



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

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Andrew Barr, MLA
Minister for Education and Training
GPO Box 1020
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Dear Minister Barr

The Association of Parents and Friends of ACT Schools (APFACTS) presents the following brief submission for consideration as part of the ACT Government's 2008–09 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 and it is a result of their choice that 41% of ACT children attend non-government schools. They contribute substantially to the cost of their children's education through fees paid with their after tax dollars, often at very 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 requests that the ACT Government give consideration to the following issues in the preparation of the 2008–09 Budget:

- Commitment to former ISS funds remaining in the sector
- Increased recurrent per capita funding.
- Indexation aligned with the real cost increases in education.
- Equitable funding for students with disabilities.
- IT support.
- Support for education services

You will note that these priorities bear a striking similarity to those in our 2007-08 Budget Submission. We remain committed to addressing the funding shortfalls in the non-government sector and remind you of the pre-election promises made, nearly three years ago now, to increase support to our community.

Infrastructure support

APFACTS acknowledges the Government's 2007 budget initiative which resulted in the former Interest Subsidy Scheme (ISS) funds being committed to providing improved facilities for children with disability. APFACTS urges you to lock in the remaining years' ISS funds to the same, or a similar, infrastructure related, purpose.

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 contribution of per capita funding to at least 25% of the average cost of educating a student in an ACT Government school.

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 parents who choose the non-government school option, save the ACT tax-payers a significant amount. In a budget surplus era, it would be prudent to recognize this

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 2.5%. 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.

We note that the Government uses a combined wages-based and CPI figure to calculate supplementation for programs funded under the Health portfolio and request that a similar calculation be applied to funding for non-government schools.

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.

IT support

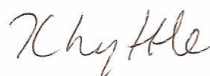
This is an area of high capital expenditure where there is real need. Grants for IT support should be on the basis of specific needs identified through a rigorous and transparent process. We note, with approval, your commitment during 2007 to improving the IT facilities at Government schools. We ask that you consider a similar program for the non-government schools, many of which have significantly poorer quality facilities than their government counterparts.

Support for Departmental Staffing

As APFACTS has noted previously, cuts made to departmental staffing levels was of grave concern and has negative impact on outcomes **for all students**. Our concerns, previously articulated, related to cuts the areas of curriculum and in the level of support provided to teachers to assist them in undertaking the complex tasks of moderating student results. This year, through membership to School Sport ACT, we have first hand experience of how departmental cuts have affected the effectiveness and efficiency of operations of the PE and Sport Unit. We note your commitment to improved student activity levels and urge you to re-instate the positions previously cut.

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



Kate Lyttle
Executive Officer