



NSW Primary Principals' Association Inc.

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'LOCAL SCHOOLS - LOCAL DECISIONS'

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE NSWPPA AS PART OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

28TH October 2011

Introduction

NSWPPA Principals generally support:

- Increased local decision-making at the school level, provided that funding levels for Public Schools are enhanced according to individual student needs and there is genuine authority for Principals to make informed decisions;
- Greater flexibility for the Principal to use resources to meet these individual student needs with a commensurate replacement of small grants and subsidies by a genuine 'global' school funding allocation;
- Changes to the way schools are staffed and the methods by which quality teaching and leadership are enhanced;
- Obtaining a balanced approach to purchasing resources, maintenance and cleaning of school sites that takes into account both centralised procurement savings and appropriate use of local suppliers;
- Local Public Schools working together and the continuation of 'education communities' where these are locally managed, not imposed, and maximise the effectiveness of each school and the NSW Public Education system;
- Maintaining appropriate accountability for the use of public funds, while reducing the quantity and duplication of submission-based approaches to obtaining resources and ensuring the alignment and congruence of reporting requirements on the use of both State and Commonwealth Government funds.

NSWPPA Principals believe that any changes to policies and procedures that further empower local schools to make local decisions must be supported by:

- Increased, not diminished, funding to schools and a well-planned phasing-in period for all changes affecting schools and their communities;
- High-quality, relevant professional learning for school leaders and staff who will be implementing local decisions;
- Real devolution of decision-making about matters that each school is best-placed to deal with and which have the most impact on student learning and site management, not matters that should rightly remain the responsibility of Governments and their Departments who must ensure NSW has a well-resourced Public Education system, serving public purposes;
- The State and Commonwealth Governments working together to ensure schools are not required to meet duplicated, divergent and often unnecessary accountability procedures;
- A reduction, not an increase, in both Regional and State bureaucracies, with savings invested in local schools. Regions should however, retain the responsibility and personnel to co-ordinate the placement of special-needs students;
- A collaborative approach with the NSWPPA to the implementation of 'Local Schools Local Decisions', based on the strong foundation of the Futures Alliance, which acknowledges that Principals, working with their schools and the DEC, are the best drivers of effective change in schools.

Recommendations

In this submission, based on the Discussion Paper and consultation with Principals, the NSWPPA has highlighted:

- ***Proposals that we support;***
- ***Proposals that we question; and***
- ***Recommendations that NSWPPA Principals believe should underpin effective implementation in the 5 key areas.***

**Making Decisions
Managing Resources
Staff in our Schools
Working Locally
Reducing Red Tape**

Making Decisions

We support:

- A well-researched analysis by Government of the level of funding required for each student to reach national benchmark standards, become successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens (Ref: 'Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians' – Dec 2008);
- The use of data, including AEDI, Best Start, NAPLAN and school student assessments to determine the level of support needed in every individual school for all students to achieve to their potential;
- Schools setting their priority areas, generally on a three-year School Planning cycle, with the Principal having the authority to direct funds to these priorities. Principals may wish to consider the idea that 'the research evidence indicates that substantial improvements to student outcomes may take between 5 and 8 years' (Ref: World Bank report 2011 pp 129 – 130);
- NSW Public Schools, as part of a state-wide Public Education system, informing decisions on their priorities by reference to the current Board of Studies Syllabus documents and the future Australian Curriculum, national assessment tools such as NAPLAN, Best Start data and school assessments;
- The need for a well-defined charter of authority and accountability that enables Principals to work collaboratively with the school staff and community, while maintaining the ultimate authority of the Principal, who is solely accountable to the Director-General;

We question:

- That Commonwealth, State and DEC Plans are at times compiled without reference to the timing of the School Planning Cycle which, under a devolved decision-making model, must be the foundation stone of corporate planning, not the other way around;
- Any increase in Regional bureaucracies or the relevance of producing Regional Plans, as the focus of Regions should be solely to co-ordinate equitable distribution of resources to support School Plans;
- Whether State reforms such as Local Schools Local Decisions and Commonwealth policies such as Empowering Local Schools and Performance Pay, have sufficiently taken into account the public purposes of education in Australia (Ref: 'Exploring the Public Purposes of Education in Australian Primary Schools' – Reid et al, AGPPA 2010);
- The ability of the current central and regionalised system to introduce these reforms over a time-span and in a manner that takes into account differences in geographic and demographic factors. There is a broad spectrum of schools from high-SES, through the under-resourced majority of local primary schools, to the high-equity funded schools. Currently, as a system, we tend to focus resources on schools serving highly disadvantaged communities, allow the high-SES schools to draw on their community funding sources and have little 'left-over' to fund the majority of local primary schools;
- The support that will be made available so that Principals can manage even more complex levels of decision-making and add to what is already expected of schools and their leaders in areas such as social welfare, pastoral care, social media and increased demand to cater for 'at-risk' students;

