



Education and Training

# School Improvement in ACT Public Schools

Directions 2010-2013

*“Leadership is the practice of improvement  
- like it or not ...”*

Richard Elmore, 2008

# our vision

That all young people  
in the ACT learn, thrive  
and are equipped  
with the skills to lead  
fulfilling, productive and  
responsible lives

## our values

**HONESTY • EXCELLENCE • FAIRNESS • RESPECT**



# Improving our public schools

The vision of the *ACT Department of Education and Training Strategic Plan 2010-2013 – Everyone Matters* is to ensure that all young people in the ACT learn, thrive and are equipped with the skills to lead fulfilling, productive and responsible lives

While some ACT public schools are already achieving excellent results, there are individual students in all schools who are not achieving at an appropriate level, for a range of reasons. **In every school and every classroom there is room for improvement.**

From 2010, the Department will implement an integrated and comprehensive approach to school improvement based on the principle that the core work of all school leaders is to improve student learning outcomes. This approach will build upon the current work in schools to improve teacher quality, develop leadership capacity, introduce more consistency in curriculum provision and use data to monitor and report on school performance.

The Department is committed to developing a more systematic and targeted approach to school improvement by:

- organising our schools into four networks, each led by a school network leader (SNL)
- enhancing the accountability of principals and school network leaders
- increasing the availability and use of data to inform school improvement practices and monitor progress
- providing support for our principals to ensure they are highly effective instructional leaders
- building the capacity of our teachers, particularly in literacy and numeracy teaching.

# Strengthening school improvement

Between 2010 and 2013, schools and their communities will use the School Improvement Framework (SIF) to reflect on the quality of their practices, identify strategic priorities and develop programs that are effective, challenging and engaging for all students.

The SIF is based on four key processes:

- 1 Schools self assess to evaluate progress and identify school priorities.
- 2 Schools plan for improvement through a four-year school plan and an annual operating plan including accountability measures and targets.
- 3 Schools report on progress through the Annual School Board Report.
- 4 Schools participate in an external review process over a four-year cycle.

The SIF has been designed to assist schools to evaluate their performance using evidence-informed processes and tools.

*“...one of the greatest barriers to school improvement is the lack of an agreed-upon definition of what high-quality instruction looks like.”*

Richard Elmore et al, 2008



Analysis of school performance has highlighted significant variation in student outcomes within and across schools. The strengthened school improvement focus aims to reduce these gaps by ensuring that every student is exposed to high expectations, effective teaching and a supportive learning environment – regardless of the school they attend.

The strengthened school improvement focus will:

- define and promote consistent understandings of what constitutes effective teaching and learning at school, network and system levels
- prioritise improvement in literacy and numeracy outcomes and school graduation rates
- set high expectations for student learning and intervene early when progress is less than expected
- prioritise the maximisation of teaching time within each lesson, school day, term and year
- use in-class coaching as a basis for professional learning to build teacher and school leader capacity
- establish networks across the system for resource deployment, school improvement and professional learning
- increase the school network leader's involvement with individual schools
- build collaboration within and across schools by identifying, sharing and resolving problems of practice
- strengthen partnerships between the central office and schools to work together to improve student outcomes
- increase accountability and transparency in relation to school performance
- include an annual school review by the school network leaders based on each school's self assessment
- ensure high quality data is available and used to monitor and drive school, network and system improvement
- ensure all staff receive proactive and regular feedback on their performance.

# A network approach to improvement

To support the school improvement focus, schools will be organised into four networks. A school network leader will lead each network.

The school network leaders will develop effective and purposeful partnerships within and across the four school networks. Partnerships will be flexible and innovative, informed by high quality local, national and international practices and initiatives that improve the performance of every school.

**School network leaders and principals will engage in honest and open discussion about the individual and collective performance of their schools.** They will work together to identify and address problems and issues affecting each school, establishing a collaborative learning culture over time. Networks will provide a platform for developing common understandings of effective teaching and learning, sharing successful practices and offering opportunities for leadership and teacher development. Participating in shared learning experiences, such as instructional rounds, will increase the principals' capacity to lead improvement across all schools in the network.

Early in 2010, networks will prioritise common areas for improvement in line with the Department's Strategic Plan and develop and articulate these in network improvement plans. The areas for improvement will be based on joint analysis of data gathered from all schools in the network, with improvement strategies and actions identified collectively. The plans will be developed and implemented from Term 2, 2010.



# Shared accountability for school improvement

At the heart of the Department's school improvement agenda is the principle that accountability applies across all levels of the system and involves a collective responsibility to work together.

Principals are directly responsible for developing the conditions that support achievement of all students. **As the instructional leader, the principal builds a clear consensus of what constitutes effective teaching and learning in their school context and is proactive in addressing identified challenges at the earliest point in time.**

They monitor the quality of teaching and learning at classroom level, ensuring that the aims and objectives of all lessons are clearly articulated by classroom teachers. Leadership teams will support their teachers by participating in lesson observation and feedback in line with the Quality Teaching Model and providing support where required.

Principals will be required to share their school accountability and performance data openly and collectively work on solutions to individual and network problems. Principals from high performing schools will be expected to share their schools' successful teaching and leadership practices.

The principal is accountable for their school's performance to the Chief Executive through their school network leader, and to their community through their school board.

School network leaders are responsible for overseeing continuous school improvement. They are accountable for the overall performance of their network, including the performance of each school, and ensuring effective planning, resource allocation and support at school and network levels.

