The New South Wales
School Leaving Age Initiative: Maximising
the potential of our young people

Community Consultation Report, September 2008
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To maximise the opportunities of young people in a continually changing social and economic global environment, and to build our state’s prosperity, the New South Wales Government committed to increasing school retention to 90% by 2016. Extensive community consultation was undertaken to identify effective strategies for achieving this goal, including raising the school leaving age.

Community feedback indicates strong and widespread support for implementing changes to increase the engagement of young people in education and training. This includes strong support for raising the school leaving age to 16 years or the end of Year 10, whichever comes first. It also includes strong support for introducing a “participation phase” to 17 years, during which young people would be supported in remaining engaged in education, training, full-time work or a combination of these options.

The community consultation findings also provide clear feedback regarding the strategies that will be required to ensure that the proposed changes are effective in both increasing retention to Year 12 or its vocational equivalent, enhancing the quality and richness of young people’s education and training experiences, and facilitating their successful articulation into further education and training or employment. The key identified strategies and processes were:

- Focus on student engagement in learning
- Provide strong, coordinated student welfare support
- Provide learning support that will enable students to succeed
- Ensure the curriculum is relevant, interesting and responsive to students’ needs and interests
- Expand the range and availability of vocational education and training options
- Equally value all education and training options
- Ensure young people are informed about their options and supported in making choices
- Provide clear pathways to further education and training, and to employment
- Address expectations about the value of education and training
- Provide comprehensive support for Indigenous students.

Ongoing consultation will continue through the development and implementation phases of the New South Wales School Leaving Age Initiative to ensure its success in maximising the potential of our young people.
The current school leaving age in New South Wales is 15 years. This age was set in the 1940s, and reflected the economic and social circumstances of that era. Since that time, however, there has been an increasingly rapid pace of economic and social change, and a corresponding increase in the demand for skills and higher-level qualifications.

These include improvements to overall well being such as improved health, reduced crime and lower dependency on social services. More young people on a pathway to further education and training will also help to fill critical skill shortages, and build a pool of talent that meets the future needs of industry for a highly skilled workforce.

In response to the recognised benefits to the individual young person and the community of increased engagement in education and training, the NSW Government through its State Plan committed to the following target:

We will increase the proportion of students completing Year 12 or recognised vocational training from 82.7% in 2005 to 90% by 2016. (NSW State Plan 2006)

A key strategy the Government proposes to achieve the goal of lifting expectations and improving retention is an increase to the school leaving age.

Other Australian states have similarly responded to the acknowledged benefits of further education and training by raising their leaving ages to at least 16 years. In addition, Queensland, Western Australia and Tasmania have implemented a “compulsory participation age” which requires young people to be engaged in further education, training or work to 17 years. South Australia is planning to introduce a participation age next year, and the Australian Capital Territory is undertaking community consultation into raising its school leaving age from 15 years and also introducing a compulsory participation age.

The New South Wales Government committed to undertake comprehensive community consultation to explore community views on both raising the compulsory school leaving age, and implementing a follow on participation phase for young people.

This paper reports the feedback obtained through the community consultation process.

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1/ Australian National University’s Centre for Economic Policy, 2005

Consulting with the community – the objectives and process

The community consultation process was informed by the following objectives:

- Identify community views about the various school leaving age options under consideration
- Identify options which offer the greatest potential to successfully engage young people in further education and training
- Identify other processes and strategies which will contribute to the effective engagement of young people in education and training
- Identify community views regarding related issues including the role and purpose of the School Certificate
- Generally, engage education, community, business and industry stakeholders in the reform and development process, and contribute to the building of positive relations with and between these key stakeholders.

To promote understanding about the reasons for reviewing the school leaving age, and provide a tool to facilitate public discussion, a consultation paper was developed and released throughout the community in February 2008.

The consultation paper asked the following questions about the school leaving age:

1. To what age should the school leaving age be increased: 16, 17 or 18 years?
2. Should an increase in the legal school leaving age be accompanied by further requirements that young people be engaged in education, training or productive work until a specified older age, such as 17 or 18?
3. What would a higher minimum leaving age mean for employers, parents, students and the wider community?
4. What other strategies are needed to ensure that students are supported to stay on at school?
5. What strategies are needed to ensure that NSW’s high standards of achievement at school are maintained?
6. What should the future role and purpose of the School Certificate be if we raise the minimum leaving age?

