Kitchen Table Discussion Guide
Strengthening the provision of public secondary education in the inner Sydney area
Thank you for agreeing to participate in this consultation process. The Inner City Schools Working Party understands that many people want to make constructive and valuable contributions to public policy on the future of secondary education, for the common good.

This Kitchen Table Discussion Guide gives you a framework to have a co-operative discussion with family, friends, neighbours and colleagues to gain a deeper understanding of the complex issues surrounding secondary schooling. Using the discussion guide will help you to have a healthy and interesting conversation that can help the Working Party make meaningful recommendations to the Government.

On behalf of the Working Party I want to give a special thank you to those who have decided to host an event. As a host, you are contributing not just your time and opinion, but your space and personal efforts to helping us make better informed public policy. We appreciate your contribution and have tried to make this guide clear, informative and helpful. Inside you will find sections on the (minimal) preparation necessary as well as a comprehensive guide to running the event and importantly, how to record the results and send us your feedback.

You are contributing to a broader consultation process that includes:

- Local Members, Councillor and Principal briefings
- Workshops with staff and P&C groups from each of the inner Sydney public secondary schools
- Meetings with key community stakeholder groups
- Focus groups with future secondary school parents and existing parents
- Focus groups with inner Sydney public secondary school students

An independent communication and engagement organisation, Straight Talk, has been appointed to plan, deliver and report on the outcomes of this consultation process.

Should you have any questions about how to use this guide or the consultation process, please contact Lucy Cole-Edelstein at Straight Talk on (02) 9797 8004.

Thank you for your interest and time.

Dr Sylvia Corish
Chair of Inner City Schools Working Party
Director, Public Schools NSW
About this guide

This guide has been designed to make it easy and fun to run and/or participate in a Kitchen Table Discussion; a novel way of talking about important issues, such as the focus here on public secondary school provision in inner Sydney. Included in this guide is:

- Information on what is a Kitchen Table Discussion
- Background information on the provision of public secondary education in inner Sydney
- Information for Kitchen Table Discussion hosts
- Information and guidelines for the meeting
- A feedback sheet for completion during the discussion.

Kitchen Table Discussions

Kitchen Table Discussions are a structured way of participating in a healthy and constructive conversation about an issue that is important to those present. The Kitchen Table Discussion method harnesses the understanding we have with family, friends and colleagues, along with an innovative discussion approach, to discover solutions and ideas based on everyone’s perspectives.

The background information is a summary of the best data and analysis of the issues available. This information is included so that everyone can bring their perspective to a shared understanding of the issues.

The information for hosts is included to help hosts have everything they need to run a successful discussion.

The guidelines included are designed to make sure that everyone is heard and that the most assertive in the group do not dominate the conversation.

The discussion materials and questions keep the discussion focused on the issues. Your feedback will make a difference as part of the wider consultation process, being undertaken for the Inner City Schools Working Party.
Introduction

This section of the Discussion Guide provides background information on inner Sydney public secondary schools as a starting point for discussion and responses. It describes the 15 high schools in inner Sydney and outlines the projected needs for public secondary schools into the future as seen at this time by the Department of Education and Communities. It also shows the principles used by the Department in evaluating planning strategies and options to meet needs now and into the future.

What is the current situation?

In addition to the six fully selective or specialist secondary schools in inner Sydney (Cleveland Street Intensive English High School, Conservatorium High School, Fort Street High School, Sydney Boys High School, Sydney Distance Education High School and Sydney Girls High School) there are nine comprehensive or partially selective secondary schools – that is, with catchments largely within the Local Government Areas (LGAs) of the City of Sydney, Marrickville and Leichhardt. These secondary schools include:

- Alexandria Park Community School
- Dulwich High School of Visual Arts & Design
- J J Cahill Memorial High School
- Marrickville High School
- Newtown High School of Performing Arts
- Tempe High School
- Sydney Secondary College, Balmain Campus
- Sydney Secondary College, Leichhardt Campus
- Sydney Secondary College, Blackwattle Campus

The Department’s own analysis shows that, overall, the total capacity across these schools is enough to accommodate projected demand well into the future. The Department does however acknowledge that there is a variation at present in the utilisation of these secondary schools that needs to be addressed as some schools have spare capacity to accommodate growth within existing buildings, while other schools are at or near capacity. The Department also acknowledges parent concerns around the sustainability of current secondary school offerings in the inner Sydney area.

