



Education &
Communities

Report on Consultation

Connected Communities



CONTENTS

Introduction..... 2

Consultation Process

Stakeholder meetings..... 3

Discussion paper..... 7

Youth Forum..... 12

Appendix

List of Contributors..... 16

INTRODUCTION

Connected Communities is a new approach to how we deliver education and training in our most vulnerable communities – and to how we link this learning to other related services, such as health, housing, community services, early childhood education and care, and vocational education and training.

We want our schools to be the hub of these communities by delivering services that respond to local needs and aspirations in order to improve student learning and community engagement. This will be achieved through developing a program that delivers strategies that are innovative and academically rigorous for Aboriginal students and ensures their Cultural safety while emphasising the importance of effective leadership structures, good governance and building stronger, authentic relationships with parents, families and Communities.

The purpose of the *Connected Communities* initiative is to progress a consistent, concentrated effort across a selected number of schools, which takes a different and innovative approach to the planning and delivery of quality education for Aboriginal students, and all students in these schools.

This report draws together comments from:

- The Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG)
- Major stakeholders through organised stakeholder meetings
- A range of individuals and groups through the *Connected Communities* Discussion Paper
- Young Aboriginal people between the ages of 12-25 through a Youth Forum

The Department appreciates the valuable contributions from a broad range of people with rich and diverse experiences; deep Cultural knowledge and understandings and relevant perspectives.

These findings will influence the shape and form of the *Connected Communities* Strategy due for implementation in 2013.

CONSULTATION PROCESS

The purpose of the consultation process was to engage stakeholders and the community in setting the directions for the development of a new approach to how we work in partnership with local Aboriginal communities to deliver education in some of our most complex and disadvantaged communities.

This report includes feedback from:

1. Stakeholders in meetings held during the development of the *Connected Communities* Discussion Paper
2. community members, education staff and stakeholders in submissions in response to the discussion paper
3. young Aboriginal people aged between 12 and 25 years during a youth forum.

1. Stakeholder meetings

Over a number of months, meetings were held with key stakeholders to respond to the identified need to do something different with a group of schools where Aboriginal students' needs were not being met. Represented at these meetings were:

- Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. (AECG)
- NSW Teachers Federation (NSWTF)
- Primary Principals' Association (PPA)
- Secondary Principals' Council (SPC)
- the Ombudsman's Office
- Office of Aboriginal Affairs, and
- senior officers of the Department from state and regional offices.

These meetings set the parameters for the new approach and informed the development of the *Connected Communities* Discussion Paper which was provided for public consultation and comment in February 2012.

Stakeholders identified that current systemic reform agendas such as *Local Schools*, *Local Decisions*, the Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs and the Ministerial Advisory Group on Literacy and Numeracy needed to be considered when developing a sustainable model for *Connected Communities*.

At stakeholder meetings it was agreed that the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group would partner with the Department of Education and Communities in the delivery of Community information sessions in the proposed communities.

The following **key messages** from stakeholders underpinned the development of the *Connected Communities* Discussion paper and will inform the development of the *Connected Communities* strategy.

What was said about...

Flexible staffing, school organisation and curriculum

As each school and Community is different, the most critical issue discussed was getting the right leaders and teachers who are prepared to listen carefully to the Community. Stakeholder representatives stated that these leaders and teachers need to be able to develop school practices that directly address issues raised by the Community in a timely and practical way.

They emphasised the importance of removing some of the inflexibility that can currently 'straight jacket' leaders and restrict their capacity for innovation and being responsive to Community and school needs and aspirations.

Much discussion focussed on human resources issues, with comments proposing that staffing entitlements needed to suit these schools and their local needs. The NSW Teachers Federation indicated a willingness to consider the negotiation of industrial arrangements at the state level that would support these principals and schools.

Respondents also indicated that schools would benefit from more discretionary funding so they can employ the people they need to progress the programs and strategies.

Professional development in Aboriginal cultural education, as demonstrated through *Connecting to Country*, was highlighted as being important for all staff.

Leadership - the key to success

Many stakeholders expressed that experienced, 'outstanding' principals would require salary/incentive packages to attract them to the 'new' roles and to enlist their commitment for a medium to long term period.

