

# EDUCATION IN RURAL VICTORIA

*"A Case for Action"*

*Proposed Initiatives*



**COUNTRY  
EDUCATION  
PARTNERSHIP**

*"A leading voice on rural education"*



# INTRODUCTION

Following discussions with rural and remote education communities, as well as key stakeholders in the development of *Rural and Remote Education - A Case for Action*, the Country Education Partnership (CEP) has developed a range of Proposed Initiatives it believes will begin to address the core challenges facing rural and remote education.

These Proposed Initiatives have been developed with direct reference to the key principles outlined in *A Case for Action*:

- ◆ Equity and Access
- ◆ Empowerment, Ownership, and Evidence-Based Local Solutions
- ◆ Creativity, Flexibility and Aspirations
- ◆ Community Partnerships and Participation
- ◆ Recognizing Rural Difference and Need

Within the Proposed Initiatives there are specific and targeted initiatives; all of which CEP believes are urgently required to begin addressing the inequity facing rural and remote students, their schools and their communities.

CEP asserts that these initiatives offer ideal 'building blocks' to begin reshaping the course of country education – to truly address the many challenges and deficiencies that have been consistently identified within various research papers.

Through these initiatives CEP believes we can instill a strong platform for enhanced learning provision, opportunities and outcomes across Victoria.

CEP strongly encourages governments to see these Proposed Initiatives as central to the development of a Blueprint for Rural Education.

Now is the time to truly collaborate in the development and implementation of specific measures that will drive excellence at all levels of rural and remote education – from the early years, through formal schooling and into the workforce.

CEP is committed and eager to work with governments, education sectors, key stakeholders and rural and remote communities in the establishment and implementation of the Rural Education Blueprint, and the identification of specific and targeted initiatives that would be detailed within it.



Mike Stephens  
Chair



# A SUMMARY OF "A CASE FOR ACTION"

<b>Vision</b>	<i>"The key challenge for Regional, Rural and Remote (RRR) Education is ensuring, REGARDLESS of location or circumstances, that every young person has access to high quality schooling and opportunities."</i> Dr John Halsey, Independent Review into Regional, Rural, and Remote Education, January 2018. (Halsey Report).
	
<b>It is Now Time</b>	<i>"It is now time to step up the pace! Young people in RRR areas have missed out for too long!"</i> (Halsey Report).
	
<b>Learning Opportunities &amp; Education Outcomes</b>	The Halsey Report states that national statistics show a persistent relationship between LOCATION and EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES, including lower NAPLAN, PISA, TIMSS, and VCE outcomes in rural and remote areas.
	
<b>Early Years Learning and Development</b>	<i>"The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) data reveals 15 of the 20 <u>worst performing</u> LGA's are in Rural and Regional Victoria – "children who start behind, stay behind".</i> (Victorian Early-Childhood Reform Plan).
	
<b>RURAL AND REMOTE EDUCATION BLUEPRINT</b>	
	
<b>Unique Regional, Rural and Remote Culture</b>	The improvement action needs to recognise the unique role and contribution of rural schools to education and the building of the social fabric and culture of rural communities; including geographic collegiality of practice and partnerships, and the provision of an ideal "laboratory of learning" for leadership and teacher development in small rural schools. As the Halsey Report states <i>"more has to be done to recognise the <u>diversity</u> of contexts, challenges and opportunities of leading and teaching in RRR schools and communities"</i> .
	
<b>Underlying Principles &amp; Beliefs</b>	The "Case for Action" is about Equity and Access for <u>ALL</u> young rural and remote people; that they receive improved opportunities based on the principles of empowerment, local solutions, choice, flexibility, evidence and innovation.

