

Submission

No 7

INQUIRY INTO SCHOOL ZONE SAFETY

Organisation: Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of New South
Wales

Name: Mrs Kelly MacDonald

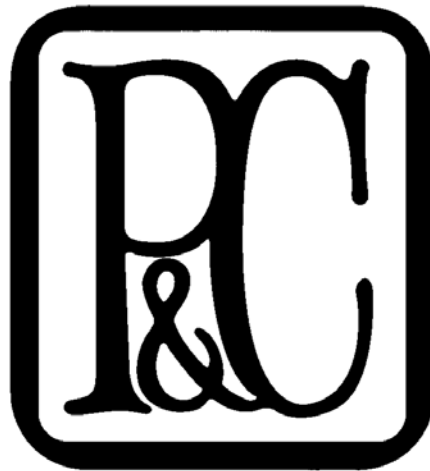
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Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of New South Wales

Locked Bag 40, GRANVILLE NSW 2142

Telephone: 1300 885 982. Fax: 1800 655 866

Website: www.pandc.org.au



Submission for the Review of School Zone Safety

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Approved by: Helen Walton

PREAMBLE¹

The Federation of Parents and Citizens' Association of New South Wales (P&C Federation) is committed to a free public education system which is open to all people, irrespective of culture, gender, academic ability and socio-economic class and empowers students to control their own lives and be contributing members of society.

This commitment is based on the belief that:

- * All students have the capacity to learn;
- * The Government has prime responsibility to provide an education system open to all, which is free and secular;
- * Schools should be structured to meet the needs of individual students and should respect the knowledge those students bring to school and build on that knowledge to foster their understanding about the world.

Parents as partners in the education process, have a right and a responsibility to play an active role in the education of their children. P&C Federation and its representatives share a responsibility of ensuring representative decision making for the benefit of all students.

INTRODUCTION

The Federation of Parents and Citizens' Association of New South Wales welcomes the opportunity to submit our contributions to the inquiry into School Zone Safety.

The P&C Federation is a peak agency for active members of school communities, parents and their children in public schools in NSW. Therefore, in responding to the terms of reference, it will represent the views and ideas expressed by members based on their experiences of School Zone Safety throughout the public education system in NSW.

There is more to safe school zones than having a consistent single speed based approach.

a) The effectiveness of school zones in reducing pedestrian casualties during school zone times;

Differing approaches to safety in school zones areas are taken by schools, these approaches depend on the nature of the environment around the school and the traffic conditions present in these areas. School zone safety can be effective in different ways, as long as there is awareness between students and drivers around the safety issues that may be present. Schools

¹ Preamble of Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of NSW. *2010 P&C Handbook* (6)

and local community have different needs and strategies when it comes to assessing the risks involved in students and pedestrians utilising areas around school grounds. Vehicle 'Kiss and drop' zones allowing parents to drop their child and, when needed, to park for short periods and walk them in to the school, are a common request from schools. The recognition is that this space allows for parents to feel safe in ensuring their child is able to alight from a vehicle and walk straight in to school gates and directly into school staff supervision.

Eastern Creek Public School fronts on to a major highway. Safe access options for parents to drop off/pick up students were limited and parental calls for appropriate alternatives appeared to fall on deaf ears. After an extensive consultation, the local Council developed a shared area at the back of the school which appeared to suit everyone's purposes. It provided parking and safe drop off/pick up areas. Subsequent development of seating and playground space has resulted in a community hub which addresses the needs of the school and community. The school community felt that the State Government and the RTA were remiss in their responsibility for the safe carriage of students when entering and leaving school grounds by any means. However, their praise of the foresight of the local Council in recognizing and addressing obvious safety issues was long and loud.

Model Farms High School (Baulkham Hills) has grown in size in recent years due to families moving into the area. The infrastructure of the area, however, has not kept pace with this growth and the resultant needs of the community. There are narrow roads which often do not have adequate footpaths developed. As a result, students are forced to walk on the road on their way to school and share this space with the buses and cars which also utilise the narrow roads. This creates a risk to pedestrians that is unnecessary and could be avoided if there were adequate provisions for the school and community needs.

b) The major contributing factors to pedestrian casualties in school zones;

Anecdotal information has indicated that bus zones are often placed away from active pedestrian/traffic flow areas in shopping precincts to prevent holding up traffic in these areas. The location of these services often results in students having to walk from the bus drop off zone to the school gates, opening them up to potential danger from traffic. This can also cause isolation of children waiting at bus stops and pick up points in the area and makes them increasingly vulnerable. Recent reports of attempted snatching of children suggest that every effort should be made to ensure students are always in the public eye in their movement from transport modes into the school gates.

