



Education &
Communities

Local Schools, Local Decisions

Discussion paper



Introduction

Schools have been doing a great job in our complex education system. We want to support them to do a better job.

Students are at the centre of everything we do. Quality teaching improves student learning. We have a responsibility to provide quality teaching for every student in every classroom.

School principals and teachers are constantly making decisions about individual students and catering for their unique needs. Students have different learning needs and decisions about what works best for them are discussed every day.

Our current rules and processes can make it hard for principals and teachers to respond quickly to these issues. It can be very frustrating when a decision that is made in the best interests of a student is hindered by a process that just doesn't quite fit. Parents can find this difficult to understand as well.

If we want to change this approach and improve student outcomes, we have to start by giving the teachers and principals who work with students every day more authority to adapt what they do and how they do it to meet the needs of their students.

The NSW Government is committed to giving greater control over school decision making to principals, teachers and school communities.

It's about local schools making local decisions, because they are best placed to know about the particular needs of a particular school and community.



As a teacher and parent I understand the importance of making sure we have a

system that supports schools to respond to the individual needs of children in the classroom, and not one that tries to impose a one size fits all approach.

This consultation process is an exciting opportunity to reshape the way the Department operates by empowering schools to make more decisions to improve the quality of the teaching in their classrooms and improve the learning outcomes for all students.

The feedback we receive will help determine how we implement this important piece of education reform.

I thank you for your time and your feedback.

Warm regards,

Michele Bruniges

Director-General of Education and Communities

Managing Director of TAFE NSW

The NSW Government is committed to increasing local decision making in schools to improve teaching and learning.

This Discussion Paper sets out some ideas and questions for consultation with principals, teachers, school and other staff, parents, students and the broader community on how to achieve the best outcomes for students.

It is intended to facilitate a conversation about who is best placed to make decisions in and about our schools. It is designed to

elicit feedback about how to increase the quality, flexibility and relevance of public education in NSW.

Feedback from the consultation process will inform the next steps that the Department will take to support local decision making.

Improving outcomes

Positive academic and social outcomes for our students are the central focus of everything we do. However, to achieve good outcomes for students, we must also consider

the needs of our parents, the community and staff, and optimise the use of assets, infrastructure and finance. This must all be supported by good leadership and management practices. All of these elements are required to develop an integrated framework with students as our focus.

Decisions in schools, regions and the state office

In our current structure decisions are made across three contexts: schools,

regions and the state office. Our system is highly centralised compared with other high performing education systems around the world. There are many decisions being made centrally that could be made in schools. This could help to simplify some of the complexity around the way that schools operate and enable local schools to be more responsive to local needs.

Our regions and state office have important roles in providing resources and support, such as information and advice, maintaining an appropriate policy framework, coordinating programs, ensuring accountability for performance, facilitating communication and sharing best practice. To identify which decisions the school, the region and the state office are best placed to make, we need to consider the advantages of each of these three contexts.

Schools

Decisions made in schools offer the most relevance to the needs of individual students and staff. Schools focus on achieving the best outcomes for their current cohort of students, parents, communities and staff. Since most of the direct actions

and decisions that affect student outcomes take place in schools, it makes sense that schools should have most of the authority in these areas.

Regions

Regions respond to the needs of many schools across a larger geographical area, not just a single school. This bigger picture view still takes account of local need, but helps to ensure the equitable distribution of resources across schools or to target specific areas of need.

Regions monitor school performance and compliance with policy and legislation through line management accountabilities. They can also improve efficiency and consistency by reducing duplication of effort and ensuring that policy and services are delivered fairly and consistently. Regions are generally focused on a time period longer than that in schools, which means that regions are well suited to making decisions that have implications over a long time period, such as major building assets.

Regions are also well placed to support schools in other ways, such as by providing specialist resources shared across schools, and by

encouraging collaboration and resource sharing between schools.

State Office

The state office establishes and maintains the policy framework within which schools and regions operate. This framework is derived in part from government policy and legislation. It should also be responsive, wherever possible, to the needs of schools. The state office is also a key source of expertise and advice to regions, schools and stakeholder groups, particularly in highly specialised areas.

The state office has advantages of efficiency due to economies of scale, and consistency due to the ability to coordinate and implement decisions across multiple contexts. This big picture focus is well suited to allocating resources across the system based on need and organisational priority. The state office has the longest time period perspective and is therefore the appropriate place for decisions with very long term implications, such as changes to the policy framework within which schools operate.