The consultation paper was posted on the Department’s website, and widely distributed to key stakeholder organisations, together with an invitation from the Premier and the Minister of Education to provide written submissions about the proposals. Feedback could be provided by post, email or internet.

A variety of other opportunities were provided to both key stakeholder groups and the general public to engage in discussion about the proposals.

These included the New South Wales Government Summit on Raising the School Leaving Age, held in Sydney on 17 March 2008. Speakers and attendees included representatives from the following key stakeholder groups:

- Parent organisations
- Teacher organisations
- School principals and teachers
- TAFE staff
- Students
- Vocational education and training groups
- Business and industry groups
- Welfare and community support organisations
- University sector

Regional Forums were also organised by local Members of Parliament, and held between April – August 2008. These were attended by a wide cross section of the community and enabled more in depth discussion about the key issues amongst smaller groups.

Approximately 470 people engaged in the Government Summit and Regional Forums, and written submissions were received from 19 stakeholder organisations and 80 individuals, including teachers, Principals, parents and students.

A full list of the public consultations and the submissions received from education, community and industry organisations is provided in Appendix A.
The level of engagement of key education, community, business and industry stakeholders and the general public in the community consultation process indicates the significance of the New South Wales School Leaving Age Initiative. The following central and major themes emerged from this feedback.

**Widespread support for increasing engagement in education and training**

There was strong support throughout New South Wales for implementing changes that will increase the effective engagement of young people in further education and training. While some stakeholders pointed out there were costs associated with this (including costs to employers and families), it was widely acknowledged that young people benefited from extra years of training and education, both in terms of their overall development and their future life opportunities. Furthermore, feedback indicated that the changes would contribute to creating a more highly skilled and informed society with a “more ‘work-ready’ workforce leading to better productivity” and other flow-on effects including a “reduction in juvenile crime rates.”

**Strong support for raising the school leaving age to 16 years, or the end of Year 10 whichever comes first**

There was strong support for raising the minimum school leaving age to 16 years or the end of Year 10, whichever comes first.

**Strong support for introducing an Education and Training Participation Phase to 17 years, during which young people are supported in engaging in education, training, full-time work, or a combination of these options**

The feedback indicates there is very strong support throughout the community in implementing a “participation phase” after the completion of compulsory schooling.

While the majority of young people are likely to continue to stay in full time schooling until the end of Year 12, young people would also have the option under this system of moving into other education or training once they turn 16 years or complete Year 10, whichever comes first. They would also have the option of undertaking full-time work during the Participation Phase, or combining education, training and employment.

The combination of an increased school leaving age and follow-on Participation Phase was seen by the community as an effective way to increase retention, while giving young people the maximum amount of choice in pursuing education or training options that align with their interests and capabilities. The community feedback stressed that it was vital that young people are provided with choice between education and training pathways that are responsive, flexible and varied.

As outlined further in the rest of this paper, the community provided clear messages regarding ways in which this can be achieved through expanding the range of vocational education and training options, strengthening the relevancy and interest of the curriculum, and developing greater flexibility to combine and move between education, training and employment options. These suggestions are outlined in the next section.
It was noted in the community feedback that young people who leave school early are likely to have had unsuccessful school experiences; this, indeed, is why many do leave. They are likely to have below average levels of literacy and numeracy, and more likely to have behavioural issues. In effect, they are likely to be students who have disengaged from school. The community feedback regarding the factors which impact upon student retention and performance is consistent with the research findings, including research findings that earlier academic achievement has a great effect on whether students stay on at school.1

Organisations and individuals delivered a consistent message that raising the school leaving age would require supporting those students who stay on who would otherwise have left school early. The key elements referred to were the need to provide quality teaching, adequate welfare and learning support programs, curriculum flexibility, varied and flexible pathways and parental involvement and support.

To some degree, the areas identified in the community findings regarding the support that students will need to succeed at school are being provided through recent and ongoing education and training reforms and initiatives. These range from initiatives to lift early school success (literacy and numeracy strategies, smaller class sizes) to increased options at the senior secondary level (such as vocational subjects in the Higher School Certificate and Trade Schools). The importance of quality teaching is recognised, and the Government is already investing heavily in transforming the teaching workforce of NSW, with a renewed focus on quality teaching and teacher professionalism. This includes through the establishment of an Institute of Teachers, with a mandate to define professional standards for teachers at all levels as well as the standards for teacher education and professional development.