School zone awareness creates a major problem in the effectiveness of safety strategies implemented in these areas. Whilst the zones are signed and marked, there is much

interpretation that can be taken from the way they are presented. There are a number of schools where consultation is required between various statutory groups involved in traffic issues and creating a safe environment for students in and around the school. Green Valley Public School has experienced problems with identifying the interpretation of signs around the school. Parents have sought clarification of signs after occurrences of parents being fined for parking in certain spaces. The parent body is seeking information on the situation as one authority informed them that they were able to park for a period of time in an identified and posted spot at the front of the school but when undertaking this were fined by the local Police, who had a different interpretation on what the sign signified. There needs to be consistency in the signs used and the interpretation of these signs by all authorities involved to provide clarity to parents.

It is also a very important aspect of school zones and their success that children and students are well educated and aware of the dangers present when moving about roads and traffic areas. A combination of both driver and student awareness creates a safer environment for all involved.

c) Age as a factor in pedestrian crash risk and the major contributing factors for casualties by age cohort around school zones;

The demographics of a school and its students have very different impacts on the hazards that can be present in school zones. Schools have such a variety of age groups and students have differing capabilities presenting a vast array of issues and risks that each school and school community must deal with to ensure their particular area is as safe as possible for students of all ages.

Traffic warders, crossing guards, lollipop ladies (or whatever these individuals are called) have been allocated in some school areas to stop traffic at identified pedestrian crossings to allow safe passage of students across a designated pedestrian safety section. The need for these individuals arose from concerns about the manner in which some drivers do not take notice of the well signposted areas around schools. NSW does not want to experience the same problems occurring in places such as WA where they have determined that traffic warders are to be removed following a study on the number of children crossing the street versus the number of cars travelling along it. In the Western Australian situation changes resulted in children having to cross busy streets with no support due to increased and heavy traffic usage but significantly smaller numbers of pedestrians. The number of children versus the number of cars using a shared area should never be the major consideration for changing policy around ensuring the safety of the child.

Normanhurst Public School is juggling the needs of the school and the local community in a different manner. The local Council has introduced a no parking zone on one side of the road from 8am to 9.30 and 2.30pm to 4pm. These times coincide with the busy period during which parents are transporting their children to and from the school. It has made it harder for parents to deliver and pick up young children in a safe way. Council contention has been that the introduction of this initiative allows for drop off and pick up of students closer to the school gate. This designated drop-off area only allows for vehicles to stop for long enough to off-load students. Parental concerns arise over the need to allow sufficient time for parents to walk younger students (particularly kindergarten and Year 1 students) into the school grounds to ensure safety and security. There are many incidents that occur in and around school zones and the main characteristic seems to be that there is lack of consultation or when consultation occurs there is little notice given to the actual needs of the school community.

Concord West Public School is increasing its numbers. The increase in student numbers and families residing in the area has meant an increase in the traffic and a reduction in available parking. As a result this has increased safety risks for students commuting along busy roads and crossing at major intersections. Parents often have to drop their child further from the front of the school requiring the child (and parent) to walk to the school area thus encountering some issues as indicated above.

Parents have expressed concerns in relation to the lack of a suitable and safe pedestrian crossing in the vicinity of some schools. Students attempt to cross busy roads while dodging traffic. A small measure of precaution was put into place in some areas in the form of a traffic island. While this has assisted in some small measure, it does not allay all parental fears of the potential for serious injury to students attempting to cross these roads.

d) The deployment of alternative facilities to reduce reliance on school zones, such as grade separation, traffic lights and fencing;

Overpasses and underpasses which allow students to move across busy highways and high traffic areas are a positive step in recognizing and addressing this safety issue. However, other considerations also need to be made.

At Rooty Hill High School, students cross a major highway by way of an overbridge. However, there are ongoing parental concerns about the lack of safety measures on the overbridge. There is a knee high fence the length of the structure but parents feel more suitable fencing is needed for the safety of the students using the overbridge. The capacity for students to 'horse around' makes them vulnerable to potential injury as the current preventative fencing is not adequate to prevent a fall from this overbridge onto a very busy roadway. On one side of the road there is a fence that is a redundant safety measure because there is no pedestrian access

to the overbridge from this direction. This type of oversight and misplacement of resources is seen to place lives at risk because of inadequate planning.