We recommend that:

- ***A clear indication of the level of State and Commonwealth funding to every school be provided and publicly declared. No educational reform that is underpinned by reduced resourcing will have a lasting positive impact on our youngest Australians;***
- ***There be a single State Education Plan, covering all DEC Directorates, which takes into account the school planning cycle;***

- ***Government Policy decisions which impact directly on how schools are managed and which are proposed as amendments to the State Education Plan, should be the subject of a collaborative approach with the NSWPPA and key stakeholders;***
- ***That schools be empowered to set their priority areas based on local need and circumstances, in the context of the State Education Plan, with the Principal having the authority to direct funds to these priorities;***
- ***Principals, as instructional leaders, determine priorities and directions for the school and facilitate collaboration with their staff, parents and school communities;***
- ***A charter of authority and accountability, which specifies the primacy of the Principalship, be developed prior to the introduction of any reforms. The level and type of increased support for Principals must be clearly articulated;***
- ***The lens of the public purposes of education in Australia be applied to all proposed reforms;***
- ***State and Regional bureaucracies be focused on supporting, not micro-managing school decision-making***

Managing Resources

We support:

- School funding and classification levels being reviewed to take into account both enrolment numbers and the complexity of each school;
- The compilation of a 'Complexity Index' that factors in, for example: enrolments, the SES level of students actually attending the school, percentage and quantum of students from an ATSI background, percentage and quantum of students requiring ESL support, percentage and quantum of students with a diagnosed disability, geographic location, lack of community resources such as Libraries and Health Care facilities. This Index should take into account the current comparative levels of global funds used to employ additional staff to meet defined needs;
- The fundamental principle of a quality public school being the 'first-in' and last-out' educational provider in every community across the State. It is essential that access, equity and building social capital underpin this principle;
- Schools with Teaching Principals being catered for in a manner that enables a balance of managing their own budgets and finances, as well as utilising a local sharing of personnel and expertise, if required;
- Schools for Specific Purposes (SSPs) and mainstream schools with Support Classes being resourced in a separate manner that caters for special resource needs and appropriately decreased student-teacher ratios;
- Consideration being given to Central Schools with K-12 enrolments, with regard to the complexity of curriculum provision, staffing and school management;
- The streamlining and simplification of school funding allocations and accountability requirements through a centrally managed audit process. A regular School Audit, the incidence of which will depend on the 'Complexity Index', should replace the many minor accountability returns currently required;
- The current role and remuneration level of School Administrative Staff (SASS) being upgraded, with additional professional learning funds allocated to schools for SASS. LMBR, cash flow budgeting, debit card usage, e-banking, increased levels of funds being managed by schools, all need high-level training and capabilities;

We question:

- Whether a deficit-model is implied i.e. schools managing their resources well and improving outcomes, find themselves penalised in future funding cycles;

- The proposal to re-locate the total school staffing budget for permanent and temporary teaching and non-teaching staff, without a commensurate local input into what the mix and level of staffing should be. Without a major input by the Principal on behalf of the local school, on how and which staff are needed, employed and managed, the management of the total school-based staffing budget will only increase the local school's workload, without any commensurate improvement in supporting the school's priorities;
- Any implied difference in complexity between Primary and Secondary Schools that does not take into account the nature and value of early childhood, prior-to-school experience and the importance of the Primary Years of schooling. *'Currently, resourcing is focused on the early years of schooling and the last few years of high school - the beginning and end of schooling - yet it is during the middle and upper years of primary schooling that the gap between the most and least successful children widens'*. (Ref: *'The Primary Narrative'* – APPA 2010);

We recommend that:

- ***A 'Complexity Index' be established, in collaboration with the NSWPPA, that enables a better and more equitable distribution of resourcing to be applied to all Primary Schools and across the Primary and Secondary sectors;***
- ***A flexible approach be applied to the quantum and management of resourcing, including SAS Staff in SSPs enrolling Secondary students;***
- ***Schools with Teaching Principals be resourced and staffed in a manner that recognises their unique circumstances;***
- ***Consideration be given to the complexity of Central Schools with K-12 enrolments, with regard to curriculum provision, staffing and school management;***
- ***A single School Audit, the incidence of which is determined by the 'Complexity Index', to replace the many minor accountability reports currently required. This Audit must also cover funds received from all sources – local, State and Commonwealth;***
- ***A review and upgrade of SASS roles and remuneration be initiated;***
- ***Additional management of staffing budgets be devolved to schools, but only if this is accompanied by a commensurate level of devolved decision-making authority;***

