

FACT SHEET

**SMARTER SCHOOLS - LOW SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS  
SCHOOL COMMUNITIES NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP**

**What is the Nature of the Reform?**

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has agreed that addressing educational disadvantage arising from low socio-economic status (SES) requires sustained effort involving a suite of reforms to transform fundamentally the way schooling takes place.

This new Low SES School Communities National Partnership (NP) directly addresses this challenge. Through this seven-year NP, the Commonwealth will provide a total of \$1.5 billion, which includes \$1.1 billion over the first five years, to address the needs of disadvantaged schools. Those school leaders and local school communities facing the greatest educational disadvantage will be given greater discretion to employ strategies that address the particular issues they face.

States and Territories (the States) have agreed to match Commonwealth funding with investment which will include redirection and reprioritisation of existing school funding sources and new funding commitments.

This NP will fund a range of within school and out-of-school reforms that will support the educational needs and wellbeing of students in schools in low SES communities.

The States have agreed that they will develop Implementation Plans, based on the reforms they propose to implement in identified schools within their jurisdictions. Implementation Plans will include both government and non-government schools. The Commonwealth will negotiate a Bilateral Agreement and funding offer with each participating State, based on these plans.

The Implementation Plans may include:

- incentives to attract high-performing principals and teachers;
- adoption of best-practice performance management and staffing arrangements that articulate a clear role for principals;
- school operational arrangements which encourage innovation and flexibility;
- provision of innovative and tailored learning opportunities;
- strengthened school accountability; and
- external partnerships with parents, other schools, businesses and communities and provision of access to extended services (including through brokering arrangements).

This level of funding will support significant reform initiatives in approximately 1,500 schools in low SES communities.

The States also agreed to invite non-government schools to participate in the NP and to support principals in participating schools to develop whole-of-school plans. They will also provide regular reports to the Commonwealth on progress in implementing the agreed reforms.

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### **What will the impact of the Reform be?**

The NP will fund a range of within school and out-of-school reforms that will support the educational needs and wellbeing of students in schools in low SES communities. The NP aims to improve student engagement and educational achievement, and address entrenched disadvantage.

The NP will test the effectiveness of reforms and add to the stock of knowledge about what works in boosting educational outcomes for low SES students.

It will contribute to COAG's Social Inclusion and Closing the Gap agendas.

### **What will change?**

The NP focuses on evidence-based reforms which will be rigorously evaluated for potential system-wide transformation. It will support innovation and reform at the school level through the establishment of a supportive learning environment and dissemination of best practice. Schools will be encouraged to commit not only to excellence in teaching and learning, but also to address external factors that impact on students' ability to engage in learning.

### **What are the benefits that will flow from the Agreement or Reform?**

This NP will support nationally-significant reforms which aim to address the particular learning challenges faced by students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Schools will be empowered to improve student learning outcomes and wellbeing, to equip better students for further education, future labour market participation and contribute to the achievement of a range of social policy objectives, including addressing social exclusion and Indigenous disadvantage.

### **When will the changes take effect?**

The reforms will progressively begin from 1 January 2009 with full implementation expected to occur in 2011-12.

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**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

**1. What kinds of projects will be funded under the Low SES NP?**

The Low SES NP will include the following key elements:

- incentives to attract high-performing principals and teachers;
- adoption of best-practice performance management and staffing arrangements that articulate a clear role for principals;
- school operational arrangements which encourage innovation and flexibility, including extended hours of operation to allow for on-site or co-located extended services;
- providing innovative and tailored learning opportunities;
- strengthened school accountability; and
- external partnerships with parents, other schools, businesses and communities and the provision of access to extended services (including through brokering arrangements).

The States will be able to identify those elements that will best enable them to achieve improvements in education outcomes for schools in low SES communities.

**2. What will be the funding split between the Commonwealth and the States?**

The States agreed to match Commonwealth funding of \$1.1 billion over the five years to 2012-13 (a total of \$1.5 billion over seven years) for the NP including redirection and reprioritisation of existing school funding sources and new funding commitments.

**3. Will States be eligible for reward payments?**

This will be a facilitation NP given the high upfront administrative costs of the reform agenda.

Participating schools may be eligible for reward payments through the Literacy and Numeracy NP.

**4. Will the NP be extended beyond seven years?**

Prior to the expiration of the NP at the end of the seven years, the success of the reforms under the NP will be evaluated and consideration will be given to how best to sustain them. Options might include extending the life of the NP or rolling a portion of the facilitation payment into the National Education Agreement.

**5. How much funding would a school receive?**

The costings assume an average school cost of \$500,000 per year. The NP provides flexibility for a menu approach to reform. The funding individual schools will receive will depend on their size, the extent of reforms undertaken, degree of reform ambition and the level of State co-contribution.

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### **6. How will schools be selected?**

The Commonwealth and the States will develop a list of schools based on an agreed measure of relative disadvantage. The States will then nominate a subset of schools, or schools from outside the agreed list if it can be justified, with the final list of participating schools to be agreed by both parties in the bilateral agreement.

### **7. Will non-government schools be involved?**

The non-government school sector will be invited to participate in the NP.

The mechanism for their participation and funding arrangements will be considered in bilateral agreements and reflected in state implementation plans.

### **8. How will Commonwealth funding be allocated among States?**

Funding allocations will be determined by a methodology supported by the majority of States which will use the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage as a basis for measuring disadvantage. Final allocations will depend on the extent and timeframe for reform and the number of participating schools.