Notes:

Making decisions

The outcomes of students in the world's top performing schools show that systems that support school based innovation and decision making tend to perform better than those that don't.

The NSW public school education system is relatively centralised compared with other Western systems. This limits the flexibility and authority of schools to make local decisions that best suit their students.

The people best placed to know the educational needs of students are their teachers, their school leaders and their parents, in short, the local school community.

School principals are the people best placed to bring together the local school community, listen to them, and then make important decisions about how best to use the school's resources to maximise the benefit to students.

These are not easy decisions and many schools have operating budgets of millions of dollars so there need to be appropriate checks and balances in schools, and throughout the Department, to make sure public money is used wisely.

To improve student learning we need to make changes so that:

- Local decisions to improve teaching and learning are made by the school working with its local community.
- The right decisions are made by people in schools and across the system, who are accountable to manage resources and deliver a quality education for all students.

Tell us what you think

- What types of decisions currently made by the state office and regions should be shifted to schools?
- What accountability processes should be in place?

Establishing who is best placed to make decisions is critical to ensuring positive outcomes. The key sections of this Discussion Paper will explore this in greater detail in relation to:

- managing resources;
- staff in our schools;
- working locally; and
- reducing red tape.

First, we must be clear about the outcomes we want our schools and our system to achieve. With these outcomes clearly defined

and understood, we can delegate authority, funding, and accountability to the person or people in the system best placed to deliver the outcomes.

No one should be called to account for something over which they have no authority, and no one should have authority to make decisions for which they are not accountable. Having authority and accountability for a particular decision should also include control over the relevant funding.

Working with the local community

It is important to recognise the diversity of school contexts in NSW. Schools develop strong partnerships with local communities over many years and may have local governance arrangements, such as a school council, an Aboriginal Education Consultative Group and/or a Parents and Citizens Association. These local arrangements do not replace the authority and accountability of the principal, school staff and the school education director. Local community

organisations do not have authority to make decisions, because they cannot be held accountable for outcomes.

Communities can provide additional resources and expertise to support the school, including advice on the school's strategic direction and local priorities. Many parents, community members and organisations generously volunteer their time and services to support their local schools. Local parent and community engagement will continue to be essential to the success of schools.

Being accountable

The people in our system who have authority and control of resources will be accountable for the outcomes they achieve.

We need high quality information to be available to decision makers so that they can adjust their strategies and performance over time, and to line managers so that they can support decision makers to make better decisions.

NSW public schools are part of an interdependent state-wide system. At present, the responsibilities of individuals are not always clear and are sometimes spread across many different parts of the system. This can make it difficult for school leaders and others in our system to exercise their authority and understand their accountabilities.

When we increase the authority of local schools to make more local decisions, we must also develop

an appropriate accountability framework that reflects the authority and resources available to decision makers. This includes recognising high performance, as well as identifying and improving performance where it could be better. The accountability framework defines not only who should have authority and therefore be accountable for outcomes, but also how we should ensure that accountability.

Every school has a school plan that identifies priorities and allocates resources to achieve the school's targets. It is therefore a key instrument of accountability and communicates the focus of the school to the community. With increased local decision making, the school plan will become even more important.

Notes:

Managing resources

Each year we invest more than \$9 billion in NSW public schools. Making sure every dollar is used wisely to get the best outcomes for students and to promote quality teaching in all our schools is vital. This means we need decisions about how that money is spent being made by the right people, with the right skills, and having an obligation to show what was achieved.

In most cases, schools are currently allocated resources like staff, utilities and equipment according to complex formulas. These formulas are generally based on student numbers and don't take account of the other factors that affect the costs of delivering good outcomes in schools.

The way we currently support schools that have students with complex needs is through centrally run programs. There are special rules and guidelines attached to many of these programs. These rules limit the flexibility of our schools to focus their efforts, and their resources, on achieving key priorities.

The rules generate a lot of paperwork and take schools away from focusing on teaching and learning.

Schools are best placed to know how to use their resources to meet the needs of their students and staff. We want schools to control a larger proportion of the total education budget, and to have more flexibility to listen to the ideas of teachers, support staff and parents when catering to the needs of students.

To achieve better student outcomes we need changes so that:

- Schools directly manage an increased percentage of the total education budget, including the budget for school-based staff.
- Funding allocations to schools reflect the complexity of the school and its students.
- Schools have the flexibility to respond to student needs by managing a single overall budget rather than many small program budgets.

