



# School Autonomy

## AEU-ACT BRANCH Position Paper

### **Introduction**

ACT Public Schools have for many years been operating under a system of School Based Management which has provided considerable autonomy to each Principal. The ACT and Federal Governments are seeking to extend this autonomy.

There is growing evidence which indicates that governments' push for school autonomy is not about improving student outcomes but rather:

- Devolution of government responsibility to schools.
- Budget cuts to the central office and negligible resource provision for schools to take on additional responsibilities.
- Increased administrative workload for school leaders and teachers, taking them away from their core work. This is despite calls from the AEU to reduce compliance and accountability measures. The AEU has sought for administrative processes to be streamlined, for duplication to be removed and for economies of scale across the system to be strengthened.
- Side-stepping around Enterprise Agreements by establishing unique/school-based staffing arrangements, classifications/titles, ongoing transfer of classroom teachers etc.
- A 'divide and conquer' approach, thereby undermining collective action and union involvement.

The evidence shows that school autonomy (particularly in Victoria and Western Australia) has caused irreversible damage to public education and that increased school autonomy does not improve student outcomes. Instead, increased school autonomy fosters competition between public schools and reduces collaboration across the system.

### **The AEU-ACT Branch Position on School Autonomy**

As stated in the AEU-ACT Branch Enterprise Agreement Claim 2011 (Schools Sector Claim 2), endorsed by Branch Council in November 2010, the AEU affirms:

*That any proposed changes to school autonomy:*

- (a) Must be the subject of broad consultation (in accordance with the current Enterprise Agreement);*
- (b) bring about improvements for staff and students;*
- (c) ensure that ACT public schools operate effectively as a system,*
- (d) Must not jeopardise the ability of the ACT education system to meet the needs of all staff and students and*
- (e) Must not lead to a decrease in funding to individual schools.*

The Schools Sector Claim also states;

*That the current Section EE - Teacher Transfer of the Enterprise Agreement be deleted and the AEU and DET negotiate and agree a simpler process that enables all*

*teaching staff to voluntarily apply to transfer to known vacancies within the system or otherwise in their current placement.*

At the June 2011 Branch Council meeting the following additional position was endorsed:  
*That further to the EA Claim the AEU – ACT rejects any form of school autonomy that:*

- [1] decreases funding to schools;*
- [2] increases workloads in schools;*
- [3] discriminates against staff on the basis of their pay scale;*
- [4] removes responsibility for student outcomes from the Minister and Director-General and places it on Principals and their staff.*

### **ACT DET Review of School Based Management (2009)**

In its submission to the ACT Department of Education's Review of School Based Management (2009), the AEU made the following points:

- Public schools in the ACT tend to (already) operate with relative autonomy.
- The AEU hopes that a review of SBM will bring changes that will encourage ACT public schools to work more efficiently and effectively as a system as opposed to operating as individual schools.
- Over the last decade the workload of principals, teachers and office managers, in particular, has intensified. This is partly due to the further devolution of SBM administrative responsibilities in 1997. The AEU strongly believes that centralisation of a number of responsibilities will allow principals to focus more on educational leadership and for teachers to concentrate on teaching. There is also a need for processes to be streamlined, for duplication to be removed and for economies of scale to be strengthened.

The AEU believes that School Based Management funds should be targeted towards meeting the needs of students in each school. This includes ensuring:

- A guaranteed minimum number of school leaders to provide educational leadership to all staff (minimum Executive structure must be protected) and adequate resourcing to ensure minimum administrative support.
- Targeted funding for English as a Second Language programs. This funding must continue to be protected and the AEU calls for increased ESL funding to meet needs of the increasing number of ESL students in public schools.
- provision for a minimum teaching staff structure to ensure class sizes are capped at a maximum of 21 students in Preschool to Year 3, and 25 students in Years 4 to 12 (as per AEU policy).
- Staffing provision is made in each school to ensure that such programs as Languages and Information Literacy (Teacher Librarian) are guaranteed.

### **The ACT Government's Response to the DET SBM Review**

The AEU repeatedly sought access to the School Based Management Review report since its completion in September 2009. Despite this, the Minister refused to make the report public. Finally on 20 May 2010, the Minister released the findings of the review and issued the government's response, stating:

*“Principals will get more say over who teaches in their school. Principals will take greater responsibility for the performance of their staff who will in turn take greater responsibility for the performance of their students.... The new system would begin at both the new Gungahlin College and the Kambah School in Tuggeranong from next year.... The new system will move schools to a funding based ‘real world’ accounting system, replacing the current points based staff budgeting system... (which) will increase accountability, making it clearer to everyone involved in managing our education system what is required.”*

### [The government’s full response to the SBM Review Report](#)

As a result of the ACT Education Minister’s decision to increase school autonomy, a School Autonomy Reference Group (SARG) has been established to discuss the detail behind this initiative. The AEU has representation on this group. Any staffing processes contained within the current enterprise agreement must be adhered to, until such time as changes, if any, are negotiated within the next agreement. It is important to note that the SBM financial arrangements are not enshrined within any industrial agreement.

### **School Autonomy Trial in 2011**

DET is currently (June 2011) developing a model for school-based staffing and dollar based budgets (as opposed to the current point system) for staffing. There are eight ACT public schools that are trialling different arrangements around staffing and a dollar budget.

Although any changes must be negotiated with the AEU in accordance with the current Enterprise Agreement, the department has attempted to implement some changes which are in breach of the Agreement. Consequently the AEU has sought to stop those changes and Branch Council, in order to ensure stability for the public education system as a whole and for students, schools and all staff, have made the following decisions:

### **AEU Decisions in Relation to Staffing ACT Public Schools**

#### **Future Permanent Employment Offers to Pre-service Teachers:**

[Branch Council decision, June 2011]

*Council supports in principle the ability to make offers of employment to the ACT public education system to practicum teachers. However, Council cannot endorse the ETD proposal in its current form because it restricts the right of all teachers to apply for transfer to vacant positions as required under Section EE of the current Enterprise Agreement.*

#### **Filling Classroom Teacher Vacancies Outside the Transfer/Placement Round:**

[Branch Council decisions, June 2011]

*Council notes the negotiations with Education and Training Directorate to ensure that the proposed policy document adheres to the requirements of the current Enterprise Agreement. However, given that the policy undermines the stability of educational programs for students during each school year (by enabling continual transfers throughout the year), the AEU rejects this policy as not in the best interests of public education.*

[Read more about School Autonomy on the AEU website](#)