In other cases, new strategies and processes will need to be developed to address areas of identified need. The areas identified in the community consultation, and the suggestions provided for initiatives and reforms, are discussed further below.

Focus on student engagement in learning

Student engagement and its impact upon both performance while at school and the decision to stay or leave school early, was generally seen as a crucial issue, with disengagement described as “perhaps the biggest factor leading to early school leaving” (Federation of Parents and Citizens’ Associations of New South Wales).

It was noted that student disengagement was a process occurring over time and influenced by many factors such as curriculum interest and relevance, academic performance, integration into school culture, and relationships in the school. The decision to leave school early follows on from years of disengagement, and hence many people and organisations commented that, if we are to keep students at school until 17 years, student engagement needs to be addressed earlier. Numerous submissions stressed the importance of early childhood education in this respect, and it was widely agreed that engagement must be addressed before the final years of high school.

Provide strong, coordinated student welfare support

Community feedback continually stressed that students who typically leave early are often those whose life circumstances impact upon their school experiences and their potential to function effectively in the current school system. Issues of mental illness, family dysfunction, domestic violence and health problems were raised, and much concern was expressed about particular groups of students experiencing very difficult life circumstances which limited their capacities to engage in education and training.

If these students remain at school, it was seen as vital that they are provided with strong support networks. It was stressed that support needed to be provided for “disengaging, disruptive or non-attending students” (Tweed Heads Regional Forum). This was seen as necessary both to provide these young people with the potential to succeed, and to ensure that the learning of other students was not detrimentally affected by having alienated and disruptive young people in the classroom.

1/ Lamb, S et al. found that students’ academic achievement in Year 9 had one of the strongest effects on the likelihood of Year 12 completion (2004 Staying on at School: Improving Student Retention in Australia).
There was also concern that students with disabilities receive appropriate support and be given the opportunity to participate in education and training options of their choice, including vocational education options.

Students in Government schools are currently supported through a network of school counsellors, student welfare consultants, teachers specially trained in behaviour management, year advisors, home-school liaison officers, teachers’ aides, out-of-home care teachers and the school’s executive staff. Students also can link to a range of mental health services provided by NSW Health. The Government provides additional support to disadvantaged students through a range of additional resourcing processes, including a range of equity programs for socio-economically disadvantaged, non-English speaking, isolated, Indigenous and disabled students.

While support is provided for these young people through existing equity programs, it was felt that more needed to be done to enable them to participate effectively in education and training. The view was expressed that a major factor in students leaving school early is that they are not receiving “the level of support required to build basic skills that would allow them to engage in the learning opportunities provided” (Bathurst Forum). A wide range of suggestions for extending existing programs and developing new strategies and programs were provided in the feedback, including that “we need to intervene earlier with these students, with support and counselling” (Tamworth Forum). These suggestions will be analysed closely as the School Leaving Age Initiative progresses.

In particular, community consultation stressed that “more counselling services are needed, there aren’t enough now. There will need to be additional services to support students who don’t want to be there, but have to stay until they are 16” (Miranda Regional Forum).

In particular there were requests for greater support “in the form of careers advisers, year advisers and counsellors, being the ones that can best impact on students planning for futures” (Tamworth Forum). Numerous suggestions were made for new programs which provide individualised care, including
mentoring programs and the provision of community role models to ‘at risk’ young people.

There was also a clear message in the feedback that school culture was a central factor in students feeling valued and supported. Schools needed to provide students with a supportive and caring environment, and needed to be “more than places for academic learning” (Dubbo Regional Forum). A focus on schools as caring places was seen as just as important for older, as younger students. Respectful, friendly, caring and supportive teacher-student relations were central to this, with the comment made that “regarding the 15-19 year olds, the characteristics of a good teacher include care for the student, taking the time to work with students and empathy” (Wyong Forum).

