

School Success Model spearheads deeper offensive against Australian public schools

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A new blueprint, dubbed the *School Success Model*, was imposed on teachers and students last month with the opening of the school year in New South Wales (NSW), Australia's most populous state. It takes another major step toward implementing the pro-corporate education restructuring ushered in by the federal Labor Party governments a decade ago.

School Success features a further narrowing of the school curriculum, and the imposition of mandatory teaching methods, learning materials, classroom content and practice. It establishes annual improvement targets, with "underperforming" schools facing automatic departmental intervention, and ties teacher performance to how much "value" they add to student "learning progressions."

Taken as a whole, the model represents a historic attack on any notion of enlightened education for the vast majority of children. *School Success* is being implemented by state Liberal-National Party government in NSW to replace the *Local Schools Local Decisions* (LSLD) autonomy model introduced in NSW in 2012.

LSLD eliminated 800 curriculum support positions in the state education department's central office and devolved many financial decisions to school principals. Thousands of permanent teaching positions were replaced by casual and temporary appointments as cost-cutting measures.

In addition, in order to extract increased productivity from already overworked teachers, teacher dismissal procedures were fast-tracked, assisted by a call by the NSW Teachers Federation (NSWTF) for a special task force to facilitate the removal of so-called underperforming teachers. LSLD also tied teachers' pay rises to meeting "standards," a step toward pay for "student performance."

The new model will further entrench a two-tier system of school education. In a country with already one of the highest levels in the OECD of private school enrolments, the growing resource gap between public and private schools, compounded by the mandating of regressive new teaching methods, will further drive down public school enrolments and undercut public education.

As with LSLD, *School Success* aligns with the pro-corporate "Gonski 2.0" agenda, unveiled by the federal Liberal-National government of Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull in 2018. This program was to ensure that schools meet the demands of business for a work-ready labour force. *School Success* includes even more intensive government monitoring of student and teacher performance, via a data-driven testing model, despite teacher opposition to high-stakes testing.

The new model aims to further cut costs as dictated by the corporate elite. It dovetails with a NSW Treasury report that dismissed the glaring inequities and ongoing school funding cuts, and declared that "policymakers need to look beyond funding to lift student performance." *School Success* is also in line with the recommendations of a 2020 NSW parliamentary report authored by One Nation parliamentarian Mark Latham, on how schools measure results. Berejiklian hailed its calls for "reform."

A former federal Labor Party leader, Latham joined the far-right anti-immigrant One Nation party in 2018. He is an unabashed advocate of slashing social spending, cutting taxes for high-income recipients and dismantling welfare and education entitlements. *School Success* is to be rolled out over 2021 to 2024, together with an overhaul of the school curriculum, billed as the "biggest change to education in over 30 years." The thrust is to "clean out" the curriculum and turn back to

the “basics.” School-based programs, devised to overcome the high levels of disengagement among students are in the firing line, with 20 percent of courses already cut. Announcements of further subject restrictions are expected next month.

The rigid and mechanical phonics model for teaching reading is to be elevated in schools through a mandatory phonics screening test imposed on Year One, six-year-old, pupils.

Annual targets for improvements, based on test results such as the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and Higher School Certificate (HSC) tests, will be imposed on schools with government oversight measures strengthened. Schools will be required to publish individual school targets. Schools with “substandard” outcomes will be placed on performance plans and subject to departmental intervention.

In addition, new data collection platforms, such as PLAN2, have been launched to closely monitor student “progress” in literacy and numeracy via a unique student identification number. Teachers will be required to regularly enter “individual progression indicators” linked to syllabus outcomes. This will subject students to an endless round of tests and further create a platform for “performance pay” for teachers.

Classroom practice is to be subjected to a “laser-like” scrutiny. While full details of the curriculum changes are yet to be published, one recommendation in Latham’s report, supported by NSW Education Minister Sarah Mitchell, provides an indication.

The government’s data hub, the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE), is to devise a “CESE menu” of “mandatory best practice framework for teaching methods, learning materials, classroom content and practice, physical classroom design, external consultants and school management.”

None of these measures would be possible without the support of the teacher unions. NSWTF executives have dismissed the *School Success Model* as “spin without substance.” Their criticism is limited to the government’s failure to restore the 800 positions initially lost under LSLD.

Teachers opposed the introduction of LSLD, with 50,000 defying a strike ban in 2012 to protest against it. That strike was betrayed by NSWTF leaders, who postured as opponents, then entered into negotiations

with the government to enforce LSLD measures. This continued a long list of union betrayals, including union moves to call off a boycott of the NAPLAN testing regime in 2010 despite mass opposition.

NSWTF leaders have been working closely with the education department on the new school “reform.” During the launch of a 2021 School Excellence in Action meeting in July 2020, NSW education department secretary Mark Scott praised the NSWTF as one of the government’s great partners in “driving school improvement.”

The ongoing attacks on public education raise the necessity for teachers, parents and students to strike out on a new political road. In opposition to the bipartisan federal and state agenda, the Committee for Public Education, established by the Socialist Equality Party, is calling for the formation of independent rank-and-file action committees to unite teachers, parents and students and the working class and develop a unified political struggle against the destruction of public education on the basis of a socialist perspective.



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