

A new relationship with schools and preschools



Government
of South Australia
Department of Education
and Children's Services



Policy direction overview
Discussion paper **one**



Better start ✓

Better future ✓

A new relationship with schools and preschools



Over the past few months I have visited many schools and preschools.

I have listened to principals, preschool directors, teachers, governing council members, parents, students, employers and others and have heard their views about the challenges we face.

The sheer diversity and complexity of young people in our communities, the impact of technology and communications in a global economy, increasing public scrutiny and demand for accountability and transparency ... these are just some of the challenges our educators face in educating and developing young people for a 21st Century world.

At the same time, our school and preschool communities are working in a dynamic environment of massive investment and reform, both locally and nationally. That offers great opportunities, but also challenges, for educational leaders and teachers.

Clearly we have many good public schools and preschools with proud traditions of excellence, diversity and innovation. We know that inspirational teachers and school leaders make a difference to the lives of young people.

However, there is a community perception that the 'department' is cumbersome, not timely in responding to the needs of schools and preschools, and has a culture that is not as supportive of people in the frontline as it should be.

This perception is not new. Surveys over time confirm that most parents are satisfied with their local school, but don't have a positive view of the 'system'.

I know the people who work in our department don't want this view of themselves. I have met hundreds of hard working departmental people dedicated to making our schools and preschools better places in which to teach and learn.

However, cultural and structural factors, red tape and out-dated practices are barriers that reinforce this perception. We must overcome these barriers.

Indeed, to tackle the challenges we face and help every child achieve their best we must first harness the passion and skills of our people and our resources.

That is why we must develop stronger relationships between the Department of Education and Children's Services state office and our school communities.

We must remove the barriers that prevent school and preschool leaders from being the educational leaders they want to be. We need to give more scope for schools to determine the make-up of their staff. We must provide greater opportunities for our best teachers and other school staff. And we must foster better communication between the state office and schools.

So this first policy directions statement responds to some of the views I've heard about this issue of the relationship between the state office and schools.

There is more to do but first and foremost, we must strengthen the

relationships which are fundamental to making a difference, and reaffirm that everything we do is aimed at helping young people to learn, teachers to teach and leaders to lead.

Thank you for the contributions you are making toward those endeavours.

Jay Weatherill
Minister for Education
Minister for Early Childhood
Development



Staying in touch

Young people in our public schools and preschools come from a rich and diverse range of cultural and socio-economic backgrounds and have a rich and diverse set of interests and talents.

Our public education system supports the education and development of about 180,000 young people across a diverse range of geographic and educational locations. They include city, rural and remote preschools, children's centres, junior primary schools, primary schools, area schools, secondary schools, special schools and Aboriginal schools. Teachers support the education of a diversity of young people, including Aboriginal students, young people with disabilities, young people who excel as school based apprentices, in the arts or sciences and young people who are vulnerable and at risk of leaving school early.

Indeed, public education is a massive and complex enterprise of people and places across the State.

Everyone from teachers and other staff within schools and preschools to the staff in central and regional offices, to departmental executives and the Minister for Education, contributes to the policies, practices and processes that support the education and development of young people.

That's why it's important that there is effective communication between people in the frontline and people supporting their efforts.

Systems and processes are not an end in themselves. We need to make sure that sound policies and practices are effectively communicated and carried out by schools and preschools. We need to make sure that where problems arise, those problems are effectively communicated and fixed.

While schools cannot resolve every social problem, we must listen and respond as best as we can to shape available resources and energies around young people and their educational development.

Maintaining this culture of strong communication takes work; it does not maintain itself. So it is timely to introduce some new initiatives that focus on the constructive exchange

of views. These are not intended to replace what already exists, but to reinforce a culture of open communication between both the State head office and local school environments.

New directions

These new initiatives will include:

Classroom connect: Regular forums across every region to support conversations between teachers and the Minister will be trialled from 2011. Groups of up to 20 teachers in each region, nominated by their schools, will meet the Minister.

Back up teacher relief support will be provided for their class while they attend a 'classroom connect' forum.

