



International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change. www.ijicc.net
Volume 1, Issue 2, November 2013

The Education Reform Journey in New South Walesⁱ

Hon Adrian Piccoli MP

Minister for Education, New South Wales, Australia

In NSW (Australia), the State Government is devolving authority from the central bureaucracy out to local schools to harness the power of principals as individual leaders, whilst retaining the benefits that come from being part of a *system* of public schools, united by the values and policies of public education. These measures are part of a new vision for schooling in New South Wales public schools.



When I look at the policy development and reform the NSW Government has undertaken in the past few years, we have always been careful to consider what works – and what doesn't work – in schools. We have very carefully in the past few years introduced evidence-based policies that target the needs of students in New South Wales. We have done this with a great deal of consultation and research and the input of a range of stakeholder groups. We have embarked on a significant reform journey here in New South Wales and we have been guided by evidence every step of the way.

In NSW, we are devolving authority from the central bureaucracy out to local schools to harness the power of principals as individual leaders, whilst retaining the benefits that come from being part of a *system* of public schools, united by the values and policies of public education.

Resource Allocation Model

In March 2012 the NSW Government announced the *Local Schools, Local Decisions* education reform. At that time we also released five fact sheets that outlined our desired future state across five reform areas of:

- Making decisions
- Working locally
- Staff in our schools
- Reducing red tape and
- Managing resources

While the department is progressively addressing the various aspects of the reform areas, management of resources is perhaps the most important aspect. The NSW Government is working towards a fairer allocation of resources to schools through the phased implementation of the new resource allocation model, known as the RAM.

From 2014, schools will have more visibility over the total public school education budget and they will have more authority over how to spend it.



The fundamental premise of this reform is that decisions are best made by those closest to the people they affect. This means schools must have a much bigger say over how to use resources to support students.

The RAM is about making sure that funding is allocated in the fairest and most transparent way.

The RAM, however, represents a significant change to our current funding model, one that funds students rather than programs.

On full implementation a school will get a base allocation to cover the education of each student, including staffing and costs associated with operating a school.

Equity loadings provide the additional funding required to meet the additional learning needs of:

- students requiring low level adjustments for disabilities,
- additional support for English language proficiency and
- Aboriginal and Socio-economic backgrounds

A targeted (individual student) component, providing funding for those students with moderate to high level additional learning needs, will also be added.

The full implementation of this new model will occur over the next three to four years. This is essential to allow the development and refinement of new, more equitable loadings and allow for the increased funding that will flow through the National Education Reform Agreement (NERA).

School funding in 2014

Two components of the RAM will be implemented in 2014. All NSW public schools will receive their targeted (individual student) funding and the four equity loadings through the RAM. While a number of these loadings will use current funding mechanisms, we have injected an additional \$100 million in both the Aboriginal and the Socio-economic background equity loadings, made possible by the NERA.



The NSW Government is providing increased support for all students from a low socio-economic background. The RAM loading for socio-economic background will deliver a fairer and more transparent distribution of resources to support identified additional learning needs associated with students from low socio-economic communities.

The rate of funding per student will be determined based on a combination of individual student and school need using the Family Occupation and Education Index (FOEI). The index ranges from 0 to 300.

The higher the index, the greater the need and the higher the funding. About 1000 schools have an index between 0 to 100. Schools with a FOEI greater than 180 will receive maximum funding per student.

All students identified through FOEI in quarter one and quarter two will receive funding. The rate for a student in quarter one will range from \$155 to approximately \$2,000 per student. Quarter one students are funded at double the rate of quarter two students. If a school has a high number of quarter one students, the school will be funded to address the higher level of need.

This loading will fund more than 390,000 students across New South Wales public schools (the number of students in the lowest two socio-economic quarters of the FOEI), compared to the 120,000 students in approximately 580 schools who are supported under state and Commonwealth equity programs.

The staff entitlement that was previously attached to the state equity programs has been incorporated into the socio-economic background equity loading.

In 2014 we will invest an additional \$81 million for socio-economic background, distributing a total of \$250 million on this loading alone.

It is important to note, however, that not all schools will receive additional funding on this loading. There are a relatively small number of schools, who have received significant funding from a number of different equity programs over a number of years, who will receive a reduction



in funding. These schools will still, in most instances, receive the maximum rate per quarter one and quarter two students, but the total allocation they will receive on this loading will be reduced.

For example one school who received \$1.43 million in 2013 will receive \$1.38 million in 2014. Support will be provided to these schools to ensure that they can effectively manage this change in funding.

Increasing support for Aboriginal students

For the first time, every New South Wales public school with Aboriginal students will receive funding to support their additional learning from 2014. The level of funding for each school will be determined not only on the number of Aboriginal students in the school, but also on the percentage of Aboriginal students in that school.

The funding rate per Aboriginal student ranges from \$400 per Aboriginal student in schools with low numbers of Aboriginal students, to a maximum of \$2400 per student in schools with either high numbers of Aboriginal students, or where Aboriginal students make up a higher percentage of the school's enrolment.

