

---

**NEW MODEL OF SUPPORT TO SCHOOLS  
AS PROPOSED BY DEC PUBLIC SCHOOLS NSW PORTFOLIO  
NSWPPA / NSWSPC / PSPF - RESPONSE TO THE MINISTER FOR  
EDUCATION**

12<sup>th</sup> December 2012

**OVERVIEW**

- **As representatives of NSW Principals' Associations, we recognise the proposed State Office and Regional realignments as a means by which DEC can fit service provision within the Government's 'budgetary envelope'. However, while the proposals have been presented as a necessary 'cultural shift', we see little if any evidence that such a shift is needed, desired or driven from the ground up. This is essential if major 'cultural' change is to be embraced in a system as vast as Public Education in NSW. Our understanding is that any budgetary constraints impacting on DEC service delivery will be factored-in to the 2013 – 2014 State Budget, which gives us time to collaboratively work on meeting these constraints, while minimising any potential loss of essential services and support to schools. We are calling for a halt to any further implementation of this model pending a fully collaborative approach being undertaken from now through Semester 1 2013.**
- Further, no rationale based on evaluation or research has been undertaken, to our knowledge, on the effectiveness or otherwise of the current systems. Whilst over 360 positions were removed from the current regionally based workforce, there has been little, if any, information provided on how the services and support for schools provided through these positions will be provided in the new model. We have been advised that the new role statements were to be developed in a collaborative manner. Of the three new positions, the School Leadership Officer was the only position that provided an opportunity to employ new personnel. The importance, therefore, of getting this role statement collaboratively developed, is absolutely central to the hope of genuine 'cultural reform'. Logically, the School Leadership Officer role statement would be developed after the other roles were developed in collaboration with the Principals' Associations and the currently displaced personnel placed into their equivalent roles in the new structure. To date, no detailed description of any new roles has been provided.
- **This year alone has seen schools in 'change-overload', preparing for 'Local Schools Local Decisions', 'Every Student Every School', the total replacement of finance and student administration systems through LMBR and the imminent implementation of an Australian Curriculum - all without any guaranteed future funding from the Commonwealth under the Gonski recommendations and overlaid by State Government announcements about cuts to education funding. In addition to the above changes impacting on every school, some schools are also affected by further changes through, for example 'Connected Communities', 'Early Action for Success' and the 'Empowering Local Schools' National Partnership some of which have been implemented less than successfully.**
- Throughout the consultation about the proposed new model, there have been repeated references to 2013 being a transitional year as this new 'cultural shift' occurs. We do not believe that transition can occur effectively when, in December 2012, there is no timeline for moving from an 'old model' to a 'new model' on such an extensive scale. Questions must be answered on what schools are expected to do and what parts of the 'old model' will be maintained in Term 1, what parts of the 'new model' will be effectively in place in Term 2, in Term 3 and in Term 4.
- **Given the concerns expressed by Principals, we call for a halt to any proposed 'cultural shifts' until more collaboration can occur about the probable impact on our Public Schools and how best practice in change management will be implemented.**

## KEY POINTS

1. The new model will demand greater accountability and more local authority for Principals. Whilst the State Office realignment offers some levels of support, NSW will become the only State in the Commonwealth to attempt to implement a devolved model, moving workload and responsibility to schools, without providing additional administrative support, including executive release in Primary Schools and Business Managers where required. This will have the greatest impact on NSW Public Schools, which have the highest student/teacher ratios and the poorest levels of executive release in the nation. For a devolved model to deliver true gains for students these resources will need to be factored in to budget estimates for 2013 - 2014.
2. The support of all Principals but particularly new and relieving Principals has been progressively dismantled with the removal of the Principal Support Officers and Staff Welfare Officers and the dismantling of the PLLD Directorate. These positions need to be immediately reinstated at levels sufficient to provide authentic support.
3. The DD-G Schools must publish a clear statement of roles and expectations of Principals and a clear 'line of sight' so that Principals can access system support under the proposed Local Schools Local Decisions model. The Principals' Associations, prior to and during the consultation stages, have repeatedly recommended this.
4. Many of the day-to-day issues with which Principals are involved in leading and managing their schools are matters within the Public Schools NSW Portfolio, but many are related to the Corporate Services Portfolio, including Staffing, Finance, LMBR, Teacher Performance & Conduct, WHS and Site Maintenance. It is of concern to Principals that no consultation or collaboration with the Principals' Associations has occurred about any 'cultural shift' that may be planned for the Corporate Services Portfolio. This is of particular concern when there is an overlapping of Portfolio responsibility and Principals need to communicate with the two State Office Portfolio areas as well as the regional or local equivalents e.g. the provision of support for improving teacher performance, staff welfare and Workcover management. We understand that, while Corporate Services provision to schools will remain in its current form at the present time, there will be changes made in the foreseeable future that may, or may not, be aligned to changes in Public Schools NSW Portfolio. This has the potential to further affect the way in which schools operate for the benefit of their students.