Staff in our Schools

We support:

- School staffing and classification levels being reviewed to take into account both enrolment numbers and the complexity of each school. Staffing, school and Principal classification levels should align with a newly developed 'Complexity Index' (see 'Managing Resources' above);
- Increased authority of the Principal to determine the right mix of staff skills and abilities to meet the school's priorities, generally on a three-year cycle (see 'Making Decisions' above). The three-year cycle should be applied flexibly, with no expectation that staff would be restricted to a maximum three year appointment or 'contract';
- The use of a 'vacancy clause' whenever staffing levels change as a result of the introduction of a 'Complexity Index'. Many staff have commitments and may be adversely affected if changes to a school's staffing level or mix are implemented unilaterally – changes should be 'vacancy-driven' i.e. a model that allows vacant positions to be filled more flexibly, not one that forces personnel to change their terms of employment;
- A flexible approach allowing Principals the choice of filling a percentage of vacant positions with temporary appointments, when this flexibility enhances school priorities;
- The retention of that part of a state-wide staffing system that allows Priority Placements, including 'incentive appointments' for hard-to-staff localities. Appointments to vacancies of Priority Placements should not over-ride the ability of a school to choose to fill a vacancy by

local selection on merit where the previous vacancy has been filled centrally (see the next point below). This should apply to all levels within the Teaching Service;

- Principals and schools being able to access local appointment procedures, if they choose, for the filling of a vacancy, where the school did not have the opportunity to select a staff member for the preceding vacancy;
- A streamlining of the current process that supports teachers 'experiencing difficulty with their performance', that allows a maximum of 5 weeks for the implementation of a support plan and, if this has not been successful, a maximum of 10 weeks for a formal improvement program to address identified matters of concern. The current application of this process must be reviewed to ensure the most appropriate and expeditious outcome for student learning;
- Improved system-based support being provided to Principals, including the use of DEC personnel not employed at the school, to ensure that student learning and school programs are not adversely affected by the implementation of improvement programs;
- Professional Learning (PL) funds being administered at the school level and increased to include SAS Staff, with a balance of access to PL to meet the school's priorities and the broader professional development of the teaching and administrative staff;
- The continuation and refinement of the current PARS, EARS and TARS processes and the addition of a similar process for SAS Staff, with an increased emphasis on collegial support and an alignment for teaching staff with the National Standards for teaching and school leadership;

We question:

- The concept that Regional bureaucracies should play a managerial role in staffing allocations. A school's need for specialist staff such as STLA, ESL, Reading Recovery and Numeracy should be centrally registered, based on data provided annually by the school. This data should generate appropriate state-wide staffing funds, that will then be applied locally under the authority and accountability of the Principal;
- The role of the Regional Director in teacher efficiency determinations. The Principal and School Education Director (SED), with the assistance if required of appropriate DEC personnel not employed at the school, should be supported by State Office Industrial Relations personnel if the matter cannot be resolved locally;
- Any proposal of a 'performance pay' bonus for a limited number of teaching staff. This concept, while not a direct part of Local Schools Local Decisions, is a looming threat from the Commonwealth that will have an adverse effect on teacher professionalism, collegial work in schools and has the potential to undermine worthwhile reforms at State level;

We recommend that:

- ***There be increased authority for the Principal to determine the right mix of staff skills and abilities to meet school needs, generally on a three-year cycle with staff changes being 'vacancy-driven' i.e. a model that allows vacant positions to be filled more flexibly, not one that forces personnel to change their terms of employment. A flexible approach should allow Principals the choice of filling a percentage of vacant positions with temporary appointments, when this flexibility enhances school priorities;***
- ***Elements of a state-wide staffing system be retained but with an enhanced ability for schools to choose to fill positions locally and determine position criteria for advertised positions. This should be supported by a review of the relevance and use of Staffing Codes;***
- ***Professional Learning (PL) funds be increased for both teaching and non-teaching staff in schools and be directed at both school priority areas and the broader professional needs of staff. PL funds should be provided directly to, and administered by, the school and utilising high quality learning materials, supported by State Office resources that reflect current research;***

- **Mandatory compliance training, including Work Health and Safety, should be funded and delivered by Regions, utilising funds provided by State Office. This training is part of the responsibility of the DEC in its role of employer;**
- **The staffing of schools be locally driven, with the support of State Office in resolving industrial issues, should they arise;**
- **The management of teacher efficiency be reviewed to improve the effectiveness of the program, minimise disruption to student learning and school programs, while retaining procedural fairness;**
- **State-funded legal support be provided to all Principals as required, together with access to the State Office Employee Performance and Conduct Unit (EPAC);**

