



# **RURAL SCHOOL GOVERNANCE PROJECT**

**Report  
September 2010**

***“A leading voice on rural education”***





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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Country Education Partnership (CEP INC) has undertaken the Rural School Governance Project with funding support from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD).

The project has examined issues affecting rural school councils; explored possible future governance approaches; and identified the materials and support required to implement their role into the future.

The project was commenced through a state-wide survey of rural school council members and principals; conversations with rural schools involved in alternative governance models; and a web based scan and analysis of school governance research and writings in other states of Australia and internationally. The survey results and research materials were used to develop possible governance models and options for use in consultations within identified rural pilot communities.

Five rural pilot communities spread geographically across the state elected to participate in a consultation to explore the survey results, research materials and draft models in an information and awareness raising forum and to reflect on the relevance to their communities. A second forum provided the opportunity for rural communities to raise their ideas, issues and concerns with school governance and consider possible future approaches.

The survey and forums indicated several themes that appeared to be influencing school council operation in rural communities. In summary these were:

- A predominant attitude where actions and procedures practiced by school council result in a resistance to change and the maintenance of the status quo.
- A strong commitment to each individual school and its community but an openness to share, work with others and consider new and alternative options
- A tension in the purpose and work of school council, created mainly from a conflict between local and centrally determined issues and reduced opportunity for local participation and involvement in the educational decisions of their school and community.
- Leadership roles for principals and the council, that through processes and practices have become dominant and potentially deterministic in their implementation
- A rejection of governance models that alter school independence.
- Clear evidence of a culture and history that has used and valued shared, cooperative approaches, particularly at a staff and student level. This has been a key strategy in problem solving for rural school communities for a number of years and is highly valued.
- A willingness to undertake planned and staged change actions towards a more collaborative form of governance within a cluster arrangement

The key recommendation uses the rural culture and history to propose the development of a more inclusive and participative model for rural school governance into the future in addition to the current models of one school council – one school; one school council – multi site. Within this report it is identified as a “Cluster Collaborative Model” of School Governance.

This model is structured to allow clusters of rural school councils to begin a change process with planned staged steps. It allows growth into a more meaningful and deeper relationship where combined, collaborative effort can produce better decisions and outcomes for each school and broader rural community. It does not threaten school independence but encourages clustering to address many of the issues currently confronting rural school councils who work in isolation and an opportunity to provide enhanced learning for their communities.

Additional recommendations around training, materials development, role of the principal, and standardized evaluative practice are all included as support for the key recommendation.

## BACKGROUND

The Rural School Governance Project has been undertaken by the Country Education Project Inc (CEP Inc) with funding support from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.(DEECD)

The project comprised three main components including:

- Identifying the governance issues affecting rural school communities;
- exploring and developing possible alternative governance models through an action research project;
- developing, trialing and evaluating options and resources to support the current and future needs of rural and remote school councilors and school leaders.

For the purpose of this project, CEP Inc defined a rural community as one which:

- less than 5000 population
- at least 20 kms from a population centre of at least 10,000
- at least an hour and half travel time from capital city.
- limited, or no access to education (pre school, further education, vocational), community and health services, local government, regular public transport and retail opportunities within the community.
- there is a sense of an identified community.

Six rural pilot communities, involving 25 schools, were approached and offered the opportunity to participate in exploring these components. The pilot communities were:

