

Education (General Provisions) (Helping Families with School Costs) Amendment Bill 2023

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WHO IS P&CS QLD?

P&Cs Qld is the peak body supporting, advocating for and representing more than 600,000 state school parents and wider school communities throughout Queensland. We support the achievement of quality educational outcomes for students through fostering parental and community engagement in a thriving and successful education system.

P&CS CONTRIBUTION TO THE STATE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Parents and Citizens Associations (P&Cs) are established under the Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 and Education (General Provisions) Regulation 2017. Funding and resourcing of Schools continues to be a key priority for our members and organisation.

Each year P&Cs Qld surveys our members. The 2023 Members Survey received 330 responses representing 26% of members. (A statistically significant number of our 1262 members.) Of note is the following data as reported in the survey;

- \$74,053,787 financial contribution from P&Cs to schools
- \$334,802,394 turnover for P&Cs across the state
- 43,588 total volunteers across the state
- 1,199,797 volunteer hours
- 73.47% operate Tuckshops
- 71.02% operate Uniform Shops
- 19.52% operate Outside School Hours Care

In 2023 the following percentage of P&Cs either purchased or made contributions towards;

- 81% School infrastructure (e.g. playgrounds, tuckshop renovations, sheds, shade sails, halls, gardens, school signage)
- 76% Event contributions (e.g. excursions/incursions: camps, graduation ceremonies)
- 69% Books/learning resources (e.g. musical instruments, science equipment, library books)
- 51% Furniture and fittings (e.g. seating, water coolers, fridges)
- 45% Technology (e.g. iPads, computers, electronic whiteboards, software/Mathletics etc.)
- 42% Student representation (sporting/academic)
- 36% Donation to the school budget
- 32% Chaplaincy contribution
- 29% Funding of education or school programs such outside STEM providers, Student Well-being
- 7% Contribution to teacher/teacher aide salaries

P&Cs POSITION - EDUCATION (GENERAL PROVISIONS) ACT 2006

The Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 (the Act) should encompass all essential resources required for the delivery of high-quality education, including textbooks, digital tools and devices, access to specialist classes including resources and basic extracurricular activities, or other necessities.

As we understand it Part 3 Objects of the Act are as follows;

“OBJECTS OF ACT

(1) THE OBJECTS OF THIS ACT ARE—

(A) TO MAKE AVAILABLE TO EACH QUEENSLAND CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON A HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATION THAT WILL—

(I) HELP MAXIMISE HIS OR HER EDUCATIONAL POTENTIAL; AND

(II) ENABLE HIM OR HER TO BECOME AN EFFECTIVE AND INFORMED MEMBER OF THE COMMUNITY; AND

(B) TO PROVIDE UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO HIGH QUALITY STATE EDUCATION;”

We believe the act, interpretation of or application of the Act has not kept pace with the community expectations regarding what is required;

“to make available to each Queensland child or young person a high-quality that will help maximise his or her educational potential and enable him or her to become an effective and informed member of the community.”

Over an extended period, costs are now borne by parents or caregivers that are necessary to ensure that state school students can obtain a high-quality education.

Of particular significance to the above within the Act is;

“CHAPTER 3 COST OF PROVIDING STATE EDUCATION”

“50 STATE EDUCATION TO BE FREE

(...)

(2) THE COST OF PROVIDING INSTRUCTION, ADMINISTRATION AND FACILITIES FOR THE EDUCATION OF THE PERSON AT THE SCHOOL MUST BE MET BY THE STATE.”

There is no definition of “instruction” within the Act and as such this can be interpreted to involve only the delivery of teaching rather than the delivery of education by the state.

The Act and definitions within the Act should encompass all resources required for the delivery of education, such as textbooks, digital tools and devices, access to all specialist subjects, basic extracurricular activities and other necessities required to effectively deliver a high-quality education.

