances” (Commonwealth of Australia 2010, p. 5).

Therefore, Councils believes that equity should be judged on a school’s ability to ensure that student outcomes are based on individual student potential and are not the consequence of the socio-economic differences of individual students.

Research shows that a funding level that is adequate and distributed equitably has the ability to alleviate social disadvantage by addressing the profound effect family background has on educational outcomes (Coleman et al. 1966 and Willms 2001).

Q Are school workers sufficiently trained to deal with special needs students, student from cultural and language backgrounds other than English, and students with any other specific education requirements?

Funding cuts in the ACT has seen a loss of specialist teachers with a focus on generalists to fill the gap. Realistically, classroom teachers are not capable of providing specialised knowledge in all areas. This trend of cutting teacher specialists during tough financial circumstances undervalues the important role that specialists play in the education of students in need.

The disparity between the NAPLAN scores of Indigenous students with the ACT average highlights the real need for Indigenous students to receive additional assistance that is catered towards

their individual learning needs and understandings. Students with a language background other than English are also in need of more targeted learning to ensure the teaching meets their needs and is culturally appropriate.

Q Does the policy interface between the Australian Government and State and Territory Governments pose challenges for effective schools workforce reform? What effect will initiatives such as national accreditation and registration requirements, and the introduction of a national curriculum, have on the schools workforce and its capacity to meet the needs of students, parents and the community?

As noted above, the introduction of the Australian Curriculum will need to be met with the appropriate professional development for teachers.

Q How effective is the interaction with parents and the community on matters relative to student progress and school policy? How engaged are parents in school governance processes, in classroom support and in other aspects of school activity?

Parents have commented on the growing difficulty of securing a good volunteer base of parents to assist in school activities. Council is unsure as to the reasons for why this is the case, but the Productivity Commission should consider the difficulties for parents who lead fast paced lives and have little free time to remain actively engaged in their child's schooling. Schools therefore need to adopt strategies that overcome these hurdles and develop alternative methods for parents to remain involved in their child's schooling in a manner that better meets the changing needs of parents.

Parents play an important role in schools in raising funds, enhancing educational opportunities and ensuring better communication between the school, teachers, students and parents. Active involvement of parents in their child's education has a number of benefits for both the child and the family as a whole.

While most schools do actively encourage parental involvement, some schools struggle to develop opportunities for parents to be involved, by, for example having newsletters and permission slips emailed to parents and posted on the website, providing alternative opportunities for communication between parents and teachers for parents who struggle to meet with a teacher face-to-face.

Focus groups with parents have informed Council that parents would appreciate greater awareness of how their child is performing throughout the school term, increased guidance on how to assist in their child's learning and a greater awareness of what is happening at the school. Too often parents are only made aware of how their child is performing and the amount of work not handed in when the end of term school report arrives or the parent or their child would miss out on opportunities because their child has not passed on important information.

Many parents thought the communication between schools and parents was inadequate and negatively impacted on their child's learning outcomes.

Parents asked for:

- forms and notes to be placed on school websites within an appropriate time frame, clearer instructions for students on homework assignments, schools to establish communication links that allow teachers and parents to easily share information on a regular basis, via email or class forum, more homework that provides parents with a better idea of what their child is doing in class and their level of achievement, greater parental involvement in school.

Parent participation in their child's schooling contributes to better outcomes for students and enables the school system and individual schools to respond more effectively to community values, aspirations and needs. In addition, parent participation enhances the strength and vibrancy of the public education system.

Parent/Carers should be seen as Partners in Schooling and given the views that parents have mentioned to Council, further provisions to assist schools in developing strong and effective connections with parents, keeping parents involved and up to date with their child's performance at school and more informed about what is happening at school.

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