



Campbell High School Community Submission Towards 2020 – Renewing our schools October 2006

Executive Summary

The Campbell High School Board welcomes this opportunity to express its views regarding the proposed closure by the ACT Government of 39 public schools across the ACT as outlined in *Towards 2020 Renewing Our Schools*¹.

Although Campbell High School is not cited for closure, the proposed closure of Dickson College, the only public college in North Canberra, would significantly impact on our school. Rather than being a years 7-10 high school, the proposal would see Campbell High School becoming a years 7-12 Secondary School.

The Campbell High School Board supports the current model of years 7-10 high school/11-12 college structure. We recognise the ACT Government's responsibility to manage the Territory's public expenditure and gain efficiencies where possible. We understand the imperatives faced by the government to manage the public education system responsibly and effectively. However the closure of the only public college in North Canberra would limit choice to many families in the area and provide no choice to others who have to rely on the current public transport system.

If the closure of Dickson College were to go ahead, Campbell High School will require major funding to replicate the facilities necessary for a college. Significant funds would be required to provide purpose built teaching spaces to meet Registered Training Organisation (RTO) standards for the teaching of vocational education courses, as well as year 11 and 12 teaching resources.

¹ *Towards 2020 Renewing our Schools*

These requirements have been assessed by the Campbell High School principal with the support of ACT Department of Education. The Board would seek commitment from the government that the funding required will be provided. In addition, the Board would seek assurance that the quality and choice of courses offered by a Secondary School equal those currently offered in the college system.

However before a decision is made, an independent cost benefit analysis of the closure of Dickson College should be completed. This would need to include the teaching model to be adopted and the envisaged student numbers that would attend CHS. It is the Board's opinion that the government cannot make an informed decision without this analysis.

The Minister has stated at public forums that one reason for the drift of students away from public to private education may be attributed to parents wanting to pursue a year 7-12 secondary school. However, no evidence has been forthcoming that supports this assertion. To the contrary, enrolment at Dickson College for 2007 would suggest that there is a drift back to the public system.

This submission has been informed by the *College Review* which was released in January 2006 and strongly endorsed the continuation of the college model.

A recent survey of Campbell High School parents, in addition to the opinions voiced by the P&C members who have attended meetings over the past four months, has revealed a majority of parents would prefer their children to attend a stand-alone college in North Canberra.

The CHS School Board has noted that the Education Minister has stated on more than one occasion that he would not foist a Secondary School on North Canberra if it is not what the community want.

Introduction

This submission was developed by the Campbell High School (CHS) Board in consultation with the school community with the aim to address the issues that would face the school if the proposed closure of Dickson College were to go ahead.

To reach the conclusions contained in this submission, the Board has actively sought opinions from the broader school community in the following ways:

- Attendance by Board members at P&C meetings where the closure of Dickson College, the implications for CHS and strong statements of support were formally adopted;
- Reporting in detail on Board discussion in the school newsletter;
- Interview-type survey of 120 parents who attended parent-teacher interviews in September
- Student representatives on the CHS Board reported majority support of the Student Representative Council (SRC) for the college model;
- Staff survey indicating staff willingness to teach in a 7-12 secondary school.

The closure of Dickson College would result in the most significant change to CHS in 30 years and would undermine the integrity of the ACT's college system.

Background

Campbell High School was originally built in 1965 as a years 7-12 Secondary School with a capacity of 836 students. Curricula, teaching style, learning theory and the development of information technology have contributed to a different educational environment to the one the school was originally designed for. In line with developments in educational practice, there have been significant changes in classroom use. The school would have difficulty in accommodating that number of students today, particularly over years 7 -12, without additional amenities and infrastructure.

The CHS Board supports the sentiments voiced in *Towards 2020 Renewing Our Schools*.

"In North Canberra, schools were built to accommodate high initial enrolment levels but as community needs and demographics changed, enrolments initially declined. There is now a growth in the population of young families as people move back to live closer to Civic.

Schools in North Canberra provide a diverse range of specialist programs that address student abilities and developmental levels.

North Canberra schools are ideally located close to the Central Business District and suit families who are exercising the choice they have in selecting the most convenient and appropriate schooling for their children. Schools in North Canberra provide educational opportunities not only for students residing in their local suburbs but they also attract high out of area student enrolments from all over Canberra.

Families across Canberra are looking for options when considering what they want and need for their children's schooling. We need to continue to provide a network of contemporary and innovative schools in North Canberra that are attractive to its residents and the wider community.²"

Although used as a preamble in *Towards 2020* whose intent is to radically change the provision of education in North Canberra, the Board considers these statements support the continuation of the present model.

The implications to North Canberra

The closure of Dickson College would drastically limit educational options for North Canberra families who want to send their children to a years 11-12 public college. The successful alternative programmes offered by Dickson College (SITE, SIEC and FIP) are unique in North Canberra and could not be supported at CHS. It should be noted that these programmes are not mentioned in *Towards 2020*.

² *Towards 2020 Renewing our Schools* page 6.

Towards 2020 makes no provision for increasing infrastructure at the current CHS site to accommodate additional students and programmes that would be required for a viable years 11-12 programme.

