

EDUCATION IN RURAL VICTORIA

"A Case for Action"

Background Material and Documentation



**COUNTRY
EDUCATION
PARTNERSHIP**

"A leading voice on rural education"



INTRODUCTION

Over many years, CEP has undertaken extensive research around rural and remote education, including work with interstate and international education communities. This research has considered the future strategies required to reduce the gap in performance and opportunities currently experienced by young people living rurally.

Earlier this year, the Country Education Partnership engaged Mr Malcolm Miller to consult with a range of rural and remote educators; undertake an investigation into relevant researches and discussion papers focusing on rural and remote education, and consideration of potential future actions that could be developed and supported that would result in enhanced learning opportunities for rural and remote young people, as well as improved education outcomes for them.

Through this research, CEP has found many positive aspects of country education. In various instances, these education communities have performed exceptionally across the measurement tools used by education sectors and governments. They've also grown people who are key leaders in a wide range of positions and industries across many countries.

However, our research has overwhelmingly revealed the lack of parity within learning provision and outcomes.

As part of the development of this Background Paper, Kevin Phillips contributed to the development of this paper in partnership with Malcolm.

We believe this Background Paper (*Rural and Remote Education – A Case for Action*) has provided the basis upon which two documents have been developed to present to both education sectors and political parties:

- ◆ Rural Education in Victoria - A Case for Action
- ◆ Rural Education in Victoria - A Case for Action : Proposed Initiatives.

Country Education Partnership would like to thank both Malcolm and Kevin , along with the many education leaders, education sector personnel and the Committee of Management for their contributions to the development of this Background Paper.



Mike Stephens
Chair



All young people who live in rural and remote Victoria are provided with an education that allows them to realize their full potential and dreams, regardless of location.

Vibrant and productive rural communities are integral to Victoria's sustainability and prosperity – socially, economically and environmentally of state and national importance.

Education and training plays a critical role in building the social fabric of communities, but also in developing social capital for economic prosperity.

The critical importance of regional, rural and remote capacity building involving all levels of government and other agencies to expand opportunities for their children, young people and communities.

The overall messages of joined up action to support regional, rural and remote communities is clear.

“The key challenge for regional, rural and remote education is ensuring, regardless of location or circumstances, that every young person has access to high quality schooling and opportunities”.

Independent Review of Regional, Rural and Remote Education - 2017

“Children and young people need access to inspiring and quality preschool, school and post-school education that equips them to live in, and contribute to, our complex and globalised society. This is true for all children and young people regardless of where they live”.

New South Wales Rural and Remote Education: A Blueprint for Action - 2016

“By age 18, each young person residing in rural or remote Australia (Victoria) will receive the education required to develop their full potential in the social, economic, political and cultural life of the nation”.

MCEETYA Taskforce - 2001

“IT IS NOW TIME TO STEP UP THE PACE”

◆ Early Years Education

Rural Victoria has been left behind.

A quality education, which fully engages young people and their families and builds capacity through their early and formative years is a sound investment and repaid many times over during their lifetime.

By the time children get to kindergarten, they are already behind their city peers physically, mentally and emotionally. The results of the 2015 Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) demonstrate that there is a compelling and urgent need for intervention in rural and regional Victoria.

The AEDC measures Early Childhood performance at the point of entry across five domains physical, health and wellbeing, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills and communication and general knowledge.

On average 9.9 per cent of Victorian children are vulnerable on two or more of the measured areas within the AEDC when entering primary school. Of the 40 local government areas across Victoria where children are more highly represented on this indicator, 30 are in rural and regional Victoria.

Of the worst 20 performing Victorian Local Government Areas, 15 are in rural and regional Victoria. Worse still 14 out of those 15 became more vulnerable between the 2012 and the 2015 census.

In addition, it is clear that considerable work needs to be done to drastically reduce the time it takes for a child with potential learning difficulties to be properly assessed and an individual program designed and implemented for them. This is further complicated within rural and remote communities where access to these services is significantly more problematic.

◆ Schooling

Young people in Regional, Rural and Remote areas have missed out for so long!

The Independent review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education has recently stated that national statistics show a persistent relationship between location and educational outcomes when data for the various measures is aggregated, including:

- NAPLAN results and two international tests of school students - the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)
- In terms of successful completion of year 12 or equivalent qualification (at the level Certificate 111 or higher) by the age of 19, there is the same pattern of outcomes as those already reported.
- In relation to transition to university and the proportion of persons aged 25-34 years with a bachelor degree or above, there is also a decreasing trend with increasing remoteness.
- For vocational education and training (VET) non-metropolitan participation rates are comparable with urban rates and completion rates for Certificate 111 (38 per cent compared to 35 per cent), but at the diploma level the situation is reversed (10 per cent compared to 16 per cent).
- And, in practice, the contexts, factors, relationships and resources that impact on learning and opportunities don't exist as discrete entities. Their interactions influence the learning, growth and nurturing of students from their early years through to school graduation and beyond.

Much remains to be done to bridge the gap between the achievements and opportunities of Regional, Rural and Remote students and those most commonly associated with their urban counterparts.

Independent Review of RRR Education 2018

◆ Future Options

The national Review of Regional, Rural and Remote Education research highlights the transition from school to the next stage in a young persons life comes with a number of challenges – it was identified as one of the four key areas of focus for action within the Independent Review of Regional, Rural and Remote Education released in 2018.

“Expanding the availability, affordability and accessibility of high quality placements, VET, dual VET/University options, and two year associate degree programs for Regional, Rural and Remote students are all part of what needs to be done. As well, allocating more support for these students to make successful transitions from school including for accommodation, travel and day to day living expenses needs to be addressed.” (Halsey Report 2018)

In addition, a number of recent researches undertaken by the University of Melbourne, Federation University and Latrobe University across rural Victoria identified the challenges faced by rural young people (especially in relation to their aspirations). They identified that young people across these rural and remote communities generally showed lower aspiration levels than their urban peers.

Much of this research highlights the lack of opportunities in relation to work experience, exposure to role models, contact with inspirational people, and costs associated with moving from school to higher education or employment, which contribute to the lower aspirations of rural and remote young people.

These areas have also been highlighted in the deliberations undertaken by the past seven groups of Rural Youth Ambassadors, expressing a real need to establish a range of initiatives that encourage and support rural and remote young people to “chase and realize their dreams”.

Regional, Rural and Remote students at or near the stage of making the transition from school to employment, training, 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.

Independent Review of RRR Education : 2018



REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE CONTEXT

Many of the positive forces and the challenges facing Regional, Rural and Remote apply to both Government and Catholic Schools in Victoria, which emphasises the need for a cross-sectoral approach to Regional, Rural and Remote Education.

In relation to what determines a rural or remote community, there are currently many definitions utilised by governments and education sectors.

