NSW Transition to School Statement
Development, trial and evaluation of the Statement

Background

Professor Deborah Brennan recommended in the Review of NSW Government Funding for Early Childhood Education (the Brennan Report), that the NSW Department of Education and Communities (NSW DEC) pilot a strengths-based transition to school statement. This Statement was to be based on the principles embodied in the Early Years Learning Framework (ELYF) to support children’s transition to school, improve communication between families, early childhood services and schools, and strengthen links between schools and early childhood services.

In response to Professor Brennan’s recommendations, NSW DEC developed and trialled a Statement and supporting material, including information for:

- early childhood educators and services
- children and families, and
- teachers and schools.

How did the trial work?

The purpose of the trial was to gain input on the Statement from a broad cross-section of stakeholders from across the early childhood and schools sectors.

To this end, the trial was overseen by an advisory group that included representatives from both sectors and provided expert advice, including on the Statement’s inclusiveness, possible improvements and implementation.

A sample selection of early childhood services and their ‘partner’ schools were selected to participate in the trial. These participants were drawn from a representative mix of areas and demographics across NSW, ensuring that feedback on the Statement could then be extrapolated to the wider population.

The sample sites included:

- metropolitan and regional services
- a range of socio-economic communities, and
- services with a range of children attending, including Aboriginal children and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

The two-phased trial took place between October 2013 and March 2014:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trial phase 1</th>
<th>early childhood</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12 early childhood services selected to participate</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11 of these completed draft Statements in cooperation with children and families</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tested the Statement and gained input from early childhood educators and families</td>
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<th>Trial phase 2</th>
<th>schools</th>
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<td>Trial followed children from phase 1 to Kindergarten</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tested the Statement and gained input from partner schools and teachers</td>
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As part of the trial, data was collected from early childhood educators, parents and carers, Kindergarten teachers and principals. This included, for example, feedback on the format, structure, content, and usefulness of the Statement. The draft Statement was then amended to reflect the input gained through the trial.

What other consultation was undertaken?

Further consultation on the draft Statement was undertaken with additional stakeholders in both the early childhood and schools sectors. This was to further ensure that the Statement in final form addressed the issues and characteristics unique to
NSW’s early childhood and schools sectors. Feedback indicated:

- Support for the Statement’s explicit links with the EYLF and its holistic focus on early education.
- A need for community language translations.
- Widespread enthusiasm for its potential to improve transition practices at the local level, and
- Kindergarten teachers valued the information captured in the Statement.

The Statement and supporting materials were then revised to incorporate this feedback. Changes included:

- The addition of clear wording on the benefits of the Statement for a child’s transition to school
- Clarification that all information in the Statement is provided on a voluntary basis, and
- Clear direction on the Statement’s purpose as a voluntary tool to support local transition strategies.

The Statement was made available across NSW in September 2014.

What are the next steps in the Statement’s implementation?

The implementation of the Statement is to be evaluated in this first year of rollout. The evaluation, to be carried out in partnership with NSW DEC’s Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE), will focus on two specific “intervention” and two “control” sites, which have been identified as statistically similar across a number of areas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention areas</th>
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<tr>
<td>Riverina (including Hillston, Griffith, Wagga Wagga, Tumut)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sydney-Blacktown (including Mt Druitt, Quakers Hill, Plumpton)</td>
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<th>Control areas</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central West (including Orange, Bathurst, West Wyalong, Mudgee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney-Inner South West (including Bass Hill, Bankstown, Bexley)</td>
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In September 2014, workshops were held for early childhood services and schools in the two intervention areas to explain the purpose of the Statement.

The workshops aimed to help encourage improved connections and increase take up of the Statement in the intervention areas.

How will the evaluation work?

As part of the evaluation, CESE will compare uptake of the Statement in the intervention and control areas and identify the Statement’s impact on improving:

- Communication and partnerships between early childhood services, families and schools
- School teachers’ planning and decision-making for children entering Kindergarten, and
- Support for families with their child’s transition.

It will also identify the elements of the Statement that are working well, and which elements could be improved.

A report on the evaluation will be completed in 2015. It will include advice on any changes necessary to the Statement and its ongoing use across NSW in future years.

For more information on the evaluation of the NSW Transition to School Statement please contact: Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (E: info@det.nsw.gov.au or T: 9561 1221).