

Ways of Improving Reporting to Parents

The following is a summary of P&C Council's submission to the Government Schools Education Council inquiry on reporting to parents and the community. A copy of the full submission is available from the Council Office.

P&C Council has made nearly 40 recommendations to improve reporting to parents and the community. The recommendations cover the objectives of reporting, reporting on student progress and achievement, information about schools and the outcomes of the government school system as a whole.

Reporting objectives

The objectives of reporting to parents and the community should include:

- monitoring progress on the National Goals for Schooling, including progress towards the social equity goals;
- informing parents about the intellectual, social and personal development of their children;
- engage students in further learning;
- plan for student development at the individual, school and system levels;
- establishing partnerships in learning between teachers and parents in school and between the bureaucracy, parents, teachers and students at the system level;
- accountability to parents and the community for student outcomes.

These objectives should be incorporated in a system policy on reporting.

Reporting on student progress

Reporting to parents on student progress is one of the key sources of information for sustaining partnerships in learning. Reporting to parents is part of the core business of schools and should have a priority place in the life of the school and the work of teachers. Schools have a responsibility to ensure that teachers are fully aware of, and meet, their responsibilities as regards reporting to parents on student progress.

Many ACT government schools appear to meet the basic requirements of successful reporting. However, there are some issues relating to different aspects of reporting that are of concern and they present a case to take action to improve reporting. These include:

- lack of timely notification and intervention when problems arise;
- conflicting expectations about the role of reporting;
- variable quality of reporting practices between schools;
- narrow scope of reporting content and practices in some cases;
- a decline in professional commitment to parent-teacher interviews.

Council believes the reporting of student progress in ACT governments schools should be enhanced by:

- establishing key principles and minimum standards for the scope and content of reporting (including academic and non-academic outcomes, attitudes to learning, plans of action for student development, attendance and homework/assignment completion);
- promoting good practice reporting;
- expanding the scope and content of reporting;
- developing guidelines for the effective conduct of parent-teacher interviews as well as other methods of reporting;
- improving understanding of the role of reporting amongst teachers and parents.

Council has stated that parents should be promptly informed of any significant learning difficulties

faced by their child, how the school proposes to address the problem and how parents might assist at home. Reports on student progress should include comments that reflect the plan or program of the teacher to address areas of concern.

Another priority is to enhance the role of parent-teacher interviews. Schools should provide opportunities for parent-teacher interviews at times suitable to the schedules of parents. Ways of extending the time for interviews in secondary schools also need to be investigated.

A system policy on reporting would represent a significant step forward. It should include some basic principles for reporting on student achievement to be implemented by all schools and some minimum standards for reporting. This policy should be supported by a central database and resources on good reporting models and practices.

The system policy on reporting should be complemented by school policies on reporting on student achievement. All schools should be required to establish such policies.

Reporting on schools

School accountability to the community is enhanced by open and transparent processes that seek to inform parents about school developments, involve parents in the activities and policy-making processes of the school and provide opportunities for parents to collectively discuss and raise issues about school policy and student learning.

Council has made suggestions to improve the provision of information to parents on school policies, programs and general reporting to parents by schools. Key recommendations are to develop school communication policies, provide on-line information about the school and to have regular open forums for parents to discuss school related issues.

Council considers that school reports such as the School Board annual report and the School Development plan should be the main mechanism for reporting school achievement. These reports need to be re-designed for reporting to parents and should be widely distributed.

School Board annual reports should be designed to be the primary reporting mechanism on school achievement across the range of academic and non-academic programs of schools. The School Development process should be used as the focus of regular review and development of school improvement plans in consultation with parents.

Reporting system outcomes

The objectives/purpose of reporting government school system outcomes are to:

- monitor progress towards the achievement of the National Goals for Schooling as agreed to by the ACT Government;
- support system planning for learning development;
- support system-wide partnerships in learning; and
- provide public accountability for government school outcomes.

The Council has proposed that system outcomes information on government schools be reported to parents and the community. This should take several forms.

First, aggregated student results in the annual ACT Assessment Program (ACTAP) for literacy and numeracy should be published in a form that does not enable comparisons between government and non-government school outcomes. It is proposed to publish the proportion/number of students whose results fall within different score ranges, the range of outcomes and statistical measures to monitor changes in the degree of equality in outcomes.

Second, aggregated school ACTAP results should also be published in a form that does not identify the results of individual schools. The proposal is to publish the number of schools whose average score falls within different score ranges

Third, the number of government school students who leave school after Year 10 without achieving a Year 12 Certificate should be reported each year. This is intended to provide a gross or flow measure

rather than only a net measure as is reported at present.

Finally, aggregated student ACTAP and Year 12 results for students from targeted equity groups should also be published to monitor progress on the social equity goal of the National Goals for Schooling. It is proposed to publish the proportion/number of students whose results fall within different score ranges, the range of outcomes and statistical measures to monitor changes in the degree of equality in outcomes for:

- females and males;
- students from non-English speaking and English speaking backgrounds;
- ATSI and non-ATSI students; and
- students from low, medium and high socio-economic status backgrounds.

The Council has proposed that the Department of Education publish an annual system performance report. It would include the above information on aggregated student and school outcomes for the government system, summary information that is published at present and other information on school inputs and outcomes such as attendance and retention rates. It also proposed that the Department should report on the steps it has taken to address identified problems and improve outcomes in schools where outcomes are unsatisfactory.