Projections of an increasing population, changing teaching and learning practices, and a growing number of families with school-aged children in the inner Sydney area means the Department needs to balance the demand for high quality secondary school provision with the available supply of public high school places to ensure an equitable allocation of resources.
when compared with other areas of Sydney and NSW. Currently the numbers show that there is enough public secondary school teaching and learning spaces to meet forecast demand to 2018.

As part of its normal planning cycle, the Department is actively working to find solutions that effectively meet the demand and community expectation for accessible, high-quality public secondary schooling. This means talking to parents, students, educators, and the broader community about the best ways to address existing pressures, demands, and capacity constraints within public secondary schools now as well as meeting the demand for public secondary schooling in the area for the short, medium, and longer term.

The work done by participants in forums such as this represent an essential part of understanding needs and planning for public secondary schools to meet demand into the future.

What data is being used for planning?

The Department prepares projections every year for student enrolment data for individual schools for the next five years. The Government also looks at other sources of information to create a more comprehensive picture of demand over the next 10 to 15 years. This includes studying information and population projections for school age children in local government areas from the NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure population projections and Australian Bureau of Statistics’ census data demographic trends such as Government/non-Government school affiliations. It also includes an analysis of Government plans for major urban redevelopment and housing precincts and infrastructure projects. This information gives the Government a good indication of what population growth demands will be in coming years, as well as where further capacity or adjustments might be needed.

What are some of the options?

There is no one-size-fits-all solution that will meet the demand for high quality public secondary schooling over the coming years and decades. Broadly speaking there is likely to be a variety of possible options worthy of consideration including the review of existing school catchment boundaries, the management of student enrolments to better match school catchment boundaries, the delivery of more teaching and learning spaces (classrooms) in existing secondary schools, the construction of new facilities, and reviewing the educational offerings and enrolment policies at schools.

How will the Department assess its options?

Meeting the public secondary school needs of inner Sydney is a complex process that is likely to involve a number of options. The following principles will be used by the Department as a basis for evaluating planning strategies and options for public secondary schools in inner Sydney into the future:

- options meet projected demand for teaching and learning spaces (classrooms) in the short and long term
- school facilities best meet schools facility standards and enable flexible 21st century learning
- solutions provide value for money
- solutions make the best use of finite resources
- solutions improve utilisation and capitalise on existing asset holdings
- solutions take into account community feedback
- solutions are sensitive to location and accessibility and provide added benefits to the community
- disruption to schools and students is minimised

It is important to take into account community feedback as an input into the decision making process, and this consultation process is the main forum for that to occur.
For the host

Before the discussion

Place and time

You will need to select a suitable place to hold the discussion. As implied by the name, Kitchen Table Discussions are designed to be conducted in homes and informal comfortable spaces. You could also use many other meeting spaces, like staff rooms, cafes or other community spaces. What is important is that you can fit 4-6 people around a table without serious interruptions or noisy distractions. The event will take around 2 hours to run from people settling in to the finish of the exercises.

People

The only two qualifications for participation are an interest in the topic (secondary public education provision in inner Sydney) and an openness to communicate co-operatively using the Kitchen Table Guidelines. We’re not asking you to organise a public event or meeting with strangers; invite people you know and are comfortable sharing your home/ space and opinions with.

Contacting people

If you don’t have a good idea of when people are available, you might want to give people a call to figure out what will work. In any case, people will generally need 7-14 days notice for an event of this length.

When you contact people, they might have questions about the purpose and form of the meeting. Hopefully this guide, as a whole, will allow you to answer these questions, but if you want, you can use this “recruitment blurb” we’ve prepared.

“The NSW Department of Education and Communities is looking at how to address changing needs for public secondary education in inner Sydney. They want feedback from the community and have organised a number of ways this can occur. One way is called a Kitchen Table Discussion where people are asked to organise small groups to discuss the issues and then contribute. We’ll meet up at [meeting place] and have a chat about the issues, then answer their questions, which will contribute to the public policy making process.”

Ask people to RSVP so you make sure you have at least 3 other attendees and give them a reminder email/call the day before so they don’t forget.

