



Education and Training

Improving ACT Public High Schools and Colleges

A discussion paper to generate ideas

“Better schools will only come when those in schools dare to have dreams and work to make them a reality”

Caldwell and Loader



Everyone matters

There are almost 40,000 students enrolled in ACT public schools. In our early childhood schools, primary schools, high schools and colleges, children and young people are developing the skills and understanding needed to succeed in school and beyond.

Our vision is to support and engage all young people in the ACT so that they

“learn, thrive and are equipped with the skills to lead fulfilling, productive and responsible lives”

ACT Department of Education and Training
Strategic Plan 2010-2013: Everyone matters

Our commitment is to every student, ensuring that each is engaged in learning through a personalised approach, positioning them for lifelong success.

We will continue to foster high quality stakeholder participation in school communities to ensure students are supported and engaged to achieve their full potential.

Message from the Minister

Secondary education in the ACT has strong foundations. Our schools and colleges have served us well but are now facing new challenges. We need to provide for all students, and model best practice for the nation. **We must strive to be better and stay ahead of the game.**

Over the past few years we have invested in new schools and new school models, in curriculum renewal, literacy and numeracy learning, information technology and quality teacher professional development. Our high schools and colleges have developed vocational education and training opportunities to give students a more diverse range of career and education options.

We know education is important to every young person, which is why we have increased the school leaving age to 17. And we know that a skilled, adaptable, educated workforce will benefit both our community and our economy.

We are having discussions with the community to transform our tertiary and training landscape so that we can respond to skills shortages effectively and meet our future social and economic challenges. Now we are turning our focus to our high schools and colleges. Our high schools and colleges are changing. They are developing plans and programs of study to meet the individual needs of their students. But more needs to be done.

We are looking for new and innovative ideas that will help our school system cater better for the aspirations and interests of young people in the ACT. We want to create a connected, integrated education environment that will excite and engage our students and encourage them to adopt the philosophy of lifelong learning. **In short, we are looking for ideas to improve and energise our public education system and everyone who comes into contact with it.**

I want to create a vision that sets the ACT apart as Australia's lifelong learning capital. We have begun working on our tertiary sector. This discussion paper opens the conversation about our secondary schools. I invite you to help shape our schools for the future.

Andrew Barr MLA

Minister for Education and Training

July 2010





Our challenge

In October 2009 the ACT Minister for Education and Training, Andrew Barr MLA, identified secondary and post-secondary education as the areas of the public education landscape requiring reform and renewal.¹ He also identified the challenges ahead in ensuring every student has a learning pathway that will allow them to progress from middle years schooling to the senior years and on to tertiary education and training. This builds on achievements in early years learning, improved teacher quality, investments in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and disability education and more consistent curriculum provision.

The Minister emphasised the need to strengthen the coordination between schools, the training sector and universities, and to **build partnerships with business and the community** to ensure that our education system can continue to provide opportunities that engage and excite every young person in the ACT.

On 1 January 2010 the ACT Government amended the *Education Act 2004*. Young people will now need to stay in education until they complete year 10, then be in education, training or employment until completing year 12 or equivalent, or reaching age 17, whichever occurs first. The ACT Youth Commitment was developed as a consequence of amendments to the Education Act. The Youth Commitment means that all students will be supported and tracked in their education, training or employment.

Our retention rates to year 12 are strong in comparison to other jurisdictions in Australia. Over 80% of people aged 19 in the ACT have attained year 12 compared to the national figure of 69%.² The ACT Government is aiming for **100% retention** to year 12 with maximum opportunities for everyone to transition to further education and employment.

¹ *Reporting in from the front line of reform*, Address to the Per Capita Policy Exchange, Canberra, 2009.

² ABS Census of population and housing, 2006.

To meet this goal, we need to **ensure that the community continues to have confidence in our public schools**. The ACT public education system has arrested the flow of students leaving public education in recent years. We recognise that educational choice is healthy and ACT parents and students are able to choose schools on the basis of family beliefs, values and circumstances.

Our challenge is to make ACT public secondary schools the schools of choice for all parents and students based firmly on the quality of our education programs and opportunities for students to excel.

Our high schools and colleges are catering for students with an increasing range of abilities, interests and aspirations. As community expectations of schools grow, and the diversity of our student population increases, there is recognition that **no school can meet the needs of all its students alone**. Schools will need to develop opportunities to work with other schools and to build partnerships with service providers, other education institutions, business, industry groups and the community.

