



Ethnic Communities'
Council of NSW Inc.
Representing all communities

**NSW Migrant & Refugee
EDUCATION WORKING PARTY**



**REBUILDING CAPACITY:
ENGLISH AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE AND
REFUGEE EDUCATION IN NSW PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

AN AGENDA FOR NSW GOVERNMENT 2019-2023

SUMMARY

February 2019

INTRODUCTION

As the state's key access and equity program designed to meet the English learning needs of migrant and refugee students in the English-medium curriculum, the English as an additional language or Dialect (EAL/D) Program is a strategic state resource essential to achieving the NSW Government's access, equity and literacy goals in education and fulfilling its service obligations under the *Multicultural NSW Legislation Amendment Act 2014*.

In recent years, school-based management reforms promoted by national and state governments of both political persuasions have eroded EAL/D programs in schools and weakened public education's capacity to meet the ongoing English language and literacy learning needs of refugee and migrant students.

As Australia's largest immigration state, the EAL/D Program in NSW Government schools cannot be taken for granted. The agenda below outlines a set of systemic changes an incoming NSW Government needs to make over its term of office in order to rebuild a public education infrastructure that addresses the English learning needs of its growing linguistically diverse school population.

1. *Initiate a NSW Legislative Council inquiry into the English language education of migrant and refugee students with English language proficiency needs in NSW Public Schools and the impact of Local Schools Local Decisions on this provision*

Since its introduction in 2012, the NSW Government's school-based management reform agenda, *Local Schools Local Decisions* has eroded EAL/D programs in schools and weakened the public education system's capacity to meet the growing English language and literacy learning needs of refugee and migrant students.

Since its introduction in 2012, no evaluation has been conducted on the impact of the *Local Schools, Local Decisions* reform on the educational access, equity and effectiveness of EAL/D provision.

The inquiry will provide the necessary evidence base for a long overdue assessment of the adequacy of the department's current EAL/D Program policy and planning in the context of Australia's migration program and *Local Schools, Local Decisions*, and be able to determine key policy directions for public education in multicultural NSW.

2. *Allocate an additional 250 EAL/D teaching positions to address the unmet English language and literacy learning needs of EAL/D students in NSW Government Schools*

Each year, the Department allocates EAL/D teaching support to schools from a fixed state pool of 896 EAL/D teaching positions. Over the last two decades, the number of EAL/D teacher positions in this pool has not kept pace with increased need for EAL/D teaching support.

Over the last decade, there has been 31 per cent increase in the number of students needing EAL/D support in NSW Government schools, outstripping the 7 per cent growth rate

of the general student population. At the same time, there has been no increase to the state pool of 896 EAL/D teacher positions since 2009.

This effective freeze on the allocation of EAL/D resources has created a growing backlog of unmet EAL/D need of some 47,000 students each year. Continued failure to address the chronic underfunding of EAL/D especially disadvantages schools in Greater Western Sydney, where the majority of refugees settle and this, in turn, impacts NSW's long tail of low literacy performance and under-achievement.

Allocation of an additional 250 EAL/D teaching positions would provide the extra specialist teacher targeted support needed to improve the English language literacy performance of EAL/D students and would address the long-term structural inequity in the Department's EAL/D resource allocation by substantially reducing the EAL/D student to EAL/D teacher ratio to 1:145, approximating 2007 levels of support.

3. Improve the planning and provision of Intensive English support across the NSW Public School system

Currently, there is no comprehensive forward planning of Intensive English support that considers the special role of IECs in the public education system, changing migrant settlement and enrolment patterns across schools, the statewide approach to transition of students from IECs to high school, moderated assessment and monitoring of their English learning outcomes on IEC exit, determining optimum length of stay in an IEC/IEHS, reviewing the IEC temporary to permanent staffing ratio, or addressing the uneven intensive English provision in primary and rural schools within the New Arrivals program

Effective planning of intensive English provision needs to be part of whole-of-department EAL/D planning informed by research evidence on the time it typically takes second language learners to attain the academic literacy in English on a par with their Australian-born peers.