# Education Provision

## Current State

- ◆ Limited access to a universal Early Years Provision in many rural and regional areas.
- ◆ AEDC data indicates worst performing Local Government Areas are in Regional, Rural and Remote locations, with a significantly higher number of children who require early intervention measures as soon as they begin their formal schooling.
- ◆ Growing gap in education outcomes for rural and remote students.
- ◆ Provision challenges associated with declining population in some areas, smaller school sizes and increased diversity of student population.
- ◆ Limited access to a breadth of learning options and programs, particularly in specialist curriculum areas, and students with special learning desires.
- ◆ Limited access to curriculum enrichment activities, shared curriculum resources, special needs education, and extension learning.
- ◆ Limited access to quality career advice, quality work placements and VET options.
- ◆ Lower uptake of tertiary education courses. High expenses associated with tertiary education options, due mainly to relocation and housing costs.
- ◆ Students have little access to transition processes and information to further education and employment opportunities (eg University and VET) due to travel difficulties, costs and awareness.
- ◆ Rural and Remote education settings find it hard to share curriculum resources and collaborate with each other because of
  - ◇ distance limitations
  - ◇ technology capacity and expertise, as well as
  - ◇ current funding model.
- ◆ Limited level of Communication Technology use and a system expectation for multimodal delivery in provision of learning, along with low levels of staff capacity as to its potential use.
- ◆ Lower aspirations and expectations of young people in Regional, Rural and Remote areas.

## Actions and Opportunities

### Proposed Initiative 1:

*The State Government adopt a rural and remote education policy based on:*

- ◆ *locally-determined and place based “collaborative autonomy” partnerships to provide learning across the early years, primary and secondary years and where appropriate cross sector,*
- ◆ *establishing a funding model that encourages and supports collaborative arrangements (clusters and federations),*
- ◆ *support high quality locally provided multimodal blended learning approaches to enhance local partnership provision.*

### Proposed Initiative 2:

*Establish a “Rural Innovation Fund” to incentivize rural and remote education communities in forming locally-determined partnerships (cross-sector where appropriate) to enhance learning opportunities through;*

- ◆ *shared curriculum development and provision*
- ◆ *shared staff expertise across education settings*
- ◆ *creative collegiate leadership approaches and models*
- ◆ *whole of community governance, administration and management arrangements*
- ◆ *utilization of communication and collaboration technologies through local multimodal blended-learning delivery approaches.*

### Proposed Initiative 3:

*Establish a state-wide strategy to support the learning of students who are unable to access specialist learning areas (eg sciences, the arts,) through local provision via:*

- ◆ *further developing the “MARC and MACC mobile model” as a key strategy in providing learning in hard to staff curriculum areas such as the Arts, Science, Technology, Languages, and Literacy. Expand the program to encompass all primary schools under a student enrollment of 150 students.*
- ◆ *a highly interactive online blended learning strategy for secondary education settings that is centred on supporting local partnerships.*

#### Proposed Initiative 4:

*Establish a specific state-wide multimodal blended learning initiative to support often isolated talented students in gaining access to extension learning within their own education community initially focused on upper primary and junior secondary students.*

*Such a model could be based on successful examples in other states such as the Aurora Virtual School operating within New South Wales, or the successful eKids program facilitated by Country Education Partnership.*

#### Proposed Initiative 5:

*Develop a specific rural and remote approach to early years provision, to ensure that they have access to a universal program locally, including early intervention strategies and provision of support services.*

*Specific resources be provided for rural and remote Early Childhood Education setting to incentivize innovative approaches such as mobile pre-school units, partnerships between early years services, pre schools and schools, and inclusion within locally developed education partnerships.*

#### Proposed Initiative 6:

*Fully fund the Rural Inspire initiative to inspire young people within rural and remote Victoria in achieving their desired career pathways and dreams that includes:*

- ◆ *an interactive online portal providing a range of information and resources specifically focused on inspiring young people within rural and remote communities in accessing their future possibilities, as well as the stories of “successful” rural people who grew up in rural communities;*
- ◆ *Development of an upper primary school inspiring and hands on leadership program;*
- ◆ *Facilitating partnerships between rural and remote education and urban communities;*
- ◆ *Ongoing operation of the Rural Youth Ambassador program;*
- ◆ *A specific rural and remote post school strategy to support young people in their transition from school to further education and/or employment.*

#### Proposed Initiative 7:

*The development of a specific and targeted rural and remote Careers Advice and Support service.*