Increasing the proportion of the total education budget managed by schools

NSW public schools currently control a small proportion of the total education budget compared with other high performing education systems around the world. In our centralised system, the majority of funding is controlled by the state office and regions.

Schools receive a budget for some expenses, but the majority of funds

spent on and in schools, including the salaries for school-based staff, are controlled centrally.

A number of educational programs are also administered by the state office and regions. Schools need to apply and meet strict selection criteria and reporting requirements for programs which provide additional funds and services, such as teachers with specialist skills. The salaries of regional and centrally-based staff, as well as the costs of support materials and infrastructure are part of the costs of these programs.

Tell us what you think

- What types of resources currently managed by the state office or regions should be shifted to the school budget?
- What local factors should be used to determine funding allocations to schools?
- Which of these factors are most important?
- How can we streamline and simplify school budgets and reporting to increase local flexibility?
- What accountability processes should be in place?

School leaders across NSW have identified that they would like to manage more of the total resources required to operate their schools. Some resources currently managed by regions or the state office could be used more flexibly and effectively if managed at a local level.

Budgets should reflect complexity

Although the number of students affects the total cost of running a school, not all school communities are the same. Local complexities make a difference to how much it costs to provide opportunities for all students across the system to succeed. Therefore the allocation of funding should differ to reflect these complexities, such as low socio-economic status, remoteness, refugee students, Aboriginal students, students with specific learning needs, students with disabilities and early career teachers.

There are also differences in the costs of maintaining our schools depending on the size, age, type and condition of the buildings and assets. These vary between schools in ways that are independent of the characteristics of school communities. For example some of our schools are heritage listed, while others are brand new. Budget allocations for maintenance

should therefore be determined by the condition of the buildings and assets, rather than just the number of students enrolled in the school.

Flexible decision making with a single overall budget

Principals and teachers are constantly making decisions about the needs of individual students and schools. Our current rules and processes can make it hard to respond quickly, with centralised processes sometimes frustrating decisions in the best interests of a student.

In many cases, funds directly managed by schools are provided as tied grants that can only be spent on particular things in particular ways. This is complicated and makes it more difficult to manage school budgets to improve outcomes. A total overall budget that can be flexibly applied to the school's priorities provides more opportunities to deliver innovative programs to meet student needs.

For example, a school may be eligible for a number of centrally administered programs that target particular areas of student need, such as low socio-economic status, refugees, new arrivals, English as a Second Language, and specific literacy programs. For each of these programs, the school may be required to apply separately, plan separately and report separately. These requirements may be duplicated across the state office, region and communities of schools. The amount of time and effort required to jump through these administrative hoops, often for quite small funding allocations, means that the school has less time to focus on the actual needs of students.

School leaders have suggested that more flexibility in planning and making decisions within a single overall budget would enable them to focus on delivering better outcomes for students.

Notes:

Staff in our schools

It is well established that teacher quality is the single greatest in-school influence on student engagement and outcomes. Teacher quality, professionalism, and collaboration are essential keys to school improvement. School leaders and teachers should be able to be continuously engaged in a process of reflection, professional assessment and professional development.

Schools also need administrative and other types of specialist support, to free up teaching staff and school leaders to get

on with the job of educating our students. However not all schools need the same types of support. Schools should be able to design a mix of support staff as part of their overall budget, to get the balance right across educational and other types of work in schools.

Currently our approaches to staffing are driven by "one size fits all" formulas. We would like to give our whole system, and especially our schools, the flexibility to adapt their staffing mix to local need.

Every school is different, with different challenges. For instance some schools have students whose needs are more complex: some schools are in remote and isolated communities, or in communities with less educational advantages, some schools have a focus on the performing arts, on sports, on agriculture, and some are academically selective. At the moment we pay principals based on the numbers of students in their school, and we don't take account of the complexity of the school and its community.

We want to improve our processes so that:

- The needs of students drive the mixture of staff, including teaching, leadership and support positions.
- The culture of professional, quality teaching is enhanced because principals have increased local authority to make decisions about teacher performance, professional learning and program delivery.
- Principal salary and classification are linked to school complexity not just student numbers.

Tell us what you think

- What authority should schools have to determine and select the right mix of staff?
- What authority should principals have to manage teacher performance?
- How should principals build staff capability and align staff professional learning to best meet local needs?
- What types of programs currently managed by the state office or in regions should be shifted to schools?
- What accountability processes should be in place?
- How should principal classification be determined?

The mix of staff in our schools

Teachers in our public schools are qualified professionals and an increasing proportion of them are accredited by the NSW Institute of Teachers. Teaching is complex work and is a key contributor to improving student learning outcomes.

