

Connected Communities

Semester 2, 2013

From the desk of Michele Hall, Executive Director, Connected Communities

On 13 September I celebrated twelve months of being in the Executive Director's position for Connected Communities. It's been an opportunity that I feel privileged to have experienced.

Since that time, much has happened in shaping the strategy and informing its future directions.

- All Executive Principal positions have now been filled
- In Semester One, the Director-General and I travelled to schools and their communities and are now gearing up for our Semester Two visits
- Local school reference groups are either in operation or in the process of being established
- The positions of Senior Leader, Community Engagement in each school are either filled or under recruitment
- The Executive Principals participated in an induction program and have recently engaged in a two day professional learning forum
- School assets and infrastructure assessments have been conducted and will inform future structural planning and changes
- Curriculum, professional learning and school organisation are undergoing review and reform, with Aboriginal languages and Cultural studies gaining traction through consultation and negotiation
- The Connected Communities Directorate is fully recruited and is leading policy as well as providing essential advice, guidance and support.
- Key stakeholder relationships continue to be strengthened and are gaining traction, with effective partnerships being forged and progressed
- The evaluation framework is being formulated and customised to examine the vital elements specific to the strategy

These achievements have been realised through vision, commitment and collaboration. I'm looking forward to reporting on the next twelve months as we continue along the exciting journey of this formidable educational reform.

Executive Principals' Staffing

Congratulations to the Executive Principals who have been appointed since the last newsletter:

Allison Alliston, who has been appointed to Taree High School, Gavin Khan, who has been appointed to Boggabilla Central School and Brian Giles-Browne, who has been appointed to Coonamble Public School.

Recruitment for the Taree Public School principal position is near completion.



Executive Principals' Professional Development Forum

A Professional Development Forum was held in Sydney with the Executive Principals on 16 and 17 September.

Issues discussed in presentations and workshops included school staffing, work health and safety, school funding models, child protection and linkages with agencies such as Family and Community Services and Police. A major part of the agenda was the Executive Principals' sharing of ideas that are working well in their schools.

A highlight of the Forum was the participation of the Premier, the Minister for Education and the Director-General. The Minister graciously attended on both days of the forum and the Premier also made time in his busy schedule to attend. This was welcomed by the Executive Principals. As the Minister said later in Parliament, "I know the Premier gained a lot from that, as did I".

In her session with the Executive Principals, the Director-General reflected on her visits to the Connected Communities schools and outlined her plans for further visits. Dr Bruniges recognised the efforts of the Executive Principals to "build a critical mass of support" in their communities and encouraged them to continue this process in the context of forming their School Reference Groups. She also affirmed the willingness of senior officers in other government departments to be involved and assist the Executive Principals. Dr Bruniges emphasised the need for the Executive Principals to provide leadership in this context, in collaboration with their communities.

Presenters at the Executive Principals' Forum included:

- Helen Willoughby, State Manager, NSW/ACT for the former Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations,
- Michael Waterhouse, Director, Legal Services,
- Peter Johnson, General Manager, Human Resources (and team),
- Marnie O'Brien, Director, Work Health and Safety,
- Veronica Willmott, Assistant Director, Staffing Services (and team),
- Deb Gavan, Keep Them Safe Coordinator, Department of Family and Community Services (with Donna Argus, Keep Them Safe Regional Project Manager),
- Superintendent David Scrimgeour, Youth Area Command
- Robyn McKerihan, Executive Director, Local Schools, Local Decisions,
- Raymond Ingrey, Team Leader, Community Engagement.

Professional Exchanges

A major element of the forum was the Executive Principals' sharing of ideas that are working well in their schools.

Daryl Irvine, Executive Principal at Menindee Central, spoke in detail about the Integrated Case Management Team at Menindee Central School, which comes together regularly to ensure students and families are supported in achieving educational success. The Integrated Case Management Team is a formal structure to make sure that students and families get the services and support they require. It operates under Keep Them Safe protocols for information sharing, to ensure information is shared appropriately and privacy is maintained.