The following three definitions have been cited to indicate this diversification in describing regional, rural and remote communities across Australia and some clarity around these may be needed in any future Regional, Rural and Remote definition

Country Education Partnership outlines the following as their focus in working with rural and remote communities:

Rural communities are defined by using the following general guidelines:

- located at least 1.5 hours drive from Melbourne CBD
- located at least 15 minutes drive from a population centre of more than 10,000.
- Less than 5,000 population in their own right
- Limited, or no, access to public services.

OR

Stephen Lamb in the Mitchell Institute Paper “Educational Disadvantage and Regional and Rural Education” (2015) considered a range of rural and remote definitions such as population scarcity and referred to the following seven categories:

- Major city (Melbourne and Geelong)
- Provincial city (e.g. Ballarat and Bendigo)
- Provincial centre (e.g. Mildura, Swan Hill)
- Large town (e.g. Leongatha, Lorne)
- Small town (e.g. Terang, Skipton)
- Rural (e.g. Bright, Donald)
- Remote (e.g. Orbost, Mallee).

OR

MCEETYA, states that:

- *“characterisation of places variously termed rural, regional, country, remote and isolated include:*
 - ⇒ *population size, movement and density relative to metropolitan centres, including the requirement for young people often to have to move to larger centres to access further education and training*
 - ⇒ *distance from large population centres and service centres, resulting in high travel and accommodation costs to users and providers of services*
 - ⇒ *high migration of families and youth to larger population centres*
 - ⇒ *existence of social infrastructure, including ICT*
 - ⇒ *existence of key industry, level and breadth of employment*
 - ⇒ *diversity, access to range of youth services, including all education services.”*

Generally, when there is a deficit in any or all of these characteristics, rural and remote communities record a higher than national average of students 15 and under leaving school, and lower participation rates in higher education.

There is an overarching need for a degree of flexibility to be applied in relation to what constitutes a Regional, Rural and Remote School.

Distance from centres and population size are important factors but so is the size of the school as this has an impact on the resources available to the school to provide a high quality education. More work and thought needs to be done on what constitutes rural and remote, and we need to take care (and understanding) of the complexity of factors involved. There is a need for flexibility in the definition, highlighted by the fact that currently the education sectors within Victoria does have various funding streams for rural and remote education, all of which have different definitions for what constitutes “rural”.

Given the above context and issues related to the definition of “regional”, “rural” and “remote”, a way forward may be to give due consideration to what constitutes a “small education setting” and the disadvantages that small education settings have in comparison to larger schools. For instance:

- lack of middle level leadership positions;
- the number of principals within these school settings who have a significant teaching load; and
- lack of support for leadership via Assistant Principals.

An enrolment of 150 students or below may be a useful starting point for such a discussion, which currently equates to approximately 286 rural schools, (both primary and secondary and across all education sectors).

In addition, a small rural school (less than 50 students) has fewer people to deal with management, compliance and safety issues, and generally have a higher teaching load for principals.

Overall, we need to broaden our mindset in relation to the definition and context for regional, rural and remote schools as there are differing issues related to the size and location of the setting.

The issue is we need to take care with oversimplifying the definition of rural and remote, and perhaps consider a definition, which applies “layers” or “groups” of schools.

- ***rural schools less than 50 students, and remote;***
- ***rural school less than 50 students but not remote;***
- ***rural school 50 – 100 students and remote;***
- ***rural school 50 - 100 students but not remote.***

This is reinforced by the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education (2018), which includes the Regional context as well as the Rural and Remote context.

“Notwithstanding the context for regional, rural and remote schools, there is a growing urgency related to the need to take affirmative action to support rural and remote schools both in terms of equity and the rights of all young people (wherever they live) to have access to a high quality education which provides them with the required skills and knowledge to lead a fulfilling life and contribute to the development of our economy and community.”



The Action to support rural and remote education within Victoria needs to be:

- ***Targeted***
- ***Achievable***
- ***Resourced***
- ***Reflective of research/evidence based***
- ***Sustainable***

And based on Empowerment, Flexibility and Choice, with due respect for local autonomy and not a “one size fits all” approach.

FORCES FOR POSITIVE CHANGE

The positive forces for change that exist in regional, rural and remote education need to be emphasised prior to a discussion of the challenges and issues facing them.

It is important that we do not approach the need for support for regional, rural and remote schools with a “deficit mindset” or through a “deficit model”.

The key issue is equity and the right of all children to access the same opportunities for success in life. Positive forces are:

- ◆ There are some regional, rural and remote communities where children and young people gain educational outcomes well above state average, especially where the communities work in strong partnership with their education settings.
- ◆ Regional, rural and remote communities are resourceful and have taken steps over many years to work to ensure that young people have access to enhanced opportunities eg: school clusters and partnerships, use of technology, and school reorganisations.
- ◆ Growth and diversity of the economy in some rural areas, with positive approaches to provision of new industries (eg Tourism) and new industries.
- ◆ Diversification of agriculture.
- ◆ The caring and personalised approach to education in many of our rural and remote schools helps to build strong relationships and accommodates individual learning needs.
- ◆ The high quality community involvement and support provided in many country towns, including greater involvement in extra-curricular and community activities, helps to build school-community partnerships, which can lead to higher outcomes. Young people have “a sense of belonging”.
- ◆ Students often mix with a range of ages and backgrounds, which supports the growth of tolerance and resilience and the ability to get along with a wide range of people.
- ◆ Young people in regional, rural and remote areas often take on leadership roles at an earlier age than regional and metropolitan peers.

- ◆ Rural Schools (especially smaller schools) act as a “leadership incubator” where the Principal must exercise skills as an educational, community and resource leaders and managers on a daily basis! This is unique and largely under-valued within education sectors.
- ◆ Rural Schools provide a geographical collegiality of practice that accepts and reinforces the communities of practice model and its collaborative processes.
- ◆ Rural Schools are educational communities that have exemplified the principle of “local solutions for local problems” as cultural practices of operation.
- ◆ Rural Schools have a continued focus on partnership with their communities that focus on student need and achievement.



CHALLENGES AND ISSUES FACING RURAL AND REMOTE EDUCATION COMMUNITIES.

Demographic Change,

- ◆ Population in small towns and remote rural areas is declining in many areas, (especially west, far east and north west Victoria) which in turn leads to fewer enrolments and a smaller resource base for schools. Cheaper housing, along with lifestyle choices, in these areas has led to some influx of “retirement” aged population, but also lower socio-economic groups and single parents which has led to the need for rural schools to cater for a more diverse student population.
- ◆ On the other hand, in some areas (eg west from Melbourne, seaside areas east and west from Melbourne) there has been some increase in student numbers as some people have chosen to travel to work and/or find cheaper housing. In effect, the complexities associated with demographic change have provided additional challenges for Rural education communities.

Economic change:

- ◆ Development of larger scale agriculture has led to fewer people in many rural areas, which has had a significant effect on the public services and support available within these communities, leaving schools as the only public service within them and a key community resource in addition to providing education for their young people.
- ◆ In general, there is a decline in the social and economic infrastructure in many rural areas, including access to fuel, finance services, social services, police (safety issue), and learning options.

Social and cultural change.