4. Ensure effective whole of Department and school level accountability for EAL/D Program provision through transparent annual public reporting

Currently, NSW has no systematic, annual accountability reporting of EAL/D provision or the English language learning progress of EAL/D students. Transparency and accountability can be effectively implemented by establishing state level, annual reporting of the EAL/D program against a set of key equity and quality indicators.

5. Extend system planning and coordination support for students from refugee backgrounds to the NSW Public School system

The NSW Premier's 2015 decision to resettle in NSW up to 7,000 of the 12,000 of Australia's intake of refugees fleeing the conflict in Syria and Iraq added a cohort of some additional 2,000-3,000 school aged new arrivals requiring intensive EAL/D support to NSW public schools.

A state resettlement plan was never published and there has been no public reporting of resettlement funding expenditure, initiatives or outcomes. Efforts appear to have been

directed towards resettlement support through community-based and employment initiatives in collaboration with not-for-profit and corporate organisations.

Extending planning and coordination support for students from refugee backgrounds to the NSW Public School system will help ensure timely, targeted provision of English language and related wellbeing support throughout their schooling.

6. Strengthen health and wellbeing support for students from refugee backgrounds in the NSW Public School system

Intensive English Centre-based, nurse-led screening was established at Beverly Hills Intensive English Centre in 2011 and then expanded to Kogarah, Evans, Holroyd and Fairfield IECs. This model proved to be highly effective in increasing the detection of health conditions likely to impact on student health and learning; linking newly arrived students and their families with primary health care; and coordinating care across primary health and specialist services.

Currently, the future of this successful program is uncertain. State and local health district plans which underpinned funding for the program expired in 2016. If not secured in future refugee health plans, these programs are at risk of being discontinued

Currently, only a limited number of IECs/IEHS have access to this program. School-based nurse-led screening programs should be extended to all IECs and more key primary schools, supported with recurrent health funding secured by current department and local health district refugee health implementation plans.

In 2016, the Department established two state Refugee support teams with eight psychologist, refugee support officers to provide additional counselling services and specialist support to school counsellors in its core school counselor program. However, schools with significant numbers of refugee students still report that schools' access to counselling services is insufficient to meet the increased incidents and complexity of refugee students' counseling needs.

Refugee factors or refugee student enrolment data were not included as indicators of student need in the Department's calculation of its core school counselling allocation to schools for 2016-2018. With the NSW Government's recent announcement of funding for a full-time counsellor or psychologist and a student support officer in every high school, there is an urgent need to review the current formula for allocating counseling positions in light of current refugee student enrolment trends and to ensure that any increase specialist counseling provision is well targeted to meet the complex needs of refugees in these schools.

7. Ensure EAL/D qualified teachers are appointed to all EAL/D positions across IECs, high schools and primary schools

Despite the importance of EAL/D qualifications and expertise to effective EAL/D program delivery, EAL/D untrained EAL/D teachers continue to be appointed to EAL/D positions in primary schools, high schools and IECs.

The school-based, flexible resource management policies of *Local School Local Decisions* have made the problem worse. Principals' school-based staffing decisions have led to the re-deployment of EAL/D qualified staff to non EAL/D teaching positions and increased the number of fractionalised and casualised EAL/D teaching positions filled by teachers without EAL/D qualifications. EAL/D positions are routinely filled by EAL/D untrained casual teachers.

The Department needs to support recent subject content knowledge requirements for EAL/D as specialist a teaching role K-12 issued by NSW Education Standards Authority by re-establishing staffing mechanisms to ensure that EAL/D qualified teachers are appointed to both permanent and part time EAL/D positions in primary and secondary schools and Intensive English Centres.

