

Australian Education Legislation Amendment (Prohibiting the Indoctrination of Children) Bill 2020

**Submission to the Senate Education and
Employment Legislation Committee**

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**Prepared by: Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations
of New South Wales**

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Introduction

Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales (P&C Federation) is thankful to the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee (the Committee) for this opportunity to contribute to the *Australian Education Legislation Amendment (Prohibiting the Indoctrination of Children) Bill 2020* (the Bill). P&C Federation supports the position of individual educational and developmental needs met by a range of differential services expressed through appropriate and well-planned curricula, programs and environments conducted by sensitive and well-trained personnel in conjunction with parents¹ and families.

The core belief of P&C Federation is that the education of our children and youth is the most fundamental means of ensuring individual and collective success and, as a result, our greatest national resource. We also support the concept that it is primarily the responsibility of governments to ensure education is well rounded and fully funded.

P&C Federation is a representative voice for public education in NSW. With over 1800 member associations our understanding of the issues within education is broad and carries with it the voice of a very large body of parents and carers.

Submission

1. Nowhere does the Bill define “indoctrination”, leaving the primary objective of the Bill lacking a solid basis. It is therefore unclear what the Bill intends to prohibit.
2. The Bill also fails to define what is meant by a “balanced presentation of opposing views”. This leaves this term open to interpretation, which could mean many different things to different people.
3. While teaching students that there are alternative viewpoints on topics is a good guiding philosophy for educators, this is usually done in the context that some views are in the minority or lack supporting evidence. Providing a legislative requirement to teach an undefined set of opposing viewpoints on political, historical and scientific issues is simply unworkable. There is scarcely any topic in these fields that is not disputed by someone, and potentially requiring teachers to teach all views is impractical in the extreme. A literal interpretation of the Bill would require, for example, the teaching of a spherical Earth to be equally balanced by the teaching a flat Earth or hollow Earth.
4. The proposed changes open up the potential for an individual parent to legally disrupt any part of an approved curriculum that touches on political, historical or scientific issues. The uncertainty this would create within education could potentially be catastrophic to the delivery of a uniform curriculum, and place schools and teachers in untenable positions.
5. It is doubtful that the Federal Government has the constitutional power to legislate curriculum content, a power which currently rests with the States and Territories.

¹ “Parent” refers to anyone with legal care of a child, such as a parent, carer or legal guardian

6. We remind the Committee that adoption of this Bill would also be at odds with the National Education Reform Agreement, under which the Commonwealth has already guaranteed States a certain level of education funding. Having funding contingent on States and Territories adopting specific legislation is liable to meet significant opposition.
7. We do not consider the Bill justified or practical in any way. We believe the Bill could significantly disrupt the delivery of education in Australia, undermining the relative stability of curriculum delivery and allowing minority voices to have much more sway than they deserve.