

ACT Gifted Families Support Group Inc

Submission for 2020-21 Budget Consultation

Dear Chief Minister and Treasurer,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments, ideas and suggestions for the 2020-21 ACT Budget. On behalf of the ACT Gifted Families Support Group Committee and families, I am pleased to provide this submission.

The ACT Gifted Families Support Group (ACT GFSG) is a small, not-for-profit association run entirely by volunteers. Our focus is on supporting and advancing the needs of gifted and talented children by bringing together parents, teachers and other professionals to share and learn practical ideas and listen to the research. The ACT GFSG is an affiliate of the Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented which publishes the academic journal *Australasian Journal of Gifted Education*.

Concerns exist over stagnating or falling rates of high achievement among Australian students. Recent national and international assessments have shown that the proportion of students in Australia achieving highly has either plateaued or declined over the past two decades on some measures. (From Revisiting Gifted Education, Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, NSW 2019)

The ACT government should be looking to fund some gifted education initiatives in the 2020-21 budget to allow the ACT Education Directorate to put in place measures to reverse this trend.

The ACT GFSG hopes that funding targeting gifted learners in the ACT will be included in the 2020-2021 budget following initiatives recently announced in other Australian jurisdictions:

- Tasmania is trialling one day a week gifted schools (based on a successful program in New Zealand).
- The NSW government has recently launched a new policy and has now launched its significant professional development opportunities.
- The Victorian government has just announced a \$60.2 million investment in high ability students at all primary and secondary schools.

Our suggestions are below.

Training for Teachers in Gifted Education

The Future of Education Strategy is currently being implemented across ACT public schools and appears to call for the education of gifted students in the regular classroom. We need to train our incoming teachers and update the skills of our current teachers in education gifted learners to successfully achieve quality learning outcomes for gifted and talented learners.

The skills of a classroom teacher have a significant impact on the learning that takes place on a day to day basis in the classroom. Many teachers in ACT public schools have not completed a semester-based unit of study in gifted education during their preservice teacher training. Research informs us that teachers and school psychologists with qualifications in gifted education (not just a 1 day a year PD) are more likely to:

- Correctly identify gifted students (and which students are not),
- Differentiate learning tasks to match the learning needs of gifted students having the power to both impact student learning and the attitudes of students to learning,
- Use appropriate information to ability group,
- Determine which students require a subject acceleration, a whole grade acceleration or even radical acceleration,
- Well-designed use of enrichment and extension,
- Have knowledge of, and implement, the current research in gifted education and more.

To achieve this, we have suggested that the new gifted and talented policy requires the ACT Education Directorate to work with the schools of education at both the University of Canberra and the ACU Canberra Campus to implement research-based gifted education units in their preservice teaching degrees. But implementing a new subject in a University takes funding.

Funding will also be required to update the current teacher workforce with skills and knowledge that match the current research. One example of a change from older research to current research is below.

The earlier belief (e.g. Berger 1991) that gifted students do not need as much structure or scaffolding in their learning has been dispelled by recent research. Instead, research in cognitive science fields indicates that gifted learners benefit from explicit teaching techniques such as worked examples, scaffolding, and well-sequenced learning tasks, especially in early stages of learning a new topic or skill (Martin 2016). Even when completing open-ended and complex tasks, a randomised-controlled trial conducted by Eysink, Gersen and Gijlers (2015) showed that even gifted students benefit more from external structure and guidance. Gifted students may then be able to move through earlier learning stages to guided enquiry and problem solving faster than other students (Rosenshine 2009). (From Revisiting Gifted Education, Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, NSW 2019)

Establish Combination Selective Schools from Year 3 to Year 12

The opportunity to attend a selective school is an option available to gifted learners in most states in Australia, but the ACT does not have one yet.

There are a few models for Selective Schools. The one that best suits the ACT would be a dual stream school. Dual stream (combination) schools exist in some High Schools in NSW (Year 7 to Year 12) and provide an opportunity for both local students and selective students to attend. Enrolments could be 150 PEA students and 150 Gifted Students in each year.

A selective stream from Year 3 to Year 12 provides many advantages to ACT gifted students:

1. They can attend classes with like-minded students where the lessons are paced to match the needs of gifted learners. Taught by a team of teachers with specialist qualifications in gifted education.

2. Provides an opportunity for gifted and other learners to socialize during class breaks on one campus.
3. Provides an opportunity for gifted learners to be radically subject accelerated without having to attend another school campus all the way through to the completion of Year 12. Currently, because schools are not closely co-located in the ACT any student enrolled in a high school that have the ability and learning need to be subject accelerated to Year 11 or Year 12 is reliant on parents or teachers to drive them between the 2 school campuses. In 2020 this is a very, very poor solution: families must give up employment opportunities to drive the student between campuses or the student must leave the public system and attend an independent or catholic school.
4. Reduces the artificial end of school barrier that is currently in place between high schools and colleges in the ACT.
5. Reduces the age versus stage barrier by allowing a year 7 student to attend year 11 maths and year 11 chemistry but return to the year 7 cohort to attend PE classes.
6. Provides the opportunity for learners to move invisibly between the selective stream and mainstream if they are gifted in English but not Maths, or any other combination of subjects.
7. If implemented correctly could provide the opportunity for students to complete simultaneously a university degree and an ACT College Certificate.
8. May create a learning environment where girls do not hide their giftedness.
9. The schools would become centres of excellence in teaching gifted learners and provide mentoring to teachers across the ACT system of the best practice for gifted students.

The ACT Education Directorate needs to build more schools and classrooms to cater for the growing number and needs of students in the ACT. This is the opportunity to build 2 schools in a different model to add to the range of models in ACT schools meeting different student's needs.

Funding for the Implementation of the new Gifted and Talented Policy

The ACT Education Directorate is currently working on a new Gifted and Talented Policy with support documents. The ACT GFSG hopes that when finalized this will lead to new strategies and procedures that will need funding to implement. We hope the ACT government can fund this policy and the training in the new procedures.

Elizabeth Singer

President

ACT Gifted Families Support Group

Email: actgifted@gmail.com

PO Box 141 Jamison Centre ACT