Placement of teachers in schools currently starts with a centralised staffing process. Approximately 60 percent of teacher placements are made in this way, although this varies greatly across schools. For the

remaining placements, schools can choose from options that include selecting a graduate, selecting a staff member from a pool, and recruiting through a local merit selection process.

Currently the mix of roles in a school is largely determined by a one size fits all formula based on student numbers and is administered centrally. This leaves schools with little flexibility to design both teaching and support roles to meet student needs. As these needs change over time, the appropriate mix of roles, skills and experience may also change. The

ability to create a staffing mix to maximise outcomes for the current cohort of students will ensure that all of our resources are directed to where they will most improve teaching and learning.

The centralised system has made some efforts to support schools with more flexible staffing. Schools indicate that these changes have not gone far enough. With increased local flexibility schools will be even better placed to respond to the needs of students. Our current information systems and tools don't easily support this increased flexibility. With the

integrated Learning Management and Business Reform (LMBR) Program replacing many of these outdated systems, we will have the tools that schools leaders and other school staff need to support them.

Managing teacher performance

In schools across NSW we have excellent teachers who are demonstrating outstanding practice. Quality teaching in schools has been recognised as the most important in-school factor in improving student outcomes. We want to make our system even better at supporting teachers to continuously improve their practice.

Effective leadership and management are vital to maintaining and improving teacher performance in schools. The performance, attitudes, values, and beliefs of individual staff members contribute to the overall culture of a team or context.

Over recent years, school leaders have developed systems within individual schools to support and maintain teacher accreditation with the NSW Institute of Teachers. Processes also exist in relation to assessment review schedules for teachers, executive and school leaders. The shared accountabilities across all contexts can make it difficult to know who has the authority to manage a particular issue.

Performance and conduct are best addressed within the context where they occur. Empowering leaders to fairly and actively manage all aspects of the performance of their staff requires that they clearly understand and are supported to exercise their authority. An integrated framework that supports performance management, planning and development for all leaders and staff should clearly align roles,

authority, capability, accountability and performance standards.

Managing professional learning

Schools receive an allocation of funding to meet the professional learning needs of teaching staff. The NSW Institute of Teachers Act (2004) established a set of professional standards that describe the knowledge and skills required of teachers at key stages of their careers. The introduction of National Professional Teaching Standards and the National Professional Standard for Principals will support further alignment of skills and practice with professional learning.

We need to streamline the current range of offerings and processes to make it easier for schools to develop and implement a professional learning strategy that meets local needs.

Delivering programs

Many innovative and successful educational programs are currently being delivered across all three contexts of the NSW public school system – schools, regions and the state office.

The state office currently delivers central programs, such as Reading Recovery, Literacy on Track and Best Start, and in most cases funding allocations for these programs are made to regions and schools based on a range of criteria. Schools are required to spend these funds on initiatives related to a specific program, and are also required to report separately on how funds were expended. The emphasis is often on how resources were used, rather than on the outcomes that were achieved.

Regions offer specialist services to support schools. Some examples include literacy and numeracy

consultants, home school liaison officers and itinerant behaviour teachers. In many cases, funding could be more equitably and flexibly managed to help students if directly allocated to schools.

Schools can identify the most appropriate ways to meet the needs of their students. This would increase the scope for greater innovation and creativity in program delivery in the classroom, across a school and within groups of schools.

Classifying schools and principals

School classification is currently driven by student numbers, without regard to the local complexities of the school. This classification determines staffing entitlements, the principal's salary and other centrally allocated resources.

A small increase or decrease in the number of students can dramatically change the funding, staffing and other resources allocated to a school. These large fluctuations in resources make it difficult for schools to plan and manage sustainably over time. A funding and classification model driven by student need and complexity will be more consistent.

When schools manage more of their total resources, the levels of authority and accountability will also change. The salary of the principal should reflect the complexity of the school in the same way that funding should reflect the complexity of the school.

Working locally

Often there are times when schools purchasing goods, or getting maintenance work done, or getting some other services provided, can get a better deal from local suppliers. We want to give schools the authority to identify the best value approach for them and to make their own purchasing decisions.

Large school systems also need to purchase a wide range of resources. Sometimes, because the Department buys so much of a particular item, we can get better value for money from a bulk contract. Schools should also have the option to take advantage of state-wide contracts.