Provide learning support that will enable students to succeed

In addition to holistic student welfare support, it was seen as paramount to students’ success that learning support be provided to those students in need, and in particular, that literacy support be provided. It was frequently mentioned by students, teachers and other support staff that literacy problems were a major reason for students leaving school early, with a typical comment being that “literacy problems are an issue related to students becoming disengaged beyond Year 10” (Careers Adviser, Tamworth Forum). There are a range of learning and literacy development support programs already in place in high schools. These will need to be reviewed to ensure they are meeting the needs of students and enabling them to effectively engage in schooling, and their preferred education and training options in any Participation Phase.

Ensure the curriculum is relevant, interesting and responsive to students’ needs

The community consultation process raised various issues relating to the curriculum from Kindergarten to Year 12. The key theme of this was the need for the curriculum to be engaging and relevant to students’ experiences and interests, with suggestions made for increasing opportunities for choice, flexibility and elective study.

While these issues are important, and the community feedback will inform future curriculum development, the suggestions are broad ranging in nature, and require ongoing and long term responses regarding curriculum design. This paper limits analysis to the key curriculum issues which relate to raising the school leaving age and introducing a Participation Phase.

Review Higher School Certificate English

Of particular interest to the community are the current Higher School Certificate English subjects. The main theme of the feedback was that these subjects do not suit the abilities and interests of all students, and this creates a barrier to some students’ engagement with school. Numerous references were made to the previously existing Contemporary English course, indicating that the loss of this subject was seen as detrimental to students, with particular reference made to Aboriginal students.

There was widespread support for the development of an HSC English subject appropriate to these students’ needs and interests. Suggestions for this course included that it contains units focussing on the development of practical literacy skills, and communication skills relevant to professional workplace practices.

It was stressed that this alternative English subject not be seen as a ‘second best’ option for less able students. Rather, it is important that it be as equally rigorous in its standards as existing HSC English subjects.

Review the School Certificate

Diverse views were expressed in the community consultations and submissions about the role and purpose of the School Certificate. Some community members thought that the School Certificate should be retained as it is an important and valuable accreditation, an “achievable goal” which motivates some students to stay on who would otherwise drop out of school earlier.

Other community stakeholders suggested that few students now use the School Certificate as a leaving credential, as most continue on past Year 10 to further education and training. Further, the relevancy of the School Certificate as an objective measure and provision of information about students’ learning was questioned, on the basis that from 2008 all Year 9 non-government and government students are
comprehensively assessed through the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy.

Concerns were also raised about the timing of the School Certificate exams, with the view commonly expressed that the period between the exams and the end of the year is “largely wasted time” during which it is difficult for teachers to engage students.

Many stakeholders asked for a review of the School Certificate, with some suggesting that it be replaced with an exit credential that records achievement across compulsory secondary education, including in vocational education subjects, and possibly also work-based achievements. A review now would be timely, given the concerns with the School Certificate identified above, and to clarify its role and purpose in the context of a raised school leaving age and follow-on “Participation Phase” to 17 years.

Use technology to increase choice and flexibility

Reference was made to the potential benefits of various technological aids to increase the range of subject choices. This included supporting the use of video conferencing, enabling students to study subjects not available at their school. Some respondents felt that this provided a big incentive to more isolated students to remain engaged in education, with the comment made that “being able to take their first-preference subjects is a strong incentive for staying on at school” (NSW Government Summit).

Expand the range and availability of vocational education and training (VET) options

The Government has recently supported an expansion in vocational education and training options and opportunities. Vocational education and training can be accessed through a wide range of sources including Trade Schools, school based part-time apprenticeships and many TAFE/ VET and VET in schools courses. Through its $69 million Learn or Earn skills package, the Government has provided a guaranteed place in TAFE NSW for any person up to the age of 18 who did not complete Year 12 and does not have a job. Initiatives have also been introduced to increase the number of available apprenticeships, as outlined in the consultation paper.

The topic of vocational education and training was a major issue in the community consultation. VET subjects were seen as playing a key role in engaging many students in the senior years, and a common theme was the need for further expansion of the range of VET options, and increased access to VET. Priorities are outlined further below.

Expand vocational education and training subjects in school

It was seen as particularly important that the range and availability of vocational education subjects in high school be expanded, as these are likely to be of interest and relevance to ‘at risk’ students. It was stressed that the capacity to study vocational subjects at school was for many of these students a decisive factor in choosing to stay on. Students commented that they liked the “hands on” side of their VET courses (Port Hacking Regional Forum) and it was noted that “students seem to enjoy VET courses as they are physical and not just sitting in the classroom” (Miranda Regional Forum).