The school network leaders, directors and the Department's senior executive are accountable to the community and government for establishing the conditions that can support sustained improvement in schools and for overall performance of the system.

# Principal performance and development

As we strengthen our school improvement processes we recognise the critical nature of the professional relationship and interactions between the principal and school network leader. These relationships will be characterised by the Strategic Plan values of honesty, excellence, fairness and respect.

The principal's appraisal process has been refined to complement the strengthened school improvement agenda, including the responsibilities of each principal beyond their school to the network. Each principal will work with their school network leader to identify the school and network priorities that will be the focus of their individual work. They will devise an agreement based on a frank analysis of their leadership strengths and developmental needs, and the support they will require to achieve the identified school targets. In drawing up the Principal's Performance and Development Agreement (PPDA), the principal and school network leader will agree upon a clearly identified set of criteria to monitor the principal's performance.

The PPDA will outline the leadership strategies, and personal and network professional learning the principal will undertake to achieve the identified priorities for improvement. The School Leadership Framework provides a reference to support discussions.

The performance and development process includes systematic self-evaluation and the provision of explicit feedback. Principals will undertake self-evaluation of their progress against the stated priorities twice a year.





This will occur mid-cycle and end-of-cycle. **School network leaders will provide principals with objective and constructive written feedback on their performance and professional growth at the mid and end points of the cycle.** Feedback will support both school and system-wide improvement.

School network leaders will visit each school frequently, however it is recognised that individual school performance, context and need varies across schools and, as such, the level of work, and time shared between the principal and school network leader, may vary. This work may include school network leaders working in a coaching role with some principals in order to support them in analysing data, identifying strategies and highlighting areas for school improvement.

From 2010, performance pathways for teachers and support staff will more clearly align with the priorities of the school plan.

*“Schools are interconnected systems – like ripples in a pond.”*

Andy Hargreaves and Dean Fink, 2006

# Responsibilities of school network leaders

School network leaders will focus entirely on school improvement. This will enable them to lead, manage and support a network of schools.

**School network leaders are accountable for overseeing the performance and the results of all schools in their area.** They will undertake an annual review of the strategic priorities and targets set in each school plan. They will verify that the identified priorities are relevant, realistic and will achieve improved student learning outcomes. School performance will influence the frequency and focus of school visits and meetings with each principal.

A significant change in the role of the school network leader will be to use comprehensive and relevant data sets to support the deployment and alignment of resources when required. The resources may be allocated to an individual school, a number of schools or groups of schools within and across networks.

To achieve this aim, it is vital for the school network leader to have a clear understanding of every school. Principals are encouraged to have open and frank dialogue with their school network leader. Evidence including student achievement, school graduation rates and destination data will be used when making decisions about the support required in each school to ensure improvement.

School network leaders will have a particular focus on supporting and monitoring the progress of schools identified under the COAG National Partnerships, and those schools that are receiving additional literacy and numeracy support.

The four school network leaders, led by the Executive Director School Improvement, will operate as a collaborative team and ensure that a consistent approach to school improvement is developed across the system. They will meet on a regular basis to discuss national and ACT priorities, identify emerging issues and develop responses in a timely manner.

*“Networks can provide a means of facilitating local innovation and change as well as contributing to large scale reform. They offer the potential for re-inventing local support for schools by promoting different forms of collaboration, linkages and multi-functional partnerships....”*

David Hopkins, 2007



# A system-wide approach to improvement

Our approach to school improvement is based on a commitment to a collaborative culture that values reflection and input from key stakeholders. It is the work of all school and system leaders, collectively, that will see ACT education continue to develop as a mature and sophisticated system of high performing schools that meets the needs of all students to lead fulfilling, productive and responsible lives.

**To monitor our progress at a system level we will benchmark our improvement against other high-performing systems,** and seek opportunities to share our practices and learn from others.

To support this approach, Michael Fullan, an international authority on large-scale reform in school education, has agreed to act as a critical friend for the Department as we move to build a more strategic and targeted approach to school improvement. Michael will work regularly with ACT system and school leaders as the goals and priorities of the Department's Strategic Plan are translated into practice.



*“System change will not occur one school at a time. Schools and the district must work together to change a system. A good indicator of this is a district in which individual principals become almost as concerned about the success of other schools in the district as they do about their own school. Collective work increases shared commitment and shared knowledge to alter the context for all schools.”*

Michael Fullan, 2003



# An Integrated Approach to School Improvement

## Building leadership

Every leader a high performing instructional leader

Development of a specific vision of what high quality teaching looks like

Establish ambitious targets to improve literacy, numeracy and school graduation



## Improved learning & teaching

High expectations for student learning

Deep understanding of literacy and numeracy learning

Teachers use data to inform their practices

Early and ongoing interventions where required



This diagram illustrates the key school improvement directions and how the range of strategies and initiatives relate to one another.

### High-quality comprehensive data

High-quality data is used to monitor and drive school improvement

Schools openly share and compare data

Resource deployment and strategies are measured and analysed for effectiveness



### Shared accountability

Greater accountability and transparency of school performance

Annual reviews of school performance by School Network Leaders

Partnerships between schools and central teams to improve student outcomes



### Building capacity

Coaching of teachers and school leaders to build school and network capacity

Every staff member receives proactive and regular performance feedback

Professional learning targeted to identified needs



# School Improvement in ACT Public Schools Directions **2010-2013**

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