Issues related to opportunities and lifestyle for their families such as employment of spouses and access to health services was discussed as being an important factor to securing staff. It was noted that key deliverables

would need to be negotiated and accountabilities established. Bonus payments could be linked to the achievement of agreed outcomes.

Principals, it was said, would need to be able to recruit at least some of their staff, as individuals cannot lead change, to this extent, on their own.

Culturally inclusive curriculum embedded with an Aboriginal languages and cultural stream

All were resolute that there needed to be a definite emphasise on the valuing and teaching of Aboriginal languages and Aboriginal cultures in these schools. The President of the AECG commented: *'We need to be educated in the Western world but not at the expense of who we are, nor to the detriment of our culture. Aboriginal culture is currently not a part of education and this is a very relevant role for schools.'*

Teaching 'to' and 'about' Aboriginal people was considered tokenistic and that teaching cultural studies should be implemented and driven by key local Aboriginal Community people.

Some Board of Studies requirements, especially for secondary study, was suggested didn't fit the particular needs of students in a Community. Greater flexibility in current curriculum delivery models was deemed essential.

Recognising the capacity of the local Aboriginal Community to lead cultural immersion experiences for staff was unanimous. There were robust discussions that such experiences needed to provide insight into the social, cultural, historic, economic and political issues that continue to affect Aboriginal people and communities.

It was agreed that schools need to value the concept and meaning of 'country' from an Aboriginal cultural standpoint and strengthen Aboriginal parental and community engagement.

Governance structures

It was proposed that a Senior Officer (Aboriginal identified) is required to lead *Connected Communities*. The Senior Officer would work within the department, specifically with the Aboriginal Education and Training Directorate, and lead cross agency work at a state level.

This position was seen as a critical interface between the department and the Aboriginal Community and should report directly to the Director-General (or the Deputy Director-General, Public Schools) to validate the status of Aboriginal education and ensure the integrity of Aboriginal education and cultural knowledge and information is accurately communicated and upheld.

A governing body in the form of an Expert Advisory Group or State Steering Committee is expected to oversee the planning and development of *Connected Communities* and the negotiation of the integrated service delivery model.

Local governance structures (including shared community decision making and input)

There was strong support for the idea that schools could become *community hubs* inviting local people to fully engage by being able to say what's needed in their Community. The principal's capacity to respond in a timely way needs to be integral to *Connected Communities*.

It is considered that early and extensive community consultation and information will be vital to influence the design of the strategy and to build community ownership and support.

A shared vision for education that comes from partnership between the school and the Community will only evolve and be sustainable, if it draws on the strengths of the Community. Community healing is critically important within Aboriginal communities and timeframes must be respected and supported.

There was consensus that public meetings and public commitment to informing the local Community were essential to ensure Community engagement in *Connected Communities*. Local advisory groups should contribute to ensuring Community engagement in each location.

Integrated service delivery at the local level

Concerns were expressed that agencies often 'fly in and fly out' in rural and remote communities and 'do to' rather than 'do with' in their service delivery. It is acknowledged that agencies often have very inexperienced staff in these locations.

A place-based approach has many advantages where all key players with funding or a contract to deliver services locally, sit around the table to identify resources, capacity and opportunities.

2. Feedback - Discussion Paper

This section describes the findings of the qualitative analysis of all contributions to the *Connected Communities: Discussion Paper* consultation process. It lists common and notable suggestions and highlights risks raised for consideration in developing the next steps.

A total of 45 written submissions were received as well as engaging in a number of conversations from a variety of contributors including the Secondary Principals' Council, the NSW Teachers Federation, local AECGs, the Primary Principals' Association, the Teacher Housing Authority, non-government organisations, individual principals and teachers, and regional and state office staff and teams. (A complete list of people providing written submissions is included in the Appendix.)

There was strong agreement across the submissions that it is time for a re-think and for bold action.

Key Goal and Guiding Principles

The key goals and guiding principles in the Discussion Paper had widespread support. There were many comments about the need to build on the existing strengths of schools, families and communities.

In the key goals, contributors commented on the need to strengthen the focus on the safety, health and wellbeing of students and their families.

It was suggested that preschools should be included in the statement of the key goals and that '*a student's safety, welfare and wellbeing should be a paramount concern for all schools*' (Child Wellbeing Unit).