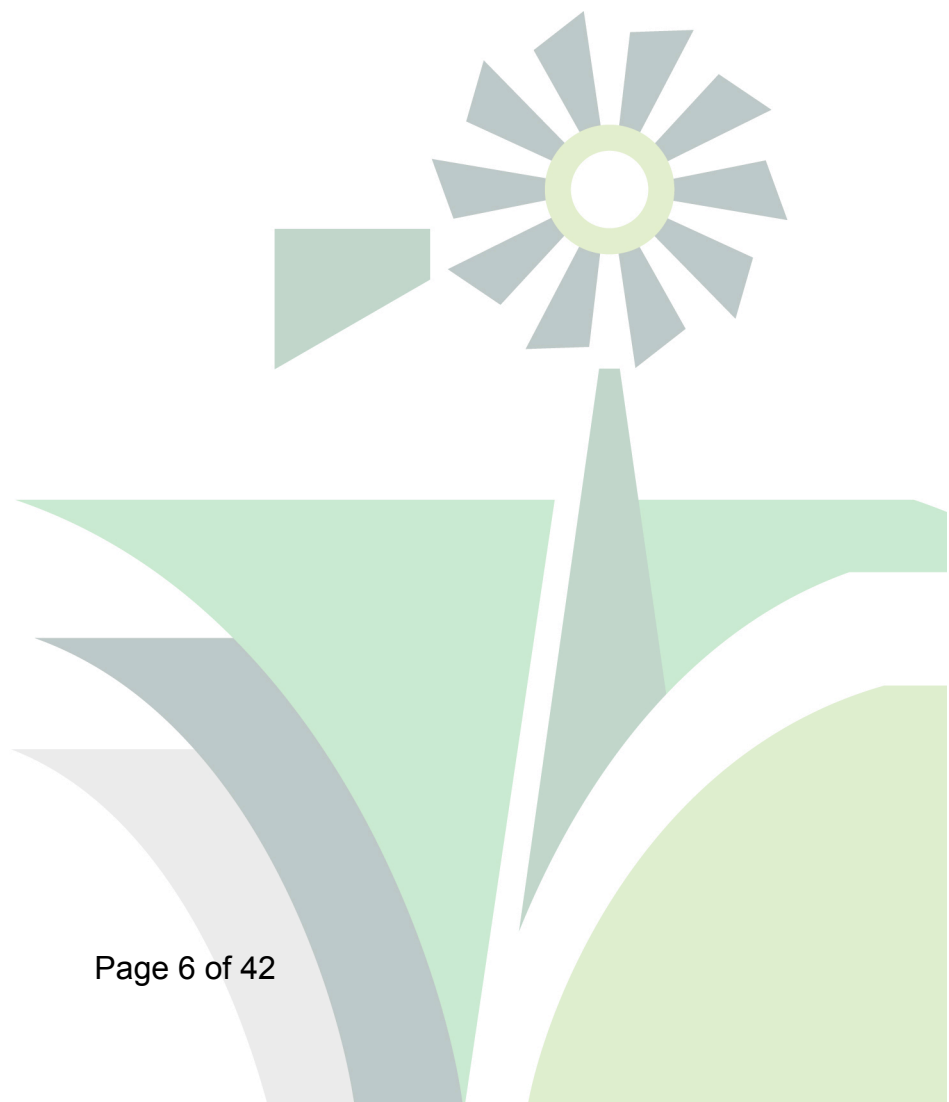
- **The North Central Cluster:** a community comprising the three rural towns of Weddeburn, Charlton and Wycheproof. The three schools within this cluster are all P-12 Colleges and are in a location that is experiencing decreases in their student enrollments, especially within Wycheproof and Charlton. The three schools are also part of a larger cluster of schools who are involved in the North Central Education Cluster which provides a range of education and vocational opportunities mainly for Year 9 and Year 10 students.
- **The Colac Area Rural Schools Cluster:** a group of seven smaller rural schools within the Colac area. The cluster has worked together in a co-operative way for a number of years in the provision of group, sporting and cultural days. The cluster consists of Alvie P.S., Beac P.S., Carlisle River P.S., Cressy P.S., Deans Marsh P.S., Forrest P.S., and Swans Marsh P.S.
- **Derrinallum – Lismore Communities:** a small rural community located an hour south of Ballarat within the Barwon South West Region. It consists of Derrinallum P-12 and Lismore P.S. and in recent times has experienced student enrollment decline.
- **Sale Rural Cluster** is a small group of rural schools south and east of Sale. The schools within the cluster include Longford P.S., Seaspray P.S. and Loch Sport P.S. The cluster is also part of a larger Sale Rural Schools Cluster which comprises all the rural schools around the Sale regional centre.
- **King Valley Cluster:** is located within the King Valley area of the North East, 45 minutes south of the regional centre of Wangaratta. The cluster comprises Greta Valley P.S., Whitfield P.S., Myrree P.S., Edi Upper P.S., and Moyhu P.S. It has had a long history of working co-operatively together in areas such as teacher professional development, sharing of staff, development of cluster learning programs and joint program applications.