We observe a growing disparity between the objects and provisions within the Act and the reality of the out-of-pocket expenses borne by parents or caregivers. This includes an expectation that families are to provide stationary, textbooks, computers and IT related items and costs for educational and basic sporting extracurricular activities. It is widely

accepted that the above listed items are required to effectively deliver a high-quality education.

It is noted that current interpretation and application of the Act has not accommodated the evolving needs of education, including technological advancements over the past 30 years, diverse learning approaches, increased research and evidence-based pedagogy practices and community expectations.

As a result, the interpretation of the Act now falls short in addressing contemporary education needs, resulting in a widening gap between what the legislation explicitly states and what our community rightfully expects with regards to the delivery of high-quality education.

P&Cs Qld supports the proposed amendment or any other amendment that makes clear that the definition of “instruction” includes all necessary items and resources to deliver high-quality education.

EDUCATION (GENERAL PROVISIONS) (HELPING FAMILIES WITH SCHOOL COSTS) AMENDMENT BILL

P&Cs Qld understands that the main objective of the Bill is to reduce the out-of-pocket expenses incurred by families whose children attend state schools by ensuring that Queensland’s state schools are fully funded. In particular, the Bill aims to reduce the out-of-pocket expenses associated with:

- extracurricular activities, such as sporting programs, musical programs and school camps
- individual student resources, including textbooks, laptops and tablets.
- school uniforms.

Our view is that the cost of providing State education should be free and met by the State and this should include all student resources required to deliver high-quality education and basic extracurricular activities.

Fundraising by local P&Cs should be used to provide the school and its students with optional and addition opportunities. For example, “Excellence Programs” that may include music and additional sporting activities, STEM, non-educational excursion ns and school community building events. It should not be used to provide schools and students with the basic educational necessities and school infrastructure required to attain a high-standard of education.

Historically P&Cs have been a significant contributor to providing additional infrastructure to Schools. This has resulted in P&Cs often providing for things that we as a community now expect as standard. Such as Telephones, Toilets, Air Conditioning and Playgrounds. This trend continues with 81% of P&Cs reported in 2023 that they were continuing to make contributions towards infrastructure.

We wish to provide the following additional background information to the committee for consideration.

Services Provided by P&Cs

P&Cs within Queensland play a vital role in supporting and enriching the educational experience of students. These typically provide a range of services and support within schools and the broader community.

P&Cs Qld strongly supports P&C run business units such as Tuckshops, Uniform Shops, Out of Hours School Care and Stationery/Book Shops. It is evident that P&C run business units are more cost efficient and effective for students and their families.

Many P&C run business units utilise the 43,588 volunteers across the state to minimise operational costs and reduce expenses to families. As the representatives of the Parents and caregivers within the school the P&C can determine if the business unit is run as a service to the school or as a fundraising activity. These business units provide meaningful employment opportunities within the school community with 60% of P&Cs employing at least 1 staff member.

Stationery and Book Packs

P&Cs Qld identified that there are significant cost impositions placed on families as they are expected to provide stationary for students. Our research indicated that there was a requirement for parents to purchase book packs that in many cases totalled over \$175 per student per year.

We reviewed multiple book lists across multiple schools and identified there was no standard approach regarding book packs and stationery. There were no two book packs the same across any two schools for the same year level. There were also reports of schools and teachers pooling resources to cover any shortfall or increasing the number of items required in book packs to cover for those who could not afford the items.

We worked with a Queensland owned and operated business to provide a cost-effective solution for families. This included establishing a minimum standard book pack by year level, optimising items included in book packs, minimising freight and packing charges to families and ensuring that no items such as headphones for iPads, tissues, and reams of A4 paper were included in packs.

We have also developed a framework so that P&Cs can vote in a general meeting if they choose to add a small mark-up or provide this offer as a service to the school. This compares with many reports of rebates from stationary providers being currently paid to schools without explicitly stating so to parents.

