



NSW Liberals & Nationals Literacy & Numeracy Action Plan

Delivering excellence and equity in education.



The NSW Liberals & Nationals believe every child has the right to achieve in reading, writing and maths.

Parents would be staggered to learn that in NSW as many as 15 per cent of all students progress to high school without meeting minimum standards in literacy and numeracy.¹ Every year almost 13,000 children fail to meet basic standards in reading, writing or mathematics when they finish primary school. There is universal recognition that once these students reach high school, it is almost too late to recover these skills.

In *Smarter, Stronger, Healthier, Safer: The NSW Liberals & Nationals Social Policy Framework*, we set ourselves the clear goal of delivering equity and excellence in education by ensuring all students receive a world-class education.

In Government we will achieve this goal through our \$250 million Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan. We will:

- **Recognise the importance of early childhood development to improved literacy and numeracy outcomes by moving responsibility for preschools from the Department of Community Services to the Department of Education.**
- **Use Kindergarten screening assessments, current internal school data, Best Start results and Australian Education Development Index information to identify K-2 students at risk of not meeting literacy and numeracy standards.**
- **Expand and enhance the Reading Recovery Program by providing an additional 900 teachers, and revising the program to include both literacy and numeracy and targeting ‘at risk’ K-2 students.**
- **Reallocate over 300 K-2 Support Teachers Learning Assistance (STLA) to provide more intensive support to students in Years 3-10 with a focus on upper primary and early secondary (Years 5-8).**
- **Establish a Ministerial Working Group comprising educational experts to report annually on the performance of our Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan.**

Funding for the additional 900 teachers will be allocated on the basis of need across the government and non-government sectors.

The NSW Liberals & Nationals believe that, with a strong focus on early intervention, no child with the ability to read and write will need to progress to high school without achieving minimum national benchmark standards in literacy and numeracy.

¹ Achterstraat, P., (Auditor-General), “Improving Literacy and Numeracy in NSW Public Schools”, Audit Office, New South Wales, Auditor-General’s Performance Audit, October 2008, p. 13.

Background

In *Smarter, Stronger, Healthier, Safer: The NSW Liberals & Nationals Social Policy Framework*, the NSW Liberals & Nationals committed to a goal of delivering equity and excellence in education by ensuring all students receive a world-class education.

NSW has always boasted a strong standard of education. The average NSW student performs at a high level, and in many cases better than interstate and overseas students. For example, out of the 57 countries surveyed in the recent OECD PISA study, only five countries achieved higher average scores than Australia in literacy and eight in numeracy.² NSW scores exceed the Australian average.

However, performance of students across the NSW education system is not uniform. Our education system does not perform well in terms of equity. While the average performance is strong, many students fail to meet basic standards in literacy and numeracy. The NSW Auditor-General recently estimated that between 5 to 15 per cent of children were at risk of not reaching the minimum level of achievement needed to advance at school.³ A 2006 OECD study showed that 14 per cent of 15-year-old NSW students read below minimum standards.⁴

These findings were confirmed by the 2009 NAPLAN results. In reading, the Year 3 test shows that 12.5 per cent, or over 10,000 students, in NSW were either at or below the minimum standard for reading.⁵ By Year 9 almost 18,000 students, or over 20 per cent of students, are at or below the minimum level.⁶ This compares with 9 per cent of Year 3 students and 17.6 per cent of Year 9 students in Victoria at or below the minimum standard.⁷

NSW Students (%) achieving at or below the Minimum Standard⁸

Year	Reading	Numeracy
3	12.5	13.1
5	16.8	14.6
7	17.3	17.9
9	20.5	18.2

² Ibid, p. 18.

³ Ibid, p. 13.

⁴ Thomson, S. & De Bortoli, L., "Exploring Scientific Literacy: How Australia measures up: the PISA 2006 survey of students' scientific, reading and mathematical literacy skills", OECD PISA National Report, 2008, Australia, p. 167.

⁵ National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), "2009 NAPLAN – Achievement in Reading, Writing, Language Conventions and Numeracy", 2009, Table 3. R.1, p. 8, retrieved 7 December 2009, http://www.naplan.edu.au/verve/resources/NAPLAN_2009_National_Report.pdf.