One of the benefits of having a system of connected schools is that groups of schools can work together, and share resources and facilities to provide a better education for the students at the schools. This means that local budgets, especially for small schools, can go further and be more effective when schools work together.

We want to work locally so that:

- Schools have more authority to make local decisions about maintenance and purchasing, including the use of local tradespeople and businesses where they offer better value.
- Schools have more opportunities to meet their local needs by working together and combining resources (eg curriculum delivery, shared facilities, staff) within communities of schools, and across our large network of schools.

Tell us what you think

- What maintenance and purchasing decisions currently made by the state office and regions should be shifted to schools?
- How can we better facilitate sharing of resources between schools?
- What accountability processes should be in place?

Schools working locally

A school is an important part of its local community. Many schools have built strong and effective partnerships with local businesses and service providers. Currently our centralised procurement systems can slow down or frustrate schools and local communities who are trying to work together. This is particularly important in rural and remote communities.

There are benefits associated with being part of a large centralised system with economies of scale that enable us to negotiate goods and

services that offer better value over the long term. The Digital Education Revolution is a successful example of a state-wide procurement process which provided laptop computers, software and support across all secondary schools in NSW.

School leaders have identified working locally as a particular area in which increased local decision making will lead to better local outcomes.

Schools working together

Schools can currently work together to combine their resources so they can do more for their students and staff. This often happens in the context of communities of schools which form strong and lasting relationships.

Resource sharing is common across NSW public schools. Some examples include:

- sharing expertise in a community of schools where all teachers benefit from the experience and knowledge of a teacher with outstanding skills;
- sharing a business manager who manages a number of smaller school budgets, freeing up time for teaching principals to work with educational programs in the school; and
- sharing a general assistant to keep grounds mowed and tidy, allowing schools to use other general assistant allocation funding to prioritise minor maintenance issues.

We want to make it easier for schools and communities to share resources for the benefit of staff, students and the broader community.

Notes:

Reducing red tape

The priority in our schools is teaching and learning. We want to cut red tape in the system and remove any work practices that get in the way of quality teaching and student learning. Removing or streamlining as many processes as possible will make our Department more efficient and more focused on supporting teachers in the classroom.

Good decisions are made by people who have the most up to date and accurate information.

To help schools make better decisions we need to build better information systems for them to use. We also need better information for the rest of the organisation to support decisions that help schools.

School plans are important in every school. Strengthening the role of school plans so that every member of staff in the school is focused on the teaching, learning and management outcomes that they are responsible for will help give schools a unifying and encompassing focus.

Currently principals and school staff have to navigate a complicated and disconnected collection of policies, procedures, guidelines and regulations. Having to know and adhere to all of these can leave principals and staff feeling overwhelmed. We want to simplify the policy framework that schools operate in to make it easier for them to safely and effectively lead their schools.

We want to simplify school administration so that:

- Schools have reduced paperwork and red tape by reporting against their own school plans instead of a complex range of separate programs.

Tell us what you think

- What can we stop doing or do differently to minimise paperwork and red tape?
- What current reporting can we consolidate into the school planning and reporting process?

Streamlining processes

There are a number of bureaucratic processes in our current system that hinder efficiency and create delays. We need to identify processes and practices that can be streamlined. Some of these complex processes include:

- the procedures associated with the selection process;
- reporting requirements, such as demographic information (eg English as a Second Language numbers and refugee numbers)

and other information, such as suspension numbers, attendance numbers, HSC course numbers, NAPLAN exemption numbers, number of students in special education settings; and

- documentation and bureaucratic processes around Work Health and Safety.

A number of educational programs that are managed at regional and state level have their own planning and reporting requirements as part of regional and state accountability. Incorporating a range of reporting

requirements into one process would provide opportunities to reduce red tape. The information systems and tools that support schools will be improved through the LMBR program. This will help to reduce duplication and red tape.

Our priority is to focus on teaching and learning. Wherever possible we are committed to minimising paperwork that does not directly benefit learning outcomes.

Conclusion

The Department of Education and Communities will be working with principals, teachers, support staff, parents and the community to look closely at how we can enable schools to make better decisions and achieve the best outcomes for students.

Initial consultation will be undertaken from 15 September to 18 November 2011, with a view to defining next steps by February 2012.

We understand that this will need to be a gradual process. Making sure staff in our schools are ready, with the right tools, and the right skills is essential.

We value your input into the consultation process. Everyone with an interest in public education is invited to contribute to the conversation. To see how you can contribute please visit www.schools.nsw.edu.au/lslld.

Notes:



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