



# The Hon Barry O'Farrell MP

## Premier of NSW

### Minister for Western Sydney

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## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **CONNECTED COMMUNITIES: IMPROVING ABORIGINAL EDUCATION**

NSW Premier Barry O'Farrell, Minister for Education Adrian Piccoli and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Victor Dominello today launched *Connected Communities* – a strategy to drive improved education outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people.

The strategy – an Australian first – will be delivered through 15 schools in some of NSW's most complex and disadvantaged communities.

*Connected Communities* schools will be given unprecedented authority to tailor education to students' needs. The schools will become community hubs to deliver a range of services from birth, through school, to further training and employment.

"This is a new approach that recognises one size doesn't fit all for Aboriginal education – we have to do things differently," Mr O'Farrell said.

"It is appalling that only a third of Aboriginal children who start year seven currently complete high school.

"*Connected Communities* will allow individual schools to work in partnership with Aboriginal leaders in the local community to help improve education outcomes for young Aboriginal people.

"This is a first step in achieving generational change to give Aboriginal children the same education opportunities as all students in NSW," Mr O'Farrell said.

Education Minister Adrian Piccoli said *Connected Communities* schools will play a bigger role in day to day life in their local communities.

"Schools are usually the largest physical asset in these communities – they should be better utilised as a hub for a range of other services," Mr Piccoli said.

"The principals in these schools will become the most highly paid in NSW. Schools will work closely with the community to develop and implement strategies that will work for them."

Initially, schools in western NSW, New England and the North Coast will be involved in delivering *Connected Communities*.

Mr Dominello said *Connected Communities* is the first major Government initiative endorsed by the Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs, including leaders of peak Aboriginal organisations.

“The strategy can be tailored in each school according to the local community’s strengths and aspirations,” Mr Dominello said.

“The local business community will also be included in the strategy, to help coordinate employment and training opportunities.

“*Connected Communities* has been developed in collaboration with the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, together with research on locally-delivered services and community development.

“These strategies will be an important step in fulfilling the NSW Government’s commitment that Aboriginal students in all schools will be supported to achieve outcomes on a par with all other students.”

The *Connected Communities* Strategy addresses key issues that positively influence Aboriginal students’ educational and life opportunities.

Engaging the Aboriginal community with its local school is the most important of these, and can be achieved by:

- employing Elders and Aboriginal staff;
- embedding and celebrating Aboriginal culture and language;
- building cultural understanding among teachers;
- engaging and working with parents.

“For too long the investment in these communities has not led to any improvement in student performance. These changes will enable schools to coordinate resources to better support students,” Mr Piccoli said.

“We have listened to these communities and they have told us to take bold action. The approaches of the past have failed.

“The success of the strategy will be rigorously monitored and measured.

“This will include Aboriginal children’s readiness for school, family and community active engagement in schools, attendance rates, and improvements in literacy and numeracy measured against national minimum standards.

“Ultimately, the benefits of the *Connected Communities* Strategy depend on effective leadership, good governance and genuine community partnerships.

“To achieve this, participating schools will have a specially-selected executive principal, a community partnership leader, a community member endorsed to teach Aboriginal languages and culture, and an advisory council.”

An executive director to oversee the *Connected Communities* Strategy will be appointed in July, with Executive Principals selected in October.

These officers will then hold community workshops and other key preparation before the *Connected Communities* Strategy is fully operational from the start of the 2013 school year.

For further information please visit: <https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/home/>