



## 2022 Federal Election Statement

**The Australian Parents Council advocates for the next government of Australia to keep education a priority. APC believes that significant improvements to children's education can be achieved if action is taken on five key issues as a priority.**

**The Australian Parents Council has provided parents and governments with a credible voice in education policy for over 55 years. A non-denominational and non-political organisation, we advocate on school education matters for parents with children in non-government schools and for Australia's wider parent population. Our interests and activities extend from early learning to post-school transitions.**

APC recommends the next government of Australia to adopt the following priorities in education:

1. Easily accessible mental health support for children and young people
2. Positive measures to build and enhance strong partnerships between teachers, schools, parents, carers and community
3. A national strategy to improve the status of the teaching profession
4. Digital equity for all students and school communities
5. Fair and equitable funding based on need for every child.

### **1. Easily accessible mental health support for children and young people**

We believe that resourcing and commensurate funding of initiatives, programs and services to improve the mental well-being of students and families should be a priority. Every child has the right to and should be supported to develop positive mental health. The [2021 National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#) recognises this. However the strategy also reports that more than 50% of children experiencing mental health challenges are not receiving professional intervention. There is overwhelming evidence that children and young people's mental health deteriorated during COVID. Whilst the demand for mental health support has skyrocketed, the shortfall in service provision needs to be urgently addressed. Current extra funding for mental health services does not meet demand and is dwarfed by the investment the current Federal Government has made in the economy during COVID. Fully funding mental health services to meet current demand is an investment in our children's and Australia's future. Accordingly, the next government of Australia would need to:

- Review the school chaplaincy program to explore and strengthen preventative mental health capacity. The review should address how to ensure school chaplains adopt evidence-based practice and are professionally trained and credentialed.
- Support the creation of unified mental health services in school communities to bridge the division between education and health service provision. These could be modelled on family hubs at schools, like the [FamilyLinQ hubs](#) in Queensland, which provide mental health services for children and young people where parents are also involved. This integrated approach enables schools, health professionals and families to work together to support children and young people.
- Ensure universal, timely and direct access to mental health services, programs and wellness support both in school and the community, that are fully funded and resourced. This should include access to school counsellors and mental health services provided by qualified professionals.
- Continue to support a consistent and ongoing focus on mental health and wellbeing in the curriculum and the pastoral care of students, including the provision of teaching and support resources for teachers, school staff, students and parents.



## **2. Positive measures to build and enhance strong partnerships between teachers, schools, parents, carers and community**

Parents have the greatest influence on education outcomes for children beyond the classroom and engaging parents in their child's learning is in the best interest of students and teachers. The importance of family and community engagement is demonstrated in research and recognised in the [Alice Springs \(Mparntwe\) Education Declaration 2019](#).

Remote learning has highlighted the importance of strong relationships between school and home and there is a body of evidence demonstrating that parent engagement with their child's education increased during COVID. [The Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority \(ACARA\) reported](#) parents have a greater understanding of their child as a learner. A ministerial briefing paper on the impact of COVID on disadvantaged Australian students recognised that "involving parents/caregivers in learning has a greater impact on improving student outcomes than socioeconomics." according to the [Australian Council for Educational Research \(ACER\)](#).

Hence, it makes sense to elevate parent engagement to capitalise on the recent gains and reap the benefits in student achievement. This is in line with the recommendations made by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ACRACY) and ACARA.

However, there's much that needs to be done to lay a strong foundation. A [2020 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development \(OECD\) report](#) noted that pre-COVID parent engagement in Australian schools was not a strength of the system, with teachers spend on average just over an hour a week communicating with parents. There is also great variation between states and territories, systems, schools and teachers.

APC is concerned that there is a reduced commitment to Family and Community engagement in current government policy thereby reducing the impact of the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration where Family and Community partnerships sit as a pillar of Education in Australia.

