

Issue No. 9

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

APFACTS has welcomed the launch this month by Minister Burch of an ACT Pilot Project into Parent engagement which APFACTS has worked tirelessly promoting since February 2013.

This project will see the Australian Child Research Alliance ([ARACY](#)) develop in the ACT a benchmark into parent engagement, an Australian first! This will become a valuable tool for schools and school communities as they work together towards creating more collaborative partnership in student learning.

APFACTS has been a strong advocate for parental engagement in schooling to be recognized as a reform area. We congratulate Minister Burch for her leadership in both recognizing the need and giving commitment to progressing parent engagement in schooling. APFACTS looks forward to working with the cross sector stakeholder group in moving this project forward. More about the ACT pilot project and Minister Burch's own contribution piece in this new sletter.

Our APFACTS team and delegates have been busy with strategic planning, submissions and reviews, forward planning our events and fine tuning our membership offerings. I am constantly and pleasantly surprised at the level of enthusiasm, inspiration and commitment of the parent delegates from both Catholic and Independent schools in the ACT that are members of APFACTS. The collegiality, robustness of conversations and the outcomes this skinny organisation with a big vision is able to achieve is outstanding!

Welcome to all the new APFACTS delegates from member schools in recent months, thank you for joining us! This week Rebecca Prior also joins us as the new Communications/ Events Officer. Rebecca is a St Clare's College graduate and currently studying law at ANU. Rebecca is probably most well-known for her amazing work leading 180degreeconsulting at ANU.

As always, we love to hear your views and feedback and encourage you to be actively involved in the work of APFACTS. There are many ways to be involved - you can join committees, attend an event or simply stay informed of parent news and views by joining our online community on Facebook and/or twitter.

I wish you a Happy Easter and safe first term break.

Charuni Weerasooriya, President

ACT PILOT PROJECT INTO PARENT ENGAGEMENT

APFACTS is a strong advocate for parent engagement in schooling and been advocating for an ACT Pilot project into parent engagement since it's [February ACT Budget submission 2013](#).

This month we were delighted that the ACT Education Minister, Joy Burch recognised the importance of parent engagement in schooling and commissioned the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth ([ARACY](#)) to establish: a definition of parent engagement in the ACT, a

In this edition

- ▶ [President's Message](#)
- ▶ [ACT Pilot Project into Parent Engagement](#)
- ▶ [Article by ACT Minister for Education and Training, Joy Burch](#)
- ▶ [Naplan Update](#)
- ▶ [Senate releases it's recommendations and report into Naplan effectiveness, March 2014](#)
- ▶ [Naplan online testing](#)
- ▶ [Curriculum update](#)
- ▶ [Safe Schools Hub](#)
- ▶ [Productivity commission on childcare and early childhood education](#)
- ▶ [Preschool matters Program](#)
- ▶ [Some events for your diary](#)
- ▶ [Parent resources](#)
- ▶ [Apfacts news coverage](#)

President's Message

Welcome to the APFACTS Term 1, 2014 new sletter.

We encourage you to be part of the conversation around education issues, join us on:

- [Facebook](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [Visit our website](#)

Executive Committee members

[Charuni Weerasooriya](#)
President

[Paul Crowley](#)
Vice-President (Fraser)

measurement tool to look at levels of engagement and best practice and establish a benchmarking tool across the ACT.

"It is a significant project. The Minister has seen the potential with this project to authentically connect and empower all the important players in a child's life towards their learning.

This pilot project will help broaden the dialogue and involvement of parents beyond helping in classrooms, tuck shops and at fetes and come to the core of engagement in learning and creating greater partnership between home and school for the learning and wellbeing of our children" said Charuni Weerasooriya, APFACTS President.