Working Locally

We support:

- A balanced approach to purchasing resources, maintenance and cleaning of school sites that takes into account both centralised procurement savings and appropriate use of local suppliers;
- Principals being given greater authority to employ local tradespersons, with support provided by State Office in a number of areas e.g. pro-formas for risk assessment, trade qualifications, working with children checks, business bona-fides; Workplace Health & Safety requirements;
- Principals being given the choice of local management with appropriate support, or management by Regional Asset Management Units;
- Local Public Schools working together and the continuation of 'education communities' where these are locally managed, not imposed, and maximise the effectiveness of each school and the NSW Public Education system;

We question:

- The effectiveness of state-wide whole-of-Government contracts for School Maintenance, Utilities and School Cleaning, negotiated without input from schools and Principals. The recent re-negotiation of these contracts Principals were assured, would lead to improved maintenance and cleaning, but this has not been the case in many instances;
- The commitment required by the State Government to continue to fund ongoing maintenance and capital works programs, particularly with the increased 'asset-footprint' created by the Commonwealth BER works in Primary Schools;

We recommend that:

- **The central procurement process be reviewed to ensure a better balance between savings achieved for large high-cost items through State Contracts and the ability of local Principals to ensure the greatest efficiency and build goodwill by using local suppliers;**
- **Schools and Principals, working with the DEC and the NSWPPA, have a major input into any future negotiations for state-wide school maintenance, cleaning and other contracts;**
- **Local schools be encouraged to more readily share resources, including personnel and equipment, and schools with particular expertise or effective programs being able to draw on resources administered by Regional Offices, such as additional teacher funding, to compensate schools providing this service. All schools involved in any 'learning community' should participate collaboratively in determining where funding and resources are best located;**
- **The State Government and DEC State Office provide increased funds to meet the maintenance and capital works needs of their Public Schools;**

Reducing Red Tape

We support:

- Schools setting their priority areas, generally on a three-year School Planning cycle, with the Principal having the authority to direct funds to these priorities (see 'Making Decisions' above);
- The streamlining and simplification of school funding allocations and accountability requirements through a centrally managed audit process. A regular School Audit, the incidence of which will depend on the 'Complexity Index', should replace the many minor accountability returns currently required (see 'Managing Resources' above);
- The increased capture and application of accessible information by State Office, utilising technology, thus reducing the need for schools to duplicate data collection;
- A review of the Annual School Report (ASR) and its relevance, given the advent of the burgeoning 'My School' website. Schools still see relevance in reporting achievements and successes to their local community, but much of the information in the current ASR is a repetition of the data on 'My School';

We question:

- That Commonwealth and State Plans, DEC Public School Portfolio Plans and Regional Plans are at times compiled without reference to School Plans which, under a devolved decision-making model, must be the foundation stone of corporate planning, not the other way around (see 'Making Decisions' above);
- The role of Regional bureaucracies in a more devolved Public Education system. Simplified accountabilities through PARS, EARS, TARS and a similar process for SASS should be managed by Principals and SEDs, with further assistance from State Office if employment and industrial issues arise;
- The ability of State and Commonwealth Governments to agree on a unified funding and accountability model. Such a model would reduce the current cumbersome and in many cases, overlapping and duplicated accountability paperwork;

We recommend that:

- ***A co-operative approach be taken by the State and Commonwealth Governments, as much of the 'red tape' is a result of the State and Commonwealth Governments requiring different but often overlapping accountability procedures. Such an approach will markedly reduce the amount of red tape which currently binds schools;***
- ***Schools and SEDs, with DEC State Office support when required, should work together on matters relating to the staffing of schools. This approach will remove the need for much of any proposed additional Regional bureaucracy;***
- ***A streamlined School Audit process be adopted to support Principals in managing any increase in financial accountability at the school level, as a result of the implementation of Local Schools Local Decisions;***
- ***State Office use available data collection methodologies to prevent unnecessary duplication at school level;***
- ***The current ASR process be reviewed to eliminate duplication with 'My School', while allowing schools to continue their effective communication with parents and their local community.***

