

ACT Government Towards 2020 proposal

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The ACT budget raised a multitude of issues that education is facing in the ACT (and nationally), however school closures has attracted most of the attention and has overshadowed other aspects which if dealt with could reduce the need for school closures. The bringing together of all the aspects that make up the education system is a complex operation, the effects from one component may alter the implementation of other components, leading to imbalances in the system. Changes to the education system is not a trivial matter that can nor should be handled by one group, however the Towards 2020 proposal is doing this with the Department not having open discussion and not allowing any other party to be involved in the decision making.

Broad Issues:

- The ACT Government is spending more money than it is receiving as income;
- Education is a target for cuts as funding is above national average;
- Older schools require overdue maintenance;
- Decrease in public school numbers;
- Changes in demographics;
- Is the current structure of schools (K – 6, 7 – 10, 11 – 12) suitable for education needs sought by the community; and
- NSW students are attending ACT schools.

Challenges:

- Having the right size school to cater for each location – handling changing demographics;
- Maintaining schools, building new schools provides respite from maintenance issues for a while, but if proper funding for maintenance programs is not in place we will be in the same situation in 20 years;
- Finding funds for schools, is the government spending money in the right areas – who determines;
- Promoting public schools – dealing with perceptions and in some cases reality. Dressing up the schools, as a society becomes more affluent a better class of citizen doesn't want to mix with lower classes. There is a perceived "safer" environment in the private education system whether this is right or wrong the perception is there;
- School structures which is the best mix – K-6, 7-10, 11-12. Are there other models which offer a better education, does the community want choice in the model. Children are different, a particular format may suite one child better than another; and
- The transition period will have an effect on students and teachers as they are left uncertain about where they will be going.

Campbell High School specific issues

Could an "in area" only policy be enforced upon Campbell, this would considerably reduce the population as currently 68% of enrolments are from out of area¹. What would happen to Campbell if this was to occur.

Changing to a 7 – 12 operation will directly affect the current students in Years 9, who will possibly be spending year 11 at Dickson then returning to Campbell for Year 12.

Will any expansion of infrastructure at Campbell occur. Campbell has a maximum capacity of 836. It has been stated on the Towards 2020 website that there is sufficient capacity to cater for students affected by closures. This is not true in the North Canberra region where the projected enrolments for 2010 are 1170 students for Campbell and Dickson, with Campbell as

¹ Figures obtained from the Towards 2020 brochure published by the ACT education department

the only 11 -12 school in the region, this would mean an in area policy which would need to be enforced leaving NSW students out.

There is as yet no policy on what the structure of Campbell if it becomes a 7 – 12. Some considerations on this point include:

- Separation of 7 – 10 from 11 – 12 students;
- The programs that will be offered for 11 – 12 students;
- Inclusion of specialised courses currently offered at Dickson;
- Increased car parking requirements
- Loss of playing fields
- Teacher views on having a 7 – 12 school
- Operational impact of having a 7 – 12 school.

If extra buildings are required will they be able to be completed in time by the start of 2009, contingency plans need to be included to cater for uncompleted works.

Further Information required

Further information is required to help in being able to deliver a truly informed response to the proposal.

- What are the real costs of running Dickson, what is the cost of converting Campbell HS to a 7-12;
- Is there a proposed structure of Campbell after 2008;
- What will happen to the courses offered by Dickson, will these be taken up by Campbell;
- What options have been explored – different school models, use of schools for other community based activities etc.; and
- Are there other ways to fund education or to provide more money for education – reduce spending in other areas which are not providing community benefits.

Considerations:

- Why are numbers in public education declining;
- Do parents (and children) want choice in education when you have to travel across town to get that choice, this may be OK for college years (or it may not), but is it real to expect a 5 or 6 year old to spend an hour on a bus;
- The role of school based bodies has been minimal in the consultation process – P&C, school board, school executive;
- Future of “education” i.e. the broader picture not just public education;
- How to ensure public education is available to all and the standard of education is the same across all schools;
- Is there an ideal structure of schools, encompassing:
 - size of schools
 - which years each school incorporates (i.e. K-6, 7-10, 11-12 etc.)
 - flexibility in catering for demographic shifts
- Where does the funding for schools come from, drilling into revenue sources, does funding for education stem from rates and revenue bases of state governments or does it come from taxes collected by the Federal Government;
- The information that has been presented does not address any of the issues from the proposal, it is geared around highlighting the benefits;
- What will happen to the schools that are closed? Will they be leased to the department of public works lease it out to greedy developers to make a profit from;
- What is the social cost to a community of closing down a school;
- Is 2020 long enough to project to. Should a plan take into account past this time, there should be flexibility so that changes in the future are not required to go through the same process as happening now; and
- The Atelier report from the beginning of the year explored the option of having one or two colleges with multiple campuses, has this been considered.

Misaligned process:

The Towards 2020 process goes against the goals of the ACT Education Department, there are four strategic goals with the third goal being:

- Build communication, collaboration and partnerships

This incorporates the principles of establishing a culture of information sharing and innovation, working with parents and carers to provide the best possible outcomes for children and young people. Unfortunately the government has foregone this goal with the proposal put forward, the Government and the Department need to take this goal into account and remove the proposal as it stands and start an open and transparent consultation process aimed at securing high quality education for our children into the future.