

Submission  
To  
**The House of Representatives  
Committee on Education and  
Vocational Training**  
**Inquiry into Teacher Education**

Submission by the Australian Council  
of State School Organisations  
(ACSSO)

**Contact Details**

Organisation: Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO)

Name: The Hon. Terry Aulich

Position: Executive Officer

Address: PO Box Cutin 323 ACT 2605

Phone: 02 6282 5150

Fax: 02 6285 1351

Email: [executive.officer@acssso.org.au](mailto:executive.officer@acssso.org.au)

# Table of Contents

1. This Submission in Brief .....	3
2. ACSSO's Role as a Research Institution .....	4
3. A Significant Change in Strategies Required .....	4
3.1 Literacy and Numeracy .....	4
3.2 Parent School Partnerships in Teacher Education Curricula .....	6
3.3 Reporting to Parents.....	7
4. A Public Campaign to Promote Education .....	7
4.1 Funding of Teacher Education.....	7
4.2 Improving the Quality of Teacher Education .....	8
5. Summary of ACSSO Recommendations.....	10
6. Bibliography .....	12
7. Contact Details.....	12
8. Appendix.....	13
A. About ACSSO.....	13

Submission  
to  
**The House of Representatives Inquiry into the Education of Teachers**  
Submission by the Australian Council of State School Organisations  
(ACSSO)

## **1. This Submission in Brief**

1.1 ACSSO represents the parents, students and school communities in 7000 of Australia's public schools. We are therefore uniquely placed to provide parent and community input into an inquiry which might otherwise focus primarily on the pedagogical issues.

1.2 Central to our submission is the proposition that schools do not exist in a vacuum. Both teachers and pupils are affected by and interact with the communities in which they live.

One of the major skills required of any teacher is the capacity to develop and build on those relationships.

1.3 Therefore, ACSSO looks for evidence that teacher education courses include significant treatment of parent-school partnerships and community building, not at the expense of class-room skills but as a central part of the teaching process.

1.4 ACSSO holds that parent-school partnerships enable a child's education to be continuous and seamless in that education activities such as reading, language development and motor skills are already well developed by the time a child enters school for the first time. Thereafter, those skills continue to develop both at school and out in the community as well as at home. Teacher education courses which ignore this situation deserve to be criticized as deficient.

1.5 ACSSO's submission therefore deals with those areas where parent-school partnerships are significant factors in ensuring effective teacher education and classroom practice. In particular, these areas are literacy and numeracy, children starting school and the transition between primary and secondary levels, reporting to parents and the building of relationships between parents, schools and the community.

## **2. ACSSO's Role as a Research Institution**

ACSSO approaches this inquiry not only as an organisation that represents the views of parent and public school communities around the country but as an organisation involved in a large number of research projects for various clients.

Our large network and apolitical approach has encouraged Government agencies and community organisations to utilize our services to conduct active research in areas where such research is “thin on the ground”. This submission is therefore based not on straight policy propositions but on that research and on the feedback and briefings we organize around the country.

Over the last few years ACSSO has conducted research in the following areas for Government agencies and other clients;

- Parent-school partnerships
- Families Matter ( a mental health program over 300schools)
- Values in Education
- Assessment and Reporting
- Literacy and Families (especially for immigrant families )
- Investing in Our Schools (briefings about capital funding to, currently, over 1100 parents and principals)
- Participatory Democracy
- Indigenous education

## **3. A Significant Change in Strategies Required**

### ***3.1 Literacy and Numeracy***

In a society which requires adequate literacy and numeracy for personal fulfilment and financial well-being, it is unacceptable that any child should be illiterate or that significant numbers of young people should find no pleasure or value in reading.

Although schools play an key role in literacy and numeracy it is important to remember that parents play a major role in the process. Parents reading with children both before their schooling starts and during their schooling years is critical but we have seen very little direct reference to that process in teacher education courses.

ACSSO therefore recommends that home reading be formally incorporated in teacher education courses, especially in those areas where the teaching of literacy is a critical part of the curricula.