"We are very proud of APFACTS advocacy in bringing this reform and project to the Minister's attention. The Minister's focus and attention through this ACT pilot project will lead the nation in developing a benchmark for parent engagement." said Charuni Weerasooriya, APFACTS President

Recent news on the ACT Pilot Project into Parent engagement:

- APFACTS Press Release : March 20, 2014: [APFACTS congratulates Joy Burch on launch of Pilot Project into Parent engagement](#)
- APFACTS Comments in the Canberra Times: March 20, 2014: [ACT Pilot project into Parent engagement](#)
- Australian Parents Council Press Release: March 20, 2014: [ACT Pilot project into parent engagement a great move](#)
- [Legislative Assembly Hansard](#) - Pgs 639-642, 655 and 661.

Like to know more about Parent engagement in schooling?

- Check out our APFACTS [website](#) for some resources to better engage in our child's learning and reports on parent engagement.
- Join our APFACTS advisory committee on Parent engagement. Email :executiveofficer@apfacts.org.au

ARTICLE BY ACT MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING, JOY BURCH



When I was appointed Minister for Education in November 2012, one of the first things I put my mind to was how to build stronger links between schools and the communities they serve. I know it is not only important for individual students to have a strong attachment and link with their school but that parents and families should also have a strong role in the outcomes of students.

Parents and carers are the first teachers of their children and we all know learning doesn't just happen in the classroom. A growing body of research shows that building effective partnerships between parents, families and schools to support children's learning leads to better learning outcomes. The whole school community benefits when parental engagement is an integral part of school planning and improvement processes. For this reason it was clear to me that we policies and activities that put special effort into enhancing parental engagement.

Early in 2013 I met with Mrs Charuni Weerasooriya from APFACTS who made me aware of recent research commissioned by the Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau in parental engagement by the Australian

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Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY). While I had been aware of ARACY for some time, particularly in the early childhood area, this was the first time I had heard about their work in parental engagement and its impact on schools and students.

It was very compelling research and the opportunity for further research in the ACT on ways to enhance parental engagement was too good to pass up. A further meeting with Mrs Weerasooriya and with Dr Lance Emerson of ARACY proved to me the value of a partnership to improve parental engagement in the ACT and I set about putting into place a project to do just that.

I was therefore very pleased to announce on 20 March the Parental Engagement Project, a \$250,000 research project led by the experts at ARACY and involving all schools in the ACT- Government, Catholic and Independent, as well as parents and parent representatives.

This will provide a missing link in Australian research on parental engagement in education and will test the current levels of parental engagement in ACT schools. It will trial a number of different strategies on what kind of activities boost the level of parental engagement.

These are significant nation leading reforms to help ensure that our education system continues to be a high performing one. I look forward to keeping you updated on this project as it rolls out over the next two years.

NAPLAN UPDATE

March saw the latest NAPLAN results released and new data populated to the Myschool website. Once again the ACT's outstanding jurisdictional performance across all school systems was highlighted.

Around the time of the NAPLAN results there is always much debate in the media about school performance.

APFACTS has consistently spoken of the need to see NAPLAN testing for what it is - simply a diagnostic tool providing a snapshot of a student's performance on one test on one day. Results in isolation don't provide the whole picture of a student or school performance.

"Parents and teachers have a whole year view of student progress that is much more holistic than one naplan result. It is important that the focus is on regular conversations between home and school that help build collaborative partnership to support student skills." said Charuni Weerasooriya, APFACTS President

Recent APFACTS news and coverage:

- APFACTS Press Release on March 7, 2014: : [Student performance is so much more than league tables](#)
- APFACTS comments in the Canberra Times: March 10, 2014: [Naplan guides will help parents understand MYSCHOOL Data](#)

Some great resources for parents:

- The Australian Parents Council [Naplan guide for parents](#)
- The Australian Parents Council [Myschool guide for parents](#)
- ACARA [parent perspectives on NAPLAN](#)

SENATE RELEASES IT'S RECOMMENDATIONS AND REPORT INTO NAPLAN EFFECTIVENESS, MARCH 2014

The Senate Education and Employment References Committee 2013 Inquiry into the Effectiveness of the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) released its final report on March 27, 2014. [Read report](#)

APFACTS supports key recommendations by the Senate Inquiry,

namely:

- Quick turnaround of test results to receive the highest priority in the design of NAPLAN Online with achievable and measurable targets built in to the system.
- Design of adaptive testing for NAPLAN Online with the needs of students with disability and non-English speaking background taken into account.
- Closely monitoring of the use of NAPLAN results to ensure results are published to assist the Government to deliver extra, targeted funding to schools and students who need more support, rather than the development of league tables.