## MAJOR AREAS OF CONCERN

### Roles and Responsibilities

- The absence of clear role statements for all non-school based positions is a key point preventing any genuine attempt to interpret the potential positive or negative impact on students, staff, Principals and schools. This is a genuine opportunity to undertake a 'cultural shift', with role statements collaboratively developed with the Principals' Associations, but it will require time and a genuine approach to 'get it right'.
- The presentation of the revised structure was difficult for Principals to access, interpret, navigate and compare to the first version and recognising changes and developments was a cumbersome process.
- There is still a lack of clarity around the relationship between the Directors of Schools and Principals. How does the new role differ from the current School Education Director role?

- The DD-G Schools has commented: *“I want to make it very clear that the dynamic, interactive, professionally enriching connections, relationships and partnerships between Principals, teachers, schools and school communities are not to be restricted in any way by the Principal/Director relationship.”* What will this mean in practice when, for example, there is a disagreement over the contents of a school’s plan? Will, for instance, Directors be required to ‘sign off’ on school plans?

### **Relationships between Schools and State Office**

- The concept of ‘line of sight’ between the newly realigned Schools Portfolio at the State Office level and the services in the new model remains unclear for the majority of Principals.
- The transition strategy and timeline to continue to provide support to schools for Equity and Multicultural /ESL education is not articulated.
- There is ongoing concern regarding the loss of corporate knowledge when people leave positions in State and Regional Offices and/or when school programs are cut. This will have a direct impact on students. The concept of schools or Communities of Schools ‘brokering’ their own specialists for ESL/CLOs etc has the potential to be fragmented, ineffective and time consuming. With the loss of the expertise mentioned above, who will fill a co-ordinating role to ensure effective delivery at a school level?
- Principal Advisory Groups, Reference Groups and similar have provided an opportunity for Principals to give input into State and Regional programs. They enabled senior officers and school leaders to work more closely together. These groups or similar, do not seem possible in the proposed model. As a result, respondents felt this was another example of successful, positive and productive links being broken down. We believe they must remain central to the decision-making process, regardless of the structure of the day.
- DD-G Schools has commented, *“I’ve talked about 2013 as a transition year. In many ways it will be business as usual, particularly for semester one, 2013.”* If this is the case why is this consultation being rushed through at the end of a school year when those most affected are least able to respond? Can the consultation be extended until the end of Term 1, 2013 by which time the NSWPPA and others will be able to see the role descriptions and other essential information that has yet to be provided?
- How will an Executive Director or DD-G be able to evaluate the quality of the relationship with Principals? Directors, it seems, will only have a snapshot of schools from centrally-held data. A holistic picture of a school will not be able to be developed.

### **Curriculum Support and Professional Learning**

- Effective syllabus implementation is a significant factor in ensuring high quality teaching in NSW Public Education and must be supported through the individual professional development of all teachers regardless of their placement within our system. We are encouraged to celebrate any new syllabus as a positive opportunity for enhancing pedagogy within our schools. It is acknowledged that Principals are to be the key drivers of the implementation of the new Australian Curriculum and as such, we need to ensure that Principals are supported in this process. Is the intention that one curriculum support person will provide English advice in each ‘network’, one maths person and so on? How can such a provision be effective when everyone will require the support at exactly the same time? The reduction of curriculum support personnel is being countered within the new model by a significant increase in online professional learning, to be led within schools by Principals and executive. Such educational leadership must be supported in every primary school through the provision of executive release, exactly as it is currently provided in secondary schools, so that effective and quality professional learning takes place.

- Will there be face-to-face professional learning provided for Principals? The plethora of online courses available is not a substitute for authentic professional discourse.
- Large-scale compliance and other mandatory professional learning have both been delivered on a regional basis. How will this be progressed in the new design?