A sixth community within the Grampians region was identified but after consultation with the regional office the timing of this project was not quite right for the identified community.

The clusters were geographically spread across the state and contained a mix of rural schools that included:

- A cluster of three P-12 schools
- One larger primary school and two smaller outlying primary schools
- A P-12 College and a smaller nearby Primary school
- Two clusters of predominantly small Primary schools

The geographic spread, and the differing levels in relationships provided this project with pilot communities that had the capacity to contribute a diversity of views and perspectives on rural school governance.



## CURRENT SCHOOL GOVERNANCE SITUATION IN VICTORIA

School Councils within Victoria are currently formed and operated under the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 and Regulations 2006.

The Act describes:

- the role and duties of the Minister in relation to school councils
- the objectives, functions and powers of school councils
- the employment of staff
- further powers of school councils
- reporting and accountability
- requirements

The Regulations define:

- Meetings and membership
- Sub committees
- Delegations
- Accounts and records
- Common Seal

The 2005 Review of School Governance in Victoria resulted in changes to the legislation and to the support and practices of school councils. In particular there was a clearer definition of the functions of school council and their powers. Guidelines on the respective roles and responsibilities of school council and the role and responsibilities of principals with respect to school councils were also clarified.

The details of how school councils can function and their powers and accountabilities, have been summarised in "*Making the Partnership Work*" (DEECD, 2009). This has been further developed through a series of training packages that can be found on the DEECD website:

[www.education.vic.gov.au/management/governance/schoolcouncils](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/management/governance/schoolcouncils)

DEECD provides annual training and professional development through regions for school councillors. This training provides a range of information related to School Council requirements, role, and accountabilities of school councils and school councillors. The format of this training varies from region to region.

Within rural Victoria at present there are three general school governance models operating:

- Individual School Council*: where an individual school has one school council
- Hub Annex*: where a school (generally small) is linked to another school for administration and management reasons
- Multi Campus*: where a group of schools have one school council responsible for all the sites. This model has one principal across all sites.

Within the DEECD website, there is an outline of the current models of school councils.

In 2008 the Victorian Government launched its *Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development* (the Blueprint) setting out the Government's five-year agenda for learning and development from birth to adulthood. It is the next generation of reform to improve outcomes for children and young people.