Recent APFACTS news and coverage:

- March 28, 2014: [APFACTS Comments in the Canberra Times](#)

NAPLAN ONLINE TESTING

March saw students in Years 6 and 10 from 107 schools in New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria take part in a field trial of the online National Assessment Program (NAP) in ICT literacy (ICTL).

The trial was part of a wider initiative by ACARA to move all national assessments online. [Read more NAP website.](#)

Federal Minister for Education, Christopher Pyne has proposed that national NAPLAN testing will go online by 2016.

APFACTS has always advocated for faster turnaround times of results so schools and parents can use the data in a timely manner for discussions that can lead to greater student skills.

In recent meetings APFACTS was told that online testing could have a turnaround time of one month which certainly would hasten the feedback loop for students, parents and teachers.

We are keen to hear your views on online testing of NAPLAN. Please email your responses to: Executiveofficer@apfacts.org.au

- How do you feel about testing going online?
- What information about your child's learning is most important to you?
- What information would be more useful for you?
- How do you find navigating the MY School website and information?

CURRICULUM UPDATE

In January 2014, Federal Education Minister Christopher Pyne commissioned a review into the National Curriculum. Panelist Professor Ken Wiltshire AO and Dr Kevin Donnelly were appointed to the review to evaluate the robustness, independence and balance of the Australian Curriculum including examining the content and development process.

In February, two parent organisations - APFACTS and the P&C Council were asked to represent to the panel parent views on the Australian Curriculum.

APFACTS also provided a Submission to the Review of the National Curriculum. [Read more](#)

APFACTS advocates for:

- a rich, challenging and inquiry based curriculum that focusses on 21st century skills required for our young people.
- A curriculum developed nationally that covers the learning years F-12. It is important for parents to know that all students learn the same content throughout the country at any given year level and the student is not adversely affected by family movement between different educational environments, locations and settings.
- Greater technology focus for all subject areas throughout the

curriculum so young people are developing the skills necessary for the global workforce they will enter when leaving school.

- APFACTS is a strong advocate for parental engagement in schooling and therefore would like to see continual focus and development of on-line tools which support the National Curriculum and allow for greater parental engagement across learning areas.

APFACTS is a strong advocate for parents on many curriculum forums in the ACT. We represent parents on:

- BSSS – Board of Secondary Studies
- CAC – Curriculum Advisory Council
- ACT Curriculum Taskforce.

Are you interested in curriculum issues? If you have any areas regarding curriculum you would like us to discuss, please [email](#) us.

SAFE SCHOOLS HUB

Have you visited the [Safe Schools Hub](#) lately? Some great information and advice on how your family can support a safe school culture and manage problems when they arise at your child's school.

The Safe Schools Hub was developed with the expert advice of educational psychologists, Professor Helen McGrath and Professor Toni Noble, and provides useful information and practical activities for principals, teachers and parents to help create safe and supportive schools.

The Hub also provides expert advice on a great number of topics, from deciding when your child should start school, through to what to do if your child is anxious.

PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION ON CHILDCARE AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

In February, APFACTS after extended consultation with the non-government parent community gave its submissions to the Productivity Commission into Child Care and Early Childhood Education. [Read APFACTS submission.](#)

“There is clearly a need for more options for working parents in the ACT when it comes to finding affordable, quality childcare to allow both parents to participate in the workforce. In addition there is a growing demand for preschool places in non-government schools and this needs to be adequately funded in the same way that government preschools are funded” said Julie Sengelman Executive Officer, APFACTS.