When you invite people, point them to the website at www.dec.nsw.gov.au/sydneyhsconsultation so they can read the background information and this guide beforehand if they like.

Materials

The discussion doesn’t require many materials:

1. This guide, including the feedback form at the back;
2. Pens; and
3. Blank paper for people who want to take notes.

It might be a good idea to have drinks and snacks available, but for a meeting of 2 hours duration this may not really be necessary.
During the discussion

As the host, you have a very important role to play in the process. It’s your job to read and understand this guide in full so that you can answer questions and help the others understand and participate. You will introduce and explain these rules and the discussion topic schedule. You have the responsibility of creating and participating in a constructive discussion without dominating it or allowing it to get out of control. These rules and the process of getting participants to agree to them are an important part of defining and shaping the discussion so that it is constructive and enjoyable.

The guidelines

In the next section (“For All Participants”), you’ll find the Kitchen Table Discussion Guidelines. Read the guidelines aloud and confirm that everyone understands them. Then go around the table and get people to indicate that they agree to abide by them for the course of the discussion (the next hour and a half or so). This formality is necessary to protect and nurture the conversation that will follow.

The talking object

The talking object is a formal and concrete indicator of who the designated speaker is. It can be any object that can be comfortably picked up and held while people speak. A designated speaker system solves the problem of people talking over one another and not listening (just waiting for an opportunity to speak). The concept of a formally designated talking object is a popular tradition in evidence in many cultures – for example, the “Tharunka” of Central Australian Aboriginal people and the Scepter of King Agamemnon in Homer’s Iliad. A scepter or mace is still used to denote the authority of the speaker in Parliaments around the world today.

Although we recommend a talking object, we leave it up to you whether to use such a formal mechanism. Other options include you formally calling on people before they speak, or people knocking on the table to indicate they have finished speaking. The important principle is that people can speak without interruption when it is their turn, so that everyone gets to have their say and be really listened to. If you like, you can have a brief discussion about this principle with participants and get them to decide how to make sure that people can speak without interruption. And if your chosen mechanism starts to be ignored, you can always bring in a talking object when necessary.

Questions

As the host, it’s your job to guide people through the agenda. Have a good read of the “In the Discussion” segment of the next section and make sure you understand it and can answer any questions about it. You’ll be responsible for moving the group on to each section, determining speaking order and making sure that nobody breaks the guidelines, particularly by interrupting people or by speaking too long.

Time Keeping

You should organise one participant to be the time-keeper. It’s their job to time each person talking and let them know when they are running out of time, and when their time is up (at 2 minutes). This will help you get through all the questions before people get too tired and restless.

Recording and submitting your feedback

Your final job as host is to make sure that the opinions of the group are recorded and sent to Straight Talk, on the reply paid feedback form provided. You might want to delegate this task to another participant if they don’t mind, to share the workload. At the end of each question, fill out the relevant part of the form.
There's a common sentiment that it is not good to discuss “big issues” at social gatherings – the more important an issue, the higher the chance of strong emotions, ungenerous debating conduct and tactics and, ultimately, hurtful communication. Unfortunately, for all of us and the society we live in, our desire to reduce conflict can end up limiting discussion to less important matters and trivialising our conversation.

These guidelines are designed to create a framework for positive communication and understanding between a group of people while still talking about the big issues. This means a very different and perhaps unfamiliar set of guidelines for when and how to speak on a “political” issue. These guidelines have been designed to shift the objective of discussion from “winning” to “understanding”.

Talking Object

These guidelines suggest a designated speaker, either through the use of a “talking object” or through another agreed method. Your host will explain how the group will designate speakers.

The Guidelines¹

1. Open mindedness: listen to and respect all points of view. Conversation isn’t just talking. It’s talking and listening. In fact, in a group of 4–6, you’ll be listening more than you’ll be talking. By focusing on listening, you also benefit from the variety of ideas around the table.

2. Acceptance: suspend judgment as best you can. We all judge one another, but do your best not to. Doing so will enable you to hear new things from others. It also helps everyone feel safer if they think others are trying to not judge them!

3. Curiosity: seek to understand rather than persuade. We’re not here to convince others that we are right and they are wrong. If someone expresses a point of view that seems different from yours, see if you can ask some questions to gain clarity or understanding.

