

ACT LABOR

# EDUCATION POLICY STATEMENT

2024



PROGRESSIVE  
PRACTICAL  
PROVEN

## **HIGH QUALITY EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING FOR CANBERRANS**

ACT Labor believes in the transformative power of education. We will continue to invest strongly in our public schools and our educators. Our investment in education and skills reached \$1.8 billion this financial year, and will continue to grow each budget.

ACT Labor believes that all members of our community should have full and equal access to high quality free public education at every stage of their lives – from early learning right through to post-school pathways.

Teachers change lives. To ensure the ACT continues to lead the nation in delivering high quality education outcomes for all students, Labor will invest in more support for our teachers, educators and leaders.

### **What we've achieved this term**

Over the past four years, the Barr Labor Government has delivered on the education commitments we took to the last election.

For our littlest learners, ACT Labor delivered one day per week of free three-year-old preschool. We also delivered Canberra's first workforce strategy for the early childhood education and care profession, and advanced career pathways and professional recognition for early childhood teachers.

In the last term of government, a Labor Government added more than 800 teachers and support staff to our public schools. We also ensured our public school teachers are the highest paid in Australia through the latest enterprise agreement.

During this term of government, a Labor Government opened a new public school every year. We also completed or funded fourteen more new public school builds and major upgrades, and begun early planning works for several more. This is all part of our plan for a billion-dollar public education build over the coming decade.

ACT Labor funded an extra 25 teacher librarians for our public schools, as well as 25 more social and youth workers, to ensure young people have access to the specialist support they need to thrive at school.

Labor established a new team of Gender Equity Coaches to support ACT public schools to deliver high quality respectful relationships education that will make a real difference to the lives of the next generation.

Labor is supporting students to fully engage in their education, regardless of their background. We established the Future of Education Equity Fund to support more than 5,000 students each year with payments of up to \$750 to cover the costs of educational expenses like uniforms, excursions, camps and extracurricular activities.

Labor is also providing free breakfast and lunch in five public schools three days a week, because we know students can't learn on an empty stomach.

ACT Labor believes public education is for everyone. In the last term of government, we began implementing our new *Inclusive Education Strategy*, a 10-year roadmap to build a more inclusive public education system. We legislated the right of every child with a disability to attend their local public school, begun to establish formal partnerships between specialist schools and their local public schools, and established a new team of disability inclusion coaches to provide teachers and support staff in schools with expert support and guidance in how to deliver inclusive education.

Labor has set up a partnership with Legal Aid ACT to provide free and confidential legal services to ACT public college students, to ensure young Canberrans understand their legal rights and obligations, and can access legal advice and education in school on issues ranging from family and domestic violence, consent, housing and justice.

ACT Labor has funded the Winanggaay Ngunnawal Language Group to advance its language revitalisation efforts, and to begin work on creating bi-lingual early years readers for use in ACT public primary schools.

In the last four years, ACT Labor established the Head Start Program, which matches school-based apprentices and trainees with local businesses in need of skilled workers. This program provides extra wrap-around supports to help school-based apprentices and trainees to succeed in their chosen pathway, with a particular focus on supporting students with disability into post-school employment.

With the federal Government, ACT Labor has rolled out fee-free TAFE through CIT to address skills shortages and open doors for Australians who might otherwise be unable to afford training, supporting more than 2,500 Canberrans in 2023.

ACT Labor is investing even more in the CIT with the CIT Woden project, due for completion in 2025. CIT Woden will have an ongoing and positive impact on the delivery of vocational education and training in the ACT focused on cyber security, hospitality, hairdressing and beauty therapy, creative design, and media and music. A new Youth Foyer is being built in the campus to support up to 20 young people with housing while they study.

ACT Labor has delivered Australia's first TAFE Centre of Excellence, which is supporting existing automotive workers to upskill and new apprentices to gain skills in the new economy. The first students have completing Australia's first Certificate III in Automotive Electric Vehicle Technology at CIT, and Transport Canberra's mechanics have completed skill sets to work on battery electric buses.

In collaboration with local brewers and CIT, ACT Labor developed 'Brewed to Succeed,' a pilot program addressing the specific skills needed in Canberra's brewing industry, aiming to train employees, strengthen local businesses, and potentially serve as a model for addressing skills shortages in emerging industries.

In the last term of government, ACT Labor entered a new Civic Partnership agreement with the University of Canberra, reaffirming the university's role in growing and shaping our community, developing essential skills and providing education opportunities for Canberrans at all stages of their life's journey.

We have approved the Master plan for the new UNSW Canberra Campus, progressing this city-defining project. This new campus will deliver roughly \$3 billion in economic contribution, create 2,000 jobs and bring around 5,000 – 6,000 students to Canberra. When complete, our city centre will be bordered by ANU's Acton Campus and UNSW Canberra's Reid Campus. With the Canberra Innovation Network in the city centre, this will cement Civic as a knowledge and innovation precinct.

