



School Excellence Initiative

Achieving Excellence in ACT Government Schools

Message from the Minister



It is my pleasure to introduce the first publication associated with the School Excellence Initiative announced in the recent Stanhope Government's 2003-04 Budget.

Providing high quality schooling is a priority for the ACT Government. The School Excellence Initiative aims to assist ACT government schools build on existing good practice and provide high quality education for all students. It will assist them in striving for even higher standards. It will help schools assess their performance and instigate improvements.

The School Excellence Initiative encompasses many other programs that are adding rigour and innovation to our schools. It provides a framework that aligns each one of these programs. This exciting initiative allows informed strategic planning for education in the ACT and will provide opportunities for ACT schools to continue to lead the way in providing improved learning outcomes for all students.

Katy Gallagher MLA Minister for Education, Youth and Family Services

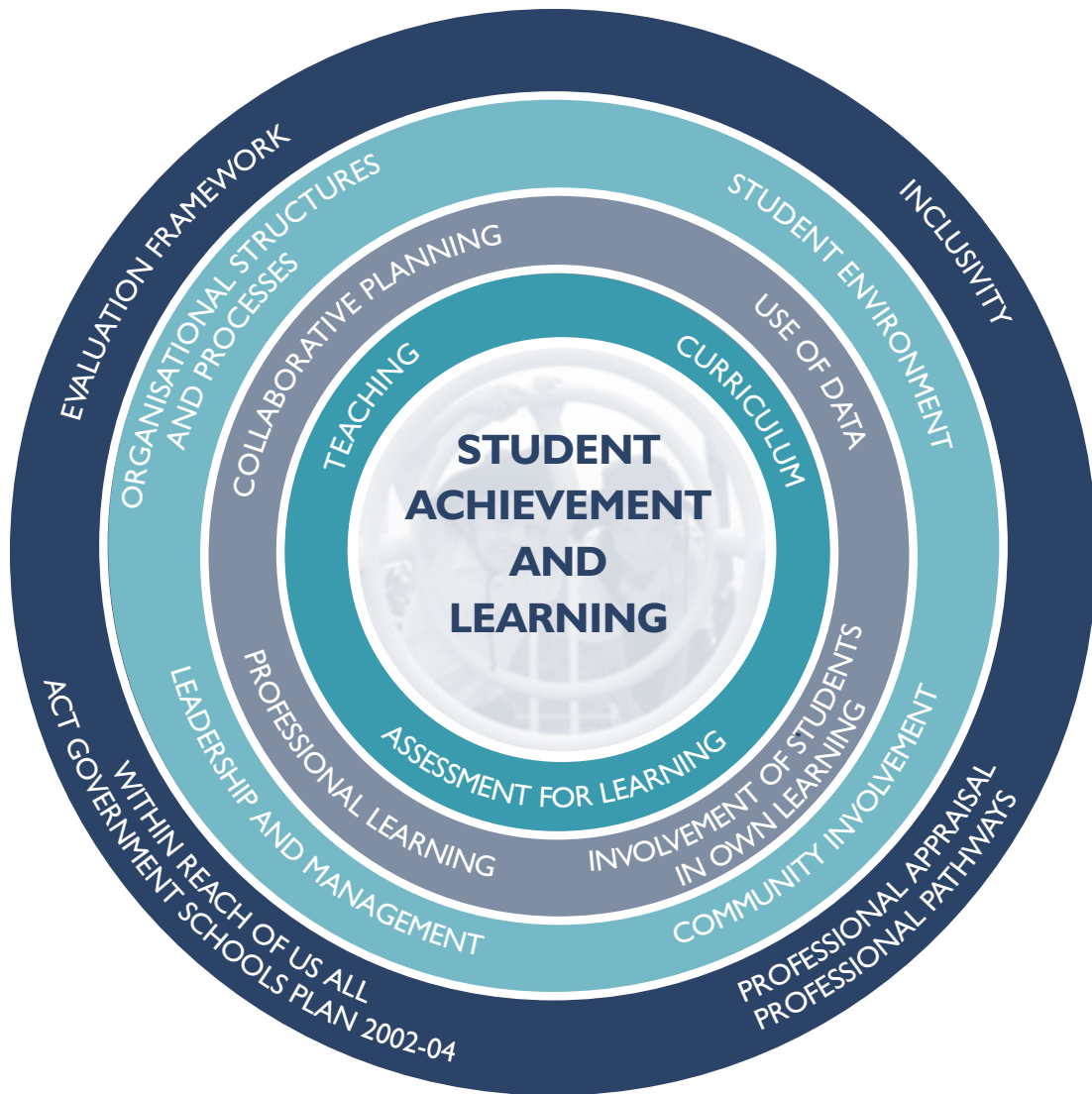


What is the School Excellence Initiative?

