



March 2019

## **APC's Federal Election Statement on Education**

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 and for Australia's parent population more generally. Our interests and activities extend down to early learning and up to post-school transitions.

**We are calling for the next government of Australia to keep education a priority. APC believes that significant improvements can be made if action is taken on the following key issues.**

### **1. Quality teaching and raising the status of the teaching profession.**

Parents cited teacher quality as the most important education issue in APC's 2018 national survey, with many calling for more support for teachers. APC believes teachers need to be better supported professionally and equipped with quality teaching resources and effective teaching practice. Teachers should be encouraged to develop their professional skills, and their expertise should be consistently recognised, to build the capacity of the profession, improve retention rates and ultimately to achieve the best outcomes for students. Initiatives should include:

- A focus on support and professional development for all teachers throughout their careers. Improved resources for initial teacher education, national guidelines that put in place structured, comprehensive and effective induction, support and mentoring programs for new teachers, as well as formalised career long professional development and support for teachers and school leaders.
- Greater professional and financial recognition of teachers' skills and expertise across their career, that celebrates and rewards expertise and ability, rather than simply tenure.
- Teachers need better professional and management support for dealing with challenging students and crisis situations, including physical and psychological attacks. There need to be effective health and safety measures in place that protect them, and extra resources made available to enable early and effective intervention. All teachers should also have access to mental health services to help them deal with work-related stress.
- A national review of what we are teaching and how we are teaching it. We need to ensure the curriculum is equipping students with the skills to succeed in a rapidly changing world, that it is backed by comprehensive resources for students, teachers, schools and parents, and that we adopt evidence-based teaching practice.
- Recruitment of more specialists into teaching in STEM areas, and training and professional development for teachers teaching STEM subjects beyond their specialisation.



2. **Fair and equitable funding based on need for every child, wherever parents choose to send children to school.** Every child and family should have access to a quality education.
  - Parents value choice in education. This fundamental tenet of education provision in Australia must be preserved by the next government.
  - Extra provisions and measures to address education disadvantage should be made for indigenous students and those from a culturally diverse background, rural and remote students, and students with special educational needs, including students with a disability, learning and behavioural issues, as well as gifted and talented children, especially at the important transition points throughout their education.
  - The impact on family budgets needs to be factored into any significant funding changes. Families make a financial commitment of up to 13 years per child when they choose a non-government school. Eighty-five per cent of parents with children at non-government schools reported that they would struggle to pay higher than expected fee rises and be forced to make 'significant sacrifices' to keep their children at the school of their choice, with 25 per cent saying they would have to move their children to different schools, according to APC's national survey. It is important for the stability of the government and non-government sectors, and the well-being of tens of thousands of families and students currently at non-government schools that changes are introduced over a realistic time frame to allow families to adjust.
  
3. **Resourcing and commensurate funding of initiatives and programs to improve the mental well-being of students.** Every child has the right to and should be supported to develop positive mental health as this enables learning to flourish. Access to programs and wellness should be available both in school and in the community. Measures should include:
  - National recognition of mental health and wellness of young people as a priority.
  - Consistent and ongoing focus on mental health and wellbeing in the curriculum and the pastoral care of students, including the development of teaching and support resources for teachers, school staff, students and parents.
  - Universal and timely access for students to school counsellors and professional mental health services, who are properly funded and resourced themselves.
  
4. **Digital literacy, digital citizenship and equity of access to technology in schools is challenging but essential if we are to equip students for life beyond school.** All students need to have digital skills and learn to be responsible in our digital world.
  - Universal access to technology must be a priority in every school, along with appropriate training for teachers.
  - There should be a focus on critical thinking skills and digital ethics, as well as how to use technology.
  - Technology-related school expenses should be tax deductible, as they have become a significant extra cost for families.
  
5. **Positive measures to build strong partnerships between teachers, schools, parents, carers and community.** Research demonstrates that parents are the greatest influence on education outcomes for children. Engaging parents in their child's learning is in the best interest of students and teachers. There are many ways to foster good relationships with parents.



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- National guidelines for teachers, schools and parents – including establishment of school and parent charters outlining roles, responsibilities, good communication, reporting and conflict resolution. The guidelines should enable consistent and regular reporting about student achievement, behaviour and engagement at school in language that parents can understand, and a policy of ‘early and often’ communication between teachers and parents, especially when there are learning and behavioural issues at school. The Family-School-Community Partnership Framework, endorsed by all COAG Ministers, addresses many of these concepts and should be more widely promoted and promulgated.
- Better training for pre-service teachers and more emphasis on why and how to build relationships with parents, more guidance and support for new teachers, professional development for teachers and school leaders in communication skills and conflict resolution. Access to training programs like the ASQA registered Certificate IV in Parent, Family and Community Engagement developed by APC in conjunction with Registered Training Organisation Lee Hecht Harrison and adoption of targeted specialist modules from the Certificate IV in Parent, Family and Community Engagement in pre-service teacher education, and as professional development for teachers and school staff and leaders.
- National roll out of programs for parents in how to support their child’s learning in school, focusing on key areas like literacy and numeracy, as per APC’s ‘Successful Learning’ program for parents of children starting school. These could be delivered at school or in the community and be delivered in ways that address cultural diversity and community languages. Programs should include communication skills with guidance on how to approach teachers and schools to resolve issues and build positive relationships.

The Australian Parents Council sees education and the growth of all Australian young people as a partnership between families and schools assisted by education stakeholders, business, policy makers and governments.

The emphasis on sufficient funding and good policy that first listens to families and their needs, and assists them in raising educated, healthy children is important if we are to build the agency and efficacy in young people to be equipped with the skills and attitudes for their future endeavours and through these endeavours, Australia’s future benefit.