⁶ Ibid, p. 170.

⁷ Ibid, pp. 8 & 170.

NSW Year 3 Students (%) Below the Minimum Standard By Region⁹

Region	Literacy 2007	Numeracy 2007
Sydney	4.3	5.6
Northern Sydney	1.4	2
South Western Sydney	10.8	11.4
Western Sydney	8.7	9.3
Hunter/Central Coast	9.2	9
North Coast	11.4	9.8
New England	12.2	11.7
Riverina	11.4	10
Illawarra / South East	9.1	8.4
Western NSW	14	13.5

In NSW poor performance in literacy and numeracy are most obvious amongst groups of students including Indigenous students, those living in remote and very remote areas and other areas of disadvantage. It is staggering to note that more than one third of Indigenous students in Year 3 are currently at, or below, the minimum standards in literacy and numeracy.

Percentage of Year 3 Students at or below the Minimum Standard (2009)¹⁰

Classification	Reading	Numeracy
Remote	29.5	31.4
Very Remote	27.8	32
Indigenous	35.4	38.2

Despite the NSW Government being aware of the importance of early intervention in literacy and numeracy, the funding provided for proven and effective literacy and numeracy programs, such as Reading Recovery, has been inadequate. The Reading Recovery Program is designed to assist the lowest achieving 20 per cent of students in Year 1, approximately 12,500 students.¹¹ However, it is only funded for 9,000 students, or 15 per

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Achterstraat, P., op. cit., p. 15.

¹⁰ Ibid, pp. 10, 12, 46 and 48.

¹¹ NSW Public Schools, "Supporting Students", *The NSW Department of Education and Training*, retrieved 7 December 2009 from

<http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/studentssupport/programs/readingrecovery/selection/index.php>

cent of the students.¹² At least 3,500 students every year are missing out on critical intervention and support to improve their basic reading skills.

The implication of this cannot be underestimated. Students skilled in literacy and numeracy are not only more likely to stay in school and post-school earn higher wages, but they also have higher levels of confidence, a better ability to deal with daily tasks and better outcomes in terms of lifelong learning and health.¹³ More broadly, an equitable system that provides opportunities to all is one of the most powerful levers in creating a fairer and more skilled society.¹⁴

A 2009 study by the 'Every Child a Chance Trust' in the UK¹⁵ identified the long-term costs to government of poor literacy and numeracy. According to the report, the costs included:

- educational costs, including additional special educational needs provision in primary and secondary schools, truancy, and exclusion from school;
- reduced employment opportunities, resulting in lost tax revenue and increased unemployment benefits;
- increased health risks, including depression, obesity and substance abuse, and
- significantly increased risk of involvement with the criminal justice system.

Furthermore, the report identifies the return on investment of early intervention in literacy is between £11 and £17 for every pound spent.¹⁶ The Trust considered these to be conservative estimates and did not include costs that could not be readily quantified, including social housing costs and social services costs.

¹² Verity Firth MP cited in General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2, "Budget Estimates for Education & Training Transcript", 16 September 2009, p. 17.

¹³ Council of Australian Governments National Reform Agenda, "The NSW Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan", April 2007, p. 2.

¹⁴ Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, "Ten Steps to Equity in Education", *Policy Brief*, January 2008, p. 1.

¹⁵ Every Child a Chance Trust, "The long term costs of literacy difficulties", 2nd Edition, London, United Kingdom, January 2009, retrieved 10 December 2009,

http://www.everychildachancetrust.org/ecar/pubs/long_term_costs_of_literacy_report.pdf.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 5.

NSW Liberals & Nationals \$250 Million Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan

The NSW Liberals & Nationals have a \$250 million Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan. We believe with a strong focus on early intervention, no child with the ability to read and write will need to progress to high school without achieving minimum national benchmark standards in literacy and numeracy.