We need to build on current good practice while transforming our traditional education structures. We need to encourage the use of **digital technologies, more flexible timetables and learning opportunities** and the reshaping of schools as **connected learning communities**.

We need to enhance our schools' capacities to deliver:

- academic excellence
- high quality vocational education and training opportunities
- relevant pathways through schooling and beyond
- sustainable partnerships with:
 - other schools and educational providers
 - community organisations
 - business and industry.

While individual schools and colleges are embarking on innovative programs and community partnerships, it is **time to imagine a bigger picture**. A picture that sees all ACT public schools systematically and strategically planning for equitable, meaningful learning pathways that engage all students.

AN
INVITATION...

We are
seeking your
ideas to help
shape our
high schools
and colleges
for the future.



What if?

- ... high schools and colleges worked together as connected learning communities to offer greater choice to students?
- ... some schools offered courses in a range of locations?
- ... schools developed their curriculum in partnership with the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) or a university?
- ... students were able to combine school and work more formally?
- ... partnerships between schools and business gave students regular access to work-based training, mentor support and pathways from school to work?
- ... some schools had flexible timetables?
- ... the virtual school became a reality?
- ... some students worked from home or elsewhere?
- ... some schools offered two-shift days?
- ... we had girls' or boys' schools, or some schools offering single-sex classes?
- ... some schools offered accelerated learning for academically gifted students?
- ... we had selective entry schools?

- ... some schools developed specialist programs for students with interests in particular sports (golf, tennis, athletics, rowing, football, hockey) or the performing arts, visual arts, graphic design, media and communications?
- ... some schools developed centres of excellence for students with talents in areas such as mathematics, science and technology, languages and the humanities?
- ... students could develop personalised pathways across a range of education settings—schools, universities, CIT, industry and the community?
- ... schools in a local area became a federation of schools and pooled their resources to offer a broader curriculum to their students?
- ... partnerships were developed between public and non-government schools?
- ... new processes for graduating from high school to college were developed?





Our context

The ACT agenda

The ACT has a proud history of educational achievement and innovation in its public school system. The demands and opportunities for young people are becoming more complex, and community expectations on education are growing. So we must consider how to best meet the needs of students in a local, national and international context.

In 2006, in *Towards 2020: Renewing our schools* the ACT Government set out its vision for new school structures across the ACT to achieve high quality education into the future. These structures include early childhood schools and a range of models to enhance middle schooling, such as a year 6–10 high school and P–10 schools. With the opening of Gungahlin College in 2011, eight colleges and a year 7–12 school will provide options at the upper secondary level. Each school model has been designed to provide choices for contemporary learning and the best opportunities for local students.

State-of-the-art facilities in all new public school buildings, and significant upgrades to existing infrastructure, have delivered greatly enhanced learning environments for our students in response to changing community expectations.

We already have excellent practice and innovative thinking in our schools, but more can be done to invigorate current practice and learning programs. The ACT Government has invested in **new technology**, which will redefine the boundaries of what constitutes a school. Virtual learning environments will provide access to information and learning far beyond the walls of any school building.

The ACT Government has introduced a **systematic and targeted approach to school improvement** by:

- organising our schools into four networks, each led by a school network leader
- increasing the availability and use of data to inform school improvement practices and monitor progress
- supporting principals to ensure they are high quality instructional leaders
- continuously and systematically building the capacity of teachers
- enhancing the accountability of principals and school network leaders.

The school networks provide the basis for greater collaboration and sharing between schools, with a focus on improving the performance of all schools within the network.

Through Territory and Australian Government national partnerships, our public schools are improving literacy and numeracy learning, teacher quality and leadership capacity. From 2011 our schools will begin implementing the Australian Curriculum. Our schools are using more inclusive practices for students with disabilities, and non-English speaking students. We are increasing our efforts to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students graduate from year 12. At the college level, students are gaining greater access to a variety of courses, particularly in the vocational education and training area.

The ACT school system performs well on measures of international standards. The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) has reported that ACT students are performing consistently better than the rest of Australia and





many other countries in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). However, ACER also notes that the relative performance between ACT students with high and low socio-economic indexes represents a 'gap' similar to groups of students in the Northern Territory and Tasmania, and greater than in all the other Australian jurisdictions.

