

EDUCATION

POLICY POSITION

STATEMENT

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Creating an equitable and inclusive education system for all Canberrans

ACT Labor believes that every child deserves a great education and the opportunities that flow from it.

Our public education system must welcome all children as they come, with a diversity of backgrounds and circumstances, and support them towards their brightest future. Our education system must also mould mature and resilient young adults. It will achieve these things by providing equity of access for all children and responding to the needs of each individual.

ACT Labor knows that teachers change lives. After a child's personal circumstances, teachers are the single most significant factor in student achievement. Investing in teachers means investing in children.

Getting a great education is so important for finding secure employment after school. In these times of economic uncertainty, it is more important than ever that the ACT invests in education so that we can give our children and young people the best chance of success.

What we've achieved this term

Over the past four years, the Labor Government has:

- Delivered the *Future of Education Strategy*, which outlines our plan for education in the ACT over the next decade, following a conversation with more than 5,000 community members and organisations
- Delivered *Set up for Success: An Early Childhood Strategy for the ACT*, which outlines our plan for early childhood education and care in the ACT over the next decade, the first strategy of its kind for the ACT
- provided all public school students in years 7 to 12 with a Chromebook so that everyone has access to the tools they need for learning
- employed an additional 20 school psychologists, bringing the total number of school psychologists to 81 across the public-school network
- established the Future Skill Academy, which now has hubs on the southside and the northside of the city
- established the Muliyan off-campus flexible learning program, for students who need a different style of education to traditional classroom learning
- launched the Safe and Inclusive Schools Initiative to equip schools with resources and support to provide a safe and inclusive environment for LGBTIQ+ people
- provided secure public service jobs to more than 300 former contract school cleaners, helping to ensure that their valuable skills and experience remain within our public education system
- hired an additional 180 cleaners in response to COVID-19, to conduct dedicated hygiene cleaning activities throughout each school day to keep school communities safe
- reached a new enterprise agreement that has ACT public school teachers as the highest paid in the nation
- improved teacher safety by working with the ACT Branch of the Australian Education Union to develop and implement a nation-leading occupational violence policy and management plan
- provided better support for new teachers through coaching and mentoring

- established the University of Canberra Affiliated Schools program, which partners schools with this tertiary institution so that existing teachers and teachers in training can continue to improve their expertise
- invested in the learning needs of established teachers, including scholarships to undertake a Master of Education degree
- provided \$15 million in infrastructure funding for non-government schools, consistent with needs-based funding principles.
- delivered grants for P&C associations to enhance parental engagement and strengthen governance and business acumen
- built, expanded and upgraded public schools for our growing city including:
 - built and opened Margaret Hendry School in Taylor, the first all-electric, carbon neutral school in the ACT, and begun work on a new primary and high school in Denman Prospect
 - invested \$85 million in public school capital upgrades, including classroom and staff room upgrades, improved outdoor learning spaces and cultural and sensory gardens, energy efficiency improvements, bathroom and change room upgrades and school expansions
 - upgraded heating systems across nine ACT public schools.
 - replaced and upgraded school roofs
 - expanded and upgraded Belconnen High School
 - invested about \$50 million to expand schools in Gungahlin, as well as providing expansions where needed across the city; and
 - allocated \$29 million to expand Franklin Early Childhood School from a P-2 to P-6 school.
- Begun trialling solar batteries at public schools to support sustainable, efficient school infrastructure
- Allocated \$15 million to non-government school infrastructure grants, to support these schools based on need
- Begun a phase in of universal early learning for three-year-old children with 600 targeted places for those children most in need.

What we will deliver

Public school infrastructure

Canberra's population is growing, and more and more families are choosing public education. A re-elected ACT Labor government will build new public schools in Canberra's growing suburbs, and expand and upgrade older public schools to ensure that every child has a place at a great local school. As we have done in government, all new schools will be carbon emissions free – contributing to our zero net emissions target by 2045.

Under a re-elected ACT Labor, the \$33 million stage one renewal of Narrabundah College will commence in the next term of Government. This will include upgrading old buildings and replacing the temporary transportable classrooms with permanent modern and energy efficient classrooms.

A re-elected Labor Government will also commence consultation and planning for new and expanded schools in the Woden Valley. With Woden's population growing, ACT Labor will ensure that new families moving to Woden will have access to great local public schools.