We would like to see a renewed commitment and policies in place to foster strong relationships with parents, including:

- Programs and funding to rebuild relationships within school communities, including the introduction of a Family and Community Liaison Officer in every school.
- National guidelines for teachers, schools and parents outlining roles, responsibilities, effective 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 easily understand, and a policy of 'early and often' communication between teachers and parents. The [Family-School-Community Partnership Framework](#), endorsed by all Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Ministers, addresses many of these concepts and should be widely promoted.
- Implementation of the [National Principles of Child Safe Organisations](#), developed after the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, by all schools. The principles direct that "families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing", participate in decisions affecting their child, have a say in the development and review of the organisation's policies and practices, and are informed about the organisation's operations and governance.
- Better training and professional development for teachers on building relationships with parents, communication skills and conflict resolution. A useful tool could be training programs like the



Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) registered [Certificate IV in Parent, Family and Community Engagement](#) developed by APC as professional development for teachers, school staff and leaders.

- National roll out of programs for parents on how to support their child's learning in school, focusing on key areas like literacy and numeracy, and how to communicate with schools and teachers. Eg: APC's '[Successful Learning' program](#) for parents of children starting school that can be delivered at school or in the community in ways that address cultural and linguistic diversity.

### **3. A national strategy to improve the status of the teaching profession**

APC believes that Teachers should be better recognised and rewarded. Parents, the community and governments have gained a wider appreciation of the job they do, their dedication and professionalism during COVID. The role of teachers as essential workers has been manifestly demonstrated. Currently we have an aging teacher population and multiple reports of burnout through remote schooling and the recent return to face-to-face teaching. To ensure we have talented, motivated and sustainable teaching professionals it is important to appreciate teachers and celebrate their valuable contribution. This would also help attract talented prospective teachers into the profession. Rewarding and developing teachers will ultimately benefit students and to this end APC recommends a number of strategies:

- A national strategy for raising the profile of the teaching profession, that focuses on the strengths and contribution of teachers.
- Aiding states and territories to provide more certainty for teacher employment with increased job security and more opportunities to progress their career.
- Greater professional and financial recognition of teachers' skills and expertise across their careers, that celebrates and rewards expertise and ability.
- Teachers should be encouraged to develop their professional skills to build the capacity of the profession, improve retention rates and ultimately to achieve the best outcomes for students.
- Teachers to have access to mental health services to help them deal with work-related stress.
- Recruitment of more specialists into teaching in STEM areas, and training and professional development for teachers of STEM subjects

### **4. Digital equity for all students and school communities**

Digital equity is essential for all students, both at school and at home. During COVID the digital divide disproportionately impacted the education of disadvantaged students and those living in rural and remote communities. Only 68% of Australian children aged 5 to 14 living in the most disadvantaged communities have internet access at home, compared to 91% of students living in advantaged communities, [according to the Smith Family](#). Students living remotely whose internet is intermittent and not reliable enough to cope with online learning, and those in large families sharing limited digital devices, were left behind. As were those children whose parents did not have the digital skills to be able to assist their child in accessing their education during this time. Digital literacy and digital citizenship is also essential. APC advocates that:

- Universal access to technology and digital connectivity at school and at home should be a priority for all students. There should be funding to ensure that disadvantaged, rural and remote students are able to access digital devices and the internet.
- Technology-related expenses for students should be tax deductible, as they have become a significant extra cost for families
- A focus on critical thinking skills and digital ethics, as well as how to use technology.

### **5. Fair and equitable funding based on need for every child**



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APC believes that every child should have access to a quality education regardless of the school sector their parents choose.

- All children in government schools should be funded at 100% of the resourcing standard. The federal government should have greater accountability in their actions when working with the states and territories to ensure full funding of government schools. It is necessary for this to occur across all jurisdictions. Allowing state school funding to be used as a political lever across the jurisdictions is not in the best interests of our children nor in the best interests for education in Australia.
- 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 behaviour issues, as well as gifted and talented children, especially at the important transition points throughout their education.
- Parents value choice in education. This fundamental tenet of education provision in Australia should be preserved.

To find out more about APC please visit [www.austparents.edu.au](http://www.austparents.edu.au).

#### **Ends**

Contact [media@austparents.edu.au](mailto:media@austparents.edu.au) for more information or interviews. To find out more about APC please visit [www.austparents.edu.au](http://www.austparents.edu.au).