



# SUSTAINING QUALITY SCHOOLS



## JOINT POSITION PAPER 2008

### Community of Schools

#### Background

As the landscape of public education evolves across New South Wales, there has been a discernible trend for schools with a community of interests, either by virtue of their geographic proximity or because of their role or function, to associate together in co-operative arrangements for their mutual benefit. Many have developed quite independently of established administrative 'districts'. These co-operatives identify themselves variously as "learning communities", "school networks", "communities of schools" and the like. For simplicity, *Community of Schools (CoS)* has been adopted here as a generic term to describe these diverse and organic groupings, though its use is not intended to exclude the use of others.

Sparked by the notable success of individual Community groupings in NSW (some in operation for years or decades), the NSW public schools' principal organisations instituted a program to foster this kind of local action model as part of their *Sustaining Quality Schools (SQS)* project. Around the same time, the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) was also sponsoring groups to initiate locally-based promotions of public education and the SQS program worked jointly with departmental officers in a number of areas in NSW to facilitate CoS development.

During 2007, the SQS project conducted a study to evaluate the work that had been done by the project, as well as assessing the overall situation around the state in relation to interschool co-operatives of various kinds. The result was a quite upbeat picture of this kind of development, highlighting the potential for inter-school and local co-operation to provide a significant new dimension in the delivery of public education. The SQS study found that there are benefits and costs, as well as a number of characteristics associated with the success of these groups. It was also noted that some schools were members of more than one Community.

#### Joint Position

*The PPA and SPC jointly recognise that:*

1. collective, corporate action by groups of schools within a local area can provide positive benefits for:
  - a. Their students.
  - b. Their staff;
  - c. The schools involved
  - d. The communities served by the schools
  - e. The corporate image of public education.
2. co-operation among colleagues at a local level is a powerful means of delivering collegial support and professional learning for their members and where possible, we will advocate for and facilitate the growth of co-operatively-based Communities of Schools.
3. local ownership of the nature, purpose and agenda of Communities is central to their success and sustainability. It is essential that efforts to facilitate further development of CoS groups commence from this understanding and emphasise facilitation and empowerment, rather than channeling or constraint.
4. the potential return of intellectual and social capital from Communities of Schools warrants a considerable investment in their facilitation and development.

The nature and extent of such investment will vary from situation to situation, but an allocation should be available for groups contemplating developments of this kind or for sustaining existing CoS groups. As a baseline, this investment would fund the release time and travel involved in the work of establishing and maintaining the community