

AEU ACT Submission to the ACT Government re the 2015 16 ACT Budget

The AEU ACT makes submissions in relation to three items:

- Implementation of the ACT Labor Government's 2012 Election commitment of '\$70m to create the best learning environments for students and teachers in our older (public) schools';
- An initiative for funding new heating and cooling infrastructure in ACT public schools; and,
- An initiative for funding of public school based professional learning communities.

1. Older Schools:

In its 2012 Election education commitments totalling \$250m of recurrent and capital initiatives, ACT Labor specifically identified '\$70m to create the best learning environments for students and teachers in our older (public) schools. In the ACT Labor 'Governments first Budget after the 2012 Election, it appropriated a one off figure of \$3.345m for 'School Infrastructure for the Future' in the 2013-2014 Budget.

In addition, in the post-Election Budgets of 2013-14 & 2014-15, the ACT Labor Government appropriated a total of \$27.398m to annual school Capital Upgrades of which \$3.940m (approx. 14.4%) has been apportioned to Older School Upgrades – Yarralumla (1957), Hughes (1964) & Curtin (1965).

The percentage of the above apportionment to older schools needs to be measured against the average of 67.76% of ACT Public schools with an opening date of 1979 or earlier. Below are the category percentages:

- Colleges 56%
- High Schools 82%
- Primary Schools 69%
- P-10s 23%
- Special Schools 100%
- Pre-schools 66%
- Early Childhood Schools 66%

The AEU ACT submits that there is a shortfall in appropriation against the 2012 ACT Labor Election commitment of \$70m as follows of:

- \$66.655m in 'School Infrastructure for the Future' initiatives; or,
- \$66.060m in 'Older School Upgrades'

Accordingly, the AEU ACT calls on the ACT Labor Government to appropriate either an additional \$66.655m to 'School Infrastructure for the Future' initiatives or an additional \$66,060m to 'Older School Upgrades' in the two Budgets preceding the 2016 ACT Elections in order to acquits its 2012 Election commitment to older public schools.

2. Heating & Cooling:

Following the very high to extremely hot temperatures experienced in the ACT during the summer months of 2013 - 2014, AEU ACT requested of the Education & Training Directorate an audit of heating and cooling facilities and services in all ACT public school building stock. The audit was conducted on a school network basis over the period March – April 2014. While schools audited were reported to be 'fully heated', barely 80% were reported as being only partially cooled or air conditioned. Additionally, 12% of school libraries and 16% of school admin areas were reported as being not air-conditioned or cooled. The audit did not go to the age, condition or effectiveness of the heating and cooling equipment.

AEU ACT calls on the ACT Labor Government to appropriate sufficient funds:

- to conduct an audit of the age, condition and effectiveness of current heating and cooling equipment and to make recommendations about its managed replacement;
- to extend to those admin areas and libraries currently without cooling; and
- to ensure that no classroom has a temperature range in excess of 30 degrees Celsius in the summer and 17 degrees Celsius in the winter.

3. Professional Learning Communities:

AEU ACT calls on the ACT Government to appropriate the following funds:

- not less than \$10m to resource teacher participation in professional learning communities for 1.5 hours per week for primary school teachers and 1 hour per week for secondary school (60 hours per year and 40 hours per year respectively);
- \$1.0m (salaries* plus on-costs) for an additional 42 Executive Teachers (Professional Practice) required to complete the roll-out of providing for a minimum of one per school to co-ordinate and supervise school-based professional learning communities. [*The salaries component is composed of the difference between the rate for an Experienced Teacher level 2 and the Executive Leader C.]

School-based professional learning communities are one of the most powerful ways of improving student outcomes.

In the Commonwealth Government's *Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework* endorsed by the ACT Government on 3 August 2012, it states clearly that: "There is strong evidence that better appraisal, coaching and feedback leading to targeted development can improve teacher performance." However, the document also observes that Australian teachers report that they do not always get the feedback they need to improve. In an OECD survey, 63% of Australian teachers reported that appraisal of their work is largely done to fulfil administrative requirements."