In Government the NSW Liberals & Nationals will:

- **Recognise the importance of early childhood development to improved literacy and numeracy outcomes by moving responsibility for preschools from the Department of Community Services to the Department of Education.**
- **Use Kindergarten screening assessments, current internal school data, Best Start results and Australian Education Development Index information to identify K-2 students at risk of not meeting literacy and numeracy standards.**
- **Expand and enhance the Reading Recovery Program by providing an additional 900 teachers, and revising the program to include both literacy and numeracy and targeting ‘at risk’ K-2 students.**
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The Importance of Early Intervention

A historically consistent theme across education research is the importance of early intervention strategies and programs. The earlier learning difficulties are identified, the more likely they can be remedied.

One of the world’s most eminent economists, Professor James Heckman, states:

“If a child is not motivated to learn and engage early on in life, the more likely it is that when the child becomes an adult, it will fail in social and economic life. The longer society waits to intervene in the life cycle of a disadvantaged child, the more costly it is to remediate disadvantage”¹⁷

¹⁷ Heckman, J., “NBER Working Paper Series - Schools, Skills, and Synapses”, *National Bureau of Economic Research*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, June 2008, pp. 4-5, retrieved 10 December 2009, http://www.nber.org/papers/w14064.pdf?new_window=1.

Moreover, early intervention is proven to work. In the United Kingdom the 'Every Child a Chance Trust' is rolling out a Reading Recovery Program to support up to 30,000 children per year. According to the Trust, in the schools funded through their program, children receiving Reading Recovery lessons made on average a gain of 21 months in reading age in 4 – 5 months of teaching – well over four times the normal rate of progress.¹⁸

The Trust has also established a numeracy program, 'Every Child Counts', based on an early intervention one-on-one approach, similar to Reading Recovery. This program is also in the process of being rolled out to support 30,000 students nationally.¹⁹ Students supported by the Trust made on average, 13.5 months progress in Number Age in just 20 hours of teaching spread over three months – over four times the 'normal' rate of progress.²⁰

Pre-School Literacy and Numeracy

Early childhood is a critical period in a child's learning and development. Quality early childhood education is an essential building block for later success in literacy and numeracy.

Under our \$250 million Action Plan, the NSW Liberals & Nationals will recognise the important educational role of preschools by moving responsibility for preschools from the Department of Community Services to the Department of Education. This will include the administration and support for the existing NSW Curriculum Framework.

We will also work in close consultation with the Federal Government and the early childhood sector to build on and implement the new national Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF). Implementation of the Early Years Learning Framework will help to ensure that parents and early learning professionals achieve the best learning and development outcomes for children.

These changes will guarantee that children develop the foundations for success in literacy and numeracy and have a seamless transition from preschool to Kindergarten.

¹⁸ Every Child a Reader Organisation, "Every Child a Reader: the results of the third year", London, United Kingdom, 2008, p. 4, retrieved 10 December 2009, http://www.everychildachancetrust.org/ecar/pubs/third_year.pdf.

¹⁹ Every Child A Chance Trust, "Every Child Counts – The results of the first year 2008/09", London, United Kingdom, 2009, p. 2, retrieved 10 December 2009, http://www.everychildachancetrust.org/pubs/ECC_first_year_results.pdf.

²⁰ Ibid.

Expanded Reading Recovery

Early intervention for children at risk of falling behind is critical. The NSW Liberals & Nationals will enhance and expand the existing Reading Recovery Program to ensure that all at risk children are able to access intensive one-on one, and small group, support for basic literacy and numeracy skills. This will include:

- expanding the focus of Reading Recovery to include numeracy as well as literacy and making it available to all at risk students from Kindergarten to Year 2;
- employing an additional 900 teachers, thereby increasing the total number of intervention teachers to 2,000 for Kindergarten to Year 2 and,
- redesigning the system of allocating teaching resources to focus on assigning teachers to individual students rather than on the need of a school community.