As well as strengthened specialist staffing processes for EAL/D teachers, there is an urgent need for teacher retraining and accelerated teacher training programs in EAL/D that target qualified primary and secondary teachers who are currently appointed to an EAL/D position But have not completed a formal qualification in EAL/D.

8. *Boost the EAL/D teaching skills of all NSW Public school teachers across the curriculum through a whole school EAL/D program and professional development allocation supported by pre-service EAL/D training requirements for all teachers and a statewide EAL/D professional development program for mainstream teachers and school leaders*

Effective EAL/D program delivery in schools requires EAL/D teachers to work together with class teachers in collaborative EAL/D planning and teaching and with school leaders as a professional resource across the school. An essential condition for success is for collaborating teachers to have sufficient, dedicated time to work together.

What schools need is a specific-purpose allocation that supports professional collaboration among EAL/D, class and executive teachers in planning, improving, delivering and evaluating effective school EAL/D teaching and refugee support programs; implementing school-based EAL/D professional learning projects; and providing specialist mentoring support to beginning teachers.

A comprehensive, state wide approach is also needed to ensure that teachers entering the profession are adequately prepared with necessary EAL/D teaching skills from their pre-service teaching programs. This need can be addressed through establishing pre-service EAL/D training requirements in teacher education.

State wide support is needed to ensure that mainstream teachers and school leaders in NSW Government schools are able to upskill their professional practice through tertiary delivered and accredited EAL/D teaching courses. This need can be met through targeted sponsorship of teachers and leaders in schools with significant numbers of EAL/D students in an EAL/D Graduate Certificate course with specifically designed teacher and leadership strands.

9. *Restore and improve frontline specialist professional support to NSW Public schools by establishing state teams of Multicultural/EAL/D advisors and Community Engagement officers and extending the services of the Refugee Support Leaders team*

Loss of the Multicultural/ESL consultants in 2013 under *Local Schools Local Decisions* resulted in the disruption of long-established EAL/D professional learning networks and support for both EAL/D and mainstream teachers as well as the loss of system-wide, support for developing effective, targeted, needs-based EAL/D teaching learning programs in schools.

Loss of Community Information Officers resulted in the loss of established community-based networks and agencies, particularly around refugee student support, and shifted the workload of CIO teams to schools.

The Refugee Support Leaders established by the Department in 2016 to support schools in responding to large numbers of Syrian and Iraqi refugee student enrolments in NSW government schools has been limited by temporary, year to-year funding over the last three years, their exclusive focus on schools with high refugee enrolments and their rigid, school-based service boundaries.

Growing diversity of the NSW school population, the need for improved literacy outcomes and ongoing changes to the teacher workforce, and school staff necessitate ongoing funding and establishment of improved, frontline specialist professional support to NSW Public schools. This involves establishing statewide teams of 14 Multicultural/EAL/D advisors and 18 Community Engagement officers and extending the services of the team of 19 Refugee Support Leaders.

10. *Develop and implement a strategic, five year EAL/D action plan to strengthen and improve EAL/D services to meet the immediate and long term English language and literacy learning needs of migrant and refugee students in NSW Public schools.*

At the state level, there is no systematic forward planning, strategic oversight, coordination, or performance monitoring and development of EAL/D services in NSW public education.

EAL/D education is not identified in any of the Department's corporate plans and strategy documents such as the two page Department of Education Strategic Plan 2018-2022, the NSW Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2017-2020, or the Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2018-2022. The Department's Multicultural Plan (2016-2018) expired last year. Reporting on implementation of the plan has been biennial since 2013/14. The last Multicultural Programs and Services Plan Report was published in 2016.

Systematic planning for improving EAL/D provision and delivery can only be assured by a comprehensive five-year strategic state plan identifying EAL/D program development strategies that addresses English language and literacy learning needs of migrant and refugee students in NSW Public schools. The Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2016-2020, with its key design features such as areas of action, outcomes, consultation, implementation and governance, monitoring and reporting, offers an effective model for such a plan.