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ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations Sustainability Policy

In 2008, the Lake Ginninderra College Parents & Citizens Association presented a preliminary document on sustainability to the Council. The document was based on the premise that sustainability is the process of meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This instigated the process of developing the ACT Council of P&C Associations Sustainability Policy.

The Council then formed a Sustainability Working Party of interested parents, co-convened by parents Vivienne Pearce and Diane Johnson, to further develop the policy. A draft was distributed to member P&Cs for their input, and a general sustainability policy was presented and unanimously adopted at Council’s Policy Conference in late 2008. In 2009 this policy was expanded into a suite including policies on the school environment, school buildings, facilities and transport. The previous 1995 policy relating to environmental curriculum was also expanded. These policies are available for download from Council’s Publications page, www.schoolparents.canberra.net.au/Publications.html (see Policies A3, E6 and H1-4).

The Sustainability Working Party now continues as the Council’s Green Team, working to implement the ACT Council of P&C Associations’ Sustainability Policy.

Critical Ideas in Policy

Council believes that when students leave school they should have a comprehensive and sensitive understanding of the basic principles of ecology and the nature of human impact upon the environment. Further, they should have the power and will to apply these insights to manage their lives and the environment in which they live in an environmentally sustainable way.

Sustainability must be a central part of our education system. Council sees the increased involvement of our schools and their communities as a crucial part of the overall strategy needed to reduce both the ecological and carbon footprint of our society. Schools can educate students both through the curriculum and by example. The environmental issues associated with the physical infrastructure of schools and their surroundings, school activities and the day-to-day management of schools should also be addressed.

In the interests of equity, additional funding must be made available to assist disadvantaged schools and students in working towards sustainability. The knowledge of how to live sustainably must be made available to all students, regardless of socio-economic background.

Proposed Actions

Council seeks to play its part in the shared task of achieving ongoing sustainability in schools and the society of which they are part. Among other actions, Council:

- a) Commits to maintaining and enhancing the integrity and biodiversity of the natural environment.

- b) Recognises collective responsibility to act sustainably in everything that we do.
- c) Aims to create a carbon-neutral future for schools and for P&C Council by actively promoting sustainable practices through behavioural and infrastructure changes and through education.
- d) Will encourage all schools to improve their curriculum, their management and their physical infrastructure in the areas of energy use, waste, water, biodiversity and landscape design.
- e) Urges schools and Council to buy locally produced or 'green' products with reduced packaging and transport, where possible.
- f) Supports environmental education for sustainability as a central and consistent theme in schools. This curriculum framework should be embedded across all subject areas.
- g) Seeks specific funding for professional development for teachers and other staff (i.e. registrars and janitors) in the area of environmental sustainability and green programs such as Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative (AuSSI), and National Solar Schools Program (NSSP).
- h) Seeks specific funding for a dedicated position in the ACT Department of Education and Training to promote sustainability in our public schools through curriculum development and sustainable infrastructure planning. This would facilitate the implementation of green programs such as AuSSI and NSSP.
- i) Will lobby government to provide sufficient new funds to make the transition to sustainability achievable.
- j) Will lobby for any savings brought about through the implementation of sustainability measures to be reinvested within the school to encourage a sense of community ownership and to fund further sustainable initiatives.