

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the PACER program.

The Australian Council of State School Organisations, in the national voice for families attending government schools across the country. We appreciate the opportunity to make comment and sends the following contribution. Should you have any questions or comment please don't hesitate to call.

To what extent do the PACER and CCE programs align with the needs of Australian students and the Australian curriculum?

Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER)

The PACER initiative has shown to be a valuable opportunity for Australian students to engage directly with their democratic institutions and heritage. These visits enable students to thoroughly understand their political system, history, and civic responsibilities. Most notably, observing democracy in action, we hope may inspire students to appreciate democratic values and become engaged members of their local communities.

The Parliament and Civics Education Rebate is crucial for disadvantaged and remote students as it has the potential to encourage civic participation, bolster democratic principles, and address educational inequities.

Students who live in disadvantaged or remote areas often face obstacles when it comes to having access to quality education. This can be due to a lack of resources, geographic isolation, or socioeconomic challenges. However, providing a rebate for Parliament and civics education can help to bridge this gap. By doing so, we can ensure that all students have equal opportunities to receive the education they need to succeed.

In line with the Australian Curriculum, Civics and Citizenship education is given special attention as a strand. Its goal is to instil in students the knowledge of their responsibilities and roles as active, well-informed citizens. The PACER program offers practical experiences and concrete demonstrations of democratic processes, which could serve as a valuable complement to the more theoretical aspects of the curriculum.

Civics and Citizenship Education (CCE)

The program for Civics and Citizenship Education serves as a comprehensive effort to provide Australian students with a range of educational resources and activities that aim to increase their understanding, knowledge, and involvement in civic matters.

The main goal of CCE is to encourage students to become active and responsible members of society. This program provides essential knowledge and skills necessary to participate effectively in various activities related to community service. Promoting civic literacy helps students develop critical thinking, informed decision-making, and respect for diverse perspectives. These qualities are essential for becoming well-rounded and engaged citizens.

As previously mentioned, the Civics and Citizenship strand within the Australian Curriculum outlines the necessary knowledge, understanding, and skills that students should obtain in this area. The CCE program supports these curriculum objectives by offering teaching resources, materials, and professional development opportunities for educators to enrich civics education within schools.

ACSSO believes that the PACER and CCE programs complement the educational goals of Australian students and the Australian curriculum by emphasising civic education and promoting active participation in democratic processes. Through a blend of theoretical knowledge and practical

experience, these initiatives have the potential to foster responsible and engaged citizens who can make positive contributions to society.

How could PACER and CCE programs be better integrated or aligned with programs provided by State and Territory Governments and non-government organisations?

Integrating and aligning PACER (Parliament and Civics Education Rebate) and CCE (Civics and Citizenship Education) programs with those provided by State and Territory Governments and non-government organisations can lead to a more comprehensive and effective approach to civic education.

We believe fostering partnerships between the federal government's PACER and CCE programs, State and Territory Governments, and non-government organisations is important. This helps avoid duplicating efforts and ensures that civic education initiatives have a greater impact. To achieve this, it's crucial to establish clear communication channels and shared goals. Working together allows for identifying areas where joint efforts can be more effective.

In today's financial climate, working together on outreach and extracurricular activities focusing on civic education is essential. When organisations team up, they can pool their resources, avoid scheduling conflicts, and provide our students with a broader range of opportunities. These could include simulated elections, debates, or visits to legislative institutions.

We feel that working with local organisations and community leaders can effectively identify and address gaps in civic education outreach, particularly in underrepresented communities. This collaborative approach can also help tailor programs to meet diverse student populations' unique needs and cultural backgrounds.

We know that if PACER, CCE, State, and Territory Governments, and non-government organisations collaborate and share data and evaluation results, it will enable a comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of various civic education initiatives. This would also help in promoting continuous improvement.

To ensure sustainable funding for initiatives related to civic education, it would be beneficial for stakeholders to collaborate and advocate for support from every level of government. By delivering a unified message highlighting the significance of civics education, stakeholders can enhance their likelihood of obtaining funding and support.

If we integrate and align PACER and CCE programs with state/territory initiatives and non-governmental organisations, we can establish a comprehensive and cohesive civic education ecosystem that equips students to become responsible, informed, and active citizens at both national and local levels.

To what extent are CCE programs designed appropriately to address equitable and inclusive participation of schools and students?