Computers /iPads & BYOD

Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) is now offered and, in some cases explicitly stated as required or mandatory at many State Schools. This is a further example of cost impositions being passed onto families. It is widely quoted on State school websites that BYOD is a pathway “supporting the delivery of 21st century learning.”

A simple internet search returned the following statements on State school websites;

“All students at Brisbane State High School are required to supply an iPad as standard school equipment through a Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) program. The iPad is the core learning device from Year 7 to 12... At Brisbane State High School, all students use technology to support their learning.” Brisbane State High School

“In 2024 we strongly encourage all student from Year 1 to Year 6 to have their own iPad to enhance their learning journey through primary school.” Ellanora State School Website

“Bring your own Device (BYOD) is a new pathway supporting the delivery of 21st century learning. it is a term used to describe a digital ownership model where students use their personally owned devices to access the department's information and communication (ICT) network. You will find all the information needed on this website about Pallara State School's BYOD Program. If you are requiring to get a BYO Device for your child, continue on to Joining the program page located on this website and follow the 4 step process.” Pallara State School Website

“Woombye State School has determined that explicit teaching of the responsible use of technology is a critical component of digital literacy. We believe that the knowledge and confidence to navigate and use these technologies safely whilst developing digital literacy is a responsibility shared between parents, school, staff and students.” Woombie State School Website

“Over the past decade, technology, as well as the expectations of our students, have significantly changed. For students, having access to a digital device at home and at school, enables them to extend their learning beyond the classroom. To assist this process, Pimlico State High School has introduced a Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) program. The goal is to enable every student the opportunity to be effective digital learners, who become confident, creative and productive in the digital world.” Pimlico State High School Website

“As we continue to innovate and adapt in a world that is ever changing for our students, Miami State School will become a Bring Your Own Device (BYOD iPad) school from 2023 starting with your student (our current Year 3 students). This will be a gradual roll out over the next 3 years until all students in Years 4, 5 and 6 in 2025 and beyond will be a part of the school's BYOD Program.” Miami State High School Website

We note that the only two schools in the top twenty search results had reference to school managed lap top programs or details for support for families who cannot afford technology available namely Mansfield State High School and Kingaroy State High School.

For most disadvantaged Queensland children, having access to an IT device is a helping hand to break the cycle of poverty and receiving the education they need to set them up for life. This includes having access to an IT device that can be taken home (rather than remain always on school grounds as is current policy.)

In 2022 and 2023 P&Cs Qld partnered with ACS Queensland, Substation33, Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Foundation (QATSIF), LiteHaus International to deliver the See I.T. Be I.T. Program. This initiative is focused on supporting students by giving access

to the device for use at home to aid with homework. The program involves businesses and the public sector donating quality computers, laptops and electronic equipment that can be refurbished to support kids in Queensland who don't have ready access to a tech device.

Support for Students who cannot meet out of pocket expenses

The Department of Education data indicates there was a total of 570,259 students enrolled in 1,262 Queensland state schools in August 2023.

According to the Poverty in Australia 2022 snapshot by the Australian Council of Social Service and UNSW Sydney 16.6% of children in Australia live below the poverty line.

It can be assumed that there are 94,663 students enrolled in the state education system living below the poverty line.

There is no defined or consistent manner in which P&Cs across the state contribute funds towards schools and students who cannot afford items such as uniforms, book packs, excursions, or lunch. If a P&C wishes to contribute towards assisting the school and disadvantaged students, there is a requirement that a motion be presented and passed at a General Meeting.

CONCLUSION

The Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 (the Act) should encompass all essential resources required for the delivery of high-quality education, including textbooks, digital tools and devices, access to specialist classes including resources and basic extracurricular activities, or other necessities.

P&Cs Qld appreciates the opportunity to provide this submission on behalf of P&C members, volunteers and parents/carers of Queensland state schools.

P&Cs Qld can make its resources available to support and assist any future Government campaigns or programs through our existing networks and connection with Queensland parents/carers and our P&C Associations.

Submission prepared by P&Cs Qld

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