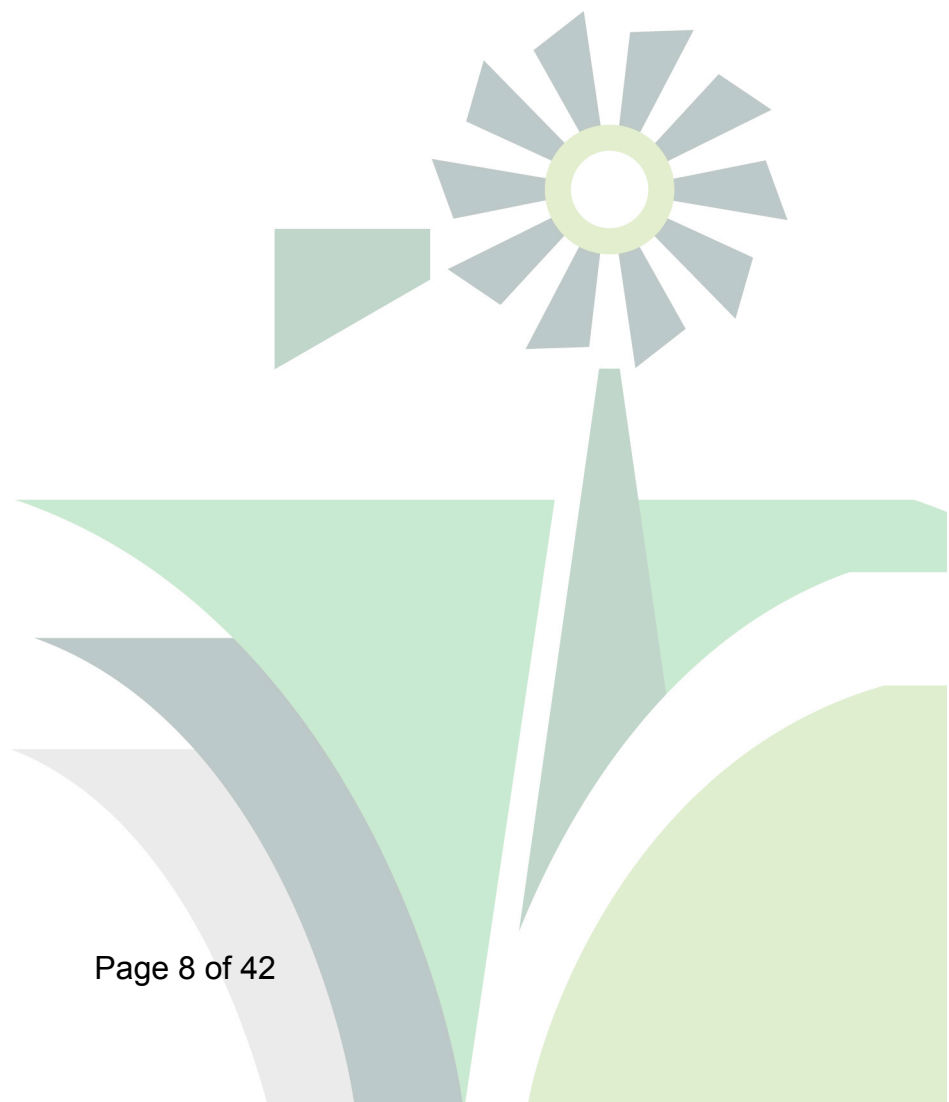
Through a Life Cycle, 0-18 years approach, the Blueprint focuses on three key areas:

- system improvement
- partnerships with parents and communities
- workforce reform.

Within this Blueprint there are some key areas impacting on the role of school governance. Some of these specific actions include:

- improve parental involvement in their children's education
- development of stronger management networks at a local level for early years and greater integration of care and education

It was within these overall government policies that the Rural School Governance project considered the future role of rural school councils.



## METHODOLOGY

### **Introduction**

The strategies utilised within this project included:

- a. An online survey (see Appendix 1)
- b. A national and international research scan and analysis of school governance approaches including interviews with multi campus principals and those with annexes
- c. Forums in each rural pilot community
- d. The development of governance model options for consideration in the forums based on literature and discussions with rural schools.
- e. Consideration of current school council training materials and approaches and their value and appropriateness to rural school councils.

#### **a. Online Survey**

The Rural School Council Survey was an online survey for:

- School Council members of rural schools and
- Principals of Rural schools

#### **b. Literature and Governance Models Review:**

The research materials consisted of a broad based web search around school governance with a focus on England, Scotland, Wales, United States, Netherland and Denmark.

The Education and Reform Act 2006 and Education and Training Reform Regulations 2007 were used to provide an outline of the framework within which decisions and discussions for this project should occur.

The purpose of the research was to determine current practices, trends and actions and to provide a context for this project.

In addition, exploration of two "alternative" models were explored including:

- multi site rural schools (Peranbin and Woody Yallock)
- Hub annex arrangements.

#### **c. Development of Possible Future Models:**

As a result of the research, interviews and references a number of possible future governance models were developed as a tool to facilitate discussion within the five pilot communities.