### **Expected Outcomes and Impacts**

- ◆ Enhanced learning opportunities and improved educational outcomes for ALL Regional, Rural and Remote students, evidenced by NAPLAN, VCE completion and transition to employment and tertiary studies.
- ◆ Enhanced education outcomes for young children who have greater disadvantage on AEDC through early intervention strategies, and enhanced access to Early Childhood Education.
- ◆ All rural and remote children gain access to a locally-provided, universal pre-school program.
- ◆ Enhanced sharing of education resources across locally-determined partnerships leading to greater opportunities and outcomes for Regional, Rural and Remote students.
- ◆ Regional, Rural and Remote students better enabled to participate within extra curricula activities and programs (such as team activities, VET offerings, etc.) due to increased “cohort size”.
- ◆ New approaches provided for students with special needs, and students seeking extension learning opportunities.
- ◆ A system expectation of increased use of interactive communication technology in the provision of learning via blended-learning approaches, thus providing greater curriculum offerings for students.
- ◆ Greater awareness of rural and remote young people of the pathway opportunities they have after school.
- ◆ Greater flexibility provided to students accessing VET programs, university services (such as revision lectures) and other further education options.
- ◆ Increased number of rural and remote young people realizing their dreams and participating in higher education options.

***“In addition, regional, rural and remote students at or near the stage of making the transition from school to employment, training, further study or combinations of them, are often confronted with issues and costs which their counterparts in urban areas do not have to worry about.”***

*Halsey Report : 2018*

# Human Resources

## Current State

- ◆ Increasing number of rural and remote education communities finding it difficult to recruit and retain high quality teachers, school support service staff, early years educators, and administration staff.
- ◆ Access to, and retaining, educators within specialist curriculum areas and student support staff is a real challenge.
- ◆ The “Hidden Resource” issue of rural and remote educators being required to teach outside their area of expertise and qualifications - a growing trend.
- ◆ Access to professional learning, support and development to build the required skills and knowledge is limited due to location and models of delivery. Distance, low staff numbers, access to Casual Relief Teachers and costs negatively impact a teacher’s ability to engage in professional dialogue and professional development.
- ◆ Access to Casual Relief Teachers is particularly difficult, with a diminishing number being available to rural and remote education communities. Often education settings are required to “double up” classes to cover staff absences. This also impacts on education organizations being able to provide opportunities for their staff to be involved in professional development.
- ◆ New graduates report that they are not adequately prepared for teaching within a rural and remote education setting.
- ◆ Graduate teachers experience a lack of opportunities and support, especially within the initial years of their teaching, and often operate under an umbrella of uncertainty, often contributing to them leaving.
- ◆ There is limited professional learning opportunities for administration and management staff, and support staff within rural and remote education communities - a large majority of these employees are engaged on a part time basis thus making it more problematic.
- ◆ Inequities associated with the Global Budget “Average In: Actual out” formula, and the resourcing of schools based on student numbers, fails to take account context and location when employing staff.

## Actions and Opportunities

### Proposed Initiative 8:

*Establish, and resource, a state-wide “Rural Education Centre of Excellence” that brings together education sectors, teacher education universities, rural and remote education communities and key stakeholders to support a holistic approach to recruitment and retention of educators within rural and remote communities through:*

- ◆ *developing best practice and evidence based approaches to teaching and learning within rural and remote communities,*
- ◆ *Development of a “research bank” of relevant research and Discussion Papers, as well as facilitate research where relevant,*
- ◆ *facilitating partnerships between teacher education universities and rural and remote education settings to engage pre service teachers in rural practical experiences,*
- ◆ *overseeing and further expanding the rural and remote placement scholarship scheme that supports pre service teachers involvement within rural and remote education communities,*
- ◆ *encouraging teacher education universities in the development of creative programs that involve final year pre service teachers participation within rural and remote education communities. For example, an internship program that sees them employed as “paraprofessionals” while undertaking the final year of their studies,*
- ◆ *facilitating a quality promotion approach to attract educators and student support staff to rural and remote education communities.*
- ◆ *develop and implement a Rural and Remote New Graduate Induction and Support Program in partnership with professional development organizations,*
- ◆ *develop a rural and remote education exchange initiative in partnerships with urban education settings.*
- ◆ *develop a range of incentives that support educators in taking up roles within rural and remote education communities. For example six weeks sabbatical leave after six years of continuous service, reimbursement of HECS debts, financial and accommodation incentives, etc.*
- ◆ *ensuring that high quality professional development approaches are available and accessible to all educators within rural and remote education communities.*