Contributors agreed that there would be major benefits in implementing innovative practices. Some contributors qualified this by saying that innovative practices must be consistent with Departmental policies, legislation and industrial agreements and where necessary, renegotiated for *Connected Communities*.

'Changes developed and implemented in the Connected Communities initiative should be consistent with customs and practices in relation to DEC policies, industrial awards and agreements'. (NSW Teachers' Federation)

Key features for each community

There was strong support for the key features of *Connected Communities*. However contributors stated that it is important to draw on existing success elements and strengths – in communities, in schools, in programs, in interagency practice (e.g. Keep Them Safe, Schools as Community Centres) and in research, and to draw from what has been learned.

While there was strong support for local customisation of the *Connect Communities* strategy, some contributors suggested that the strategy should also have consistently defined success measures across the State.

There was strong support for an emphasis on vocational education and training and having strong links with TAFE and university sectors. Some contributors saw this as a positive opportunity for innovation with secondary education with strengthened links to apprenticeships and traineeships and increased career development opportunities for young people.

More broadly, contributors want a curriculum that is relevant, culturally responsive and rigorous and provides a seamless integration with TAFE and university.

Some contributors stressed the importance of students and parents seeing a purpose for education. They want a focus on opportunities for employment for members of the Community.

Contributors supported a model that is unique to the site. They suggested that a community profile, which is informed by current data, needs to be developed jointly by the school and Community.

*The strength of the package is agencies and communities working together –
'This is very time consuming work but well worth the effort.'* School Education
Director, North Coast Region.

In regard to funding of the strategy, some contributors want to be sure that funding will be available to ensure its success. They also stated that the administration of the funding needs to be different to current department procedures.

Contributors supported the provision of early childhood education and care, stating that there needs to be an increased emphasis on pre-birth to school, especially access to pre-school.

Leadership

There was overwhelming support for the need for a new and different approach to leadership in these communities which allows principals (and the Community) to lead the change and make local decisions when addressing local issues.

There was strong support for using the professional learning program *Connecting to Country* but it was suggested that all staff should be involved and not just the Executive Director and the Directors.

There was a view expressed that the status, salaries and conditions of employment should be consistent with current structures and awards. It was suggested that any variations in recruitment strategy and incentives packages can be negotiated at state level.

Individual negotiation of salaries, conditions and incentives for local staff by the Director was not supported in a number of submissions.

Contributors expressed the importance of Executive leadership teams in schools having experience in working across agencies with children and families.

There was support for consultation through an Expert Advisory Group but the importance of having clear processes and being transparent was stressed.

Executive Director

There was clear feedback that the Executive Director must identify as Aboriginal and be an educator.

There was strong support for the Executive Director position to report directly to the Director-General. However some contributors stated that current management and reporting lines for schools should be maintained.

Directors (known as Executive Principals)

There was clear feedback that all Executive Principals must be educators.

Contributors did not support calling the leader of a school a Director as they felt that the term Director does not make it clear that this person is the Principal and that it's their responsibility to lead the school.

They stated that the Executive Principal's role should be equally about leading and managing the school as it is about leading other integrated support for the students.

The importance of local decisions was stressed by contributors. They also stated that Executive Principals, working in collaboration with a School Advisory Council, must have authority to make decisions to meet local needs.

Some contributors suggested that a local governance group should form a compact with the school. In this way the principal would report regularly to the community (such as once a term) in a public meeting about achievement and results.

There was support for giving Executive Principals three months lead time before taking up their positions however some contributors felt that is insufficient time to achieve what will be required.

Community development and governance

There was overwhelming support for building relationships in the Community during the consultation and development phases of *Connected Communities* - co-creating power with the Community.

Some contributors felt that this is “generational change” and will take 20-30 years to be fully realised.

Some submissions stated that as Connected Communities is about doing this differently it is critical to build relationships and develop ‘co-production with communities’.

It was stressed that local Aboriginal people should make up the majority of local advisory councils.

The importance of including students and young people as partners in the development and implementation was also raised.

Clearly contributors see the importance of collective decision making that is not based on a hierarchy.