Another international assessment is the Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) which is an indicator of knowledge and abilities in mathematics and science at years 4 and 8. The ACT is a high performer relative to national and international standards, ranked first when compared to other Australian jurisdictions, and sixth and eighth respectively in mathematics and science when ranked against the 49 international participants.³ Maintaining this high level of performance creates a challenge for our system particularly at the international level where our Asian neighbours continue to improve at impressive rates.

The national agenda

In 2008 the Australian Government embarked on a school reform agenda for the nation. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has agreed to major national growth targets that include:

- the achievement of a national year 12 or equivalent attainment rate of 90% by 2015
- halving the gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students attaining year 12 or equivalent by 2020
- halving the gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade
- entitlement to an education or training place for 15 to 24 year olds which focuses on attaining year 12 or equivalent qualifications.

In 2009 the Australian Government accepted the Bradley Review recommendation to deregulate university enrolment. From 2012, tertiary

³ Overall Australia was ranked 14th out of 49 countries in mathematics and 13th out of 49 in science.

institutions will be free to determine student enrolment numbers. It also accepted the Bradley Review recommendation that by 2020, 20% of students enrolled in higher education should come from low socio-economic backgrounds. Achieving these targets requires new strategies to engage students in learning for longer.

The international perspective

Today's students are digital learners immersed in a culture of technology. They understand how to use and access digital tools. The classroom is no longer just local, and our students now participate in and contribute to learning beyond the walls of their schools. They are part of a global learning environment and we need to reflect this as we plan new models of schooling.

Learning in the 21st century and beyond has been described by researchers from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the Innovation Unit (United Kingdom) as including:

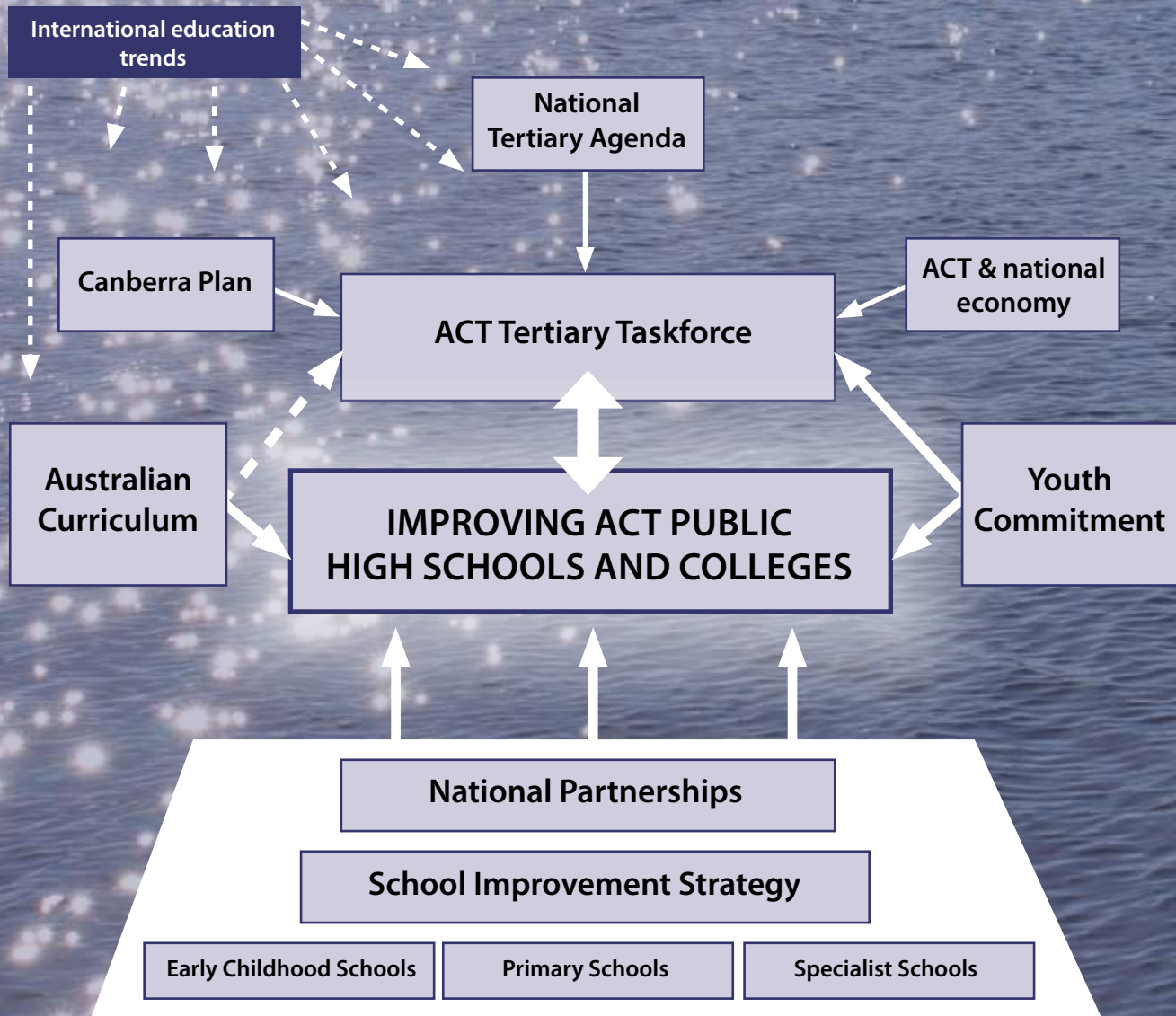
- the student being placed at the centre of the learning
- learning pathways that are personalised and varied to engage students
- real life experiences and real life learning that form the basis of educational experiences for all students
- teachers who have a wider range of skills and strategies, with increased focus on the use of technology underpinning the student learning
- productive learning pathways that are pursued with enrolment in more than a single school at any one time.