- ◆ There is a growing social-cultural divide between rural and metropolitan students. As farms become larger in size, and rural population ages, many young people lose their sense of identity and, face significant “cultural shock” when they move to metropolitan areas.
- ◆ In addition there are issues related to low aspirations and low expectations amongst a growing number of young people and parents in rural areas. There is also a growth in the “itinerant” population with some families moving in and out of country towns, which has an effect on the stability of the local education organisations. Overall, the changing cultural profiles in Remote and Regional areas is providing additional provision challenges for Regional, Rural and Remote education.
- ◆ **As the issues facing students and families grow in rural areas, the expectations placed on teachers are enhanced. This is related to the diversity of the student population as well as the changes in the socio-economic culture in rural areas, including declining farm incomes.**
- ◆ The rural school Principal is expected to be the contact person and leader in the community in an increasing range of areas, almost a “one stop shop” role (broader community leadership role) and as the numbers of rural schools in each geographic area diminishes, there is a growing sense of “isolation” for personnel in these areas.
- ◆ This even extends to the necessity for some staff in rural schools to support daily cleaning of the school as the resources allocated for cleaning in the Budget are insufficient to attract people to undertake the role.
- ◆ The overall workload and all-consuming nature of the role of the Rural School Teaching Principal is a disincentive for prospective applicants to the role of Rural School Principal.

Educational Provision.

The Country Education Partnership “Rural Education Framework : Discussion Paper 2016” refers to a number of educational provision issues, including:

- ◆ The gap in student learning outcomes compared to regional and urban peers, especially in higher year levels of schooling, early years and engagement in Middle School.
- ◆ Lower uptake of higher education courses, and lower aspirations. A related issue is that the expenses associated with university and tertiary education is also an inhibiting factor for some parents.
- ◆ Limited access to a breadth of learning options and programs and support services. (For example currently there are 12 student support service vacancies in the Wimmera Region DET).
- ◆ Many young people do not view Distance Education as a viable option for learning and many rural schools don't promote this service as an option preferring to explore other local options.
- ◆ Declining enrolments have an effect on the resources available for rural schools to provide a comprehensive curriculum, including the range of higher level subjects that can be offered. Rural enrolments linked directly to school funding limits the resources available for rural schools to meet education system expectations, targets and achievements.

In addition, the allocation of resources through individual school funding approaches leaves little incentive to work with other schools in developing partnerships.

- ◆ Decreasing parent involvement is related to declining enrolments, but also a factor in itself, again meaning that the local school has fewer resources to support the program.

- ◆ Over the past seven years rural and remote young people have identified access to a breadth of curriculum opportunities, especially at a senior level, as a key contributor in supporting them achieving their chosen career pathways. Many Rural Youth Ambassadors reflect that they are not provided the learning opportunities to support them in achieving their aspirations.

The NSW Blueprint for Action (2010) refers to a number of related issues including:

- ◆ Teachers and students find it difficult to share curriculum resources and collaborate due to the “tyranny of distance”.
- ◆ Similarly, students in remote areas have fewer opportunities to participate in transition activities and curriculum enrichment activities due to geographical barriers; as well support for gifted students and students with special needs. Access to quality work placements for students undertaking VET courses is a related issue. There are fewer “career role models” in rural areas.

These areas have been highlighted throughout the consultations undertaken with rural education across Victoria.

The NSW Blueprint for action in rural and remote areas also highlights another challenge for rural education, namely access to high quality early childhood education.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, the situation in Victoria is very similar.

Research clearly demonstrates that quality early years education has a significant impact on a child's future success at school, yet many young people in rural areas do not have access to effective ongoing early childhood education. Universal access has not been achieved in some rural areas, partly due to geographic isolation and also access to qualified early years staff.

In some cases, this in itself has had an effect on the “local school” as parents enrol their child in kindergarten in a larger centre, which can lead to a further decline in enrolments in the local rural and remote school.

Rural Student Performance

NAPLAN results and two international tests of schools (the PISA and TIMSS tests) highlight that rural and remote students performance is lower than their urban peers.

In terms of successful completion of Year 12 or equivalent by the age of 19, there is the same pattern of outcomes as those already reported.

The transition to university and the proportion of persons aged 23 to 34 years with a Bachelor Degree or above, there also a decreasing trend with increasing remoteness.

For vocational education and training non-metropolitan participation rates are comparable with urban rates and completion rates for Certificate III (38% compared to 35%), but at the Diploma level the situation is reversed (10% compared to 26%)

And, in practice, the contexts, factors, relationships and resources that impact on learning and opportunities don't exit as discrete entities. Their interactions influence the learning, growth

It is clear, much remains to be done to bridge the gap between the achievements and opportunities of regional, rural and remote students and those most commonly associated with their urban counterparts.

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.

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Halsey Report : 2018



Human Resources.

The Country Education Partnership Rural Education Framework refers to a number of Human Resource Challenges including:

- ◆ The difficulty in recruiting and retaining high quality education leaders and educators to rural and remote education communities.

There are many examples of the need to re-advertise teacher positions in regional, rural and remote towns due to the lack of quality applicants. In comparison, a high profile provincial school nearer the metropolitan area has the budget capacity to recruit several graduates, which means there are budget monies “saved” to recruit additional staff.

The financial costs associated with relocating include relocation of household items, finding and securing suitable accommodation, the cost of travelling during term breaks as well as the social costs with relocating away from networks of family and friends can be significant.

No rental, low quality rental, high cost rental, no / low school housing

Members of education sectors have debated this issue for some time with little impact on improving this situation. In fact in consultation with rural and remote education communities it is worsening.

- ◆ There are issues of inequality related to the School Global Budget with the “averages in, actual out” formula. Many rural and remote schools have an ageing staff profile, which enhances their overall global budget expenditure. Combined with falling enrolments, there is often little capacity to recruit quality graduates from provincial and metropolitan areas.

In comparison, a high profile provincial school nearer the metropolitan area has the budget capacity to recruit several graduates, which means there are budget monies “saved” to recruit additional staff.

There needs to be affirmative action to staffing strategies to support regional, rural and remote education communities.

- ◆ The difficulty of accessing quality professional learning and development at a reasonable distance from place of employment.

Geographic isolation and school size also limits the opportunities for teachers and school leaders to work and learn together. Often, networking and clustering are proposed as a support option for regional, rural and remote schools, but in many cases this imposes more travel time and pressure on the small school Principal or teacher.

Graduate teachers recruited to rural schools, operate under an umbrella of uncertainty. They are usually on contract and when enrolments decrease they become the “easy option” to solve over staffing. This environment makes rural school roles far less attractive. It is a major disincentive for graduates to apply and stay in rural settings, including lack of mentoring opportunities from staff in their school, other than the Principal who is essentially their employer.

In addition, in cases when regional, rural and remote schools have been able to recruit graduates, access to professional learning opportunities for these graduates is an issue as is access to collegial support from other graduates, often due to the ageing staff profile and lack of opportunities for them to meet in networks within their locale.

In some cases the graduate may be head of a “one teacher” curriculum area. Eg: Languages.