Labor have partnered with the University of Canberra and the Australian Catholic University to create scholarships for nursing and midwifery students, bringing students to Canberra and supporting our future workforce.

Through our trade program, Labor has worked closely with our universities to promote Canberra in international markets as a great place to study. These efforts saw international education reclaim the top spot as the ACT's largest export sector, worth more than \$1 billion to our economy each year.

### **What we will continue**

ACT Labor believes Canberra should continue to lead the nation in education. ACT Labor will continue to invest in initiatives that promote equity and excellence, and provide students with the support they need wherever they are at in their learning journey.

A re-elected ACT Labor Government will redouble our efforts to ensure no child is left behind. We will increase our investment in initiatives that promote early childhood intervention, and continue to target our focus on those students who need additional support to reach their potential.

#### *Early childhood education*

- Provide universal access to free three-year-old preschool, alongside a targeted three-year-old early learning program which provides wrap-around supports to ensure vulnerable and disadvantaged three-year-olds can engage in early learning.
- Build the pipeline of Early Childhood Teachers through offering up to 16 scholarships each year of \$25,000.
- Support up to 260 women to study qualifications in early childhood education through the Early Learning Connection Program, which provides wrap-around financial, mentoring and employer supports to students.
- Boost cultural integrity in early learning through finalising new scholarships to support a pipeline of future Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood educators.
- Deliver *Set up for Success: An Early Childhood Strategy for the ACT*, our plan for early childhood education and care in the ACT over the next decade.
- Deliver *Valuing Educators, Values Children: A Workforce Strategy for the ACT Early Childhood Education and Care Profession* to build the pipeline of qualified early childhood professionals in Canberra, and enhance career pathways and recognition for existing staff.

- Provide training for educators on play-based learning and intentional teaching practice, cultural integrity, trauma-informed practice, and inclusive education.
- Work closely with the early childhood sector on future directions through our Valuing Educators Reference Group.

#### *School infrastructure*

- Complete construction of Aunty Agnes Shea High School, which will welcome its first students in 2025.
- Complete construction of the new early childhood education and care to year 6 public primary school in Strathnairn.
- Complete construction of the new early childhood education and care to year 6 public primary school in Whitlam.
- Build a second college in Gungahlin, located in the suburb of Nicholls, to open before the end of this decade.
- Continue planning for a new public high school and college in the Molonglo Town Centre which will include a range of new community facilities.
- Undertake a feasibility study in partnership with the University of Canberra on sites for a future public primary school on campus to support educational options for students in central Belconnen.
- Undertake major upgrades to Telopea Park School's Senior Campus, Narrabundah College, Majura Primary School and Garran Primary School, in addition to hundreds more smaller scale upgrades across the entire public school system.
- Progress works to release land for three more non-government schools across Molonglo and Gungahlin.

#### *Supporting school leaders, teachers and support staff*

- Ensure ACT public school teachers remain the highest paid in the country.
- Prioritise the safety of school staff through reviewing and implementing changes to how occupational violence is managed schools.
- Listen to teachers to implement real solutions to the issue of teacher workload and burnout, working in partnership with the Australian Education Union. We will build off our existing work to implement the recommendations of the Teacher Shortage Taskforce Report, give teachers more release time for planning and mentoring early career educators, and provide them with a dedicated student-free day at the start of each term for lesson planning.
- Increase system support for educators in key areas, with additional resources to support teachers to deliver inclusive education, and strong literacy and numeracy outcomes.
- Invest in the learning needs of our existing public school teachers, by providing scholarships for them to undertake further study and training.
- Support the University of Canberra Affiliated Schools program, which partners public schools with the University of Canberra so that pre-service and existing teachers can continue to improve their practice and engage in research.

- Centralise non-teaching functions, like building maintenance, to ensure our school leaders and teaching are freed up to focus on delivering high quality teaching.
- Prioritise the wellbeing of our school leaders, because strong schools come from strong school leaders.

#### *Inclusive and equitable public education*

- Provide all public school students in years 7 to 12 with a Chromebook so that everyone has access to the tools they need for learning.
- Provide families who need it with access to free internet at home.
- Implement our *Inclusive Education Strategy*.
- Develop a new adjustments-based funding model for students with disability, to provide students with the adjustments they need to access and participate in learning on the same basis as their peers, without the need for a formal diagnosis.
- Continue to roll out expert disability inclusion coaches in ACT public schools.
- Provide all ACT public school students with free access to period products.
- Ensure all public schools have access to youth workers, social workers and psychologists.
- Provide families experiencing financial stress with payments of up to \$750 to support children and young people to engage fully with their learning, to cover the cost of things like uniforms, stationary and extracurricular activities.
- Support flexible education options, like the Muliyan off-campus flexible learning program, for students who need a different style of education to traditional classroom learning.
- Support the Safe and Inclusive Schools Initiative to equip schools with resources and support to provide a safe and inclusive environment for LGBTQIA+ people.