‘Facilitative and conversational leadership – head and heart conversations...Collective sense making and decision making – less hierarchy – more circles.’ principal of a north coast high school

The importance of early intervention was raised throughout the submissions. While it was acknowledged that this is a feature of the proposed strategy, many contributors commented that this should emphasise, not just prior to school care access to preschool for all children in the communities.

Contributors recognised that to have a culturally appropriate curriculum, there must be community involvement in teaching and learning and professional learning for staff.

An integrated services approach

There was strong support for integrated services that include links with all services that already exist in the Community. The practical difficulties for achieving this were noted by a number of contributors.

The challenges in achieving an integrated service hub were acknowledged.

The importance of senior officers in the participating areas such as Family and Community Services, Health and Housing having the authority to vary existing service delivery models and resource allocation was stressed. Contributors also noted the importance of service areas being responsive to community needs.

A number of submissions commented on the need to strengthen TAFE and VET resources in these communities.

Some contributors stated the importance of a focus on employment beyond school.

A principal of a central school commented that the connections between Juvenile Justice and schools need to be greatly enhanced.

'Too often I have witnessed a young person...cast adrift again once released'.

Risk factors

Many submissions raised a number of risk factors that they believe need to be considered for the successful implementation of *Connected Communities*:

- The implementation timeframe is 'unrealistic' i.e. 15 school communities being ready to start in 2013. Suggested solution, was to start with a small number of communities.
- Some communities may be reluctant to participate.
'Many of the potential communities will be reluctant to engage because of past experiences and lack of confidence in education. They can be engaged, but it will take time and a respectful, positive approach.' CEO Tirkandi Inaburra Cultural and Development Centre.
- There is a need for bi-partisan support from the government and opposition as well as from COAG.
- Executive Principals may not achieve all they need to in the three months before taking up their positions.
- Additional resources, in addition to those currently allocated for Aboriginal education are required and should be made available in a timely way.
- Achieving integrated service delivery will be very challenging. There are few successful models to date.
- There must be reliable access to the internet for students, staff and the community. Site specific digital learning centres and video conferencing studios are essential to curriculum reform in these schools.
- There must be sufficient housing for teachers and other staff in these communities. Currently availability is limited. The CEO Teacher Housing Authority has indicated his willingness to be involved from an early stage in the development of *Connected Communities*.

3. Feedback from Youth

Aboriginal young people from across NSW participated in a forum at the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Annual Conference on 9 March 2012 where they were asked *'If you had the opportunity to make changes in your school, what would it look like?'*

The forum was facilitated by Michele Hall, Director Aboriginal Education and Training, Department of Education and Communities

The young people who were aged from 12 through to 25 years of age engaged enthusiastically with the opportunity to provide ideas. They were specific in their recommendations.

The experience of the youth forum reinforces the value of involving young people in the establishment and implementation of *Connected Communities* at a local level.

Comments were clustered around the following themes.

Identity

- Incorporate Aboriginal cultural studies and Aboriginal Languages in the school.
- Provide more opportunities for Community members to engage in education (particularly Elders) both as 'teachers' and 'learners'.
- Encourage Aboriginal iconography such as murals and the flying of the Aboriginal flag with the Australian flag.

Relationships and support

- Provide genuine support for students to gain more confidence and belief that they can achieve.
- Introduce effective mechanisms to combat racism.
- Provide mentoring and/or coaching.
- Provide *Norta Norta* tutorial assistance.
- Ensure productive relationships with parents and care-givers - not only when their children are in trouble.
- Support the passions and dreams of all students – the future Prime Minister can be Aboriginal.

Expectations and learning

- Build productive student and teacher relationships – know the students and their families.
- Have ambitious expectations that students can and will achieve.

- Provide a rigorous curriculum and study programs – stop the ‘dumbing down’.
- Provide broader opportunities regarding school to work transition including work experience and traineeships and cadetships.
- Ensure all staff to undergo Cultural immersion - *Connecting to Country*.
- Provide teachers who are knowledgeable and confident with their subject areas particularly around Aboriginal issues, history and current circumstances.
- Establish more opportunities to study through ICT and the ‘virtual school’ where particular subjects can be taken that aren’t currently offered in the school.
- Provide opportunities to link more with TAFE courses and to ‘experience’ University - offer financial support to do so where needed.