As important as teaching methodology is to this inquiry, ACSSO strongly recommends that there is also adequate focus on other ways in which children learn to read. Put simply, teaching literacy in schools is a key activity that benefits young people, if the process is successful. However, expert after expert in child learning and development has highlighted the language and social attainments of children in the first five years of their lives, well before attendance at school.

Similarly, there is a rich body of research which has chartered the wide variations in social and skills development between children of different socioeconomic backgrounds up to the age of five.

In terms of both social equity and learning effectiveness, ACSSO wants governments both at a Federal and State level to research and develop nationally co-ordinated programs that encourage reading in the home, especially in the first five years of a child's life. To wait until a child enters the school is to be "behind the eight ball", a situation which, in some cases, may never be remedied even by the most effective teaching at school.

Heckman, 2000 winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics, succinctly described the benefits of early intervention;

"The role of the family is crucial to the formation of learning skills, and government interventions at an early age that mend the harm done by dysfunctional families have proven to be highly effective".

Even where questions of disadvantage are not relevant, ACSSO believes that literacy should not be simply defined as a capacity to read and write in functional terms. It is more than that. Universal literacy as a goal goes beyond the capacity to read and fill in a basic form; ACSSO's goals are to have young people and adults;

- love reading for its own sake
- communicate in written form with a good sense of audience
- appreciate good writing for its capacity to deal with emotion and stimulate the imagination
- feel comfortable with the written word
- share the reading experience with others, including their own children
- experience communication with each other in a caring environment

### **3.2 Parent School Partnerships in Teacher Education Curricula**

A preliminary examination of existing curricula for teacher education throughout Australia's higher education institutions does not indicate any obvious examples of parent-school partnership course units or even adequate treatment of this important component in teacher practice or theory. It may be that the subject is integrated seamlessly into the curricula but only a detailed analysis would be capable of finding this educational gold amongst the sometimes impenetrable ore of University curricula description.

*“There seems little evidence that school-parent partnerships feature significantly in any teacher education courses that ACSSO has examined; a significant oversight given that such partnerships are generally considered to be an essential component of successful teaching.*

*Does this oversight represent a mind-set which concentrates on pedagogical training at the expense of community and parent connection?”*

Similarly, the documented examples of funding for parent school partnership research from such sources as the Australian Research Council and other funding providers indicate that the subject does not attract the significant interest of our academic community; at least in a way that will feed through to teacher education theory and practice.

So, in both research and in teacher education terms, the interaction between parents and schools and the educational results of parent-school partnerships requires greater focus in teaching education courses.

To this effect ACSSO will be approaching some of the key players in research and teacher education with a view to filling the gaps. We will be especially concentrating on the following perceived deficits;

- the need to provide dedicated units of learning which concentrate on the theory and practice of building effective parent-school partnerships
- the need for trainee teachers to learn from and interact with parents and parent representatives in person
- the need for teachers to understand and therefore build on the child development that occurs before school age or that occurs outside the school environment
- methods of building and encouraging productive parental involvement in their schools

ACSSO is prepared to write and develop curricula that will enable these and other issues to be addressed in a manner which is both academically rigorous and practically useful to the teachers entering the profession or undertaking continuous training.

### ***3.3 Reporting to Parents***

Although this is a subset of parent-school partnerships, it is necessary to address a number of the more sensitive issues. ACSSO already has written papers and conducted research in this critical area and strongly supports the issue being dealt with in some depth in teacher education courses.

At the outset, ACSSO recognizes that the issue of assessment and reporting is complex and requires more than a politicized, behaviourist solution such as simple peer group ranking and the provision of league tables supposedly designed to help parents choose their children's schools or to encourage children to "do better".

