

At the centre of proposals to devolve more decision making to schools is the attempt to dismantle guaranteed state-wide staffing entitlements. This was conveyed in *Your School's Right To Choose*: "If the principal, in consultation with the school council and staff, decides that the formula-based allocation best meets the needs of the school, then that number and mix of staff will be provided for the school. If however the principal, again in consultation, decides that a different arrangement would be more satisfactory in terms of the educational priorities and needs of the school, then a different course can be followed."

In a statewide consultation process, principals, teachers and parents overwhelmingly rejected the proposals in *Your School's Right To Choose*. They were not convinced to give up the guarantee of a statewide staffing formula that ensured equity and quality for students and permanent career paths and employment security for teachers. For the same reasons, similar proposals in *Local Schools, Local Decisions* should be rejected.

Such moves for increased devolution coincided with the Greiner government's attempt to abolish 2500 teaching positions from NSW public schools.

## Premier O'Farrell and Education Minister Piccoli rejected the "secret" cost cutting plan

Premier Barry O'Farrell and Education Minister Adrian Piccoli must honour their pre-election commitment to reject Boston Consulting Group's cost-cutting strategies that used the devolved Victorian public schools as the benchmark:

"Labor's blueprint for education cuts will not be part of a Liberal & Nationals Government... We utterly reject this disgraceful report and call on Kristina Keneally to explain why Labor was drawing up secret plans to cut schools and teachers across NSW." (Media release, March 19, 2011)

On this basis, NSW public education communities have every right to expect the O'Farrell Government to maintain a statewide system with guaranteed staffing formulae to provide equity, quality and a curriculum guarantee for students and permanent career paths and employment security for teachers.

### Further information

Federation members are encouraged to go to the union's website [www.nswtf.org.au](http://www.nswtf.org.au) for further information for responding to *Local Schools, Local Decisions*. These resources include:

- *Expenditure Review of the Department of Education and Training (DET) — Initial Scan*, Boston Consulting Group, January 29, 2010
- *Your School's Right To Choose*, NSW Department of School Education, June 1992
- Media release, Barry O'Farrell and Adrian Piccoli, March 19, 2011
- *Submission to the Review of Funding for Schooling, "Governance and Leadership"*, NSW Teachers Federation, March 2011
- *School Leadership for the Challenges Ahead*, a discussion paper written by Denis Fitzgerald for the NSW Teachers Federation, 2011
- *Statement on professional accountability practices, limited tenure contracts and performance management agreements*, NSW Public Education Alliance, July 13, 2011
- Various articles from *Education* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

Members are also encouraged to use the pro forma response on [www.nswtf.org.au](http://www.nswtf.org.au) to email an individual submission to the Director-General and Education Minister.

Federation Representatives are asked to convene a workplace meeting of members, with the aim of endorsing the enclosed statement and sending it to :

Director-General Michele Bruniges, fax (02) 9561 8465  
Education Minister Adrian Piccoli, fax (02) 9228 5492  
NSW Teachers Federation, fax (02) 9217 2470.

Authorised by Jenny Diamond, General Secretary, NSW Teachers Federation, 23-33 Mary Street, Surry Hills NSW 2010.

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# Doing more in NSW public schools with less funding from government?

The NSW Teachers Federation provides the following information for use in responding to the NSW Department of Education and Communities' consultation paper *Local Schools, Local Decisions* (August 2011).

The decision by Education Minister Adrian Piccoli to conduct a consultation process on devolving additional decision making to schools will provide principals, teachers, parents and school communities with an opportunity to seek changes which can improve the delivery of education to students in NSW public schools.

The NSW Teachers Federation supports policies that enhance the capacity of principals, teachers and schools to deliver higher quality public education. Greater school based

### **Increased school based decision making should be motivated by the pursuit of genuine educational improvement, not government cost cutting.**

Federation will continue to oppose devolution policies that undermine or attack teachers' employment rights and entitlements. Experience elsewhere shows that devolution is used to introduce local 'hire and fire' of teachers and replace permanency in teacher employment with limited tenure individual contracts.

Many proposals for increased school autonomy, greater principal autonomy, more school based decision making and the like accentuate the differences between schools and disregard the commonalities. They either undervalue or ignore the benefits of public schools being interconnected in a system underpinned by the principles of equity and excellence for all. No public school is an island, entire of itself. Each school is a part of the greater system of public education, with responsibilities and obligations that extend far beyond the front gate.

Federation supports school based decision making whereby a principal, in negotiation with staff and community, makes decisions affecting their school, providing those decisions do not harm the interests of a student or a teacher at another school.

Federation will oppose any attempt by government to use increased school based decision making as a cover for off-loading responsibility for properly resourcing and staffing public schools. Any changes must not undermine state-wide curriculum, resource and staffing guarantees.

### **What does the research say about increased devolution and school autonomy?**

Findings on school autonomy and student achievement are contained in a report published by the OECD entitled *PISA 2009 Results: What Makes a School Successful? – Resources, Policies and Practices (Volume IV)*. It found that education systems that provide schools with greater autonomy in selecting teachers and for school budgets do not achieve higher results in reading. It concluded that "greater responsibility in managing resources appears to be unrelated to a school system's overall student performance" and that "school autonomy in resource allocation is not related to performance at the system level".