There was widespread agreement that the VET subject choices available to students in the senior years should be expanded to reflect student interest and potential employment pathways. This issue was particularly raised in relation to VET options available to students in rural and remote areas, with it being noted that currently VET subject are very limited. It was also suggested that those options which did exist, did not always align with the main areas of local employment.

It was noted that if a Participation Phase is introduced, that in some remote areas where there are very limited employment and training opportunities, it is likely that students will have no choice but to stay on at school. It is therefore vital that they be able to take relevant VET subjects in school.

It was also suggested that VET subjects be incorporated into Stage 5.

Strengthen the links between schools, TAFE and the workplace

Currently, students in the senior years have the opportunity to mix academic study with vocational training, including study at TAFE NSW, leading to the attainment of industry-recognised qualifications as well as the Higher School Certificate.
It was suggested that these opportunities could be expanded further, and that there need to be improved coordination of TAFE and school delivered VET subjects. Main points in the feedback were:

- Foster closer collaboration between schools and TAFE to provide expanded course offerings to students in their senior years
- Avoid the duplication of resources through offering similar courses in TAFE and school VET
- Provide more optional pathways within the HSC that include TAFE pathways more clearly
- Provide high quality work experience programs, and enable students to undertake work placements earlier, in Years 9 and 10
- Provide more opportunities to undertake school-based apprenticeships.

Address transport issues which limit young people’s capacity to engage in education, training and work placements

The practicalities of accessing education, training and employment options arose in community discussions. Feedback indicated that in some situations young people find it difficult to access training and work placements because of transport related issues, such as a lack of public transport, or the high cost of transport. Examples were given of students unable to attend TAFE courses or undertake work placements because they simply could not afford the travel costs, or no transport was available. This particularly affected young people in rural and remote areas. Increased subsidisation of public transport costs would significantly address this issue.

Equally value all education and training options

There was much discussion regarding what was seen as a current privileging of an academic over a vocational education and training pathway. It was felt that VET was seen as the ‘second best’ alternative, and for this reason young people were sometimes deterred from exploring VET options which may suit their interests and needs better than an academic pathway.

It was suggested that action be taken to raise the profile of vocational subjects in secondary schools, as expressed in the comment by one parent that “we need to de-emphasise the UAI and equally value all pathways” (Oatley Forum). Said very simply, the feedback strongly indicated that the focus should be “Stay on in Education and Training - Not just SCHOOL” (Bathurst Forum).

Ensure young people are informed about their options and supported in making choices

Improve the provision of information and support to students in planning for the future

There is a plethora of state and federal government and non-government networks, programs and resources providing support for and information about the transition from school to further education, training and employment options. These include the NSW Government’s “School to Work” program, which provided transition information and support to over 164,000 students in 2006, and the joint territory, state and Australian governments’ “My Future” website https://www.myfuture.edu.au. The Commonwealth Government is currently reviewing the provision of information through its career websites.

In addition to the guidance provided by careers advisers and other school staff to all students, there are also programs and strategies specifically designed to support “at risk” students. These include the provision of Transition Advisers in schools, who work with other staff to support students with particular needs plan their transition from school to further education, training or work.

The community feedback indicated that this career information and guidance was central to young people making informed choices. It also indicated that, despite the amount of information available, students and their families were sometimes confused about or simply unaware of their options, suggesting there are gaps in the current flow of information about education, training and employment pathways. There were numerous requests for clearer information about options, and stronger guidance to students in their decision-making.

A typical comment was that there needs to be “more extensive and focussed careers advice for students to ensure they make better decisions” ( Queanbeyan Forum). It was felt that “students should be encouraged to
be thinking about their futures early on in high school” and supported in exploring options. They “need to be supported to make the best decisions about their paths of study, especially with regard to careers education” (NSW Government Summit).

Use Student Education and Training Plans to support decision-making about future options

Careers advisers, student counsellors and teachers currently utilise a range of tools to assist their students in planning for their futures, and students, parents and carers are also able to directly access many useful print and electronic resources, including for instance through the Vocational Education in Schools (https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/vetinschools/schooltowork) and Students at Work (http://www.studentsatwork.org.au) websites.