- ◆ The NSW Blueprint for Education (2016) highlights an issue related to appropriate qualified staff stating that rural and remote schools often have only one suitable qualified teacher in some curriculum areas, and at times some teachers may be asked to teach courses for which they have little or no formal training. This in fact is part of the “Hidden Human Resources” agenda in rural and remote schools, with metropolitan schools (on average) having more experienced and qualified teachers, and leaders.
- ◆ The NSW Blueprint for action in rural and remote areas also highlights another challenge for rural and remote education - namely access to high quality early childhood educators. This has also been highlighted within the consultations throughout rural and remote Victoria.

Research clearly demonstrates that quality early years education has a significant impact on a child’s future success at school, yet many young people in rural areas do not have access to effective ongoing early childhood education. Universal access has not been achieved in some rural areas, partly due to geographic isolation and also access to qualified early years staff.

In some cases, this in itself has had an effect on the “local school” as parents enrol their child in kindergarten in a larger centre which can lead to a further decline in enrolments in the school and subsequent impact on the broader community.

Support Staff:

In addition, rural and remote schools have difficulty in accessing high quality school education support eg; Psychologists, Social Workers, Special Therapy. For instance, within in the Wimmera Area (S.W. Region) during 2018, there were 12 student support vacancies. Although there are some policies to attempt to attract and retain teachers, there are no policies in place to attract and retain school support service staff.

Some of the issues raised by Student Support staff working in rural areas include:

- ◆ Isolation from other professionals
- ◆ Access to quality professional learning
- ◆ High case loads
- ◆ Travel and time away from home.

There is a need to undertake an independent analysis and review of Human Resource Issues (in rural and remote schools) in order to gain more understanding of the problems and issues.

Along with this there needs to be affirmative active staffing strategies to support rural and remote schools.

Apart from support with recruitment, there needs to be strategy developed to encourage high quality and graduate teachers to remain in country locations.

This is also related to the issue of appropriate succession planning to support rural schools.

Education Leadership, Administration and Management

- ◆ There is a growing, and concerning, trend within rural and remote education communities with the decreasing number, and quality, of educators applying for principal positions regardless of education sectors - many education communities reporting they have to advertise numerous times to gain suitable applicants, and in some cases not making an appointment.

In addition, some educators are not applying for rural school Principal positions due to anxieties about possible closure

There are examples of “unqualified” appointments to leadership roles in Special Schools; the number, range and quality of applicants for Principal positions and teacher positions.

- ◆ In consultations with rural and remote education leaders across all sectors, the responses gained highlighted three priorities:
 - Educational provision – the challenge for small rural and remote schools to provide effective education in specialist and enrichment areas such as LOTE, DRAMA, MUSIC, Physical Education, and school support needs (eg psychology, social worker)
 - Business and financial administration, including the requirements of the CASES SYSTEM and school accounts, school policy areas such as emergency management plans and OH&S.
 - Communication and Collaboration with Principal Colleagues and the “education systems”.
- ◆ In many small rural and remote schools the Principal is the one person largely responsible for all actions sanctioned by education sectors, as well as having a significant teaching component in their role.

There are few options to delegate, and the issue is exacerbated with a shortage of casual relief teachers leading to “doubling up” of classes when an education leader is absent.

In fact, the issue of OH&S is an additional Human Resource Issue in itself as there is a safety issue for small school Principals in remote locations, especially where there are schools with difficult behavioural issues and in some cases angry parents who may threaten the safety of a Principal or teacher.

This can be exemplified in very small schools where a principal is required to attend education sector network or regional meetings, thus leaving a classroom teacher “in charge” of the school - this is further exacerbated when the classroom teacher is a recent graduate.

- ◆ The sense of isolation (along with the all-consuming nature of the role) is a challenge and it is often difficult for rural and remote school education leaders to find the time (and resources) to travel to Regional/Diocese Education Leader meetings, apart from the shortage of CRT’s. The issue seems to have been exacerbated in recent years.

Some rural and remote education communities are required to travel up to six hours to attend these regional/diocese meetings.

- ◆ Is the rural school Principal not in fact a Head-teacher role?

Do we have the correct classification, given that predominately the role of the Principal in a small setting is a “Teaching – Head- teacher role”?

- ◆ Often Principal classifications are based on student numbers and do not reflect the complexity of managing and leading education in a small setting.
- ◆ Principals in small regional, rural schools and small secondary schools may have responsibilities for areas in which they have little or no expertise. For instance, a secondary trained teacher who becomes a Principal in a small rural primary school and has little or no Early Years teacher training, yet in fact a key part of their role is “to teach”.
- ◆ Geographic isolation and school size also limits the opportunities for education leaders to work and learn together. While these are extremely valuable and valued by rural and remote education leaders at a local cluster level, the regional/diocese level approaches proposed as a support option for regional, rural and remote schools imposes more travel time and pressure on the small school Education Leader.

- ◆ Access to quality business managers and cleaners is also difficult, especially when these roles within rural and remote education settings are part time in nature. In some cases the Principal even needs to provide direct support to school financial administration and cleaning to ensure the school meets OH&S requirements. (For example, daily cleaning of toilets).

According to a number of rural and remote education leaders, the area of Business Administration support can cause much anxiety as most rural and remote education leaders are trained teachers, not office administrators, and if there is no Business manager available or the Business Manager is away, they must take on the role.

In addition, the Business Managers are often only employed on a part time basis, and in many cases Business Managers employed in the local rural school have “grown up” through the system, often starting as a parent helper, and some of these people have not had access to the necessary PD to support the additional complexity of the role.

- ◆ There are also limited professional development opportunities for administration and support staff in regional, rural and remote areas.
- ◆ Management and maintenance of ICT systems is a particular issue for both government and catholic schools in rural and regional areas.

ICT can be supportive to curriculum provision and communication. However, in a large majority of rural and remote education settings, the ICT support and technician access is 2 hours a fortnight, and often the priority of this service is in larger locations, thus leaving the smaller rural and remote education settings disadvantaged.

If there is a breakdown in between visits, access to virtual learning and other curriculum support is often suspended.



School Organisation

- ◆ Regional, rural and remote schools have often “led the way” with attempts to expand educational provision via partnerships, partnerships, clusters, and online provision.

Support by both government policy and a funding framework that encouraged collaborative approaches, resulted in many innovative curriculum initiatives being developed by these communities as they worked together to enhance learning provision within their communities.

MARC/MACC , Shared specialists in hard to staff curriculum areas, use of technology to deliver post compulsory units and languages, and cluster based professional learning communities are a small example of this work.

- ◆ Often there is a constrained view of how available technologies could be used to enhance education provision. For example, often rural schools in a cluster offers its students a subject choice and if the numbers are small, discussion between schools takes place as to the possibility of providing the study via telematics/online delivery—it not necessarily seen as an integrated approach to provision.
- ◆ Currently, there are “organisational, cultural and attitudinal” challenges associated with the model described above and regional, rural and remote schools require more affirmative support and incentives to take on such a collaborative approach.
- ◆ A growing challenge is now being faced by small rural and remote communities, with their declining youth populations that result in decreasing student enrolments.

