



# White flight Victorian blueprint for school reform

A *Sydney Morning Herald* report by Anna Patty on a confidential report by the New South Wales Secondary Principals Council on principals' perceptions about student enrolment patterns almost single-handedly created an alarmist new educational issue, 'white flight,' in March.

According to Patty's report, the confidential survey of 163 NSW high school principals – a third of the NSW Secondary Principals Council membership – was presented to the NSW government in February 2006, but has never been released.

Patty reported that principals in New England estimate that 56 per cent of the Anglo-European students who left their public schools went to private schools. In North Sydney, 35 per cent of students who left the public system went to private schools. According to Patty, 'The report shows the percentage of Anglo-European students in public schools has decreased by a third in western NSW, by 42 per cent in North Sydney and 37 per cent in New England.' The period during which those percentage decreases occurred was not reported.

'This is almost certainly white flight from towns in which the public school's enrolment consists increasingly of Indigenous students,' Patty quoted from the report. 'The pattern is repeated in the Sydney region. Based on comments from principals, this (pattern in Sydney) most likely consists of flight to avoid Islamic students and communities.'

According to Patty's report, the survey quotes one principal as saying, 'The Asian students are scared off by Lebanese enrolment at our school following the Cronulla riots – we had 18 no-shows on day one in Year 11, mostly Asian.'

The confidential NSW Secondary Principals Council report appears to rely on principals' perceptions by means of a self-report survey, rather than statistical evidence of the actual scale of 'white flight.'

Victorian Minister for Education Bronwyn Pike released two 'education blueprint' discussion papers last month – a *Blueprint for Early Childhood Development* and a *Blueprint for School Reform* – that aim to: create a 'culture of excellence' in the Victorian education system, overhaul the teaching workforce, and develop stronger links between schools and parents.

Pike said the proposed reforms put an increased emphasis on ensuring every student progresses in school, on new ways to equip students and the school workforce with what they need to succeed, and on new ways to encourage high-performing principals and teachers to work at under-performing schools.

Pike's blueprint proposals for school reform build in a range of accountability measures, including stronger interventions and more intensive monitoring in under-performing schools, and monitoring and incentives to ensure that adequately performing schools are encouraged to improve

Pike also proposes a scheme to encourage high-performing graduates from other fields to enter teaching, along the lines of the British Teach First model and the United States Teach for America model; incentives, including higher salaries, for 'the best teachers and school leaders to work in those schools where they are needed most'; and mechanisms to help teachers who have become disengaged to leave the profession, after appropriate opportunities and support have been provided to lift teaching practice.

Pike said talented teachers could help lift standards in under-performing schools. 'We're prepared to offer incentives to make sure we get some of our best teachers to move,' she said.

'What we want to see are measurements of progress within our schools, and league tables are often a very crude way of compar-

ing performance,' Pike said. 'Every school is different, every school has different priorities, different strengths and different weaknesses, but what we want to know is that every school is improving.'

According to the *Blueprint for School Reform*, 'Teachers deserve a clearly articulated career path, including an instructional model that outlines developmental levels, creates a common language and shared practice, and supports teachers in ongoing professional learning to move from novice to expert practitioners. They should be able to focus on teaching. It is critical to reward high-performing teachers, both in recognition and performance-based reward. We need to improve our succession planning so teachers know where they are headed and we can identify and prepare the next generation of school principals and leaders. And by making teachers more accountable for their students' outcomes, we can more easily encourage good teachers to remain in the profession and assist disengaged teachers to leave.'

Australian Education Union Victorian branch president Mary Bluett said the government first needed to address pay and working conditions. More than 10,000 Victorian state school teachers took strike action, as well as a campaign of 35 four-hour rolling stoppages between February and April, to put pressure on the government in negotiations for a new agreement on teacher pay, workload, class sizes and contract employment. The negotiations have already had their first birthday.

The top of the salary increment for a Victorian state school teacher is \$65,414 a year. In Queensland it's \$69,225; in Western Australia it's \$71,067; and in NSW it's \$75,352.

It's not hard to imagine which way the traffic runs in Albury-Wodonga.

# School lockdown – five charged

FIVE TEENAGERS ACCUSED OF A VIOLENT RAMPAGE THROUGH A WESTERN SYDNEY HIGH SCHOOL LAST MONTH WERE REMANDED IN CUSTODY TO FACE 100 CHARGES THIS MONTH. STEVE HOLDEN REPORTS.

‘We were having assembly, when a bunch of guys walked in with machetes and baseball bats, and they said they were looking for some kid.’ That’s how an unnamed male student speaking on Network Ten described an alleged attack by five teenagers accused of a violent rampage through Merrylands High School in Sydney’s south-western suburbs last month.

According to media reports, the teenagers, who confronted the school body during an outdoor morning assembly on 7 April, were allegedly looking for a student from the school. Detective Inspector Jim Stewart of Holroyd Police told Macquarie radio ‘The information available to us is they were coming here...seeking someone.’

Merrylands principal Liliana Mularczyk immediately called for a lockdown, and students and staff moved to classrooms where staff barricaded the doors. Police locked

down the grounds before arresting the rampaging teenagers.

The five – two of them 14, two 15 and one 16 years of age – each faced 20 charges, including assault, malicious damage and affray, in the Parramatta Children’s Court. None applied for bail although it was formally refused. They were remanded in custody to appear in the Parramatta Children’s Court on 22 May via audiovisual link.

The five allegedly ran through the corridors of the school in the six minutes before police apprehended them, smashing windows and showering students with glass. A 43-year-old male teacher was taken to Westmead Hospital after suffering bruising to the back of his head. It’s alleged he had attempted to restrain one of the youths. Two students were also taken to Westmead Hospital, while 16 students were treated at the school for injuries caused by shattering glass.

NSW Department of Education director general Michael Coutts-Trotter told Sydney’s *Daily Telegraph* that Mularczyk and Merrylands High teachers deserved praise for the way they handled the alleged attack.

‘I just want to recognise the principal at Merrylands, who is a fabulous school leader,’ he told Macquarie radio. ‘She leads a fabulous staff and they did a fantastic job.’

According to a report by Jordan Baker and Arjun Ramachandran, with Bridie Smith, in Melbourne’s *Age*, a Merrylands Year 10 student alleged the five were from a nearby high school. The *Age* reporters alleged in their story that one of those arrested was a 15-year-old Granville Boys High School student and speculated that the alleged attack may have been prompted by ethnic tensions between students from schools in the area.

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