The effectiveness of Civics and Citizenship Education (CCE) programs in promoting equitable and inclusive participation can vary based on a range of factors, including educational policies, cultural context, and program goals. ACSSO is not privy to the development of local programs however, to ensure that each program is designed appropriately, we believe they should incorporate diverse perspectives and voices in their curriculum content. This can be achieved by exploring historical events and contemporary issues from various cultural, social, and ethnic backgrounds. By presenting

a more comprehensive view of history and society, these programs can better engage students from different backgrounds and help them connect with the subject matter.

CCE programs should also be culturally sensitive and relevant to the students' lived experiences. The curriculum should reflect the local context, considering the community's cultural, social, and political realities. This ensures that students can relate to the content and see the relevance of the topics to their own lives.

Teachers should use inclusive teaching methods like group discussions, collaborative projects, multimedia resources, and experiential learning activities to cater to diverse learning styles and abilities. Differentiated instruction can help students with varying abilities and backgrounds engage effectively with the material.

Including diverse role models and examples of individuals who have contributed positively to society in CCE programs is essential. By showcasing individuals from different backgrounds who have made meaningful contributions, students can develop a sense of belonging and aspiration regardless of their own backgrounds.

Creating opportunities for student participation and engagement within the CCE program is important. Students should be encouraged to express their opinions, share their experiences, and discuss issues that matter to them. This can foster a sense of ownership over their learning and help them see the relevance of civic engagement.

Contemporary issues, such as social justice, human rights, and environmental sustainability, should also be addressed within the CCE. By discussing these issues, students can connect their learning to real-world challenges and understand their roles as responsible and active citizens. This year provides schools with optimum opportunity to discuss issues in the context of the referendum on the Voice and the issues surrounding housing affordability and rental accommodation.

To promote equitable and inclusive participation in CCE programs, federal, state and territory jurisdictions must provide support, including adequate resources, teacher professional development, and a commitment to creating a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students.

Regular evaluation of the CCE programs is crucial to assess their effectiveness in promoting equitable and inclusive participation. Gathering feedback from students, teachers, and parents can provide insights into areas for improvement and help refine the program's design and implementation.

To what extent have schools been able to access PACER and CCE programs? Consider levels of awareness, reach of the program, and accessibility for different school types. The vast majority of schools are aware of the PACER program. It is utilised mostly by NSW and Victorian Schools for the obvious reason of proximity to the ACT.

Small and remote schools find it difficult.

Apart from distance accessibility becomes an issue for SSP schools especially if they are required to be away overnight. The availability of staff to support for this kind of activity with both limited funds and limited staffing numbers is problematic.

What are the key enablers for schools in accessing PACER and CCE programs?

- Schools need to be aware of the programs. Effective communication and dissemination of information to schools about the program objectives, benefits, application process and participation are crucial

- Having clear and well-defined program guidelines help schools understand expectations, objectives and the parameters of the program goals. It allows school to align their activities and initiatives with the program's goals.
- Financial resources to enable schools to participate
- Professional learning for teachers to allow them to enhance their understanding of the program's themes and goals. This enables teachers to effectively integrate program content into their teaching practices
- It should have school curriculum alignment and complement existing curricular content rather than create additional burden
- It should be flexible to adapt to different school contexts, year levels and student ability.
- Collaborate between schools, organisations, government agencies to facilitate sharing of resources
- Provide opportunities for students to engage, actively participate and express their opinion – a way of gaining experiential learning
- Needs to be sustainable

It is important for schools to be informed about programs through effective communication and dissemination of information regarding program objectives, benefits, application process, and participation. Clear and well-defined program guidelines provide schools with a better understanding of expectations, objectives, and program goals. Financial resources are also necessary to enable schools to participate, while professional learning for teachers enhances their understanding of program themes and goals. The program should align with existing curricular content and be adaptable to different school contexts, year levels, and student abilities. Collaboration between schools, organisations, and government agencies is important to facilitate resource sharing. Allowing students to engage and express their opinions allows for experiential learning. Sustainability is crucial for long-term success.

What are the key barriers to schools in accessing PACER and CCE programs?

The main obstacle is the cost, as even with the available rebate, it would still be financially challenging for most families.

Schools have found that accommodation and transport have risen disproportionately to wages; thus, the school being able to provide an excursion at an affordable price is becoming difficult.

In today's environment, there is a shortage of teachers, which makes it challenging to maintain the appropriate student-to-teacher ratio. The situation is particularly challenging for teachers who teach multiple grade levels since finding replacements for those on camp duty can be difficult. This can create problems in providing adequate coverage for students who remain in school.