Within these communities, the school is often the “hub” of local communities, and is often the only public service left within them - they are key to the well being of these communities.

For example, in the Pyrenees area of the South-Western Victoria Region there are seven schools in of group of schools, which have a combined total of 54 students.

Could it be that these schools become part of a “Federation” or collaborative model with an Executive Principal (Highly classified), supported by site education leaders and possibly one Business Manager. Such an approach could retain their local education setting; administration and compliance requirements could be lessened; and curriculum provision is could be enhanced via collaboration and sharing, and online provision.

There is an example in East Gippsland where there are shared Principal roles being developed, and creative approaches to supporting small remote education settings remaining within their community – eg: Goonerah and Tubbut where they share a Principal and the students spend half a week in each community with a small bus transporting the students to the other on a daily basis.

Much more could be delivered if the schools in an identified geographic area agreed to pool their total teaching resources and develop a strategic view of the curriculum the schools wanted to offer to students.

Through the use of blended multi modal approach; involving online delivery, occasional teacher visits and combined classes, the curriculum provision range would be greatly enhanced, and “marginal” study areas could become available, and teaching resources more effectively utilised.

- ◆ Similarly, there are now a growing number of small education settings across Victoria where they are located near larger population centres (within 30 minutes travel of these urban settings), and in most cases the community wish to retain their local school.

Many students in these rural education settings often have special individual needs which are well catered for in the personalised and caring environment of the local rural school. These smaller settings provide an additional element of choice for the parents who reside in these communities. Some of these parents are single parents (or in some cases even grandparents) who live in these communities due to cheaper housing, or because there are no alternative and viable options available to them.

The annexe model has been successfully implemented in some parts of Victoria where these smaller rural schools are located in close proximity to larger population centres (eg Haven-Horsham West PS, Scotsburn-Buninyong PS). Such a model could be explored with these small education communities as a viable option in decreasing administration and compliance requirements of education sectors, as well as providing the breadth of learning students would like to access or need.

Such an approach, provided it is supported and endorsed by the rural education setting, could see education provision enhanced, and rural towns retain a local school site, with an education leader. The administration could take place via the “host” education setting.

Given the overriding criteria of choice and autonomy, education settings would require support and incentives to explore and develop such models outlined above.

Given the increasing challenges facing small schools due to demographic and geographic isolation, have we now reached a point where more direct support is provided to small schools to develop multimodal approaches to educational provision? This includes the challenges associated with on line delivery, as well as organisational issues.

- ◆ A related governance issue for small settings is the lack of parents available to effectively constitute a School Council, which can also be addressed through local arrangements made within a Government framework that enable sound, responsible governance to be provided for rural schools.



Vibrant and productive rural communities are integral to our state’s sustainability and prosperity. Education and Training play a critical role in building the social fabric of these communities, and also builds social capital for economic prosperity.

Vison

Given the challenges now facing rural and remote education in Victoria, is it time for a **RURAL EDUCATION BLUEPRINT** to ensure that

“by age 18, each young person residing in regional, rural or remote Victoria will receive the education required to develop their full potential in the social, economic, political and creative life of the nation”.

MCEETYA



Key Principles

◆ **Equity and Access**

Ensuring that children and young people have access to an equitable and high-quality education, regardless of where they live.

◆ **Empowerment, Ownership, Evidence Based Local Solutions**

Rural education communities work best when they are empowered and incentivised to build on their successful, existing collaborative partnerships; partnerships that share resources; and undertake evidence-based actions.

“Local Solutions to Local Problems”.

◆ **Creativity, Flexibility and Aspirations**

Encouragement of innovative thinking and approaches with an emphasis on specific initiatives that directly promote sustainable change and lift the aspirations of young people.

A recognition of the high degree of variability and diversity that exists in rural and remote areas, thus the need for flexibility.

◆ **Community Partnerships and Participation**

An acknowledgement that parents, young people, education organisations, and the wider community have a significant impact on quality learning.

Rural and remote education organisations are integral components of their communities. They contribute to the economic and social development of the community.

◆ **Recognising Rural Difference and Need**

A recognition that students and families living in rural and remote Victoria have specific needs, which are the direct result of living in particular geographic locations.

In addition, to the above guiding principles, the Independent Review into RRR Education (Pages 1-2) refers to 5 convictions related to improvement (for Rural Schools) which shaped the Review.

They are:

- ◆ vibrant and productive rural communities are integral to Australia’s sustainability and prosperity – socially, economically and environmentally;
- ◆ focussing on ideas and options for re-thinking and reframing education in regional, rural and remote areas is likely to be more productive than simply concentrating on “the problems ;
- ◆ student achievements and beyond-school opportunities are shaped by a diverse blend of in-school and community and home factors, as well as interactions between them- context and relationships are always important
- ◆ government and departmental/sector policy settings are very significant in developing possibilities for change together with the work of parents and communities;
- ◆ improvement in education is achieved by exploring how existing resources can be used more effectively, not just by allocating more of them.



THE ENABLERS NEEDED

Education Provision

Rural and remote communities provide a caring and supportive environment for young people but direct support is required in order to address the challenges and issues documented earlier in this paper.

The CEP Rural Education Framework (2016) provides a clear direction for rural and remote communities in relation to the role of place based, collaborative partnerships (including rural learning alliances and partnerships); the need for a Rural Innovation Fund to support innovative approaches to provision; and Rural Learning Provision (including quality Early Years Program, breadth of curriculum options and extensive learning opportunities).

However, we now live in a time when the “Tyranny of Distance” can be more directly addressed, and help to address the challenges.

Rural and remote education communities should be provided with direct resource incentives to pool staffing resources and develop a collaborative, strategic approach to curriculum provision - for instance, special needs staffing provision to help support the cluster and schools in providing learning for students who require specific learning, or extension learning. This could be based on learnings from The Aurora Virtual School model in New South Wales.

In addition, within the NSW BluePrint, rural and remote education settings are supported to collaborate and plan an overall strategy for education that best meets their needs. This includes strategies to bring together early childhood services, sharing of curriculum and teachers, support for an integrated primary and secondary curriculum and transition strategies to connect teachers and share with vocation education such as TAFE.

An “Incentive Fund” needs to be developed to encourage rural and remote education communities to work together in partnership for the development of collaborative learning programs. This could be extended to direct support for the development of collaboration models such as Learning Alliances and Federations of schools and encourage pooling resources to better support young people.

The MCEETYA task force research clearly demonstrates that curriculum which best needs the needs of rural and remote students take place when programs are developed in partnership with the local community and are responsive to both the local community needs as well as the requirements of the global society, with additional pathways.

Shared approaches to professional development could also be part of the incentive approach.

In alliances or partnerships of rural and remote education settings, there would be agreement for all schools to operate with one Principal based at a co-ordination school, with the co-ordination school managing the combined resources, while all individual schools retaining their local site, an education leadership role and sense of identity.