Meet the leaders: Local leaders' executive groups successfully engage school principals in addressing shared policy and management concerns. The Minister and senior executives will regularly join in these discussions to keep in touch with school leaders.

Phone the Minister: School principals and preschool directors will be invited to call the Minister with their constructive ideas, views and concerns on educating young people, with a Ministerial 'hotline' to be trialled from October 2010. The Ministerial hotline will be open at a regular set time each week for leaders to call.

Education Round Tables: These will create new opportunities for representatives from professional school leadership associations,

business, unions and governing councils to share ideas and specific policy directions with the Minister and departmental executives. The round tables will come together to address key issues as they need to be addressed.

Back to school: Staff in the state office will be invited to spend two days in a school each year, as a volunteer in the classroom. This trial will enable state office staff to, for example, help read to children through the learning assistance program or Premier's Reading Challenge, provide extra support in the school resource centre or administration office or share their skills with students and school staff. This voluntary work would be treated as part of their regular employment.

On Assignment: School leaders and experienced teachers often work on assignments in state office and regional offices for short periods, bringing practical front line experience to help address system-wide policy issues. This will be formalised to ensure professionals from the frontline are engaged in all major policy developments. This could include principals and experienced teachers examining how better we can support school and preschool communities in common policy areas such as lifting science and maths skills, behaviour management, leadership and management. After contributing their expertise on state-wide policy issues, they will return to their local school.



A better way of recruiting teachers

We know that of all the school factors that affect learning, the quality of teaching has the biggest impact. We don't only know this from the research - we can all remember those teachers who had a profound impact on our own learning.

Inspirational teachers and leaders make a difference.

That is why a dynamic, innovative and skilled education workforce is essential for every child and for South Australia's social and economic future.

We can be proud of the diversity of our public school and preschool communities.

But this also reinforces the need for local schools to better match teachers and school leaders to the needs of young people in their own community.

Our challenge is to balance the increased emphasis on local schools making local staffing decisions with a comprehensive public education system that supports excellence and equity across our diverse range of schools and services.

Some existing employment structures and rules are from times when there was more central management of staffing, lower retirement rates, higher student enrolments and more teachers working fulltime.

Some of the old rules, such as the requirement that teachers move or re-apply for their job after 10 years, regardless of the impact on educational development at their school, don't reflect today's needs.

This and other out-dated rules also create added red tape and burdens to local school staffing.

In recent years principals in socially disadvantaged and remote areas

have gained a stronger say in selecting staff that best suits their schools' needs. At a time of greater accountability for results from school leaders, we cannot deny all our principals this capacity.

Also, we have enthusiastic and sought-after staff who struggle with short term contracts, creating job uncertainty and disruption to student learning. Meanwhile, with an ageing workforce, there is increasing retirement of staff expected in the next few years, paving the way for more opportunities for other teachers and leaders.

New directions

The State Government has undertaken a significant departmental review of the education workforce and policies to develop a comprehensive new recruitment strategy to renew, refresh and reform our education workforce.

The new strategy will:

- increase local school authority and responsibility for recruiting local teachers on the basis of open advertisement and merit
- better enable schools to attract, recruit and retain the staff they need
- attract quality teachers, principals and other leaders to schools which are traditionally difficult to staff, including some rural and remote schools and in communities where young people are socially and economically disadvantaged
- lift opportunities for graduates and early career teachers to gain stable employment in the metropolitan area.

New recruitment initiatives will include:

- Providing principals in all schools the capacity to recruit staff to suit their school's circumstances. Principals will have the capacity to select ongoing positions in all schools on merit; they will not be constrained to select from the pool of existing permanent teachers. This will also create

more opportunities for contract teachers to gain permanent jobs. We will continue to honour existing employment conditions and rights for the small number of teachers returning from the country by maintaining a limited system of priority placements