Some students may face challenges when it comes to going on excursions due to their family's culture and religious beliefs. It is possible that their parents may not approve of their child participating in such activities.

What impact do PACER and the CCE programs have on school communities? Consider outcomes for students, school staff and community more broadly.

Disadvantaged and remote communities often lack access to quality education resources, resulting in a gap in their understanding of their rights, responsibilities, and the functioning of their society. However, adequate funding for PACER can help bridge this gap by providing these communities with the necessary resource to access comprehensive civics and citizenship education (CCE) programs.

This ensures that all students, regardless of their background, receive an equal opportunity to learn and become active participants in their communities and democratic processes.

CCE programs supported by PACER are important because they empower individuals to actively participate in their communities and democratic processes by understanding how government works, the rights and responsibilities of citizens, and how to engage in civic activities. This equips individuals with the knowledge and skills to advocate for their needs, make informed decisions, and contribute positively to society. Additionally, CCE programs encourage critical thinking and the ability to analyse complex social and political issues, which is vital for remote and disadvantaged communities. This enables individuals to critically assess information, make informed decisions, and engage in constructive dialogue about pressing societal matters.

Without access to comprehensive civics education, individuals in disadvantaged communities may feel excluded from civic processes and decision-making. This can lead to feelings of disenfranchisement and disengagement. Properly funded PACER programs can counteract this by empowering individuals to participate actively in their communities and make their voices heard.

Impact on Students

Civics education programs provide students with a solid foundation for understanding government structures, political processes, and civic responsibilities. This knowledge empowers students to make informed decisions as active citizens. By examining real-world issues and engaging in discussions and debates, students learn critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving skills that are transferable to various aspects of their lives.

In addition to developing these essential skills, civics education encourages students to become active community participants. Through this process, students develop a sense of agency, leading them to engage in volunteer work, advocacy, and civic initiatives. Furthermore, by understanding their role in society, students may develop a sense of social responsibility and a commitment to addressing societal challenges, such as inequality, environmental issues, and social justice. Ultimately, civics education plays a vital role in shaping the future of our society by empowering our youth to become informed and engaged citizens.

Impact on School Staff

Incorporating current events and relevant topics into civics education can enhance the curriculum. This may require educators to receive training to teach these concepts effectively, which can improve their instructional skills and content knowledge. Engaging students in discussions about civics and citizenship can lead to deeper classroom engagement and better student-teacher relationships. Teachers can act as guides in helping students understand complex societal issues.

Impact on Community

Learning about civic responsibilities through education programs can help create an informed and knowledgeable population, allowing them to participate in democratic processes. Students exposed to civic issues may become more involved in local community projects, initiatives, and advocacy efforts, leading to positive community development. Such discussions can foster a sense of unity and shared values among community members who are more informed about their rights and responsibilities. An engaged population holds public officials accountable and contributes to a more transparent and responsive government.

To what extent do the PACER and CCE programs work collectively as a suite of programs to deliver civics and citizenship educational opportunities?

- They enhance students understanding of political concepts, democratic processes and citizenship responsibilities by offering a supplementary learning experience that complements the regular classroom instruction.
- The trip encourages active participation of students through role play of various civic and political activities. This could include mock debates, simulations of legislative processes, discussion on current events and an opportunity to interact with real world policy makers.
- It could provide authentic context and examples to help them understand how the principles and concepts learned in the classroom apply in practical situations. This involves visits to Parliament House and Old Parliament House or meetings with elected representatives.
- The activities in the PACER program would also align with assessment components of the curriculum. This could include projects, presentations or assessments that demonstrate a student's understanding of key concepts and their ability to apply them

The PACER program aims to complement regular classroom education by improving students' comprehension of political concepts, democratic processes, and the responsibilities of citizenship. Students are encouraged to actively participate in various civic and political events by engaging in role-playing activities like simulated debates and legislative processes. The program provides genuine examples and contexts for students to realise how classroom principles and concepts apply in practical settings, including visits to Parliament House and Old Parliament House or meetings with elected representatives. PACER's activities are also aligned with assessment components of the curriculum, such as projects, presentations, or assessments that demonstrate a student's understanding of key concepts and their ability to apply them.

How could PACER and CCE programs be improved or strengthened?

- Linked to current debates of relevance to young people.
- Greater funding provided to government schools to assist with opportunity.
- Sliding scale of funding for those whose ICSEA is above 1000.
- Students could visit the Parliament house of their jurisdiction but with similar rebates, especially rural and remote.