#### **d. Rural Pilot Community Forums:**

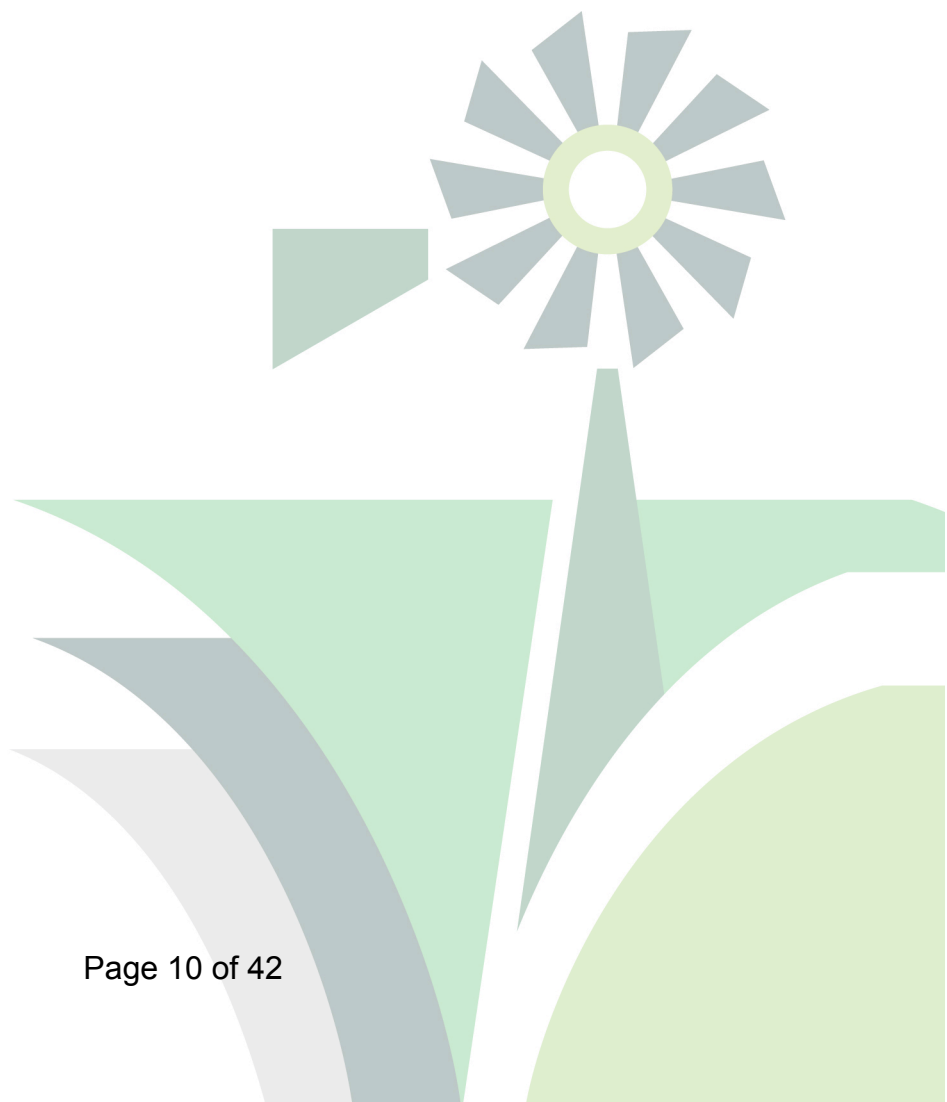
Two forums were held for school councillors involved in each of the pilot rural communities.

The aims for the Forums were to:

- initiate an informed conversation about governance in rural school communities
- provide a report to the communities on results of recent surveys, legislation and research, as a context for the conversation
- explore possible future governance options and possibilities
- allow reflection and open response on the information and possibilities
- create an opportunity for rural communities to begin to match their needs and circumstances to options and possibilities

**e. Consideration of Current Resource Materials:**

The project explored the current school council resources and training materials and reviewed them in relation to the needs and issues impacting on rural education communities.



## PROJECT FINDINGS

Across the various initiatives undertaken as part of this project there was extensive information and data provided for consideration in the development of rural school governance arrangements into the future.