In the recent Grattan Institute policy analysis, *Making Time for Great Teaching* (2014), Jensen et al conclude that improving teacher effectiveness is key to improving student outcomes and that the "best way to do this is through professional learning programs..." (2014: 5).

They identify five characteristics of effective professional learning:

- Mentoring and coaching [that] helps teachers diagnose their students' learning needs, and develop classroom management skills and pedagogy specific to their subjects
- Lesson and grade groups, in which teachers work together to plan lessons, examine student progress, and discuss alternative approaches
- Research groups that analyse a topic around content, pedagogy or behaviour management, build an evidence base and trial and refine new practices
- Teacher feedback based on a comprehensive appraisal of teacher's work
- Classroom observation and feedback

They conclude: “High performing education systems around the world have intensive professional learning programs in schools. These programs enable teachers to receive and act on continual feedback on how to better teach students.” (2014:7)

However, Jensen et al go on to argue that lack of time is a major impediment to establishing effective professional learning communities. “A big stumbling block is the failure to provide the necessary time for effective professional learning programs. Not allocating enough time makes any professional learning program – however well intentioned – a poor one. Too often, schools want to make the changes but can’t find the time or resources.” (2014:5)

The *Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders*, (2012) also endorsed by the ACT Government, states that a high quality professional learning culture will be characterised by:

- a high degree of leadership support for ongoing adult learning and risk taking;
- collective responsibility for improving practice;
- disciplined collaboration aimed at specific and relevant goals that relate to the learning needs of students;
- high levels of trust, interaction and inter-dependence;
- a focus on the professional learning that is most likely to be effective in improving professional practice and student outcomes; and
- support for professional learning through school structures, explicit planning and the allocation of time.

What is required in order to develop and sustain school-based professional learning communities in ACT public schools is additional time, without adding to the school day, for professional learning needs to be provided on a regular job-embedded basis so that professional learning is integrated into the teaching and learning program, rather than removed from it.

This submission also proposes that the roll-out of the Teacher Enterprise Agreement created role of Executive Teacher Professional Practice be completed so that every public school has a professional learning community leader.

4. Casual Relief Staff Arrangements

AEU ACT calls on the ACT Government to appropriate sufficient funds for the Education & Training Directorate (ETD) to fully fund the provision of casual relief staff in all sectors.

Presently, ETD funds only a proportion of the total cost of employing casual relief staff when schools cover the first five days of personal leave taken by a staff member. These proportions are as follows.

- College: 45%
- High: 75%
- Primary with enrolment of 276 & above: 85%
- Primary with enrolment of 275 or less: 95%
- Preschools: 95%
- Special Schools: 95%
- Primary IEC: 85%
- Secondary IEC: 75%

Costs incurred by schools arising from personal leave are contingent, uncontrollable and unforeseeable. Anything less than 100% funding for the provision of casual relief staff illogically and deleteriously impacts on school budgets and capacity to provide satisfactory educational services.

Compulsory education to age 17; an earn-or-learn environment; and significantly increased Year 12 completion rates mean the realities of the senior secondary environment have changed. Community expectations increasingly demand that classes are not cancelled. Students are in aggregate less capable of self-directed university-style learning. In the context of changed student needs and community expectations, funding at less than 100%, such as 45% for colleges, is anomalous and antiquated.

Underfunding of relief staff coverage in ACT schools is simply aggravates already excessive workloads and stress.

5. Alternative Programs and Settings

The government should fund the establishment of alternative programs for those students who require a high level of educational, social and/or behavioural support. These programs should include small classes, specialist teachers and support staff (including liaison officer), individualised programs and other supportive measures (eg. transport provision); they may be established in a separate setting to the student's own school and could be provided for the short, medium or long term, depending on the needs of each student.