Do you have a child in early childhood setting in the non-government sector? Join our early childhood advisory committee: [email](#).

PRESCHOOL MATTERS PROGRAM

The Preschool Matters program is another cross sectoral project that focusses on promoting parental engagement in preschool settings throughout the ACT.

The Preschool Matters Program acknowledges and recognises the expertise of families in their child's education and the importance of parental involvement and engagement in preschool and early childhood settings.

The Preschool Matters website was launched in December, [visit website](#)

A brochure is currently being developed and will be available soon to assist parents enrolling their children in preschool with valuable information about the various ACT preschool options and importance of engagement in a child's learning.

A small grants program was established this year where grant recipients

would receive \$500 for activities that promoted parent engagement and support collaborative relationships with families. [More](#)

New rounds of funding will commence on September 1, 2014. Find out [more information](#) about applying for a grant.

"This is a fantastic initiative that not only assists parents at a time when first decisions around schooling for their children are taking place but also promotes the importance of creating collaborative partnership between schools and parents." Charuni Weerasooriya, APFACTS President

"The foundations being set with this program will have lasting effects on how parents and school settings create relationships and engagement around a child's learning – very exciting indeed!" said Charuni Weerasooriya, APFACTS President.

SOME EVENTS FOR YOUR DIARY

- **APFACTS Project Rockit workshops – September 15-19, 2014**

APFACTS will once again be running a week long program of workshops in the ACT presented by co-founders of leading anti-bullying, cyber bullying and leadership organisation PROJECT ROCKIT. This year's workshops will target secondary students and a range of parent workshops with experts in this field will also be offered in that week. To find out more information, visit our [APFACTS website](#) at the beginning of Term 2.

- **The Mental Health & Wellbeing of young People – June 6, 2014**

Leading experts deliver practically oriented, multi-disciplinary approach to common issues which are impacting the wellbeing of young people. [More](#)

- **Identification and Interventions for children with Specific Learning Difficulties – May 7, 2014**

Presented by Associate Professor Tim Hannan, this full day workshop for teachers, psychologists and allied professionals provides an overview of the current research evidence on specific learning difficulties and the criteria that best define them will be presented and discussed. [More](#)

PARENT RESOURCES

Have you joined our online parent community? In case you missed some of our most popular posts on facebook or twitter:

Parent engagement in learning:

- [Ideas on how to set some educational goals for the school year](#)
- [Parents can build a great foundation for maths through simple games and conversations](#)
- [This article highlights the importance of student engagement at school and how we as parents can help](#)
- [Parents engaged in middle school so important!](#)
- [Pedagogy and curriculum is not enough to build life long learning in our children](#)

Wellbeing:

- [A good reference point for information on positive psychology and positive education](#)
- [A nice article about kids happiness](#)
- [The workings of the adolescent brain explains a lot more than we think](#)
- [Some great suggestions on how to encourage shy children to be](#)

[more socially confident](#)

Recent reports:

- [Recent findings from the Grattan Institute](#)
- [Interesting findings from OECD research](#)
- [OECD lifts the lid on family background being no guarantee of academic excellence](#)

APFACTS NEWS COVERAGE

- March 28, 2014: [APFACTS Comments in the Canberra Times](#): Senate call to stop league tables
- March 25, 2014: [APFACTS Comments in the Canberra Times](#): South Canberra schools in lockdown
- March 20, 2014: [APFACTS Comments in the Canberra Times](#): ACT Pilot project into Parent engagement
- March 10, 2014: [APFACTS Comments in the Canberra Times](#) : Naplan guides will help parents understand MYSCHOOL Data
- February 9, 2014: [APFACTS Comments in the Canberra Times](#): Enjoy the benefits while navigating the risks of Technology
- January 29, 2014 : [APFACTS comments in the Canberra Times](#): Schools blame fee rises on funding uncertainty.

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- Visit the [APFACTS website](#) and have your say on education issues.
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