However, we recommend that at least the following principles should apply when policies and teacher education programs are established for reporting;

- that parents and students are entitled to a clear, plain English explanation about the student's progress
- that assessment of a student's progress should be timely and continuous and a useful tool in bringing about improvement
- that a student's self respect and confidence should be tested but not damaged by the assessment or teaching process
- that an assessment system designed primarily to weed out the weak and reward the elite is damaging to many in the system
- that teaching to primarily pass examinations can have damaging consequences on staff-pupil relationships and can cause distortions in the education curricula in addition to a narrowing of the education being offered and does not necessarily involve critical thinking on the part of the students.
- that the assessment system should be designed to encourage students to do their best within the limits of their abilities and to overcome any handicaps that may exist

## **4. A Public Campaign to Promote Education**

### ***4.1 Funding of Teacher Education***

How a society treats its teachers and those who train them is a clear indicator of how important that society sees such key goals as social justice and economic competitiveness. A dumb society attaches little value to education and teachers, an

attitude which will not be addressed by simply importing more overseas teachers or deregulating the labour market or encouraging the work-force to work longer hours.

ACSSO's preliminary examination of the funding of teacher education leads us to believe that education faculties have not done as well as other more immediately marketable and prestigious disciplines. It is not our role to judge how many lawyers Australia needs or how many economists but ACSSO is concerned that teacher education faculties have not fared well when funding is apportioned to and, especially, within universities.

We would strongly recommend that the Committee examine this relative funding issue as part of its inquiry. The Committee is in a unique position to examine and understand how money raised by Universities from both Government and other sources is distributed to the various faculties. In that examination, the number of students should be considered as well as the allocation of government funds to both research and teaching.

#### ***4.2 Improving the Quality of Teacher Education***

In order to lift the reputation of the teacher profession, the structure and effectiveness of training needs to be continually improving. While understanding the inadequacy of resources, ACSSO believes that the following goals need to be attained;

- teacher education must be continuous and tied to performance pay to encourage professional development
- teacher education must be relevant and challenging which means that curricula and those who are involved in their development and delivery should be stimulated by input from outside sources such as parent organisations, professional teaching associations, unions, the artistic community and business.
- teacher practicums need to be extensive and appropriately resourced including the provision of funding for active research to ascertain what problems need to be addressed
- coverage of parent school partnerships needs to be built into curricula
- there needs to be movement of teacher training personnel between the university and the “coal-face” in order to maximize relevance and an understanding of the school as opposed to the university environment
- special focus needs to be placed on early childhood development so that all teachers understand and factor in to their teaching the significant development that children attain even before they enter compulsory schooling
- all secondary teachers need an understanding and experience of primary school children and vice versa; any teacher education curriculum needs to impart an understanding about the “whole child” and the long development involved in progressing from birth to adulthood
- teacher education courses need to encourage teachers to come from other professions; this will mean changes in the training process involving a recognition and

exploitation of the experience and skills brought to the training institution and to the profession by these newcomers

- teacher education needs to be set in a cultural context so that teachers are aware of Australia's heritage, culture and history; there have been too many surveys that have indicated that our emerging teachers may be ill-at ease with many aspects of our cultural legacy

## 5. Summary of ACSSO Recommendations

1. Teacher education should include specific units on the value of home reading, especially parents reading with their children.
2. ACSSO recommends that home reading be formally incorporated in teacher education courses, especially in those areas where the teaching of literacy is a critical part of the curricula.
3. ACSSO is concerned that teacher education facilities have not fared well when funding is apportioned to and, especially, within universities. We would strongly recommend that the Committee examine this relative funding issue as a part of its inquiry.
4. In terms of both social equity and learning effectiveness, ACSSO wants governments both at a Federal and State level to research and develop nationally co-ordinated programs that encourage reading in the home, especially in the first five years of a child's life.
5. In both research and in teacher education terms, the interaction between parents and schools and the educational results of parent-school partnerships requires greater focus in teaching education courses.
6. We recommend that at least the following principles should apply when policies and teacher education programs are established for reporting;
  - that parents and students are entitled to a clear, plain English explanation about the student's progress
  - that assessment of a student's progress should be timely and continuous and a useful tool in bringing about improvement
  - that a student's self respect and confidence should be tested but not damaged by the assessment or teaching process
  - that an assessment system designed primarily to weed out the weak and reward the elite is damaging to many in the system
  - that teaching to primarily pass examinations can have damaging consequences on staff-pupil relationships and can cause distortions in the education curricula in addition to a narrowing of the education being offered and does not necessarily involve critical thinking on the part of the students.
  - that the assessment system should be designed to encourage students to do their best within the limits of their abilities and to overcome any handicaps that may exist