The *PISA 2009 At a Glance* report found that increased autonomy of schools, in relation to what was taught and how it was assessed, did correlate with improved student outcomes. But increased school autonomy over curriculum and assessment are two key areas not featured in the political push for increased school based decision making.

The latest moves for devolution come at a time when curriculum, assessment and reporting are being centralised under a command-and-control management model, right down to the stipulation that only five letters of the alphabet can be used to report on student achievement: A, B, C, D, E.

Rather than entrust the teaching profession with increased decision making over curriculum, assessment and reporting, governments instead are pushing for increased decision making over budgets, resources and staffing. This reinforces the view that the devolution agenda is more about cutting costs and reducing spending than improving the quality of public education.

### **The devolution trial in New South Wales is confirmed as a cost cutting exercise**

The current, seriously flawed 47 school trial of increased school based decision making will continue to be opposed by the Federation. Despite denials to the contrary, this trial aims to set the pre-conditions for the longer-term deregulation of teacher employment: principals with the right to hire and fire, individual employment contracts and limited tenure.

Federation's opposition to the trial has been vindicated by Boston Consulting Group's *Expenditure Review of the Department of Education and Training (DET) – Initial Scan* prepared for the previous NSW government and leaked to the media a week prior to the state election on March 26 this year.

This expenditure review confirmed the trial is designed to reduce spending, rather than improve the quality of education:

"To capture savings from devolution requires more than the rollout of the current trial

decision making and principal authority are supported in the pursuit of this goal, when and where it is demonstrable that this approach neither undermines nor diminishes:

- equity and excellence for all students and schools,
- statewide curriculum, resource and staffing guarantees,
- teachers' employment rights and entitlements, and
- the primacy of the principal's role as educational leader.

"● Current trial involves additional costs that will need to be phased out (eg. to cover higher than average staff costs in some schools) and does not yet address staffing implications at the State and Regional Office."

Further references reveal the true intent:

"● Current trial tests the concept but more work is required to build in the efficiency savings before any rollout.

"● NSW schools currently operate with a centralised authority and accountability framework and a complex, program-based funding model with resource allocation undertaken by the central body.

"● Preliminary benchmarking has shown the lowest cost jurisdiction to have a devolved model (while maintaining good outcomes), suggesting savings may be available through reduced central staff under this model."

This trial is part of a cost cutting strategy that aims to undermine and dismantle the existing formula-based approach to determining school staffing entitlements. The long term aim is to have the size of the school's staffing budget determine the number and mix of staff, rather than a government guaranteed staffing formula that ensures equitable provision for all students. Under this approach, governments would be able to reduce school staffing budgets and expect school principals as 'local managers' to field the criticism and blame for staff shortfalls and cuts.

Rather than ensuring that a formula based entitlement is maintained for all students, the devolution trial is allowing schools to trade off positions to meet some other school need that should be funded by government. This occurred in the first days of the trial, when a school traded off a teacher-librarian position for some other priority. Devolution puts the onus on schools to 'free up' funding to pay for a locally identified priority. Schools are given the 'flexibility' to change the mix of staff by not filling specialist teacher, classroom teacher and executive positions and to use that resource for other purposes.

It is clearly unacceptable that any school should be allowed to trade off a teaching colleague's career in this way and in so doing, undermine educational equity and quality for students.

### **Devolution in Victorian public schools means reduced education spending**

Too often devolution is used by governments to reduce spending and shift the blame for funding and staffing shortfalls onto local principals and school communities. Experience shows that the more governments devolve decision making on resources and staffing to the school level, the lower the overall investment in education.

This was revealed in Boston Consulting Group's expenditure review which based its cuts on the highly devolved Victorian public schools, where state governments now spend 12 per cent less than NSW on a per student basis. The Boston Consulting Group calculated this would equate with the loss of 7500 teacher positions and 1500 support positions in NSW public schools, as well as other major cuts of over \$100 million per annum in areas such as special education and equity programs for the neediest students.

The cuts to NSW public schools if the Victorian approach were to be implemented are revealed in Boston Consulting Group's summary of its findings:

"We have identified a range of potential opportunities within the State and Regional Office (including central corporate services), Government and Non-Government schools and TAFE, in aggregate these opportunities could be worth \$500-\$700m in recurrent costs and \$800-1,000m in one-off benefits, excluding school-based workforce productivity and ICT savings. Many of these opportunities require major change and would require a number of years to implement. ... Devolution of some responsibilities to schools and simplifying the school funding model could drive efficiency by reducing the number of central support staff required (potentially worth \$15-\$25m)."

The work currently undertaken by state and regional office staff will still need to be done. Devolution merely shifts it to teachers and other school based staff whose workloads continue to escalate.

### **Has this been tried in NSW before?**

Since the 1980s in NSW public education, governments have sought to devolve more decision making to the school level. In 1992, the Department of School Education distributed a consultation paper entitled *Your School's Right To Choose* which claimed: "Change is needed. Principals, staff, parents and school councils must be given power to make routine, systematic and responsible decisions about the use of resources, based on local professional judgements and on the needs and aspirations of local communities."