Leadership and participation

- Set up student governance structures such as Junior AECG and Student Representative Councils.
- Provide more youth forums to allow students to share their ideas and dreams.
- Establish better school organisation and planning - especially timetabling.

The ideal school

- Establish different school ground layout e.g. - *Planet Earth model*; campus/es High School with outdoor learning areas;
- Change the infrastructure in schools such as:
 - removing fences
 - using nature areas as classrooms
 - putting in veggie gardens, building library/resource centres
 - getting more computers
 - establishing an Aboriginal Language centre and including dictionaries
 - getting more sporting infrastructure such as football ovals, basketball and netball courts, a gymnasium, swimming pool.
 - Putting in more benches and safe places - for students who are upset.
- Provide more practical learning experiences that include more excursions and more outdoor learning.
- Make the learning more challenging.
- Be more flexible with the school day, such as start the day earlier, extend the school day, have shorter lessons and more breaks..
- Be more flexible with the education policy and processes. For example:
 - have smaller class sizes
 - remove requirement to have uniforms
 - have more professional cultural awareness training.
 - make Aboriginal Studies and English compulsory
 - increase the hours of compulsory sport and games
 - Allow schools to varied texts
 - Include more opportunities for art and music (using instruments).

- Be more inclusive of cultures and engage the community in the school - Elders and Community members.
- Provide role models – not just sporting people.
- Provide teachers that are experienced, committed.
- Provide funding to help learning – don't just spend it on halls.

Aboriginal Youth Forum mind maps of what their 'ideal' school looks like



Appendix

List of Contributors

1. Stakeholder meetings

Aboriginal students
NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated (AECG)
Primary Principals' Association (PPA)
Secondary Principals' Council (SPC)
NSW Teachers Federation (NSWTF)
Ombudsman's Office
Office of Aboriginal Affairs
Senior officers of state and regional offices

2. Contributors providing comment on the discussion paper

Tammy	Anderson	Airds Community of Schools
Peter	Balding	Equity Programs and Distance Education
Rosalyn	Bannon	Quaama Public School
Jane	Beaumont	Department of Premier and Cabinet - Queanbeyan
Julie	Blanch	Oxley Vale Public School
Bob	Boughton	
Jacinta	Bunfield	Student Achievement and Community Partnerships
Mark	Carter	Killara High School
Jim	Cooper	NSW Primary Principals Association/Albion Park Public School
Diane	de Vere	
Robyn	Dearsley	Public Schools Principal Forum
Brian	Debus	Menindee Central School
Thomas	Degens	Walgett Community College
Benjamin	Delanty	Walhallow Public School
Jenny	Diamond	NSW Teachers Federation
Ross	Dummett	Sarah Redfern High School
Scott	Geoff	Blacktown South Public School
Peter	Haight	North Coast Region
Kim	Hamilton	Great Lakes College Forster Campus
Anne	Hollands	The Benevolent Society
Hilton	Humphries	Nambucca Heads High School
Leslie	Kerr	Walgett Community College High School
Peter	King	Byron Bay High School
James	Langley	Camden
Paul	Lennox	Student Welfare Directorate
Kelly	Macdonald	Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of NSW
Tony	McCartney	Windellama Public School
Carole	McDiamid	Western Regional Team
Malcolm	McFarlane	Bowraville Central School
Anna	Morris	Child Wellbeing Directorate
Beatrice	Murray	Mulyan Public School
Heather	Parkes	Principals Australia Institute
Anthony	Paulson	<i>Tirkandi Inaburra</i> Cultural and Development Centre Inc
Terry	Pearson	Forster PS

Trish	Peters	Kincumber Public School
Alan	Quartley	
Madeleine	Read	
Kim	Rodenburg	St John's Park High School
Judith	Selby	
Peter	Sheargold	Kotara High School
Philip	Shelley	Teacher Housing Authority
Lou	Single	Youth Off The Streets Limited
Carol	Speechley	Kemblawarra Public School
Jessica	Tate	Menindee Central School
Ruth	Thomason	Asset Management Directorate

- Contributors in the Youth Forum were delegates from across the state.



GPO Box 33
Sydney NSW 2001
Australia
T 9561 8000
www.schools.nsw.edu.au

© December 2011
NSW Department of Education and Communities



Education &
Communities

Public Schools NSW