This information is detailed on two levels:

- the information and outcomes of the discussions undertaken within the areas outlined within the methodology
- the development of a number of key findings in relation to Rural School Governance and the possibilities for the future.

### Information and Discussions from the Elements of the Project

#### a. Online Survey

The online survey gained responses from:

- 106 school council members
- 73 Rural school Principals
- 85 schools responded

The responses reflected the categories on school councils with 66% being from parent members, 33% from DEECD and 3% community members.

The returns and the spread of respondents provided a sound basis from which trends and tentative conclusions could be reasonably drawn.

The tone and tenor of the returns were positive and productive. While respondents were happy with the status quo they were also very open and positive about looking at possible improvements. A total of 52% of both school councillors and principals supported the exploration of alternatives to the current situation.

Rural school council members are clearly a very committed group who work industriously for the benefit of their school and students, but are concerned enough about the future to expend energy and time looking ahead. These were very valuable attributes for a project of this nature and the future development of governance for rural and remote communities.

#### *Summary from the Survey Data*

The following information has been drawn from the survey data sets:

- Small to very small schools dominate rural school settings with 78% below 100 students
- Council sizes appear out of step with school sizes - predominantly being in the 10 to 15 member range. This reflects a desire to maintain high levels of participation and involvement for rural communities in their school.
- School council positions are valued but due to a lack of numbers the positions can be easily accessed.
- There are difficulties in attracting councillors - (39% respondents indicated their school had difficulty gaining full membership) but once achieved they get "hooked" and the turnover of members is often limited. 53% are on school council for longer than three years.
- Meetings across school councils have similarities in terms of structures, practices and agenda issues.
- Evaluation of school council work, training and induction occurs infrequently – 60% of respondents indicated they weren't involved in an annual review of school council.
- Principals value the work of School Council and rate it as very effective

- Councilors are happy with current governance structures but are open to exploring alternative options – 52% indicated a willingness to explore alternative approaches.
- In 2009 the core issues considered by councils were predominantly facilities and finance
- In small rural schools some of the designated core functions are much more important while others can be token, e.g. canteen.
- The key functions of school councils identified by respondents is to keep informed; finances; to stimulate interest in the school; and to set the vision and direction.
- A number of rural school councillors were not involved in school council training either at a regional level or through a school induction process – 65% of respondents didn't attend a workshop; and 61% indicated they were not provided with an induction process. However, those who did attend the regional workshops indicated that the content and discussions at these workshops were excellent and relevant to them.

#### *Comments from the Survey*

The opportunity was provided throughout the survey to comment on key aspects of the school council role and operation. The main themes were:

- Small rural communities demand high levels of participation and involvement from community members to meet the many demands that exist in operating community organisations. This impacts on who is available and interested in school council. The result is variability in numbers and member quality. Coercion is often used to fill membership positions.
- There is concern over the role for rural school councils. The tension arises between councils being regularly required to respond to what they perceive as the external agenda of DEECD (This is seen as the dominant agenda and is carried out at the expense of the local agenda) and their reason for joining council which is to "have a say" in how they can make their school a better place.
- It seems that a significant number of councilors join to be a participant in "local" actions. This particularly includes the "hands on" tasks of council such as fund raising, grounds and building maintenance. They do not undertake with the same enthusiasm or confidence, decision making associated with strategic or financial planning and implementation.
- Many school council members are often not being prepared for their role, nor do they understand what is involved in school council before they nominate to join. They do not feel comfortable or equipped to be making decisions about education. This results in the view that this is the role of the Principal and staff. The Principal usually accepts this role. This creates frustration for some councilors who want to have a say in education matters but from their perspective, are given little opportunity to do so.
- Principals generally have strong support in their communities and their leadership on council is valued. The concerns focus around the dominant role they play on council, the level of control they exercise over information, and their limited use of delegation. Many of the decisions of the council are viewed as "rubber stamping" principal or DEECD actions or recommendations.

#### b. Literature and Governance Model Review

The research materials consisted of a broad based web search around school governance with a focus on other states of Australia; England; Scotland; Wales; United States; Netherlands and Denmark.