The CHS Board acknowledges that there are some groups within the North Canberra community who may prefer a familiar model such as a years 7-12 Secondary School, however our data indicates that 48.6% of our parents surveyed would prefer their children to attend a college, and only 31.2% would support a Secondary School. This reinforces the conclusions of the College Review that:

"The essential integrity of the current model of separated provision for Years 11 and 12 should be maintained. When alternative models are considered, there is no compelling evidence that effectiveness would be increased to an extent that would justify a new structure, or the effort and costs associated with it. Investments in any other model would constitute a significant distraction from current and emerging imperatives.³"

Our children have grown up with the expectation that they would complete high school and progress to college. *Towards 2020* has had a destabilising effect on the current year 10 students who have to enrol for college in an uncertain environment. In addition the current year 9 students face a whole set of different uncertainties particularly if the closure of Dickson College goes ahead. The majority of CHS SRC students have indicated they do not want to remain at CHS for years 11 and 12.

The government would need to consider rezoning of schools so that, should CHS become a secondary school, students wishing to attend a college have that opportunity and are informed of the options available as early as possible.

Consultation process

Given the fiscal imperatives faced by the ACT government, the CHS Board considers that a more constructive approach would have been to involve all of the stakeholders in a taskforce to consider options for educational provision. Instead, the announcement of *Towards 2020* was presented to the community as a fait accompli.

³ *College Review* pages 9 and 10.

The Board acknowledges that:

"the objective of Towards 2020 is to give students access to a diverse range of high quality public schools. The objective is framed in terms of the diversity of school types/curricula and the resulting choices available and enhanced learning environments for students and teachers. If an improvement in educational outcomes is expected (or, at the very least, no reduction), there is no indication in the ACT government material why that is the case and how it can be determined ie how educational outcomes/quality can be measured or valued. There is also no mention of the potential loss of choice caused by the closure of schools (choice may be increased by curriculum diversity within schools and reduced by there being fewer schools or fewer schools of a particular type).⁴"

There is no publicly available information to indicate what social, financial or educational impacts the Minister might consider important or persuasive in determining whether or not to proceed to closure of Dickson College. Much information has been withheld by the government and we have no real understanding as to why the only public college in North Canberra was selected for closure.

The Minister has attended two North Canberra community meetings (3 July and 29 August) at which clear expressions of support for the retention of the college model were made. One of the outcomes of the meetings was recognition that closer collaboration between the Lyneham and Campbell High Schools and Dickson College would have educational benefits which may also lead to some financial efficiencies.

Campbell Secondary School proposal

The Board has considered *Towards 2020* from many angles and has concerns relating to the following:

- the current size of CHS will restrict the number and diversity of years 11 and 12 students and programmes;
- the loss of the opportunity for students to learn independence and responsibility fostered by the college model;
- incidental issues, ie uniforms, students who drive to school;

⁴ *Economics of Towards 2020: Renewing our Schools* page 11. ACT Council of P&C Associations Inc. 9 October 2006.

- the potential for the narrowing of course opportunities currently available in a college that can offer a diverse range of programmes due to a large number of year 11 and 12 students;
- the proposed link between Campbell Secondary School and Canberra CIT Reid campus.

Models

CHS Board and senior executive have conducted preliminary investigation into possible models of operation as a 7- 12 school. However, all models rely on additional funding for facilities to the school. This is of concern to the CHS Board as this was not mentioned in the Toward 2020 proposal.

"It is envisaged that in an ACT model, Year11 and 12 students would be provided with a similar range of curriculum offerings available in most of the existing senior secondary colleges and opportunities to access some courses in other settings."⁵

Facilities Required at CHS

For CHS to deliver a typical range of curriculum offerings that are available in existing colleges the following would be required:

- additional purpose built classrooms and facilities to RTO standards for the delivery of vocational education courses
- two additional science laboratories (school currently has four that are used to capacity)
- Senior Student Services Centre
- Senior library facilities

Conclusion

The Campbell High School Board rejects the proposal to extend CHS to years 11-12. This is principally because the Board supports the

⁵ Towards 2020 Renewing our Schools (internet version)

majority community view that the senior secondary college model offers the appropriate academic, social and vocational opportunities for senior students. Campbell High School Board does not wish to contribute to the undermining of the integrity of the college model in the ACT.

Furthermore, Dickson College has benefited from significant investment in recent times. It incorporates the facilities necessary for a senior secondary college. The loss of these amenities, and the need to reproduce them at Campbell High School is an inefficient use of public resources that is difficult to justify in a climate of cost reduction. However, Years 11-12 could not be offered at Campbell High School without significant investment in infrastructure. It would not be an acceptable outcome to the CHS Board to offer a diminished senior secondary experience to students at CHS.

Recommendations

The CHS Board recommends that the Minister for Education consider this submission.

The CHS Board urges the Minister for Education to accept broad ACT community support for the senior secondary model, and maintain the current provision of secondary and senior secondary education in North Canberra.

The Board further urges the Minister for Education to consider funding of additional facilities for the school if CHS were to accommodate years 11 and 12.

References

1. Towards 2020 – Renewing our schools (referred to in this submission as *Towards 2020*).
<http://www.decs.act.gov.au/2020/index.htm>
2. Report of the Review of Government Secondary Colleges on behalf of the ACT Department of Education and Training (referred to in this submission as the *College Review*).
http://www.decs.act.gov.au/publicat/pdf/27-01-06_colleges_report.pdf
3. Economics of *Towards 2020: Renewing our Schools* ACT Council of P&C Associations Inc, 9 October 2006.

4. Towards 2020 – Renewing our schools (Internet version)
Frequently Asked Questions

<http://www.det.act.gov.au/2020/faq.htm#em15>