The consultation feedback indicated that the use of these planning tools in schools, and the capacity of students, parents and carers to access them independently, varied considerably, and that there was a need for a more systematised approach to the use of planning tools. There was community support for more widespread and consistent use of Student Education and Training Plans as tools for facilitating students’ planning. Some stakeholders referred to the system utilised by the Queensland Department of Education and the Arts, whereby all students in Year 10 develop individualised Student Education and Training (SET) Plans, in which the student identifies strengths, achievements, goals, strategies for achieving goals and education and training options and interests. Schools and teachers could be provided with resources and guidelines to ensure these plans are completed to a consistently high and detailed standard, and are genuinely beneficial to students in the process of thinking about and planning for their futures.

It was suggested that planning “should happen as early as practicable – perhaps from Year 7” (NSW Government Summit). In particular, it was important that planning is initiated earlier in high school to capture “at risk” students, who are already disengaging from school in Years 7 and 8. This feedback was especially strong from the Aboriginal community, with it being noted that students’ attendance began dropping off in Year 8.

Avoid constraining choice by narrowing options too early

Feedback also indicated, though, that care must be taken not to stream students into particular options too early on, in such a way that it closed down future opportunities.

Provide clear pathways to further education and training, and to employment

The community feedback indicated that it was widely believed that more could be done to facilitate the movement of young people from school into further education and training and into work. There needs to be a strengthening of the alignment of education and training options with future employment possibilities, and more support provided in accessing jobs, for instance through traineeship schemes.

It was also suggested that there could be greater liaison between schools and TAFE with job network organisations to direct students into employment.

Address expectations about the value of education and training

The impact of family circumstances upon school engagement and performance was a major factor in the feedback received from the community. Key aspects of this were identified as:

- The impact upon student performance and school attendance of family circumstances, particularly conflict within the family home
- The value placed upon education in the family, and the impact extra education and training is perceived to have upon a young person’s future prospects
- The financial impact upon families of keeping young people at school longer, and the pressure this may place upon families with limited resources.

A great deal of the discussion focussed upon the impact of family expectations upon young people’s engagement and choices, and it was felt that this was an area which could be addressed through family support. It was suggested that “as a community we need to talk about raising expectations” (Dubbo Regional Forum) and that it is critical that we engage parents, and “ensure that all parents value education as of fundamental importance for their children” (Wollongong Regional Forum).
It was noted that qualities which influence school engagement and performance are developed early in the family, and hence there is a need for family support from an early age.

The community views regarding the importance of family expectations are consistent with Australian and international research which shows that the likelihood of a young person successfully completing schooling is significantly increased when students have parents who expect them to finish, and have peers who also intend to complete their schooling.

Suggested strategies to address family expectations were:
- Regular communication with parents about the school community
- Provision of regular feedback to parents on both student performance and school initiatives
- Providing opportunities for parents to be involved in school activities
- Early intervention to engage students, particularly at risk students

Provide comprehensive support for Indigenous students

Aboriginal students are particularly at risk of leaving school early, and it was stressed that it is “critical that we engage Aboriginal students as they fall into all major categories” of students at risk of leaving school early (Kiama Regional Forum). Aboriginal students have half the rate of retention to Year 12 of other students, and are over three times less likely to complete the Higher School Certificate. This is despite the fact that feedback indicated that Aboriginal families are strongly supportive of their young people engaging in further education and training. In line with other sectors of the community, feedback from the Aboriginal community stressed that changes to the school leaving age and the introduction of a Participation Phase must be accompanied by the provision of resources and processes to enable their young people to succeed in education and training.