In 2014, all 49,000 Aboriginal students will be supported compared to 24,000 Aboriginal students in 2013. This loading funds those students with the highest need at a higher rate per student.

All schools will receive at least the same level of funding as they did in 2013 for transitional Aboriginal funding and funding associated with Aboriginal Education Officer's (AEO's).

For instance, one school in NSW that has 711 students, of which 48 students (7%) are Aboriginal. This school received no additional Aboriginal funding in 2013. In 2014, they will receive \$26,044 to support the additional learning needs for these students.



In 2014 we will invest an additional \$18.5 million for Aboriginal background loading, distributing around \$48 million in total on this loading alone.

In addition to the equity loadings, the 229 schools participating in the *Empowering Local Schools* National Partnership will operate under additional RAM funding from the beginning of 2014, including their staffing budget. Principals in these schools will build on the increased decision-making authority already implemented to improve their students' learning outcomes based on local needs.

The RAM recognises that students and school communities are not all the same; they have different needs and require different levels of support. We also know that that the location of some schools means they cost more to run.

On full implementation of the RAM, the base allocation component will include specific loadings for location and size. These loadings will be developed during 2014 for implementation in 2015.

And while the new school funding model is one of the largest changes in Education in NSW, is not the only change to improve student learning.

Early childhood education

We know from research that high quality early childhood learning gives children the best start to school. Best Start data shows that almost 90% of children who attend early childhood education are more confident with language and literacy – and this rate is 20% higher than for children with no early childhood education.

Early childhood education is important for better health, education and employment outcomes for life and research supports this.

The NSW Government is targeting increased preschool participation with a funding model that provides incentives to enrol four and five year olds in the year before school, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.



The NSW Government has announced a new Preschool Funding Model that will target funding on a needs basis so that the children that need it most can access a preschool place.

Under the new model, 95% of preschools will see an increase in their base funding rate. The highest base funding rate will increase from \$2,950 to \$5,270, and the minimum base rate will increase from \$1,250 to \$1,805. Loadings for Aboriginal children aged 3 years or older will increase from \$3,300 to \$5,270, and preschools in remote areas will have a 45% increase in service loadings.

To help services transition to the new model, no preschool will receive less funding in the first two years

This reform is the largest seen in the community preschool sector and will benefit significant numbers of preschool aged children.

Other achievements in early childhood education include fee reductions in community preschools to make early childhood education more accessible to NSW families. This year the NSW Government made a one-off allocation of \$20 million to enable the average daily fee for four- and five-year-olds to drop by 23%

Also announced this year was \$5 million in capital funding to expand preschools places in areas of unmet demand. For instance, there are areas of regional NSW that need more preschool places, so the NSW Government made a one-off capital funding boost so preschools in these areas can offer more places.

The NSW Government has also worked to improve the quality of education and care services for young children across the sector. The National Quality Framework is helping services identify both their strengths and areas for improvement, to ensure children are getting the most out of their early learning experiences.

Another area of focus for the government in Early Childhood has been the transition to school, and lifting the professional standards of early childhood education staff.



When the next group of five-year-olds start school in 2014 they will be part of the most significant reform period in public education in this State for a century. While this reform will not happen immediately, in 10 years' time we will have transformed our system of school organisation and will have addressed teacher quality at every stage of a teacher's career.

Local Schools, Local Decisions and Great Teaching, Inspired Learning

Our shared purpose for a high-performing education system is one where improved student outcomes are driven by great teaching, local decision-making and a culture of innovation. Students are at the centre of every policy decision we make and every dollar we spend.

The education reform journey in NSW began with the release of *Local Schools, Local Decisions*.

The government recently launched the *Great Teaching, Inspired Learning Implementation Update*, putting into action strategies that will allow a number of the objectives of *Local Schools, Local Decisions* to be achieved.

Evidence tells us that quality teaching and leadership is at the heart of a strong and robust education system, but the system itself cannot constrain improvement.

The aim of the *Local Schools, Local Decisions* reform agenda is to release schools from the industrial era constraints of a command and control bureaucracy – and, having done that, we need to turn our attention to the post-industrial workforce through our *Great Teaching, Inspired Learning* reforms.

We are lifting both the capability of current and future teachers and school leaders through *Great Teaching, Inspired Learning* and making organisational change to support schools in an environment of increased local authority.

Removing system constraints around schools' organisational innovation and agility is a key enabling reform. The system's financial and organisational structures are being decentralised through measures like resource management through the RAM, and accountability measures that will be implemented over the next three years.



These establish the foundation for a more dynamic learning culture led by professional educators working in schools.

A lot of cultural change is occurring in schools as we implement these reforms, but at every step of the way we are making sure that principals and teachers are trained, equipped and supported to make good decisions and exercise their professional judgement.

Under *Great Teaching, Inspired Learning* greater emphasis is placed on ensuring that schools have the best staff and that we develop their leadership skills to meet our current and future needs.