The School Excellence Initiative is the overarching framework for achieving high standards in student learning, innovation and best practice in ACT government schools. It reflects the contributions of teachers, parents and carers, schools and the wider community.


ACT government schools currently rank with the best in Australia. Achievements in literacy and numeracy, retention rates and the use of learning technologies reflect the dynamic learning environments that have been created by dedicated and professional teachers. However, there is still a need to continue to build upon what has already been achieved.

At the core of the conceptual framework for the School Excellence Initiative is student achievement and learning. Integral to this are teaching, curriculum and assessment for learning. This core is further supported by collaborative planning, the use of data, professional learning and the involvement of students in their learning. Organisational structures and processes, the student environment, community involvement and leadership also support the core business of schools – student achievement and learning. The *Within Reach of Us All* suite of ACT government schools' plans, the Professional Pathways and Principals' Appraisal processes, the evaluative framework and the inclusivity focus of the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services, provide the focus for strategic planning by both schools and the central office.



CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR SCHOOL EXCELLENCE

Diagram adapted from Hopkins, 2003



What does current research tell us about the characteristics of excellent schools?

Excellent schools have a shared vision, values and clear goals

Excellent schools have clarity of purpose. They use deliberate processes to engage the whole school community in important decisions. Excellent schools share responsibility for deciding school direction, educational philosophy and core values.

The leadership is professional and effective

Effective leadership is at the core of excellent schools. It is strategic, purposeful and participative and it is focused on achievement. The involvement, confidence and successful ongoing learning of every student and every staff member matters to professional leaders. They serve as role models. They align key components of system initiatives at the school level with curriculum, professional learning, student support and resource allocation and make explicit the connections to the school community.

The focus is on teaching skills and the learning of students

Excellent schools are explicit about high expectations and emphasise high achievement and performance. Teaching and learning are accorded the highest priority. Individual student progress and whole school programs are carefully monitored through the systematic collection and interpretation of data. Decisions about the ways to improve teaching and learning outcomes are based on that data.

In excellent schools, staff believe that all students can obtain mastery when the curriculum and teaching and learning activities are designed to meet the specific needs of their students. Staff are also confident they have the skills to help their students to obtain that mastery and experience success. They give timely and helpful feedback to students about their work. They ensure every student has the knowledge, understanding, values and skills necessary for their ongoing participation in education.

In excellent schools students share responsibility for their success. They are actively involved in setting goals for their learning, for the way their work will be assessed and the extent of their effort and achievement.

The home-school partnerships are genuine

Excellent schools establish and maintain positive home-school partnerships so that parents are actively engaged in their children's learning. They look for opportunities to involve the wider community in the work of the school and its well-being.

Staff are active members in their learning organisation

Teachers in excellent schools have a positive attitude to, and are actively engaged in, professional learning. Excellent schools make time for staff to reflect on their practice and their learning needs. School leaders encourage and support the involvement of all school staff in timely, high quality professional learning opportunities.

Excellent schools provide supportive learning environments for students

In excellent schools students are engaged in learning environments that foster their self-esteem and confidence. There are strong pastoral care programs and relationships between teachers and students that are positive and respectful. Inclusivity, diversity and equity are deliberately and sensitively integrated into programs and are considered in the everyday operations of the school.

Excellent schools create opportunities for students to develop a sense of personal and shared responsibility for setting goals and planning for the future. They ensure students are actively and meaningfully involved in the governance of the school and in decisions that matter to them.

Excellent schools are inclusive

Excellent schools believe that all students are learners with the potential to achieve. They value the diverse resources and needs students bring to the classroom. Inclusive schools ensure that each student is challenged to achieve high standards and success in ways that complement what they already know, what they can already do, and how they best learn.



What principles underpin the School Excellence Initiative?

The School Excellence Initiative provides a framework and a protocol for high achievement in ACT government schools. It guides schools towards providing high quality education and learning environments for all students, irrespective of background. It focuses on achieving excellence in all endeavours. Student achievement and learning remains the key focus for the School Excellence Initiative.