The initiatives identified above apply equally to indigenous young people, but the following support needs were particularly stressed:
- Expand literacy and numeracy support programs. While there are already literacy and numeracy support programs in place for Aboriginal students in schools and other education and training providers, these need to be extended. Literacy and numeracy skills development were seen as major factors in school performance, and poor literacy in particular was seen to currently limit Aboriginal students’ performance, and constrain their options in senior education and training. The provision of greater literacy support in both TAFE and schools was seen as a priority.
- Indigenous support staff, including Aboriginal education assistants in the classroom and Aboriginal community liaison officers to work closely with families, were seen as important in effectively engaging Aboriginal students.
- Ensure the development of strong, caring and supportive relationships developed between schools and Aboriginal students and their families. This was seen as crucial to Aboriginal students’ well being and engagement in education and training.
- Provide mentoring support services to Indigenous youth.
- Provide relevant and engaging curriculum and teaching approaches.
- Improve the current access to and use of existing support resources by schools, such as the use of in-class learning support. The view was expressed that this could be done through professional development of school staff to improve their understanding of existing resources and how to utilise them efficiently.
- Improve the integration of support services. While there is formal acknowledgement of the need for integration of support services for Indigenous students and their families, feedback indicated that the reality is that this often does not happen in practice. There needs to be greater interagency liaison and coordination in the delivery of services to Aboriginal students and families.
The community consultation process into the School Leaving Age Initiative generated wide ranging discussion about many related issues. The revision of the school leaving age was indeed seen by some as an opportunity to consider “radical changes to how we deliver secondary education”, such as rethinking school hours and school organisation and linking the curriculum more closely with the knowledge and skills required in the future.

It was frequently stated that difficulties and challenges faced by young people in the senior years of education are a manifestation of prior learning and school experiences, and it is thus necessary to take a long term perspective in determining how to support students in staying in school longer, and doing better. While the scope of these issues moved beyond the School Leaving Age initiative, the discussions provided a rich source of ideas for strengthening education and training in NSW.

These are summarised below:

- Review the school starting age
- Provide access to pre-school education to better prepare children for starting school
- Develop sound literacy and numeracy skills in all students from a very early age
- Introduce vocational training programs into school earlier, in Years 9 and 10
- Undertake ongoing curriculum development
- Allow students to undertake work placements earlier in their schooling, say Year 9/10
- Restructuring – e.g. more adult and supportive environment of separate senior colleges
- Recognise students’ paid work, in terms of its impact upon their schooling, a source of valuable learning, and the potential to formally recognise it. The NSW Teachers Federation sees students’ part time work as a significant factor influencing students’ learning today. Their submission notes that their research indicates that half of all students surveyed in years 10, 11 and 12 work ten hours or more per week, and that consideration needs to be given to the appropriate support mechanisms for students, relationship between pathways between study and training, formal recognition of work undertaken. It was also noted at the Government Summit that a large proportion of school students now undertake substantial amounts of part-time employment, and “this is impacting on their ability to achieve at school.”
The community consultation process was effective in identifying the preferred options relating to changes to the current school leaving age. More generally the feedback elicited widely held views regarding strategies to increase retention and improve the quality and effectiveness of education and training experiences for the young people of New South Wales.

The New South Wales Government will continue to liaise with key stakeholder groups during the development and implementation phase of the School Leaving Age Initiative, to ensure changes are effective and beneficial to our young people.
# Appendix A

## Table 1
New South Wales School Leaving Age Initiative Community Forums

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<td>1 May</td>
<td>Wyong</td>
</tr>
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<td>19 May</td>
<td>Tamworth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Oatley</td>
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<td>29 May</td>
<td>Kiama</td>
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<tr>
<td>12 June</td>
<td>Tweed Heads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 June</td>
<td>Canterbury</td>
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<tr>
<td>30 June</td>
<td>Wollongong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 July</td>
<td>Bathurst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 July</td>
<td>Queanbeyan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 August</td>
<td>Miranda</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Forums were attended by students, parents and school staff, and representatives of local education, community, business, industry and political organisations.
Appendix B

Education, community, business, industry and political organisations that provided written submissions, and/or participated in interviews about the School Leaving Age Initiative

Australian Industry Group
Business Council of Australia
Catholic Education Commission NSW
Council of Catholic School Parents NSW
Federation of Parents and Citizens’ Associations of NSW
Isolated Children’s Parents’ Association of NSW
Marrickville Youth Resource Centre
National Children’s and Youth Law Centre
NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group
NSW/ACT Independent Education Union
NSW Group Training Association
NSW Liberal/Nationals Coalition Party
NSW Secondary Principals’ Council
NSW Teachers Federation
Newcastle and Hunter Region Council of Secondary Deputy Principals
Sarah Redfern High, High School Council
TAFE Teachers Association of the NSW Teachers Federation
Uniting Care Burnside
YWCA NSW

Written submissions were also received from 80 individuals, including teachers, Principals, parents and students.