### **Principal Support**

**The overwhelming view of Principals is that this model does not support Principals and schools to do their job. The model appears to be driven and conceptualised by the need for schools to fit a business model and this concern is reflected in reports emanating from LSLD and LMBR workshops, whereby what works for schools is sometimes overwhelmed by what fits the business model or Treasury reporting requirements.**

- There is consistent comment on the removal of the Principal Liaison Officers (Support). Despite reassurances from senior DEC personnel, these roles have not been adequately covered by other personnel. We suggest that the reinstatement of the PLO positions, with one placed in each of the five areas across the State would be a significant step towards providing a model that supports successful relationships throughout the system.
- The Staff Welfare Officer is a position that was previously well-utilised by Principals, particularly when there were issues of staff conflict. Although these positions are technically in the Corporate Services portfolio, the Schools Portfolio realignment should address this type of reduction in services to schools. Who will be available to advise Principals under the new model?
- The new model will demand greater Principal accountability and autonomy. Whilst the State Office offers some levels of support, NSW will become the only state in the Commonwealth to attempt to implement a devolved model, moving workload and responsibility to schools, without providing additional administrative support.
- This is even more problematic because NSW public primary schools are the worst resourced in the nation in terms of student/teacher ratios and executive release.
- The proposed model creates a variety of different officers to relate to schools and Principals. Their duties appear to be spread too thinly, leading to diminished knowledge and understanding of each Principal's situation. Without deep knowledge and understanding, the advice and support provided by these Officers will be more generic and superficial.
- Our Principal colleagues are often beginning and/or inexperienced school leaders, working and living in remote/isolated communities. Collegial support is developed from an individual perspective, however systems support is essential to equip Principals with the skills, knowledge and resilience required to survive and thrive in these communities. Who will have responsibility for this and how will it be delivered?

### **Other Issues with the proposed new model and options for consideration**

- Can the DEC Public Schools NSW Portfolio ensure a much higher level of quality IT support to ensure online delivery will actually work in remote areas? Current proposals do not support this.
- **Has a risk-management assessment been commissioned to determine the probable impact on schools of such a 'cultural shift'? Was this model based on research and 'best practice'? Anecdotal evidence indicates that Principals believe many of the roles currently being abolished or restructured are the ones that most effectively support schools.**

- Who provides support for Principals and schools when they are involved in court cases e.g. District, Coroner, IRC, GREAT, inquests, etc?
- **Will the reductions in 'back-office' support cause more complex and potentially expensive situations to occur, particularly in regards to teacher and Principal performance issues? Is there an expectation that under 'Local Schools Local Decisions' there will be less need to support Principals or more need?**
- Who assists schools and Principals, under the new model, with critical or serious incidents e.g. death or serious injury to a student or staff member?
- **One option to the proposed model is the concept of establishing a 'Consultant Principal' position utilising experienced high quality Principals for periods of time to undertake support, professional learning and / or professional coaching and mentoring for key responsibilities and tasks. This should be further explored as the concept has the potential to create a different paradigm to the way current positions operate.**
- Another option that should be considered is the amalgamation of the SPOs and the Directors to reduce the network sizes so that Principals have more individualised support. Could the SLOs/'Consultant Principals' pick up some of the role that the PLOs were performing? The more individualised attention and development that Principals receive the more some of the other concerns about Principal Support will be addressed. A recent survey of Principals resulted in 86% of respondents supporting the incorporation of SPOs and Directors to reduce the number of schools in the 'networks' from 40 to less than 30.
- The concept that SLOs will work with groups of Principals, many of whom may be in different 'networks' that are geographically separated, must be further explored with a view to determining how this might work effectively.
- Under a system that is moving quickly to a more devolved local authority model for all schools, there remains concern about supporting Principals in leading and managing their schools, particularly if the proposed 'cultural shift' proves to be a less than successful experiment e.g. there seems little support envisaged for beginning and relieving Principals; Principals, particularly in small communities, dealing with parent and teacher conflict; transitioning to a new finance and student management system with relieving School Administrative Staff; and accessing special provisions or placement for students with a disability, beyond the school's capacity to provide.

## SUMMARY

- **As leaders of NSW Principals' Associations, we believe that the time is right for full and meaningful consultation as to whether a 'cultural shift' in the way our Public Education system supports school education is needed or warranted.**
- **In moving support closer to schools and enhancing the capacity for Principals, in collaboration with their school communities, to have more authority in education delivery, the Government, DEC and the Associations need to work collaboratively and initiate change from 'the ground up'.**
- **A top-down model for imposing change has rarely proved effective or long lasting in any democratic society. It seems to many Principals that people who have been providing quality support to schools in a number of service areas are the ones most likely to be missing in the proposed model.**

- We anticipate that effective change-management will occur within the DEC, once there is an acknowledgement that frontline managers i.e. experienced Principals, have the knowledge and understanding of 'what works' for students.
- We understand that Treasury demands, 'budget envelopes' and tight timeframes are the reality we all face, but the gap between policy development and service delivery at the frontline will be reduced only through genuine collaboration.
- This paper has attempted to highlight our concerns about the proposed model. We are calling for a halt to any further steps in implementation until the Principals' Associations have been engaged in a collaborative process around change management.

*Lila Mularczyk (NSWSPC President)*

*Cheryl McBride (PSPF Chairperson)*

*Geoff Scott (NSWPPA President)*