Proposed Initiative 9:

*Provide resources to support the up-skilling of rural and remote early years practitioners to at least Bachelor level to ensure high quality provision of early years services and programs.*

Proposed Initiative 10:

*Review current Global Budget approaches to funding rural and remote education settings, and establish creative funding approaches for education leadership and staffing such as “dual staffing” and cross sector engagement.*

Proposed Initiative 11:

*Provide scholarships for aspiring education leaders to participate within the highly respected Victorian Regional Community Leadership Program supporting them in building relationships with other leaders within their community.*

**Expected Outcomes and Impacts**

- ◆ Greater access to exemplary teaching personnel, student support and Early Years employees, leading to enhanced learning opportunities, and improved educational outcomes.
- ◆ Improved retention of quality educators in regional, rural and remote areas, contributing to enriched student opportunities and outcomes.
- ◆ Enhanced equity in relation to Global Budget Approach releasing more resources to support superior teaching in regional, rural and remote schools.
- ◆ Enhanced access to professional learning for education staff, leading to all-round improvement for students and existing staff.
- ◆ More equitable and accessible career pathways for rural and remote educators.



# Leadership, Administration, Resources and Communication

## Current State

- ◆ Recruitment of rural and remote Education Leaders is becoming a great challenge. Many education settings are advertising for education leaders multiple times, with a growing number of “no appointments” occurring.
- ◆ Increasing administration and governance demands being placed on principals (especially in compliance and Occupational, Health and Safety areas) - this is having a significant impact on rural and remote school leaders and teaching principals, especially in relation to their teaching commitments.
- ◆ Rural and remote principals being under-prepared as to the broader roles expected of them within a rural and remote community.
- ◆ The unique challenges facing “Teaching Principals”, and the growing sense of their isolation, particularly considering the current increase in administration and compliance requirements directly impacting on their teaching role, and ultimately student learning.
- ◆ Growing sense of isolation among rural and remote education leaders, especially those within smaller education settings.  

The “one model fits all” approach which seems to be currently operating within education settings needs flexibility to allow for the needs and added challenges faced by rural and remote education communities in this area.
- ◆ Travel and time costs associated with attendance at education sector meetings and forums; accessing professional development programs; and attending education networks is a key area of concern for rural and remote education leaders.
- ◆ Minimal access to effective collegial support including education sector expectations regarding travel to Principal meetings.
- ◆ There is an increasing demand on Business Managers especially when the majority of rural and remote education settings employ part time staff, and many of these education communities are experiencing population decline - this then adds work and responsibility to the education leaders role.
- ◆ Within the current autonomous approach to school funding there is little support or incentive for rural and remote education settings to work in partnerships, sharing resources and learning programs, especially at an administration and management level.

- ◆ Communication technology is often viewed by governments and education sectors as a key element in supporting the provision of learning within rural and remote communities. At face value, this is a positive assumption but, in most instances, there is a distinct lack of knowledge among educators of how to actually use this technology.

In addition, the difficulty of accessing quality Information Communication Technology (ICT) support is a growing area of concern.

The quality of this service is often inconsistent across education settings, thus creating difficulty in establishing partnership arrangements that utilize communication technology for learning provision.

## Actions and Opportunities

### Proposed Initiative 12:

*Establish and resource a specific Rural Education Leadership Professional Learning Strategy that includes the development and resourcing of a Rural Education Pipeline Leadership Program for current education leaders, middle leaders and aspiring leaders.*

### Proposed Initiative 13:

*Within the Rural Education Leadership Professional Learning Strategy, resource a specific and targeted rural education leaders well-being initiative that strengthens collegiality between education leaders and provides a range of responsive initiatives.*

### Proposed Initiative 14:

*Support the establishment of “Executive Education Leaders”, or Executive Principals, to work within rural and remote partnerships (eg clusters or federations) to provide administration and management leadership for education settings involved, thus allowing for education setting principals to lead teaching and learning.*

*Such a role would also provide executive functions for the Rural and Remote Education Partnerships, as well as support collegiate support and professional networks for education setting principals and staff.*