7. Teacher education must be continuous and tied to performance pay to encourage professional development
8. Teacher education must be relevant and challenging which means that curricula and those who are involved in their development and delivery should be stimulated by input from outside sources such as parent organisations, professional teaching associations, unions, the artistic community and business.
9. Teacher practicums need to be extensive and appropriately resourced including the provision of funding for active research to ascertain what problems need to be addressed
10. Coverage of parent-school partnerships needs to be built into curricula
11. There needs to be movement of teacher training personnel between the university and the “coal-face” in order to maximize relevance and an understanding of the school as opposed to the university environment
12. Special focus needs to be placed on early childhood development so that all teachers understand and factor in to their teaching the significant development that children attain even before they enter compulsory schooling
13. All secondary teachers need an understanding and experience of primary school children and vice versa; any teacher education curriculum needs to impart an understanding about the “whole child” and the long development involved in progressing from birth to adulthood
14. Teacher education courses need to encourage teachers to come from other professions; this will mean changes in the training process involving a recognition and exploitation of the experience and skills brought to the training institution and to the profession by these newcomers
15. Teacher education needs to be set in a cultural context so that teachers are aware of Australia’s heritage, culture and history; there have been too many surveys that have indicated that our emerging teachers may be ill-at ease with many aspects of our cultural legacy

## 6. Bibliography

Bowlby J. *Attachment and Loss*

Hargreaves, A. *Beyond International Reform; bring teachers back in* Buckingham and Philadelphia

Harlow, Harry (1986) *From Learning to Love*, Clara Mears Harlow, Praeger

Heckman, James. (2000) *Policies to Foster Human Capital*. University of Chicago, Irving B. Harris Graduate School of Public Policy Studies. p. 39

## 7. Contact Details

Organisation: Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO)

Name: The Hon. Terry Aulich

Position: Executive Officer

Address: PO Box Cutin 323 ACT 2605

Phone: 02 6282 5150

Fax: 02 6285 1351

Email: [executive.officer@acsso.org.au](mailto:executive.officer@acsso.org.au)

Judith Bundy

President

Mobile:0419 814 045

## 8. Appendix

### A. About ACSSO

ACSSO is the national organisation representing the interests of parents, citizens and students associated with government schools throughout Australia. ACSSO is non-party political and non-sectarian.

ACSSO is committed to access, equality, equity of outcomes, excellence and participatory democracy.

**The principle of access** means a public education system available to all, irrespective of their age, capacity to pay, class, culture, gender, level of ability, location, religion/belief, or sexual orientation.

**Equality** is dependent on recognition that all children have a capacity to learn. Learning is the construction of meaning from experience. School practices must acknowledge and build on the culture and experiences children bring to school. Children have a right to develop their skills, knowledge and aptitudes in challenging but personally successful and fulfilling ways.

**Equity in educational outcomes** means all social groups should, as a result of schooling, have comparable distributions of educational outcomes.

**Excellence** means that the public school system must provide the highest quality education for all.

**Participatory democracy** means a partnership of students, parents and teachers in school and system decision making. It also means that students should, as a result of schooling, have the knowledge, skills and understandings necessary to shape their own lives and to participate effectively in shaping society. This will enable students to learn how to learn throughout their lives for the benefit of themselves and others. Public education must develop among all students a sense of justice as well as respect and concern for others.

ACSSO believes that public education must remain secular and be fully funded by government.