Under a re-elected Labor government, families in Canberra's North will see a new \$85 million high school in Taylor and a new \$35 million primary school to meet forecast growth in public school enrolments in North Gungahlin.

Construction on the high school for 800 children in Taylor will commence in the 2022-23 financial year. New school builds of this size generally take 2 years to construct.

A new primary school for 600 children will meet the growing demand in North Gungahlin, and ACT Labor will start construction on the new school early in the next term of Government.

ACT Labor will also increase capacity for college students in Canberra's North through a \$50 million investment over the next term of government. A re-elected Labor Government will work with school communities at Gungahlin College and Dickson College on these plans.

A re-elected ACT Labor government will support local jobs with a four year \$118 million school infrastructure renewal program to ensure every public school is a great school, with facilities that are safe, comfortable and fit for learning. This renewal program will deliver investments like improved learning spaces, staff rooms, toilets, outdoor learning and play equipment.

Some examples include:

- Upgrades to the Koori Preschool at Ngunnawal Primary School
- Cooling and double-glazing in the hall at Evatt Primary School
- Upgrading the gymnasium at Lyneham High School
- Oval upgrades at Charles Weston and Torrens Primary Schools
- Classroom upgrades at Gowrie Primary School

Labor will work with school communities, including staff, parents and students, to complete upgrades that respond to local interests and needs.

This renewal program includes \$14 million dedicated to improving heating and cooling in public schools, keeping them cooler in summer, warmer in winter, and better sealed to keep smoke out.

It also includes \$15 million to accelerate the removal of hazardous materials from public school infrastructure.

Many buildings, including schools, built before 1985 in the ACT contain some hazardous building materials that require management plans to ensure the buildings remain safe. As buildings age, managing these materials becomes more difficult and complex.

A new team in the Education Directorate will oversee this program and work with schools to give them confidence that school facilities remain safe. This commitment will fast track a program of works to remove hazardous materials from public schools and will create jobs for Canberra's economic recovery.

Delivering on the Future of Education Strategy

The ACT Labor Government's Future of Education Strategy recognised that our priority in school education must be equity and inclusion. A re-elected ACT Labor Government will make sure that no child is left behind in our schools. ACT Labor is committed to providing all students and their families, no matter their background, with the best possible start when it comes to their education.

A \$12 million Future of Education Equity fund will support families experiencing disadvantage in local schools with their education expenses. This includes school uniforms, school excursions, sport

equipment and activities and music lessons. Each year, Canberra families will be able to apply for \$400 for preschool children, \$500 for primary school children and \$750 for high school and college students, targeted at families who need it most.

ACT Labor will trial free breakfast and lunch three days a week for students at five public schools, prioritising schools that will benefit most. The trial is expected to cost around \$700,000. Kids learn better on a full stomach, and this commitment will build on the great community run breakfast clubs already providing meals in some schools.

A re-elected Labor government will establish a new team of youth and social workers who will support wellbeing in our public schools. By the end of the term of government, we will hire the equivalent of 25 youth and social workers, with an investment of over \$7.4 million. These new youth workers will assist students with their individual needs, goals and strategies while at school. Social workers will complement this by working with a student and their family to provide support, advocacy and mediation aimed at improving student engagement.

Schools will be key to supporting children as our community navigates the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and these additional resources will assist in our community's recovery.

For disability inclusion, ACT Labor will work with people with disabilities to create a future of education where students with disabilities are included in a way that suits them and their families. This will include feasibility work on renewal of Canberra's northside specialist schools.

A re-elected ACT Labor Government will provide new pathways for young Canberrans to secure a job and rollout free online courses for Canberrans to upskill during Canberra's COVID-19 economic recovery. ACT Labor would pilot an innovative 'Headstart' program for year 12 students from public schools looking to complete an apprenticeship.

The program will allow young 50 Canberrans to take an extra year to complete college so they can start early training for a recognised qualification or trade. All students and employers will have one-on-one support to complete their qualifications and gain their senior secondary school certificate. The pilot is expected to cost approximately \$2.3 million and will start in 2022.

Labor will also:

- implement a gender equality in schools initiative to provide a whole-school approach to respectful relationships education and prevent domestic and family violence by creating a culture of gender equality in schools;
- continue the Safe and Inclusive Schools Initiative that supports gender and sexual diversity in schools; and
- provide funding to work towards embedding local Aboriginal language and culture into the public school system.

