



AUSTRALIAN PARENTS COUNCIL Incorporated (white)

The National Federation of Organisations Representing Parents of Non-government School Students

National Secretariat
PO Box 5011
Launceston TAS 7250

Tel: (03) 6334 8886
Fax (03) 6334 8862
email:admin@austparents.edu.au

FSCPb LAUNCH ADDRESS BY HELEN McDEVITT (BRANCH MANAGER FOR ACCESS & EQUITY, DEEWR)

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"Congratulations to ACSSO and APC today. It is a momentous occasion being able to announce the Bureau, where organisations have come together, working with us and other key organisations and schools around Australia to deliver quite a co-ordinated and comprehensive strategy to this parental engagement in schools with the Bureau assisting us. It's been a long time coming

I have been to these forums for the last 8 months talking about the Family/School Partnership Framework and the very first job of the Bureau will be helping us to distribute and to promote the Family/School Partnership Framework. While the Framework has been delayed a fair bit, the timing has actually worked out pretty well I think, because we have now got, what we in DEEWR consider, a very strong vehicle now for promoting and disseminating and working on the ground in all schools across Australia – working with principals and school leaders, with teachers and with the students to build fairly constructive partnerships.

It is also worked out to be incredibly good timing because we are now working through what has been a huge COAG Reform Agenda and one of the key policy directions of that reform agenda is boosting parental engagement.

So again, being able to launch the Bureau today enables the Government to, not display they are doing Family/School Partnerships. We talk about citizen centred approaches, or students centred approaches, but the Bureau allows us to take a very parent centred approach to developing these partnerships.

I have to say largely by reading all the material that ACSSO and APC have produced to day, that Australia is very much a world leader in this area. I don't think there are many other countries that would have an infrastructure such as a Family/School & Community Partnership Bureau that works with parent groups with State and Territory Government, with independent schools and Catholic schools, with Government departments to have a co-ordinated approach to building these partnerships. They are not an easy thing.

Just to touch on the COAG Reform Agenda, I think the task ahead of the Bureau is very challenging. We have got some good work to build on in terms of the work that has been done to date. The piloting and the consultation that went into the development of the Family/School Partnership Framework and the fact that we will now be disseminating that provides a really good start.

The research that ACSSO and APC have been doing over the years, and the involvement of ACSSO and APC over the years, in working with our Department in particular, but others as well, in delivering a whole lot of programmes as well as engagement of parents, through surveys of parents, or whatever. So it is a really strong base, but the boosting parental engagement reform agenda of COAG, is very much about engaging parents who aren't engaged with schools, those parents who don't come near the schools, who perhaps aren't empowered enough to be assisting the students and working with the principal and teachers to help their kids.

We hear a lot about the research that talks about quality teaching, but that's one of the in-school things, although I think the research still holds up – it says one of the biggest factors on students' wellbeing and attainment are the parental expectations. So there is a huge job of work to be done and I think you will all agree that it's fantastic work and let's bring it on, let's get into it. So it's nice to know that we have got the infrastructure and some resources.

The sorts of things we have been intensely negotiating around in terms of what the Bureau can effectively do, and in that context the Bureau has given us all the ideas and we have working to refine. There are some pretty significant things there.

One of the early projects will be to pick up the work that has been sitting there for the last year or so that was done in the formation of the Family/School Partnership Framework. Go back and both look at the schools that participated in those pilot programmes, as well as other schools, to do more and more work about identifying best practice, identifying the barriers - communicating with schools and the broader community about what parents need to make a partnership work, particularly in those school communities where there are numbers of parents that aren't particularly engaged. Some of that means bringing parents into the school and helping give them the skill, so you are almost working with the parents as much as with the students.

Continuing with that work, which will be on the ground, grassroots - what works, what we need to do more of, bringing people ongoing from the Bureau. In addition we have also agreed that every couple of years, so over the next few years, we are going to do two quite significant parent surveys. The old DEST has done a couple of surveys in the past, but this one will be working very much with the Bureau as well as others in our Department, to construct a fairly robust survey that will then complement the other consultation of focus groups and things that the Bureau does.

We will look at targeting certain areas of information that we want that survey to focus on. We are looking at rolling out a survey in 2009. That will be really important for all of us to identify what parents want, what their needs are, what their thoughts are on particular issues and to help drive that ongoing agenda.

Ongoing research will be really important for the Bureau. Certainly over the next year we will be looking to the Bureau to help us promote the Family/School Partnership Framework. I know the Bureau is already looking at websites and online and help desk facilities that all parents and principals of schools can use.

There is some really substantial work there that the Bureau has already commences, so we are satisfied that we have agreed on what priority areas to focus on, that we are tagging the resources available to the Bureau in a way that will get best value for money in this way.

It will be dependent on all of you, particularly using this amazing network that the Bureau now brings together to achieve this.

Well done - the work begins. Someone said to me today that the Bureau is going to be even busier than Kevin Rudd's public servants! That's really scary!

It's great work and we will be working with you all the way. This is the first significant partnership between the Bureau and the Department.

Congratulations on bringing this together. We look forward to working with you on this."