



AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT PRIMARY PRINCIPALS ASSOCIATION

'Championing the Cause of Primary Education in Government Schools'

Position Paper: Empowering Local Schools

June 2011

AGPPA Position

AGPPA is the professional association representing Principals of over 5,300 Primary Schools across Australia from the Government sector. Within the Government sector there already exists a significant difference in the degree of local empowerment for schools across different States and Territories. AGPPA supports Principals having increased decision-making capacity, working in collaboration with their local community. The extent of local decision-making and the aspects of school leadership and management that are accepted as being most effectively devolved to the school level must reflect the individual circumstances of each school and its community – a 'one-size-fits-all' approach will not work.

Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments must work collaboratively with each other and consult widely with Principals, teachers and parent communities about empowering local schools, while ensuring that all schools are provided with the wherewithal to ensure students meet the *'Educational Goals for Young Australians'*. There is a need to ensure the healthy diversity of schooling in Australia is not confined or constrained by any blanket policy that shifts responsibility for appropriate resourcing of education away from Governments and onto local communities.

Governments and education authorities must base their approach to local empowerment on credible research into those aspects of schooling that make a difference to student learning when they are controlled by the school. The OECD states, *"School leaders need time, capacity and support to focus on the practices most likely to improve learning. Greater degrees of autonomy should be coupled with models of distributed leadership, new types of accountability, and training and development for school leadership."* It is a further imperative for governments and education authorities to ensure that Principals be held accountable only for those aspects of school governance over which they have authority and control.

Background

1. The OECD identified four major domains of responsibility as a key for school leadership to improve student outcomes:
 - o Supporting, evaluating and developing teacher quality
 - o Goal setting, assessment and accountability
 - o Strategic, financial and human resource management
 - o Collaborating with other schools

2. There is a wide divergence in the degree of local decision-making that currently exists within and across Australian education jurisdictions.
3. Research is very clear and explicit on what works. A national vision, a flexible approach with comprehensive professional learning, partnerships with parents and a restructuring of the way a school does business, have the most impact.
4. Increasingly, some Principals feel they are being given 'token' authority in areas of school governance with political, jurisdictional and industrial circumstances over-riding what is best for students. In some states and territories, this tokenism is coupled with increased emphasis on low-level, time-consuming administrative tasks which have little or no impact on improving student learning.
5. In some jurisdictions, Principals experience considerable frustration managing the quality of staff appointed to their school because they operate in a system that minimises their role in determining the appointment and tenure of staff. In other jurisdictions, a degree of local empowerment is only extended to a limited quota of schools, exacerbating equity issues and creating a two-tier staffing system that disadvantages some schools. Further, some jurisdictions with a higher number of schools serving rural, remote and hard-to-staff communities, have in place incentive staffing agreements that include a right-of-return to a preferred location.
6. To ensure an equitable model of local empowerment, AGPPA believes that the Australian Government has a pivotal role to play in creating and supporting a well-resourced national education system that empowers Principals, in collaboration with their local communities, to make decisions that benefit student learning.

Recommendations for implementation

1. The Australian Government Primary Principals' Association supports the evidence available from Australia and international sources where high-performing school systems have developed well-resourced, locally empowered schools providing the best opportunities for students to achieve excellence.
2. That the Australian Government, in collaboration with State and Territory Governments and education authorities and jurisdictions, prepares a template for school autonomy that focuses on the areas in which research demonstrates local empowerment will make a difference to student learning.
3. That the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) endorses a range of options from which schools may choose to draw, that enables increased local authority and empowerment for Principals and school communities, based on the circumstances at each school. The options should include models that recognise and support incentives for staffing rural, remote and hard-to-staff schools.
4. These options must be supported by implementation strategies which are equitable and well-resourced across jurisdictions. Effective high-level training and development for principals must be a critical part of this process.
5. That all Governments, working together, should ensure any new funding model for schooling, including the level of funds available to schools from all sources, supports increased local empowerment. There must be careful monitoring of any requirement by individual jurisdictions that diminishes the ability of Principals to access the range of options for local empowerment.
6. That all schools are resourced to initiate and sustain their own site specific, evidence-based strategies through a range of options.
7. Resourcing for all school students should be equitable regardless of student age.