#### *Skills and vocational education*

- Put CIT at the centre of vocational education in the ACT.
- Complete construction on the CIT Woden project.
- Roll out further tranches of fee-free TAFE to address labour and skill shortages, and achieve ACT Labor's new vision to grow our total workforce to 300,000 by 2030.
- As part of our Skilled to Succeed: Skills and Workforce Agenda, implement our action plans for five key industries in partnership with training providers and industry:
  - Technology industries (including ICT and cyber security)
  - Building and construction industries
  - Caring industries (early childhood, health, aged care and disability care)
  - Experience industries (hospitality, tourism and arts businesses)
  - Renewables

### *Higher education*

- Continue to be the main funding partner of the Canberra Innovation Network, which brings together all of Canberra's universities along with the private sector to support innovation and entrepreneurship in our city. This provides a valuable nexus that connects our higher education institutions with the private sector.
- Work with our universities to ensure Canberra remains a destination of choice for higher education.
- Work with the Australian Government through the Universities Accord process to ensure that Canberra's universities can continue on a pathway of managed growth.

### **What we will deliver**

#### Early childhood education

ACT Labor believes universal access to high quality early childhood education is a pathway to a fairer future. It's why we legislated the right of every child to attend a government-funded early learning program in the two years prior to their formal schooling.

A re-elected Labor Government will focus on expanding universal access to early learning, ensure preschool hours better meet the needs of working families, and supporting community-run and not-for-profit early learning services.

#### *Doubling free three-year-old preschool*

A re-elected Labor Government will double the three-year-old preschool program. It will mean that every three-year-old child in Canberra will be able to access 15 hours per week, 600 hours per year, of free early learning. It will save the average family over \$2,600 per child. With over 5,000 three-year-olds in Canberra, all of them are eligible to access additional early learning.

#### *Expanded hours of care*

Labor will expand the hours of care available at our four-year-old public preschools. A re-elected Labor Government will work with the sector to roll out supervised before and after preschool care at public four-year-old preschools, taking pressure off thousands of working families.

ACT Labor also recognises that it is often working families and shift workers who need the most flexibility in hours of care. A re-elected Labor Government is committed to better supporting these families, by undertaking a feasibility study to determine if there is sufficient demand, community interest and sector capacity for establishing an extended hours early childhood education and care service in Canberra for shift workers, like hospital workers.

### *Supporting community-run and not-for-profit early childhood education and care services*

A re-elected Labor Government is committed to increasing support for the not-for-profit and community-run early learning sector, by ensuring all future services in ACT Government-owned buildings are leased to not-for-profit or community-providers at a below market community rent.

A re-elected Labor Government will also work with the not-for-profit early learning sector to explore measures to increase the number of not-for-profit early childhood education and care services in the ACT through future land release.

### School education

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 re-elected Labor Government will focus on prioritising equity across the public school system – from infrastructure upgrades to access to specialist support and extracurricular activities, and ensuring every public school has what they need to deliver evidence-based literacy and numeracy teaching.

### *Delivering new and upgraded public schools*

A re-elected Labor Government will invest \$150 million in upgrading public schools across Canberra.

Labor will prioritise equity in school infrastructure, by auditing the infrastructure at ACT public schools against defined standards, and ensuring the established schools we know and love are prioritised first for a boost to their infrastructure. Essential projects like accessibility upgrades and bathrooms will be given a higher priority.

Labor will work with the Fraser Primary School community to refresh their oval and create a new nature play space that will be available to the public outside of school hours. We will involve the Fraser Primary School students in the design of the project.

Labor will work with the Melba Copland Secondary School community on a staged renewal of its infrastructure facilities.

### *Cooler public schools*

We know that students learn better when they are comfortable. Labor will audit the heating and cooling in all ACT public schools, and begin a \$30 million upgrades program with schools prioritised according to need.

### *Inclusive public schools*

To provide our educators with access to more support and expertise to deliver inclusive education, ACT Labor will deliver a new team of disability inclusion coaches in Belconnen public schools. This follows a successful rollout of disability inclusion coaches in Tuggeranong public schools this year.

### *Boosting literacy and numeracy outcomes*

A re-elected Labor Government will double our recent investment in literacy and numeracy, with \$25.9 million in new funding. This represents a total investment of \$56.5 million in rolling out Strong Foundations, a system-wide program to boost literacy and numeracy outcomes.

### *Supporting Canberra's teachers*

ACT Labor will ensure our public school teachers are the highest paid in the country.