We want the best and brightest candidates to study teaching, and we have recently announced a new rural scholarship program, new positions for school-leavers to work as paraprofessionals in schools as interns, and cadetships for final-year university students to gain classroom experience before graduation.

Some in the University sector are not thrilled with the entry bar for HSC entrants being set at 3 Band 5 results, one of which must be English. But this reform came from listening to the profession, who emphasised the importance of setting minimum entry standards for teacher training courses.

Once teachers are in the classroom, however, we want to improve the support we provide to beginning teachers and we recently announced the tripling of support for our teachers in their early years in the classroom.

From next year all permanent beginning teachers in NSW government schools will have two hours per week release time, to support the development of their skills in their first year. They will also have access to an experienced teacher who will be given one hour per week release to provide mentoring and support. Teachers will also be provided with one hour per week of release time in their second year.



Going forward, the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers will apply to all our teachers, ensuring performance development and management, professional learning and structured feedback throughout a teacher's career. Outstanding practice will be recognised and rewarded.

Strengthening school leadership is a key reform under *Great Teaching, Inspired Learning*. We will be moving to a standards-based career structure for teachers with a stronger focus on succession planning, leadership development and the showcasing and sharing of best practice.

Proposals are being developed to align salary progression to the attainment of the Professional Teaching Standards and will be negotiated as part of the 2014 Teachers Award.

The Department will support teachers who aspire to be principals and offer more support for current principals so they can lead great teaching in their schools.

Local Schools, Local Decisions commits the Department to school leaders having leadership and management credentials before being eligible for leadership positions.

Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards

Last month the Government announced another measure to bring together the three cornerstones of education standards – curriculum, student assessment and teacher quality under a single authority to be known as the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards.

This reform will amalgamate the responsibilities of the Board of Studies and the NSW Institute of Teachers to create a new governance body.

How effective our teachers are in the classroom ultimately hinges on their understanding of the curriculum, their capacity to assess students and the maintenance of their professional skills, so it makes sense to have just one organisation responsible for the integrated functions.

The Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards builds on the principles of *Great Teaching, Inspired Learning* to improve teacher quality and some of the core measures will be delivered through the new board.



These measures will include all teachers knowing curriculum requirements, all teachers meeting literacy and numeracy requirements of their subject areas, all teachers trained to analyse student outcomes data, and all new HSC entrants to teacher education meeting standards of achievement in HSC English and other subjects.

Every Student, Every School

I hope I am making the point strongly that every policy we have in place is based on student need.

One of these targeted policies is *Every Student, Every School* which applies to every public school in New South Wales. Every regular public school, whether it is in an urban or rural community, now has immediate access to a specialist learning and support teacher position, as well as flexible funding support for those students with additional learning and support needs because of disability.

Next year more than \$42 million of flexible funding will be allocated directly to our regular public schools.

Furthermore, to build our special schools as centres of expertise, there are 76 separate projects in progress in 95 special schools with each project including strategies for networking with other schools to share expertise and specialist resources.

I am particularly impressed with the professional learning opportunities that are building the capabilities of the workforce in our schools, like the Disability Standards for Education e-learning course, which outlines staff obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and the Disability Standards for Education 2005. This course has already been completed by more than 11,000 employees from our schools.

Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan

I would also like to mention the great progress occurring under the *Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan* to turn around the performance of the lowest achieving schools by focusing on quality instructional leadership and an emphasis on the needs of individual students and early intervention.



Similarly, *Connected Communities* which is targeting 15 schools in 11 communities, is progressing well and already we are seeing better attendance and enrolment figures and, most importantly, genuine partnerships being forged between the schools, their local communities, Aboriginal groups and government and non-government agencies.

This is a radical policy and the challenges are many but we are determined to turn around the achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

Future Reform

As a Government we have had the political courage to make decisions that were not always popular—like being the first state or territory to sign up to the National School Improvement Plan. We did this because many of the proposed reforms mirrored what we already had in place, or were developing, and we could see the obvious funding benefit to our students.

As principals and teachers continue to tell me, there is no one size that fits all in the classroom – and that has been the case with education reform. Sometimes there has been a universal approach, like providing more release time for all beginning teachers, but we have still given principals the flexibility to timetable that release time – a school may perhaps bank that time so the new teacher has a half day with his or her mentor, for example.

At other times we have looked at the level and type of educational disadvantage and addressed it on a geographical basis.

One of my first acts after I was sworn in as Minister was to successfully negotiate an agreement in April 2011 between state, territory and commonwealth education ministers to make the rural and urban education divide a priority of the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood.

The guiding principle across all of these reforms, however, has been ensuring that all policy decisions are based in evidence, as opposed to what is popular or politically convenient. As



International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change. www.ijicc.net
Volume 1, Issue 2, November 2013

government, we will continue to seek feedback and expert knowledge, so that we are always developing policy to address student need based on the evidence of what works in schools.

ⁱ Speech by the Hon Adrian Piccoli MP Primary Principals Association (PPA) Annual Conference Opening Ceremony 8:45 am Wednesday, 23 October 2013 Sofitel Sydney Wentworth Hotel