4. Discovery: question assumptions, look for new insights. Kitchen Table Discussions are designed to expose us to new ideas or possibly even see old ideas in a new way.

5. Insight: seeing more deeply into a topic can come if we watch for it.

6. Sincerity: speak from your heart and personal experience. We want to hear what’s important to you, not just your opinions or data you’ve collected. Relate your ideas or reports to your personal experience.

7. Brevity: go for honesty and depth but don’t go on and on. Honesty and depth are important to a good conversation, but so is giving everyone a chance to speak. People are polite. They may not stop you if you go on and on. But you can stop yourself. Try to stay under a couple of minutes. Agree as a group how long the meeting will last and try to stick to that timeframe.

8. The Talking Object: people will only speak when they have the talking object in hand (or are otherwise designated as the speaker) and will listen to the person who is speaking.

¹ Adapted from the methods of conversation café – www.conversationcafe.org
During the Discussion

Discussion Checklist

1. Introduction
   - Guidelines & talking object explained and agreed to
   - Read the section “Answering the Questions”
   - Ask introductory question and go around once only

2. Question 1 – Short Term
   - Read question
   - Round 1 – everyone answers in turn
   - Round 2 – everyone speaks in turn, responding or expanding
   - Round 3 – anyone can call for the talking object, group seeks consensus and synthesis
   - Record feedback on form

3. Question 2 – Long Term
   - Read question
   - Round 1 – everyone answers in turn
   - Round 2 – everyone speaks in turn, responding or expanding
   - Round 3 – anyone can call for the talking object, group seeks consensus and synthesis
   - Record feedback on form

4. Question 3 – Student Needs
   - Read question
   - Round 1 – everyone answers in turn
   - Round 2 – everyone speaks in turn, responding or expanding
   - Round 3 – anyone can call for the talking object, group seeks consensus and synthesis
   - Record feedback on form

Introduction and initial perspective

The discussion begins by the host reading the rules and everyone indicating their agreement to them. Next, read the section “Answering the Questions” and explain there will be three questions with three rounds each. This doesn’t apply to the introductory question, which is just to get people started.

Then the host hands the talking object to the participant on their left. This participant introduces themselves and explains briefly “What public education means to me”. This introduction, and all turns to speak should be limited to 2 minutes or less. Remember, with the great power of the talking object to speak uninterrupted, comes the great responsibility of not talking too long!

The talking object comes back to the host, who also answers the question.

Answering the Questions

For each question, follow this process:

1. A participant takes the talking object and reads the question aloud.
2. Round 1 – The talking object is handed around the group, and each participant in turn gives their answer to the question. There is no need for each answer to relate to the previous one.
3. Round 2 – The talking object then goes around the group again, people can expand on their previous point or respond to things others have said.
4. Round 3 – The talking object is placed in the middle of the table – anyone can speak. The group seeks synthesis and consensus or clearly defines different positions.
5. Recording – The relevant part of the form is read aloud by the host and filled out.
Questions

1. Some public secondary schools are operating below capacity and others face pressure from increased student numbers. Any longer term decisions are going to take time to implement. What should be done in the short term (1-4 year period)?

Some options could be:
- Change the existing catchment boundaries
- Refurbish underutilised building spaces to teaching spaces
- Supply additional demountable classrooms
- Enhance educational offerings to attract more students to those schools which are underutilised
- Change public transport to make it easier for students to travel to schools outside the catchment that are underutilised

We want your ideas on these and other options for consideration.

2. What do you think are the best options for addressing the longer term situation (5-10 year period)?

Some options could be:
- Change the existing catchment boundaries
- Refurbish underutilised building space to teaching spaces
- Enhance educational offerings to attract more students to those schools which are underutilised
- Change public transport to make it easier for students to travel to schools outside the catchment
- Construct a new school to provide additional permanent teaching space

We want your ideas on these and other options for consideration.

3. What ideas do you have for helping to create public secondary schools that meet the demands of a modern education system and prepare students for their lives ahead?
Feedback form

Please complete and email form to events@straight-talk.com.au

**Question 1**

*Has a consensus been reached? YES / NO*

Write down each solution w/ number of supporters in right column.

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<th>Supporters</th>
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**Question 2**

*Has a consensus been reached? YES / NO*

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**Question 3**

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