Labor will also attract more teachers into our public schools by offering scholarships for people who want to study teaching, including career changers. These scholarships of up to \$50,000 will prioritise in-demand specialisations, like language teaching and disability inclusion. Increasing the pipeline of future teachers with a focus on the areas that need it most will help to alleviate workload pressures across our school system.

A re-elected Labor Government will invest additional funding in principal wellbeing initiatives, because we know strong schools come from strong school leaders.

### *Supporting student wellbeing and mental health*

A re-elected Labor Government will employ 15 additional school psychologists or mental health practitioners to work in ACT public schools. Many young people experience personal challenges with their schooling, family life or adolescent years. School psychologists will support young people to navigate these challenges and thrive in their school environment.

A Labor Government will also establish nurse-led clinics in four public colleges to provide more access to health services for young Canberrans. The nurse-led clinics will be staffed by Advance Practice Nurses who will provide preventive health services and education, mental health and sexual and reproductive health services. The clinics will also provide treatment and care for wounds, concussions, minor burns and other minor injuries and illnesses. Nursing teams will be located full-time at the college clinics and conduct visits and health sessions across other public colleges on a regular basis.

ACT Labor will also expand the School Youth Health Nurse Program to reach every public high school in the ACT so more young people can get health advice and support.

### *Supporting students to engage at school*

A re-elected Labor Government will expand the Future of Education Equity Fund, so that it reaches more students every year. It's a practical and proven plan that provides cost-of-living support for families. This year alone, more than \$3.2 million has helped more than 5,400 students with the cost of music lessons, sports equipment and uniforms.

A Labor Government will also investigate an expansion of existing flexible education options, to ensure there are programs in public education to support all children and young people to stay engaged with their education, with a particular focus on supporting children and young people from trauma backgrounds, children and young people who are in hospital for extended periods of time, or children and young people in the youth justice system.

ACT Labor will also work with the ACT Parents and Citizens Council to trial a new parent advocacy service, to promote positive partnerships between parents and carers and their schools, and assist in the effective resolution of issues.

#### *Free meals at school*

ACT Labor will support around 8,000 students across 20 participating public schools to fully engage with their education by providing free breakfast and lunch at school three days a week. This will not only help thousands of public school students with their education, but it will save Canberra families on their grocery bills.

ACT public schools will be prioritised for the program expansion according to need. The expansion will commence at the end of the current five school pilot in the middle of 2025, with an extra five public schools added each year. The meals are designed by a nutrition specialist, with dietary needs accommodated for all students.

#### *Language education*

A re-elected ACT Labor Government will work with the Hindi and Punjabi speaking communities of the ACT to undertake a survey to determine the level of student interest in learning Hindi or Punjabi at school, and which ACT public schools they attend.

Following the outcomes of this survey, an ACT Labor Government will work with the Hindi and Punjabi speaking communities of the ACT to determine how and where these languages might best be delivered in ACT public schools.

#### *Non-government schools*

Labor recognises the importance of ensuring all students, irrespective of their educational setting, have access to appropriate specialist supports at school to enable them to fully engage in their learning.

A re-elected Labor Government will work with the non-government school sector to establish mechanisms of collaboration between government agencies in areas of specialist educational supports. In particular, a re-elected Labor Government will expand the existing Healthcare Access at School program, run by Canberra Health Services, to include non-government schools.

A Labor Government will allocate \$15 million in capital grants funding to non-government schools in the ACT, based on need.

Labor will continue to provide funding for early learning for three and four-year-old children in the non-government sector.

### Skills and vocational education

A Labor Government will make it easier for first year apprentices to get access to the tools and equipment they need for their trade, with \$500 payment for first year apprentices and trainees.

A re-elected Labor Government will also increase training subsidies to 90 per cent for apprentices and trainees in critical skills areas including plumbing, carpentry, bricklaying, air conditioning, landscape construction and more. This new 90 per cent subsidy band will support around 1,500 apprentices and trainees in the first year, with that number expected to grow each year. Labor will extend the 90 per cent subsidy to 20 qualifications from early childhood through to commercial cookery and training more VET teachers.

A re-elected Labor Government will provide a major investment to deliver the Bruce Health, Education & Sports precinct. This precinct will include a renewed CIT Belconnen, including a new Yurauna Centre at CIT Belconnen, a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Educational Centre of Excellence.

### Higher education

A re-elected Labor Government will explore opportunities for more collaboration with the University of Canberra.

We will continue to support universities and academics commercialise their research, including through the new Venture Capital Fund that will start investing in local businesses and ideas in 2025.

In light of the Universities Accord and changes to the territory education landscape, ACT Labor commits to working with the University of Canberra to undertake a Governance Review to ensure the University is positioned to continue to deliver the best education and research outcomes for our city and its students and staff.