This may mean individual sites giving up some autonomy, but overall each settings students would be in a position to offer so much more to young people within their community. In NSW schools are provided with support to undertake the necessary planning through a one-off funding grant.

This is reinforced by Professor Halsey in the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education that recommends the need to improve opportunities for rural and remote education settings to implement entrepreneurship in education through curriculum, teaching, system and cultural challenges and building of good practice.

We need to positively encourage (through policy and resource support) local schools to create collaborative local solutions and responses to local issues, to create a culture where schools

“DARE TO BE DIFFERENT!!!!”

Halsey further recommends that we need to support rural and remote communities to implement innovative approaches to education delivery designed to improve education access and outcomes for students living in rural and remote communities (Independent Review P5).

Currently, rural and remote small schools receive much needed support from MARC and MACC Services as not only do they provide a valuable learning program for students in hard to staff curriculum areas, they also provide valuable relief time for Principals/Teachers.

However the role and nature of these services needs to be rethought and refocused to ensure alignment with rural and remote clusters and partnerships. The possibility of a cross-sectoral approach to the provision of these services could also be examined.

Multimodal delivery and blended learning should be an integral part of the rural and remote collaborative model and further support the breadth and depth of options available to young people.

Multimodal delivery should be part of a strategy that focuses on flexible classroom delivery using a variety of processes, including clustering of education sites pooling resources, short term and long term collaborative programs which support access to specialisation, hubs and service providers which prepare a range of curriculum content online, including online provision, access to distance education, mobile classrooms, face to face teaching, flexibility across year levels, flexible allocation of funds, and home tutoring. (Blended learning).

The MCEETYA framework (2001) highlights the area of ICT and multimodal delivery, yet the evidence available is that such delivery, especially at a local level, is not being effectively accessed and/or utilised.

Why not?

Resources need to be provided for the provision of reliable and effective infrastructure and connectivity; ICT training and development of staff; broadening of best practice Networks in rural and remote locations.

Halsey (Independent Review into RRR Education) recognises this issue and recommends the need to improve the availability, accountability and affordability of ICT for rural and remote education settings, teachers, parents and communities.

In addition there needs to be research undertaken on why the Multimodal approach is not yet effectively implemented especially in rural and remote secondary colleges where “resource pooling” could offer viable avenues for young people and broader, and more effective provision.

Is there a “patch” mentality? Is there a connectivity issue? Is there an issue with the ICT skills and age profile of staff? OR is it a combination of all of these things?

Whatever the case, it is evident that currently there are issues related to a “solution” which many students would embrace, and we also have a broader issue related to the lack of a “risk taking” culture in relation to education provision.

In addition, and as stated in the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education, (Page.5) there is a significant need to expand the availability and affordability of high quality work experience, placements, VET/university options and 2 year association degree programs for rural and remote students. Support is needed for these students to make successful transition from school to university, training and/or employment.

Any BluePrint related to educational provision within rural and remote communities must include a priority for Early Childhood Education - this is reinforced by Professor Halsey in the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education(Page.5) who recommends the need to ensure rural and remote children start school with a strong foundation for learning. For instance, the “Best Start” outcomes show that about 90% of children who have participated in early childhood education are more confident with language and literacy. (20% higher than those with no early childhood Education).

The NSW BluePrint for rural and remote education details a number of specific strategies to enable greater participation in Early Childhood Education. Victoria also has a number of strategies in place including the recently announced Early Childhood Reform Plan but the evidence is that access to quality Early Childhood Education is more problematic in rural and remote Victoria. The Early Childhood Reform Plan has a number of initiatives to promote kindergarten participation for children who need it most and strengthening Local Government partnerships but the recognition of the issues facing rural and remote children needs to be more targeted.

Innovative approaches need to be considered. For instance:

- ◆ Mobile pre-school units, enabling access to quality early childhood education wherever a child lives;
- ◆ Currently Rural Primary Schools have access to MARC/MACC services. Access to these services on a partnership basis for Early Years children could also be examined as part of an integrated approach to Education in Regional, Rural and Remote areas.
- ◆ Scholarships (\$10,000 per recipient) to upgrade early childhood teacher skills and support an enhanced workforce.
- ◆ Incentive scholarships to teach in remote areas.
- ◆ Additional resources for capital works
- ◆ Enhanced support to enable Primary schools and early childhood provision to take place within the one setting, including transition to school support and early intervention initiatives. As stated in the Victorian Reform Plan, “Children who start behind stay behind”!!

Human Resources

In order to attract and retain high quality education leaders and teachers, there is a need to provide a broader range of direct incentives for staff to locate in rural and remote areas. The current Victorian Recruitment Programs (Teacher Graduate Recruitment Program; special payments for attraction and retention; scholarships for rural Victoria cash incentives for new graduates) are clearly insufficient. More needs to be done!

A range of examples related to policy in S.A. and N.S.W. are described below. As a general principle, the preference is for the incentives to support Human Resources in rural and remote areas to be focused on capacity building rather than simply “rewards”, however in the first instance, the time has arrived for Victoria to take further ACTION to address, attract and retain high quality teachers and education leaders.

For example:

Scholarships for rural service, similar to the South Australia model where preference is given to staff who have completed rural service. This “could also take the form of an “incentive framework” which provides “rewards” for rural service (eg three months sabbatical after 6 years’ service) - affirmative action to appoint new graduates employed in rural and remote schools.

Such an approach could be “rewards” based (eg: as in S.A. model) or do we need to go to the “heart of the matter”, and examine the global budget funding model which can disadvantage rural schools (with declining enrolments) due to the “average in/ actual out” model. The approach currently provides an advantage to Provincial and Metropolitan schools who are able to appoint more graduates and use “saved” resources to purchase additional staff. The support could take the form of a direct credit to the Global Budget or is it possible to have a “dual system” whereby some education leaders give up their autonomy to employ from the global budget but in turn receive “targeted” appointments to vacancies? Some would say that this “turns back” the clock on the self-managing schools system, but the reality is that rural and remote schools are disadvantaged and find it difficult to effectively staff their schools.

NB: South Australia Country Incentives (2002/3 Agreements, include:

Incentives include: (Among others)

- ◆ Transfer to a permanent position in metro area after 4 years.
- ◆ A period of paid leave (or equivalent in monetary terms) after continuous service in a designated school (or 2 schools) which attract 9.5 or more isolated points. (After 6 years, one term. After 8 years, 2 terms, after 10 years one year)
- ◆ An allowance, equivalent to either one (for school with 3.5 isolation points) or two (for school with 5.5 isolation points) additional salary increments up to a maximum of Step 8 for remaining beyond 4 years in a relevant school.
- ◆ Cash incentives apply during 1 to 5 years of service at a named school/pre-school within a relevant county zone.
 - In addition there will be a one off “incidentals payment” made upon recruitment to permanency in County Zones 2, 3, 4 or 5. (Retention Incentive)
- ◆ 2016 Agreement – Country Incentives scheme amended to provide fixed annual cash incentive payments equal to averaged amounts over 5 years, rather than an increasing amount over the 5 year period.