- Eliminating the requirement for teachers to move schools every 10 years, which will reduce the number of 'displaced' teachers being placed into schools through a central pool, and will enable schools to retain good, experienced teachers
- Refreshing the workforce by creating more opportunities and vacancies for enthusiastic graduates and early career teachers
- Reforming recruitment processes in preschools to create better opportunities for permanent employment for staff by giving preschools greater opportunity to advertise and select their own teachers
- Enabling more school support officers to gain permanent employment, creating stronger stability for local staff who are central to providing valuable support in schools including office administration, classroom and laboratory support
- Extending open advertising for principals to attract leaders from within and beyond South Australia so that it also includes other school leadership positions such as assistant and deputy principals and coordinators to make sure we can attract the best leaders to our public schools
- Expanding the range of incentives to attract and retain quality teachers and leaders to 'hard to staff' schools in rural and metropolitan areas
- Supporting a new initiative to recruit and re-train up to 155 specialist maths and science teachers to work in our State high schools and go toward addressing shortages in these fields.



Supporting our frontline: cutting red tape

Being the education leader of a school is a complex and challenging role. Removing the red tape and unnecessary reporting burden will free up principals, enabling them to spend more time and energy on being the educational leader in their school community.

Some of the burdens on school leaders will be lifted by the new recruitment initiatives.

However, there remain out-dated administrative and structural arrangements that create barriers and burdens on schools and their capacity to get on with educating young people.

The State Government has commissioned a major review of red tape inefficiencies within our public education system which identified a number of areas that helped to create red tape and inefficiency, including the way in which schools are funded, the allocation of authority and accountability between the state office and schools, and inefficiencies and disconnects arising from existing policies and processes.

New directions

As a priority, action will be taken in line with the major review from this school term to reduce red tape across the system so that we:

- simplify the procurement process for purchasing goods and services for schools, especially in country school communities
- redesign the departmental intranet to be more user friendly
- simplify various processes relating to student attendance and enrolment numbers
- simplify, standardise and reduce all human resources and payroll related forms
- resolve issues and disputes involving schools and preschools in a timely manner
- simplify the calculation and payment of interest to preschools.

We will continue to develop the following:

- Streamlining the administration tasks related to payroll verification and reporting
- Simplifying the annual reporting requirements for schools
- Simplifying the process by which school communities set school fees
- Improving IT systems to make processes easier and more efficient
- Improving the process related to the managing of workers compensation claims
- Better use of IT to make the administration of schools easier and more efficient
- Supporting schools to manage low cost breakdown maintenance and avoid approval delays.

We will also need to guard against the creation of new red tape. Whenever we are developing new policies, systems or practices we need to ask ourselves - *how does this help young people to learn; how does this help teachers to teach; and how does this support school leaders to lead?*



Demonstrating why we are here

People working in our state office support the work of our schools and preschools in educating young people. They are an integral part of the education of our young people.

Placing a child care centre and preschool on the ground floor of the State education office at 31 Flinders Street Adelaide would be a clear demonstration of the central role that young people play in the work of the head office.

It would also provide a new service for working parents in the heart of Adelaide and be a centre of excellence for innovation in early childhood development services. It would also reflect our belief that so much of what our young people can achieve at school is influenced well before children step through the school gate for the first time.

We will therefore undertake a feasibility study for an integrated long day child care centre and preschool in the State education head office, which will set aside a substantial proportion of enrolments for low income city workers.

Next steps

This is the first in an occasional series of policy direction discussion papers on future directions the State Government intends to take to support education and children's services in South Australia.

Policy direction statements aim to:

- Inform you of initiatives and new directions being taken to further improve our public education system in the best interests of young people and South Australia's future
- Engage school communities in discussions with the Minister for Education and with public education system leaders as we work together to improve opportunities for every child.

We will now undertake targeted consultation with the Australian Education Union and other education interest groups on the new directions and initiatives set out in this policy directions discussion paper and the implementation and transition steps to be taken. You are encouraged

to discuss the ideas and issues raised in your school and preschool communities, including school governing councils and student, parent, teacher and principal networks and associations.

Copies of this statement are available from <http://www.decs.sa.gov.au/> or call 8226 0254.



**Government
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Department of Education
and Children's Services

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