The Labor government has released rolling implementation plans that draw on the phases and initiatives outlined in the *Future of Education Strategy*. This work will continue based on the four foundations of the strategy, being:

- place students at the centre of their learning
- empower teachers, school leaders and other professionals to meet the learning needs of all students
- build strong communities for learning
- strengthen systems to focus on equity with quality.

More information is available at: <https://www.education.act.gov.au/our-priorities/future-of-education/resources/The-Future-of-Education-An-ACT-Education-Strategy-for-the-Next-Ten-Years>.

Delivering on early childhood strategy

Under a re-elected Labor Government, every three year old child in Canberra will have access to one day a week of free early learning by the end of the next term of government. This is a major step towards ACT Labor's goal of providing 15 hours per week of free, quality early childhood education for three year old children.

Already, every four year old in the ACT has access to 15 hours a week of early childhood education under a National Partnership Agreement. However, ACT Labor is committed to providing expanded access to early learning for families in the ACT.

Well established research has shown that the period from birth through to eight years — especially the first three years — sets the foundation for every child's social, physical, emotional and cognitive development.

In 2020, the ACT Labor Government started this work by providing 600 three year old children most in need with access to 15 hours a week of free, quality early childhood education. A re-elected ACT Labor Government will continue to work with high quality, not-for-profit early childhood and care providers in Canberra to deliver this service for all families with three year old children in the ACT.

It is anticipated that by the end of the term, this commitment will require an investment of approximately \$15 million a year from a re-elected ACT Labor Government.

For many families, access to early learning for children means access to the workforce for parents. As we navigate the health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is more important than ever to remove barriers to workforce participation.

The most important factor for quality early childhood education is a skilled and stable workforce. ACT Labor will invest in local educators, supporting more people to get a degree qualification with 16 scholarships per year and ensuring educators have access to professional development through a \$150,000 fund.

ACT Labor will also fund early childhood experts to develop a transitions strategy for the ACT. We know that every child has a story, and the transition points between settings are very important for educational and developmental outcomes. A re-elected ACT Labor Government will develop a transitions strategy to ensure that every child is supported through those critical transitions, and that parents and educators are empowered to work together to support every child's education journey.

Set up for Success: An Early Childhood Strategy for the ACT delivered on a 2016 ACT Labor election commitment and is the first strategy of its kind for the ACT. An ACT Labor Government will continue to implement the strategy in line with its implementation plan, which draws from four foundations:

- A fair start for every child
- Valuing educators, values children
- Every child has a story
- Working together for children.

More information is available at: <https://www.education.act.gov.au/early-childhood/early-childhood-strategy>.

Teaching and school support staff

As Canberra continues to grow, a re-elected ACT Labor Government will make sure that our public education system grows with it by hiring more than 400 teachers and support staff for ACT public schools.

ACT teachers were there when we needed them most – ensuring our children continued to learn during COVID-19 restrictions. A returned Labor government is committed to attracting and retaining a workforce of great teachers and other school staff.

ACT Labor will also increase the availability of qualified teacher librarians in our schools. A re-elected government will increase the number of teacher librarians by 25 professionals by the end of the term of government.

A qualified teacher librarian requires a four year teaching degree and a masters degree. To meet our target, ACT Labor will provide up to 10 interested teachers a year with a scholarship to complete the required qualification and will provide additional funding to schools to help them employ a qualified teacher librarian, prioritising those schools most in need. With this commitment, teachers will have improved access to specialist support and advice, and curated resources to deliver high-quality learning.

A re-elected Labor Government will also hire a project team to review the existing learning resources available to public school to ensure students have access to the resources they need, such as peer-reviewed journals.

Non-government schools

Under a re-elected Labor Government, non-government schools will be eligible for ACT Government backed low-interest loans to invest in sustainable upgrades to their school facilities – reducing school running costs and creating local jobs. Eligible non-government schools will be able to access up to \$200,000 for investments such as solar panels, battery storage systems and hot water heat pumps.

A re-elected Labor Government will continue providing \$15 million for further school infrastructure grants at non-government schools - ensuring all students across Canberra have access to great school facilities.

Further investments to support local non-Government schools under a re-elected Labor Government include:

- Grants to parent associations of non-government schools to assist parents to be better engaged in their school community; and
- Release of three blocks of land across the Territory for the construction of new non-government schools.

ACT Labor is committed to improving the accessibility and quality of school facilities across the Territory, providing good educational outcomes to all students in the ACT.