The CEP Rural Education Framework mentions the establishment of a Rural Adjustment Fund, which could provide targeted resource support to schools experiencing significant decline in enrolment.

This could be used to facilitate creative approaches to provision and/or manage challenges of workforce planning associated with declining enrolments, which would help to provide stability of employment for applicants to rural and remote vacancies.

In addition to direct action support for Human Resource placements, there needs to be provision of travel and accommodation costs for professional development, consideration provided to education leadership positions to create backfill support for such leaders and provision of professional development in provincial areas to facilitate access for outlying schools. The way(s) in which current travel reimbursement takes place should be closely examined. For instance, it may be more effective to provide Rural and Remote schools with access to a shared vehicle.

There is debate about the effectiveness of the incentive based approach to address the issues facing Human Resource provision in rural and remote schools. This approach requires further analysis; however one step forward may be to provide an element of “choice” (in regard to the incentive provided) to the applicant(s).

Education Leadership, Administration and Management

A range of issues related to the administration load of the rural and remote education leaders have been highlighted in this paper, including:

- ◆ Finance to pay for cleaning and access to cleaners to do the job, and related OH&S issues.
- ◆ Finances to pay for travel costs, and relief staff, as well as availability of relief staff.
- ◆ The demands of the CASES system and business management, and the anxiety caused by access to a qualified BM on a part time basis. Limited access to IT support.
- ◆ The health and well-being issues arising from the remote nature of the role, including the need to have access to DET communications and collaboration with colleagues which can help to provide personal support. The staff “safety” issues related to the isolation, an OH&S issue.

These are all genuine and current issues and we need more affirmative action and resource support for remote, rural and regional education settings.

Similarly, with education leadership vacancies, there is a need for direct support from education sectors to ensure such vacancies are filled with high quality leaders. This could take the form of the incentives approach (eg as in S.A.) or it could be part of an upgrading of positions in targeted schools to Executive Level Principals as detailed in the NSW BluePrint.

We need enhanced support for these settings, but we also need greater recognition of the role of the rural school education leader, including greater support and recognition for transition to career paths in larger education settings.

In addition, exploring the concept of a “Rural Relieving Principal” strategy should be considered by education sectors through supporting recently retired education leaders being supported to undertake short term acting principals roles within rural and remote communities. For example, the Catholic Education Office in Ballarat has a pool of “Principal CRT’s” to support rural and remote education communities who provide acting principals functions within these communities as required.

The NSW BluePrint (\$30million over 4 years) provides for a new range of incentives to attract experienced teachers and leaders to rural and remote schools based on six-point and eight-point incentive schools. For example, in rural and remote 8 point incentive schools a recruitment benefit of \$10,000 may be used to attract suitable applicants, if 2 consecutive selection processes have not filled a vacancy; payment of 50% rental subsidy to teachers in rural and remote schools; designing salary arrangements that are not only linked to enrolments but also to school complexity; in 8 point schools some flexibility to appoint teachers over establishment if there is no vacancy.

The Rural Education Framework of 2016 developed by Country Education Partnership also proposes a specific Rural Education Leadership Program (“Pipeline model”) that provides a substantial framework for the development of skills and knowledge required to provide educational leadership in rural and remote schools as well as educational leadership succession. Through a pilot project in 2018, the involvement of outstanding educators, middle leaders, aspiring education leaders and education leaders from rural and remote education leaders has seen a growing number of these educators show interest in principalship and education leadership role into the future.

To support the involvement of rural and remote education leaders within local education sector meetings and networks; participate in professional development; overcoming the sense of isolation and support the capacity building of these leaders, a resource strategy for travel and CRT is needed.

In relation to education leadership health and well being, there is a need to develop a specific rural and remote education leaders health and well being strategy to access support for their own health and well-being, and a safety plan and strategy needs to be developed for issues related to “hard to manage” students and aggressive parents.

There needs to be affirmative action support for rural schools to participate in “Rural Administration Bureaus” - as per the model developed in the South-Western Region of Department of Education and Training. This model is “tried and tested” and does provide direct support to these education communities, but it needs to be an expanded option, with voluntary participation. For a relatively low fee, schools can join the LAB and have the majority of CASES transactions, support in human relation areas, and gain high level finance support and advice completed by the LAB, whilst retaining their local decision making.

In some cases the LAB could form part of the approach to enhance collaboration and sharing referred to within the “Education Provision” section of this paper.

Apart from the LAB, there are examples of successful models of school collaboration and sharing a Business Manager, both in the Government and Catholic school sectors.

Issues related to Administration and Communication also apply to many rural schools in towns, and some of the options detailed above would also provide support to these schools.

However, there are also a number of schools (if given the option) that would delegate their responsibility for certain functions (eg: capital works, building maintenance, PRMS) back to the education sector, or to a collaborative group of education settings. Some of these issues are time consuming and difficult to manage in smaller settings.

Why not provide the option?

Reviewing the provision of collaborative Communication Technology approaches and support is needed to ensure that rural and remote education communities can provide the education that their communities need and desire.

Education sectors need to ensure that the area of connectivity is of a quality to allow rural and remote clusters and partnerships in developing collaborative approaches to enhance education provision - providing resources to ensure such connectivity is provided to all rural and remote education setting is required.

In addition, a review of the provision of Information and Communication Technology support is required. To overcome the difficulty of accessing quality and consistent technology support, exploration of a strategy that sees such support being provided through clusters and partnership should be undertaken - and linking this role to the proposed Rural Administration Bureaus” could be a mechanism for this support to the provided.



School Organisation

There needs to be direct policy incentives to encourage rural and remote education organisations to “think outside the square” and be incentivised to do so.

References within this paper has been made to the need for support for innovative approaches to school and early childhood organisation and structure as a means of supporting enhanced access to quality education and outcomes in regional, rural and remote Victoria.

Any options developed by education sectors need to be based on local empowerment and choice (autonomy). We need to have confidence that rural and remote education communities, given the right conditions and support, will make choices which do provide their children with the best possible opportunities.

This has been the experience for many years in rural and remote areas, but the education sectors need to ensure that the “conditions” are created and supported to ensure communities are able to make the choices that cater for the needs and desires of the communities in which they exist.

There are a number of examples available from the Country Education Partnership that support the concept of local empowerment and innovation that have resulted in enhanced learning opportunities and improved education outcomes. As stated previously, we need to encourage and improve opportunities for regional, rural and remote education communities to implement entrepreneurship in education.

The MCEETYA Framework refers to the ENVIRONMENTS which help to support cultural sensitivity, partnerships and community. This includes support to identify and use local expertise and leadership, support of industry, and government/nongovernment collaboration - direct support for whole of Government co-operative action.

Effective partnerships need to be both encouraged and supported, and they are fundamental to the building of engaging and quality learning environments.

Local education communities can play a significant role in local capacity building and utilisation, and need policy and resource support to do so. By building effective community relationships and partnerships, programs can be tailored to meet local needs, as well as wider requirements.