1. Best Practice

The School Excellence Initiative is underpinned by reliable evidence of performance and research into international, national and local best practice. Research provides useful insight into ways schools might build their capacity to extend the effectiveness of learning for all students. For example, best practice in schools could involve the examination of the use of data, motivational strategies, the use of a range of research-based effective teaching repertoires and the use of technologies that support learning and teaching.

2. High Standards

High standards are critical to a successful education program. Schools will be assisted in identifying new priorities and strategies, based on benchmarks, to achieve increasingly high standards.

New tools for school self assessment in learning and teaching, leadership and management, student environment and community involvement are being introduced to support schools. All sections of the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services are committed to working together to achieve excellence in schools.

3. Self Assessment

Excellent schools are dynamic. They systematically monitor and measure their performance against agreed goals, providing a catalyst for improving the school's effectiveness in relation to each student.

The School Excellence Initiative will provide tools to assist each school to monitor its own performance and use data to inform strategies for the future. Every three years schools will undertake a major review involving external validation.

4. Innovation

Excellent schools acknowledge that periods of rapid change provide opportunities for creativity and innovation. To keep abreast of change, schools consider whether existing practices and programs are appropriate to meet emerging needs. They use evidence and research, experience and intuition to plan interesting and relevant responses to the ongoing challenges that arise in the school community environment.

5. Professional Learning Communities

Excellent schools are professional communities of learners, in which staff continuously seek and share learning and then act on what they learn. The outcomes enhance their effectiveness as professionals so that students benefit.

6. Quality Teaching

Teachers in ACT government schools practise in a professional manner accepting responsibility for the development of students in the intellectual, physical, cultural, social and emotional domains. They foster respectful and productive relationships. The School Excellence Initiative provides a framework for powerful teaching. It supports and promotes effective pedagogy that results in high quality learning outcomes.



What are some of the key components of the School Excellence Initiative?

The School Excellence Initiative aligns a range of initiatives in ACT government schools. The key components of the School Excellence Initiative are:

Rejuvenated School Development Program

A rejuvenated School Development Program will foster a culture of continuous improvement in ACT schools. It will provide the format for school self assessment in all aspects of schooling, including teaching and learning, leadership and management, student environment and community involvement. Self assessment informs planning for school improvement. The school self assessment and planning process will be externally validated every three years. The self assessment process will become part of the school's annual planning cycle and will be considerably less onerous than the current five year process.

Government Schools' Plans

The ACT Government Schools' Plan *Within Reach of Us All* 2002-2004 provides a visionary framework for the provision of high quality education for all students in ACT government schools. The **Student Support Action Plan 2002-2004** and the **Services to Indigenous People Action Plan 2002-2004** underpin this framework and focus on specific aspects of education.

Individual Student Pathways Planning and the Career Education Support Service

Through **Individual Student Pathways Plans** students will plan for successful transitions through the senior years of schooling to adult life. This planning will identify individual strengths and recognise opportunities to increase the skills and abilities of young people to capitalise on their future choices. The **Career Education Support Service** will provide integrated career guidance resources for all students in high schools and secondary colleges.

Literacy and Numeracy

Literacy and numeracy programs in ACT government schools are innovative and designed to meet the needs of all students. They result in excellent outcomes for students as indicated through the **ACT Assessment Program (ACTAP)**. ACTAP results assist schools in identifying strengths and areas for improvement.

Learning Technologies

The Department of Education, Youth and Family Services recognises that new learning technologies can transform the way we teach and learn. The **Centre for Teaching and Learning Technologies** is taking a leading role in developing innovative professional programs to assist and enhance student outcomes.

Curriculum Renewal Project

The **Curriculum Renewal Project** will enhance the curriculum development capacity of ACT government schools. It will assist schools to develop citizens of the future through relevant and appropriate curricula for years K-10.

Student Centred Appraisal for Students with Disabilities

The School Excellence Initiative will significantly enhance educational outcomes for students with disabilities by providing resourcing to mainstream and special schools that is based on the identified access and participation needs of their students. This best practice approach links resourcing with an appraisal of student need and the development of an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) for each student.

Smaller Class Sizes

The smaller class sizes initiative recognises that the early years of schooling are the foundation of future successful learning. It is supporting better educational outcomes for all K-3 students in ACT government schools.

Professional Learning and Leadership Development

The **Professional Learning Fund** and **Teacher Fellowships** recognise and support the continual professional learning of teachers and principals. ACT teachers in government schools will continue to access an exciting range of professional learning opportunities.