### Proposed Initiative 15:

*Increase the connectivity capacity within all rural and remote education communities to support the provision of high - quality multi-modal blended learning and virtual learning delivery.*

## ***Expected Outcomes and Impacts***

### ***Proposed Initiative 16:***

*Develop a statewide Rural Administration Bureaus strategy to support administration and business management staff across rural and remote education communities building on the learnings from the Wimmera Administration Bureau.*

*Such Rural Administration Bureau be linked to the rural and remote school partnerships, or Federations to ensure consistency and also have strong links to teaching and learning.*

### ***Proposed Initiative 17:***

*Review current ICT support and maintenance within rural and remote education communities focused on quality of service, and explore the allocation of such support and maintenance on a locally determined partnership through the Rural Administration Bureaus.*

- ◆ Greater access to exemplary leadership, due to more specific rural-focused professional learning and support.
- ◆ Heightened understanding and appreciation of the role of a Teaching Principal.
- ◆ A high quality and consistent ICT structure and support service.
- ◆ Enhanced access to professional learning for Education Leaders, leading to capacity building of educators and all-round improvement for students and existing staff.
- ◆ Enhanced health and well-being of rural and remote Education Leaders and teachers with a reduced workload, leading to more effective teaching and learning experiences.
- ◆ More effective administration and communication processes in and among rural schools.
- ◆ Access to, and utilization of blended learning approaches, and support, increasing the education opportunities for young people and subsequent participation in further education options.



# Education Organisation

## Current State

- ◆ Rural and remote education communities are unique. They embrace innovative approaches, maintain strong community partnerships, and provide personalized learning programs for their students. It is necessary that governments and education sectors sufficiently recognize this.

- ◆ Rural and Remote education communities have had a history of developing creative, locally responsive approaches and organizations for education within their communities - often through partnerships and cluster approaches.

Many of the creative approaches to education in rural and remote communities that facilitate shared curriculum provision, collegiate leadership models and shared teacher utilization resulting in enhanced learning opportunities largely ceased as a result of autonomous approaches developed by government and education sectors.

- ◆ Changing demographics in rural and remote communities bring welcome diversity but also a plethora of challenges for these communities trying to cater for different needs.

With the increase in demand for student support services within many rural and remote education communities, access to support services are becoming more difficult as a result of these services often being regionalized and few are locally based.

- ◆ While there is reference to collaborative practices within education sectors, the knowledge of how to develop locally effective and sustainable partnerships is not strong nor consistent.

- ◆ There is limited understanding between education leaders and education sectors as to the various partnership approaches that could be established with minimal effort to support rural and remote education provision.

*The gap in performance between rural and metropolitan students in Victoria has persisted and shows no sign of narrowing.*

*While education sectors have undertaken many activities to assist rural educators and students, these have not resulted in a significant improvement in performance.*

*Auditors General Report - 2014*

## Actions and Opportunities:

*In addition to the Proposed Actions focusing on a policy platform of rural and remote education provision through partnerships, and the establishment of a “Rural Innovation Fund”*

### Proposed Initiative 18:

*As part of the Rural Innovation Fund, allocate resources for rural and remote education communities to develop partnerships with local health and well being services to provide comprehensive and accessible student services and support, thus establishing a whole of community approach to well being support.*

### Proposed Initiative 19:

*Establish a specific, and targeted, “Rural Adjustment Fund” (perhaps within the Workforce Bridging initiative) to support those rural and remote education communities who are experiencing significant student enrolment decline and develop approaches to support learning provision into the future - especially in relation to staffing.*

## Expected Outcomes and Impacts

- ◆ Access to a broader range of learning opportunities and experiences for country students leading to greater education outcomes.
- ◆ More effective use of resources, once again resulting in improved educational outcomes.
- ◆ A more seamless approach to education provision (0 – 18), with more effective transition and tracking of students..
- ◆ Sharing of teacher resources and expertise across schools, leading to enhanced capacity of teachers and students.
- ◆ Development of locally determined school organizations that enhance the learning opportunities for rural and remote young people, as well as the sharing of educators and education leaders.
- ◆ Increased use of place based Professional Learning Communities as a key strategy in building the capacity of all staff and addressing the challenge of professional isolation.