We need to help create capacity for communities to develop local responses to local problems, and showcase exemptions of best practice.

Developing and encouraging partnerships between stakeholders from both within and among neighbouring communities; across various education sectors and; inclusive of early years and schooling helps to overcome the effects of small and declining population.

The solutions cannot, and must not be, “one size fits all”, and the support for local solutions needs to be backed by policy as well as resources.

For example, the Alliance/Federation concept mentioned in this paper, can encourage pooling of teaching and financial resources, and “reignition” of concepts such as Partnerships/Alliances. In addition, it could establish the Hub-Annexe models for smaller primary schools with the retention of the local site to support declining community infrastructure.

For instance, the example of the Doveton experience outlined in the press recently in relation to whole of community involvement, the St. Arnaud initiatives around lifting aspirations and student attendance and the Nathalia whole of community approach to learning are examples of creative community thinking which helps to identify and utilise the real strength of rural and remote communities.

The outcomes of reports such as that developed by Australia Business Council indicates the valuable experiences that young people have in rural learning as a real benefit to them in later years through a whole of community approach. With appropriate policy and system support, rural communities can have a substantial impact on community building and rural outcomes.

It needs to be emphasised that we can learn from best practice, and local education organisations can be supported to develop local solutions to local challenges. For example the CEP has worked with a number of rural and remote clusters to delineate the various progressions in governance arrangements for a cluster to move from co-operation within the cluster to a “Federation model”.

In addition, there are examples in Scotland and the Netherlands where the Federation Model has been successfully utilised to support the provision issues related to small schools including this role of the “teaching Head-teacher” - such approaches have ensured the sustainability of a number of remote and rural education settings, especially small settings.

In this context it needs to be emphasised that there are a range of variations to the Federation Model, eg Principal positions in the range of settings could be phased out; teachers could be appointed to groups of schools; some of the settings in the model may elect to retain a Principal in the short term etc.

However the evidence is clear that the Federation Model is a valid option for some rural schools and does help to expand educational opportunities for students whilst retaining local school sites in each rural or remote community.

It needs to be emphasised that we can learn from best practice, and local education organisations can be supported to develop local solutions to local challenges. For example the CEP has worked with a number of rural and remote clusters to delineate the various progressions in governance arrangements for a cluster to move from co-operation within the cluster to a “Federation model”.

For those small rural and remote schools located near a larger population centre, the Hub-Annex model can ensure that the local rural/remote education site could not only be utilised to ensure there is continuity of access to education in their rural town, but also greater community use of the school could be encouraged and supported.

Views have also been expressed that the time has come to further promote investment in integrated “education hubs”, including a one-stop shop approach for allied health, early childhood, maternal and child health services, schooling and tertiary education within locally identified rural and remote communities. This concept would lead to more effective use of resources as well as enhanced learning opportunities, increased higher education outcomes, and the potential to provide “wrap around services” to vulnerable children, as well as early intervention.

In this context, we need more research and recognition of the unique role and contribution that rural and remote education settings provide young people and the impact that a whole of community has on the learning of young people.

The issue in many cases is that the “economic rationalist” approach guides educational decisions. For example, close, or de-staff the local school and pool resources at the larger school “down the road”, some 20 to 30 minutes travel away.

Students would be supported to travel this distance to attend the larger, mostly urban education setting.

While it may cost more on paper to retain the local education site, there is a far greater return for the overall system in terms of community support and capacity building if the local education setting was retained.

Experiences from other jurisdictions indicates that they follow a capacity building approach to these challenges with collaboratives being formed across education settings to ensure provision within local rural and remote communities.

Local solutions should be encouraged and supported.

Specifically, perhaps it is time, within rural and remote communities, a whole of government approach where education support resources are provided to local rural and remote health services would enhance support services and provide a whole of community approach to such services.

Not only do these settings provide a viable choice alternative for parents and students, they also provide a high quality, nurturing and personalised educational environment for children and young people.

In addition they provide a unique leadership and management environment for aspiring leaders as the rural and remote education leader is required to address all of the accountability expectations of larger setting education leaders as well as teach and build relationships on a daily basis with the broader community.

IN CONCLUSION

The case for affirmative action and support of regional, rural and remote schools is overwhelming!

Whilst rural and remote education settings provide a caring and nurturing learning environment for young people who live in these areas; given the key considerations related to EQUITY and equal opportunity for all of our citizens, there is an urgent need for a Blueprint of Action for rural and remote education settings in Victoria.

As Halsey states in the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education (Page7)

“It is now time to step up the pace”.

Young people in Regional, Rural and Remote Victoria have missed out for so long!

The case for change is not only about ensuring quality of access for all, - As

“Education and Training plays a critical role in building the social fabric of communities, but also in developing social capital for economic prosperity” (Halsey Report.)

The role of rural and remote education settings in building the social fabric of rural communities cannot be over-estimated.

It is now time for affirmative action to provide high quality support to our Rural Schools and Communities. A key recommendation in the Halsey Report is to:

“Establish a National Focus for Regional, Rural and Remote education, training and research to enhance access, outcomes, and opportunities in Regional Australia.”

In order to move this conversation further, we need to carefully consider the challenges detailed in this paper and prioritise the issues and proposals for change, keeping in mind the diversity and considerations related to the context, as well as the need to respect local autonomy and local solutions.

In this context, we also need to be aware that improvement in education can be achieved by exploring how existing resources can be used more effectively, not just by allocating more of them (Halsey Page 1-2).

For instance, the concept of an integrated approach to the provision of education and health services would not only support higher outcomes for young people but would also more effectively utilise the resources available.

A key guiding principle is:

“Local solutions to Local Problems”

and we need to promote an innovative, risk taking culture, based on the principle, “DARE TO BE DIFFERENT”.



RESOURCES AND PAPERS

- ◆ Rural education – Wimmera and South West Victorian Area (Jane McLean - Wimmera Region.)
- ◆ Independent Review Into Regional, Rural and Remote Education, 2018
- ◆ National framework for Rural and Remote Education MCEETYA 2001
- ◆ CEP Papers –
 - ⇒ CEP Rural Education Framework Discussion Paper 2016
 - ⇒ CEP Rural and Remote Education Cluster Initiative
 - ⇒ CEP Rural and Remote Recruitment and Retention
 - ⇒ CEP Rural and Remote Education Discussions
 - ⇒ Annual Meeting March 2018
- ◆ BluePrint for Rural and Remote schools NSW 2016
- ◆ Grampians Region Papers and Workshops (various) 1997 – 2014
- ◆ Leading the small rural school: The challenges of Headship (Wilson and Brundrett)
- ◆ Small Scottish Primary Schools: An endangered species. (Valerie Wilson)
- ◆ New models of Headship: Federations (Colling, Ireson, Stubbs, Nash and Burnside).
- ◆ Victoria Early Childhood Reform Plan 2018.
- ◆ Interviews and discussions with former and current Principals and Senior Officers of the education sectors.