Principals' Professional Appraisal and the Teachers' Professional Pathways Programs

These programs focus on the importance of principals and teachers, identifying priorities for development, learning and reflecting on their practice.

High School Development Program

The **High School Development Program** is assisting ACT government high schools to develop structures and programs that will prepare students for lifelong learning. Focus areas are the curriculum and pedagogy, middle schooling and vocational learning.

Schools Equity Fund

An expanded **Schools Equity Fund** will improve the educational opportunities in ACT government schools for children and young people from disadvantaged families.

Counselling Services in ACT Government Schools

The review of counselling services will result in the placement of a youth worker in every high school and extra support for students. These initiatives will enhance counselling services in ACT government schools, permit the development of multidisciplinary teams and foster closer links with other agencies to benefit students.

Parent Participation

The Parent/Carer As Partners In Schooling Policy (September 2001) underpins the importance of parent/carer participation in schooling. This unique participation is important to student achievement and school success. Effective partnerships between schools and families foster student learning and contribute to the general ethos and development of schools. Comprehensive parent/carer participation is highly valued and encouraged and is seen as a key component of the School Excellence Initiative.



Some Questions and Answers

How will the School Excellence Initiative benefit schools and their students?

Focusing on school excellence will strengthen each school's capacity to provide quality education for its students. It will encourage a strong focus on continuous improvement and integrate and enhance current school planning, evaluation and reporting procedures. The focus remains on the attainment of the highest possible outcomes for students.

What is the role of the school community in the School Excellence Initiative?

Community participation is a strong and valued feature of ACT government schools. School Boards will establish strategic directions and priorities for the school and assess and monitor school performance against a framework for school improvement. The processes used for participation and involvement by the wider school community in School Development will continue as part of the School Excellence Initiative.

How will the School Excellence Initiative be evaluated?

School Development is the evaluative tool for the School Excellence Initiative. In a rejuvenated School Development process, schools are involved in self assessment and planning each year, with external validation every three years. They will review, monitor and report on their agreed priorities each year and identify emerging priorities.

What does the internal self assessment mean for schools?

The new self assessment process will be practical, efficient and effective. Schools will use a wide range of quantitative and qualitative data to assess and support their performance in the areas of learning and teaching, leadership and management, student environment and community involvement.

Schools will continue to make their own decisions about priorities and directions to meet the particular needs of their students. The directions outlined in the ACT government schools' plans form an important basis for deciding priorities.

What will happen to School Development?

The current School Development processes will be revised to reflect the new focus on continuous improvement and self assessment. There will be a staged implementation process.

Which schools will participate in the new procedures for school development in 2004?

Schools participating in the new school development procedures in 2004 will be:

High Schools

Canberra, Caroline Chisholm, Calwell, Belconnen, Stromlo, Campbell

Primary Schools

Aranda, Cook, Macquarie, Chisholm, Gowrie, Fadden, Gilmore, Hawker, Weetangera, Florey, Southern Cross, Isabella Plains, Theodore, Calwell, Richardson, Campbell Ainslie, Majura, North Ainslie, Duffy, Arawang, Chapman, Rivett, Weston.

What will be the impact on teacher workloads?

A shorter cycle from five years to three years has been suggested by many schools. School personnel recognise that a reduced cycle will assist schools to make more realistic plans. As the new self assessment process will support the annual planning process in schools, it will be considerably less onerous than the current arrangements.

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- www.sedl.org/changes/issues/issues61.html Vol.6 No 1 *Professional Learning Communities: What are they and why are they important?*

What are the next steps?

Establish the School Excellence Initiative Advisory Committee	Term 3 2003
<p>Distribute Information Paper</p> <p>Develop and consult on a draft format for the revised school development process</p> <p>Trial the draft format for the school development process with schools and other stakeholders</p> <p>Conduct focus group meetings for Principals</p> <p>Consult with schools and other stakeholders about the School Excellence Initiative</p>	Term 3 2003
<p>Conduct final consultation with schools and other stakeholders</p> <p>Training of one third of ACT government schools (Group I) for the implementation of the new school development format for 2004</p>	Term 4 2003
<p>Group I schools undertake self assessment using the new school development format to inform their strategic planning</p> <p>All other schools continue to plan and strive for excellence. They will review their current plans so that they incorporate the key components of the School Excellence Initiative into their ongoing planning.</p> <p>Schools can use the new school development format where appropriate.</p>	2004