A NSW Liberals & Nationals Government will use the full range of data available to individually identify students who are at risk of not meeting minimum standards in literacy and numeracy. Data sets include:

- Best Start Kindergarten Screening Assessment Data: Introduced in 2008, this assesses writing, reading, comprehension, speaking, phonics and phonemic awareness, understanding concepts about print, counting skills or awareness, arithmetic strategies, units and pattern recognition. It will be implemented across all primary schools by 2010.
- Internal School Data: Individual schools collect a range of data, which is critical in determining a students' need for additional teaching resources.
- The Australian Education Development Index (AEDI): This is a population measure of children's development as they enter school. It measures early childhood development in five areas; physical health and wellbeing, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills, and communication skills and general knowledge.

Funding for the additional teachers will be allocated between the government and non-government sectors on the basis of need. We will direct funding to the students who need it the most – no matter whether they attend a public or private school.

The additional funding will allow 16,500 students per year to benefit from intensive one-on-one tuition in literacy and/or numeracy.

Teachers will be provided with specialist training in literacy and numeracy instruction. This is consistent with the Auditor-General's recommendation that the NSW Department of Education strengthen the literacy and numeracy skills of teachers working with the lowest performing students.

We will reform the process of appointing Literacy and Numeracy Intervention teachers so children's needs are the sole driving force for allocation. On an annual basis, the number of students not likely to meet minimum benchmark standards will be determined according to the above-described information. Teachers' time will then be allocated as the numbers dictate. This manner of appointing teachers solely based on children's needs is unprecedented.

As a result of the additional resources (900 additional teachers) being provided to the lowest performing students in the K-2 years, the NSW Liberals & Nationals will be able to refocus the existing Support Teachers Learning Assistance Program (STLA) on school Years 3-10 (currently it operates K-10). This will allow an estimated 300 STLA to be reallocated, dramatically improving the pupil/teacher ratio in Years 3-10.

Importantly, the NSW Liberals & Nationals believe the current STLA structure is appropriate. We will not be making further changes to the program without complete and proper consultation with educators and the wider school community.

Implementation and Costing

The NSW Liberals & Nationals' action plan for universal literacy and numeracy will cost \$250 million over the five-year rollout period for the program.

It will be funded through \$136 million of additional recurrent funding from the State budget and \$114 million provided from the National Partnership for Literacy and Numeracy.

The National Partnership funding will come from additional 'reward' funds available for meeting established benchmarks in literacy and numeracy. These additional 'reward' funds have not been allocated under the NSW Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership Implementation Plan. It is assumed that NSW will achieve the required benchmarks to receive reward payments and that the National Partnership funding will continue at the currently specified levels beyond the 2011/2012 financial year.

Our literacy and numeracy plan meets the three priority areas for reform identified by the National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy:

- effective and evidence-based teaching of literacy and numeracy;
- strong school leadership and whole school engagement with literacy and numeracy;
and
- monitoring student and school literacy and numeracy performance to identify where support is needed.

It is recognised that the National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy requires funding to be apportioned between the government and non-government sectors. We will ensure our plan to allocate funding on the basis of need will comply with this requirement.

Importantly, the implementation of this program will not come at the expense of existing literacy and numeracy programs currently funded by the State Government or under the National Partnerships for Literacy and Numeracy, Teacher Quality or Low SES schools.

Implementation

New literacy and numeracy teachers will be recruited progressively over the 5-year rollout of the program. The 1,100 existing Reading Recovery teachers will also be given additional training in numeracy teaching skills.

New Literacy and Numeracy Teachers Per School Year

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
200	300	500	900	900

Costing and Funding

Over 5 years, the total cost of the action plan for literacy and numeracy is \$250 million, with \$136 million of additional recurrent funding from the State budget and \$114 million provided from the National Partnership for Literacy and Numeracy. The impact on the NSW Budget forward estimates is shown below:

Cost

	2011/12 \$ Mil	2012/13 \$ Mil	2013/14 \$ Mil	2014/15 \$ Mil
Additional teachers, including training costs.	\$10.7	\$25.7	\$41.2	\$75.1

Funding

	2011/12 \$ Mil	2012/13 \$ Mil	2013/14 \$ Mil	2014/15 \$ Mil
Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership Funding	\$10.7	\$25.7	\$26.0	\$26.0
New Funding	\$0	\$0	\$15.2	\$49.1
Total	\$10.7	\$25.7	\$41.2	\$75.1