Following a study of traffic and pedestrian volume, accident history, road environment and visibility as well as current speed limits in the surrounding areas, flashing lights have been installed in a number of areas across the state. Flashing lights remind drivers of the presence of a school in the area and therefore the presence of students as pedestrians. It is unfortunate that drivers can sometimes choose to ignore road signs around schools especially when trials have shown that drivers reduce speed significantly when flashing lights operate. For students and parents at schools such as Maroota Public School and Castle Hill Public School the installation of flashing light school zone sites provides some peace of mind in the provision of travel safety for school community and students enrolled at these schools. The addition of these sites brings the number to more than 689 flashing light zones across the state by the end of the year.

e) The appropriateness of a single approach school zone regime as opposed to modifying zones based on existing infrastructure and other current safety measures employed around schools;

Every school has a unique need in relation to providing safety measures around the school. This is related to the age of the children enrolled (preschool, primary or High School age), the size and geographic location of the school, the current school environment and the processes put in place to ensure the safety of all students and families. As indicated in some of the mentioned strategies, schools attempt to address their individual issues through a range of options. In refining this to a single approach, there will be no flexibility to identify and support the community needs in a manner which is appropriate. This will limit the possible outcomes for school zone safety and prevent individual schools from consultation with the appropriate authorities to have specific changes implemented to create a safer environment around their school.

f) The availability and effectiveness of current road safety education programs in NSW schools;

The education programs in existence in NSW schools provide a level of support to improving the skills of children in coping with the requirements of a busy school area during peak times. Although children are aware of this, they do not necessarily recall all of the information in times of stress and whilst around a busy road environment. There needs to be an improved road safety education program for the adults who frequently drop children or pick them up, as well as other road users who drive past schools and through school zones each day.

Availability for parents to park in designated and allowed areas before and after school seems to be a recurring issue for many. Issues include such things as parents double parking, parking

in ways that blocks vision of turning traffic (on corners), and parents dropping children off, on and/or in front of Pedestrian Crossings.

Some school parent bodies are so frustrated with the level of unacceptable driving behaviours that they have suggested deputising members of staff or the P&C association members (send them to appropriate training courses as required) who would either issue tickets or be in charge of recording details and reporting these bad drivers to the RTA.

In addition, there have been suggestions that harsher fines be issued for those who offend within school zone areas due to the vulnerability of students who are moving through the area to access the school.

g) Any other related matters.

For some High Schools, the issue of adequate parking options for staff and student drivers is also important. In areas where parking is at a premium, adequate numbers of designated spaces for teaching staff within school environs often require space to be taken out of playgrounds or ovals. In addition, car spaces for senior students are similarly allocated to reduce the congestion that parking on the street around the school may cause. This allocation is often used as a safety mechanism ensuring staff and students are not competing for car spaces during times of heavy traffic movement in the early morning and mid afternoon peak pick up/drop off periods.

The P&C Federation believes that the role of School Zone Safety is a vital role within schools and school communities in ensuring the safety of students and all involved in the school community. The need for a review of the effectiveness and safety of schools zones is of vital importance for the wellbeing of students and children.

The main points that the P&C Federation are most concerned around include but are not limited to:

- * Adequate pedestrian crossings, appropriately placed and, where necessary manned by a traffic warden.
- * Suitable safety structures around overpasses.
- * Suitable safety structures to prevent injury around high vehicle traffic roads and highways.
- * Clear sign posting and clarity of meaning of the signs expressed to both parent body and all statutory authorities.

- * Better consultation and collaboration between government agencies, statutory authorities, local government authorities, schools and parent bodies.
- * Recognition by all key stakeholders around the changing natures of schools and particularly the impact of rising school numbers on traffic flow, parking difficulties and the mechanisms to address these issues.
- * The need to address student travel issues expediently and independently of other occurrences if needed.
- * Better education of both students and drivers around school safety areas and safety awareness.
- * Unique needs and risks present at different school sites and the impact the demographics of students attending the school can have on student safety in these areas.

The Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of New South Wales welcomes the review into School Zone Safety. P&C Federation acknowledges the review and hopes that the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety takes into account a great many of the key areas that concern Parents, Students and school communities. We hope the comments made in this document are of assistance with discussions around this subject.

P&C Federation would like to thank the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety for the opportunity to comment on the review. We look forward to seeing the results and welcome any further discussion this may evoke.