



Association of Parents and Friends of A.C.T Schools Inc

The Association of P&F's of ACT Schools Representing the Interests of ACT Non-Government School Parents

PO Box 4034 Weston ACT 2611

Telephone: 02 62873538 Fax: 02 6287 3539

ABN: 70 539 617 355

e-mail: apfacts@bigpond.com

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ACT Budget Consultation
Department of Treasury
GPO Box 158
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Minister Gallagher

The Association of Parents and Friends of ACT Schools (APFACTS) presents the following brief submission for consideration as part of the ACT Government's 2009–10 Budget.

As you know, APFACTS represents the interests of parents of non-government school children in the ACT. These parents are arguably the major stakeholders in this education sector.

They contribute substantially to the cost of their children's education through fees paid with their after tax dollars, often at great personal and financial sacrifice. Conservatively, their contributions save the ACT taxpayer more than \$100 million per year and they deserve an equitable share of ACT Government education expenditure.

As a matter of principle, APFACTS believes that none of that share should be at the expense of children attending government schools and that a strong government sector is vital for parental choice.

Non-government schools provide valuable diversity through alternative outlooks and a wide range of educational and cultural philosophies.

APFACTS is concerned that the cost of education is increasing at a disproportionate rate and that this is forcing fees to rise markedly to compensate. This in turn affects parents' ability to choose, and could create undesirable marginalisation between sectors.

APFACTS Funding Priorities

Increased recurrent per capita funding

Education funding should be equitable and represent a fairer distribution of taxpayer resources. The ACT Government should progressively increase its per capita contribution - progressing from the current figure of 12.7 cents to a level (consistent with the national average) of 17.2 cents for a non-government school for every dollar that the ACT Governments spends on a government school student.

We acknowledge that comparing the ACT situation with funding levels provided by other State/Territory Governments may not be productive due to other differences in circumstances, such as remote community or indigenous special needs. Nonetheless, the ACT remains one of the lowest funded of the States or Territories and there is no question that the parents who choose the non-government school option, save the ACT tax-payers a significant amount.

Equitable funding for students with disabilities

The non-government sector values participation by students with disabilities but struggles with the costs associated with those students. It is unreasonable to expect a relatively small school community to meet these costs when the entire taxpaying community meets these costs in government schools. Parents of students with disabilities do not have equitable choice and accordingly, APFACTS requests that when a student with disability changes schools or sectors, the full funding allocation follow the student.

Indexation aligned with the real cost increases in education

The ACT Government has, in the past, indexed non-government school recurrent funding in line with the CPI. The CPI does not properly reflect the real increase in education costs. We understand that the education element of CPI is greater than 5% while CPI has been around 3%. This represents a real reduction in funding.

The payment of teachers' salaries is the largest single item dependent on recurrent funding. Noting that, in the largest subset of the non-government sector, the Catholic system schools, teacher salaries need in practical terms to be generally adjusted to match salaries of equivalent positions in the government system, an index that realistically reflects the effect of these 'flow-on' increases from the government system is vital.

Other jurisdictions have implemented a combined wages-based and CPI figure to calculate supplementation for various programs and we request that a similar calculation be applied to funding for non-government schools.

ICT Support

This is an area of high capital expenditure where there is real need. Grants for IT support should be on the basis of specific needs identified through a rigorous and transparent process. APFACTS welcomed the Labor Party's pre-election commitment to providing \$2.5 million over the next 3 years for ICT grants for non-government schools. A relatively small contribution from the ACT government would enable many non-government schools to fully utilise their allocation of computers provided by the Commonwealth's 'Education Revolution'.

Support for Capital Works

The current Commonwealth proposals to fund all schools for capital works, as recently announced in the stimulus package before the Commonwealth Parliament, is a 'one off' initiative. It does not take away from the need for there to be improved on-going provision for capital works programs from the ACT Government.

Family School Partnerships

APFACTS believes that effective partnerships with and between parents, school communities and school authorities are central to the success of schooling outcomes. APFACTS acknowledges the significant commitment the Government has made in supporting parent bodies through the recent provision of one-off grants. APFACTS looks forward to cooperative consultation with the ACT Government in the interests of maintaining high quality education for all ACT students and the right for parents to choose.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light pink background. The signature is written in a cursive style and reads "Tony Maple".

Tony Maple
President