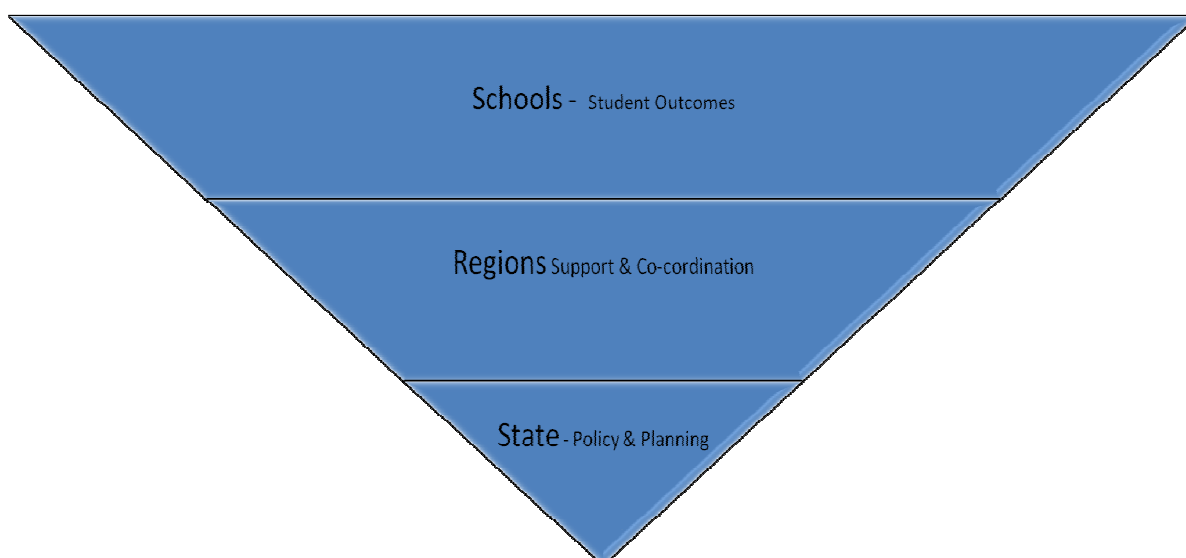
TAB A indicates, in summary, the NSWPPA recommended changes to the appropriate levels of authority and accountability in NSW Public Education.

RECOMMENDED LEVELS OF AUTHORITY & ACCOUNTABILITY

LOCAL SCHOOLS and PRINCIPALS – STUDENT OUTCOMES

Ongoing authority and accountability:

- Set priority areas based on the State Education Plan, in consultation with the community
- Make decisions and implement programs based on student needs
- Manage resources flexibly to cater for school priorities
- Apply Professional Learning funds to meet school and professional development needs
- Participate in local 'learning communities' driven by local schools and principals
- Manage staff efficiency procedures ensuring that there is a minimum impact on student learning
- Manage school staffing and staffing budgets with support by State Office in any circumstances requiring industrial intervention
- Determine position criteria for staff vacancies based on school needs
- Managing school maintenance and cleaning, utilising funds provided by State Office, with the assistance of Regional Asset Management Units if required
- Participate, through the NSWPPA, in contract negotiations by State Office in matters affecting school maintenance, cleaning and utilities



REGIONS – SUPPORT & CO-ORDINATION

Ongoing authority and accountability:

- Support school decision-making
- Retain responsibility for co-ordinating placement of special-needs students and associated support services across schools
- Allocate State Office funding for delivery of mandatory compliance training
- Assist schools to meet Work Health & Safety (WHS) requirements utilising State funding
- Provide asset management support when requested by schools

STATE OFFICE – POLICY AND PLANNING

‘One-off’ establishment responsibilities:

- Establish a ‘Complexity Index’ for school classification and resourcing, recognising unique school circumstances
- Establish a Charter of Principal authority and accountability, in collaboration with Principals
- Establish a single ‘School Audit’ process
- Review the relevance of Staffing Codes and review and upgrade SAS Staff roles and remuneration levels

Ongoing authority and accountability:

- Develop a State Education Plan – incorporating State & Commonwealth funding levels
- Support school decision-making and ensure the ‘public purposes’ of education in Australia are paramount in driving reform
- Retain and manage elements of a state wide staffing process, including ‘incentives’
- Provide increased professional learning funds for all staff in schools. Develop high quality professional learning material and recommended methods of delivery that reflect current research. Provide funding to Regions for delivery of mandatory compliance training and for school support in WHS
- Support schools in any circumstances requiring industrial intervention and provide legal support and access to EPAC for Principals and other personnel when required
- Review the central procurement process to provide a better balance with local suppliers. Provide funding for maintenance and capital works programs to meet school needs
- Utilise data-capture methodologies to reduce red-tape in schools and ensure Commonwealth and State accountability paper-work requirements are aligned

and reduced to a minimum. Review the Annual School Report requirements and alignment with 'My School' website.