We must adapt and innovate to meet the demands of 21st century learners and to meet local and national targets while competing in a new global economy requiring high levels of skill and knowledge.

The chart on the following page provides a visual depiction of our context.



Influences on the ACT Education and Training landscape



Have your say

To meet the challenges in our high schools and colleges, we are seeking ideas from students and young people, teachers and support staff, parents and community members, colleagues from other education settings, and business and industry.

The following questions are provided to guide your input:

- 1 What needs to be strengthened or changed so that ACT public schools and colleges are schools of choice?**
- 2 What needs to be done in ACT public schools and colleges to improve school graduation rates and ensure every student has a pathway to tertiary education and training or meaningful work?**
- 3 How can ACT public high schools and colleges be better connected to other education providers and the community to extend choice and opportunity for all students?**
- 4 Where are the opportunities for innovation and growth that will ensure the ACT public school system is meeting the needs and aspirations of our students and the broader ACT community?**

Our vision

“That all young people in the ACT learn, thrive and are equipped with the skills to lead fulfilling, productive and responsible lives”

ACT Department of
Education and Training
Strategic Plan 2010–2013:
Everyone matters

How to provide feedback

For information on how to provide feedback, visit the Department of Education and Training website: www.det.act.gov.au

If you have any queries on this discussion paper, please email det.consultation@act.gov.au

Written feedback should be sent to:

High School and College Consultation
Department of Education and Training
GPO Box 158
CANBERRA ACT 2601

or

email your feedback to det.consultation@act.gov.au

The closing date for feedback is **Tuesday 7 September 2010**.

What happens next?

The Department will draw on the submissions, consultations and ideas from schools and their local communities to develop a report to the Minister for Education and Training. It will include recommendations about how to improve our high schools and colleges. This will ensure that every student is engaged in productive learning and has relevant pathways to progress through the middle and senior years of schooling and on to tertiary education and training.

For more information

Everyone matters, ACT Department of Education and Training Strategic Plan 2010–2013

www.det.act.gov.au See Publications

Reporting in from the front line of reform, Address to the Per Capita Policy Exchange, Canberra, 2009

www.andrewbarr.com.au/node/419

Supporting Business–School Connections, Discussion paper of the Business–School Connections Roundtable, July 2010

www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/Pages/Roundtable.aspx

Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, MCEECDYA, December 2008

www.mceecdya.edu.au/mceecdya See Publications

Review of Australian Higher Education, Final report of the expert panel chaired by Professor Denise Bradley, December 2008

www.deewr.gov.au See Higher Education



Education and Training

ACT Department of Education and Training
GPO Box 158, Canberra ACT 2601

Telephone: (02) 6205 9400

Web site: www.det.act.gov.au

Facsimile: (02) 6205 8353

Publication No: 10/0865