Margaret Cobb, Executive Principal at Toomelah Public, presented information about the effects of brain trauma. Ms Cobb stated that, 'Research shows that significant physiological damage, if remediated in the first three months of life, has the best chance of being successful. We have been accessing



professional learning on the effects of this as well as exploring appropriate strategies. Staff at Toomelah PS, have participated in Professional Learning and workshops from leading psychologists such as Andrew Fuller where they have been focusing on the brain, classroom strategies and working with students. Since implementing this strategic focus, Margaret has observed an increase in participation in class, where students are much more engaged in learning.



Teaching and Learning Plans in Connected Communities Schools

Connected Communities schools are developing their teaching and learning plans in line with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014. The purpose of this Plan is to "accelerate improvements in the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people". There are six domains of the Plan. This newsletter shows some examples of activities in Connected Communities schools that relate to one of the domains: Literacy and Numeracy.

Literacy and Numeracy

Wilcannia Central School has collected data on all students from Kindergarten to Year 10 and each primary class now has individual targets for all students.

Years 7 - 10 classes have been redesigned to ensure a devoted numeracy and literacy group takes place each morning. Students have been assessed and staff understand the level and skill gaps for each individual student. Numeracy groups run from 9 am to 10 am and literacy 10 am to 11 am.

Staff have been supported through training in literacy and numeracy and all staff, regardless of their curriculum expertise, take either a literacy or numeracy group. Most groups have

a second support person in the group by way of the Support Teacher Learning, Literacy and Numeracy Instructional Leader, Aboriginal Education Officer or School Learning Support Officer.

Teacher professional learning will be run each week, based on the areas of need identified by staff to ensure they feel confident and capable in providing for their group.

Sustainable Learning

Brewarrina Central School has recently implemented a pilot program called 'Big Picture Learning'. In a collaborative process the decision was made to implement the program, as it demonstrated strategies to re-engage and to re-ignite students into learning. Mr Peter Morgan, Executive Principal said, 'the program is ideal for Brewarrina Central School, as it accommodates for our setting and school population'.

The elements of this pilot program are:

- Personalised projects based on each student's passions – often with strong links to culture;
- Strong relationships – teachers and Aboriginal aides work intensively with students 1:1, getting to know them as people not just learners.
- High expectations – students have to be active in their learning and take responsibility.

Peter Morgan is extremely pleased with recent outcomes and observations of the program.

In class, students are 'on task' and focused more often. They are proud to show their work and the direction they are working towards. Conflict and tension between students has declined dramatically. Strong rapport with student and teachers is being developed. The implementation of 'mini' projects and tasks is creating and building literacy and numeracy skills.

At exhibitions/student presentations, parents are proud of their child's achievement and progress and their change in attitude and self-worth. The parents can see that their children want to come to school, achieve and have aspirations.

Mr. Morgan said "Even though it's early days, it is encouraging for all and the program is already demonstrating improved learning outcomes".

Brewarrina Central School is implementing a fundamental change in the way learning is managed and it's making a difference to the students, school and community.

Further information on Connected Communities go to

www.schools.nsw.edu.au/connected-communities

© November 2013

NSW Department of Education and Communities



The Minister's Visits

The Minister for Education, the Hon. Adrian Piccoli MP, was out and about visiting Connected Communities schools in September. While in Coonamble, the Minister engaged in the opening of the Clontarf Academy at Coonamble High and enjoyed the challenge of participating in a steer handling competition.

The opening of the Coonamble High School, Clontarf Academy was a successful visit where the various aspects of the program were highlighted to the Minister. The school also showcased the outstanding opportunities and programs that are available to the students and the community of Coonamble High School.

Margaret Mulcahy, Executive Principal said "The Minister was tremendously impressed at the achievements of Clontarf and our school. It was indeed a proud day for Coonamble".

