



AUSTRALIAN PARENTS COUNCIL Inc.
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**Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment,
Education and Training inquiry into the *Status of the Teaching Profession***

December 2018

The Australian Parents Council has provided parents and governments with a trustworthy voice in education policy for over 55 years. A non-denominational, non-party political organisation, we advocate for parents with children in non-government schools (Catholic and Independent) and for Australia's parent population more generally. Our interests and activities extend down to early learning and up to post-school transitions, and to the ongoing support of Parents Australia Incorporated which we established as a national charity and deductible gift recipient in 2011.

The work of the Australian Parents Council over many years, and of Parents Australia Incorporated more recently, has contributed to the improvement of children's educational experiences and outcomes, progressive reforms in schooling, and the social capital of school and Indigenous communities throughout Australia.

Quality teaching is highly valued by parents. In fact, APC's national survey of parents¹ found parents consider it the most important education issue. APC supports the current focus on evaluating and implementing evidence-based and innovative practice and believe it has the potential to serve our children's education well, today and into the future.

We welcome this opportunity to contribute our views on providing practical and measured ways to understand and improve the status of the teaching profession from the parent perspective, and thank you sincerely.

Mrs Shelley Hill

APC Chair

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¹ APC's education issues survey was open to all parents across Australia. These figures are based on 676 responses.

1. Increasing the attractiveness of the profession for teachers and principals, including workplace conditions, and career and leadership structures.

Key issues around this topic include;

- Despite recent moves to amend teacher remuneration scales to reflect a teacher's expertise, teaching salaries usually peak after around a decade. Parents, students and other teaching professionals need highly skilled teachers to remain in the classroom, incentivised by career achievement including financial incentive in order to benefit students and the teaching profession through their example.
- Giving teachers and principals a greater voice in decisions around curriculum, assessment and reporting underpinned by sound educational research and best practice rather than being led by national political or economic imperatives.
- Developing a sense of stability and clarity in education for principals, teachers, parents and students.
- Ensuring that opportunities for teacher career progression, including roles which provide teachers a voice to influence decision making, are obvious and transparent to teachers across all sectors of the Education profession.
- APC would like to see more respect for the profession within communities and the broader Australian culture. Positive and supportive parent/teacher relationships are key and to this end, we have consistently called for a National Parent Engagement Day to promote the collaboration between schools, teachers and families, and the opportunities and increased educational outcomes that arise when there is a genuine partnership between home and school. This should be enhanced by a campaign to improve communication channels and the language used in the public when talking about teachers.
- Teachers report that relationships with parents lower their satisfaction and performance, so all avenues should be pursued to support them. The APC together with specialist education provider, Lee Hecht Harrison has developed a *Certificate IV in Parent, Family and Community Engagement*, to bridge this gap. In 2019, teacher professional development based on the specialist units in engagement and partnership will be offered to further support the profession, as teachers would benefit from increased understanding of parent engagement practices particularly in pre-service teacher programs.

2. Provision of appropriate support platforms for teachers, including human and IT resources.

There are a number of opportunities to rationalise workloads in schools;

- Career progression is often movement from the classroom into administration roles including those such as Head of Department and Deputy Principal which includes an understanding and implementation of human resources, people management culture and policy development work. Teachers are often not best placed to be working with such matters which would be better outsourced appropriately to allow them to focus on being curriculum leaders.
- Teacher time is consumed by administrative tasks including data entry and word processing, photocopying and menial resource development tasks which could be done by others.
- IT departments are usually in place as a device management service provider for staff and students. This is an essential service. However, teachers are left to research and test educational tools which may develop pedagogical practice. Much of this work could be outsourced to IT and other education professionals, allowing teachers to focus on developing the skills of critical thinking, resilience, research and more which underpin the technology use.

- Enterprise bargaining agreements currently include allocations of teacher time to do work such as playground and bus duty, moving furniture, preparing spaces for open days and fundraisers, etc in an effort to minimise the impact of such work on teachers. This work could be easily outsourced altogether.
- Teacher time should be spent in learning development, liaising with students and parents and providing quality assessment and feedback for learning.
- Teacher aides offer invaluable contributions to the core business of teaching and learning, however financial limitations usually result in desperate under allocation of Teacher aide time for students who are in great need. APC calls for a fast tracking of work currently being undertaking around the funding of NCCD identified students, with an emphasis on transparency and fairness with a view to drastically increasing teaching aide capacity to support teachers and student learning.
- Another reality is that too many teachers are teaching outside their discipline specialty especially in regional, rural and remote schools. ICT and digital technology industries are in a prime position to provide support. Work experience opportunities, mentoring and ongoing industry connections for teachers, not necessarily the school, would be beneficial. Indeed, there are industry leaders in school parent communities who have the ability to contribute, however, it requires a structure and model of engagement which invites contribution and sets clear outcomes and expectations.

3. Identifying ways in which the burden of out-of-hours, at-home work can be reduced.

This issue can largely be addressed by;

- Streamlining teacher's roles in school hours. By removing the unnecessary additional work that teachers are required to do (outlined largely above) teachers would have time to return to the core of their work which is teaching and learning, necessarily underpinned by parental engagement.
- Respecting a teacher's area of specialisation and allowing them to do what they are good at and motivated in, without the burden of teaching content they can't and should not have to deliver.
- Recognising that quality teaching and learning is underpinned by quality preparation which takes time, especially if this is outside their specialist area.
- Exploring beyond the traditional education model – flexible school days, shared teaching roles and more support for teachers to have the opportunity to work collaboratively with peers and plan highly effective learning experiences for students. We should look to other professions for models, for example in the medical field.
- Parents want quality teachers who are healthy, prepared and enthusiastic about their work! We recognise that teachers enter the profession motivated by their passion for developing students and supporting their learning. This must be protected by allowing them the time and space to undertake their core work.

4. Investigating ways to increase retention rates for the teaching profession, and avoid 'burn out' among early-career teachers.

Suggestions include;

- Early career teachers are currently provisionally registered yet undertake a full or close to full teaching load. Provisional registration should come with additional preparation time and well-structured mentoring to support early career teachers to develop strong practical foundations in their field/specialisation, leading to full teaching registration.

- Increasing mentoring programs, team teaching opportunities and rigorous support networks and PD for all teachers, especially early career teachers.
- Considering the development of early career teachers as an investment in the profession. They are newly influenced by the latest in educational research from the universities and have much to offer the school. Their contributions should be valued, and their development nurtured.
- Increasing the placement time for pre-service teachers.
- The ACER publication, 'Challenges in STEM learning in Australian Schools: Literature and Policy Review' [Michael Timms, Kathryn Moyle, Paul R Weldon & Pru Mitchell (2018)], reveals the high number of teachers teaching out-of-field. This has a negative effect on teacher satisfaction, as they have to teach in an area they are not specialist in and may often dislike and requiring more time to prepare materials. Ultimately, encouraging more pre-service teachers to take these subject specialisations may arrest the decline in these particular domains and would assist in increasing teacher retention (and student engagement).
- Investigating ways to move towards a very different approach to parent-teacher collaboration that would support early career teachers and increase the retention of all teachers, based on the child's learning as the centre of the mutual conversation. Debbie Pushor's work on 'teacher knowledge' and 'parent knowledge' should be considered in this context [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Debbie_Pushor]. Another interesting paper on this approach is written by Janet Goodall (2018), Learning-centred parental engagement: Freire reimaged in the Educational Review, 70:5, 603-621.