The Education and Reform Act 2006 and Education and Training Reform Regulations 2007 were used to provide an outline of the framework within which decisions and discussions for this project should occur.

The purpose of the research was to determine current practices, trends and actions and to provide a context for this project.

The materials provided the broad context of small rural schools examining, discussing and deciding on governance change and that this was happening world - wide. This was a key message used in the forums.

The similarity in all countries has seen the move towards a more corporate model of school governance. There has been a clear distinction drawn between the role for governance boards in policy and direction setting and the operational role of the principal in the implementation of governance policy. In Victoria this has been confirmed in the 2006 Reform Act.

#### *A developmental governance model*

The work of Lesley Payne, Murdoch University, Western Australia on the "Discourse of Development in School Governance" (2005) highlighted the move from the community empowerment and participation of the 1970's and 1980's to a more corporate phase in the present. This raised the question of purpose for a school council within its community setting. In a rural context the participation and involvement elements remain a key reason for parent interest and this creates some tensions with the use of a more corporate approach in dealing with school council action.

Payne outlines four developmental phases in the paper and they are:

1. Pioneering- This is exhibited usually during a start or new beginning for a council. It is a time for the focus on a mission with fervor and is often driven by a few keen individuals
2. Super Managing- In this phase the board is established and there is a focus on goals and outcomes, and less on mission. Meetings are regular and reports detailed.
3. Corporate- This is a period where roles are defined and separated for policy and administration, a focus on long term planning, with recommendations from professionals generally accepted. The balance of power is with the professionals and administration.
4. Ratifying- In this phase there is a dependence on professionals and decision making has become ritualised. Principals are managerially oriented and recruitment of members is often difficult.

While schools can and will move up and down, and in and out, of these phases the current evidence indicates that rural school councils are exhibiting more practices of the corporate and ratifying phases than any others.

#### *The Federated Process and Models*

The United Kingdom has undertaken research and case studies of rural communities who discussed and chose federation. This work provided a simple definition of federation as:

*"two or more schools with a formal agreement to work together to raise standards"*

In The Netherlands a more formal definition was used for federating:

*".. a group of two or more schools which share one board"*

There are some clear differences in the federated process simply springing from the definition being used.

In the UK the implication is to federate when it is in the interests of students, the community and the school. The decision to federate is focused around agreement and educational opportunity and can be a reasonably informal arrangement. The more formal definition describes an immediate move towards structural change through a combined governance approach.

This project has clearly indicated that an informal and step by step process by communities is the preferred option for any change in these directions.

The conclusion about federation although acknowledging limitations was very direct when it stated:

*"But the clear messages it provides strongly suggest that federations are an effective and powerful way of addressing falling rolls, school closure and recruitment and retention issues, while simultaneously improving pupil learning and achievement. It should also provide a 'springboard' for more detailed consideration of this crucial area of educational research."* (Report on Hard Federations for Small Primary Schools, NCSL, 2009, p.16)

Within the UK, the "hard federation model" highlighted that a group of small rural schools can and have adopted a co-operative and collaborative model and made it work for them. Their case studies provide insights into what worked and what were barriers. They also highlighted the conditions under which they were prepared to federate. It provided good examples of proactive decision making. It further highlighted that separated rural communities can take charge of their future and make change that meets their needs. In this process they defined what was needed and acceptable to them before they proceeded with the change.

In Victoria, rural school communities have made it very clear that retaining independence for their school is the essential pre cursor for exploring future governance change possibilities.

Both Denmark and the Netherlands have initiated governance changes around a federated approach. The research materials do not provide any greater insights for Victorian rural communities than those gleaned from the United Kingdom approaches.

However, of specific note is a decision taken by Demark to create a governance model in which the community membership is a significant focus. They include members from local government, employers and employee groups as well as staff and student representatives. In secondary schools the direction is that:

*" ..... the majority of members must come from outside the institution, primarily from the individual institution's local area."*

Throughout this project the interest and involvement of rural community members in their school has been very evident. The school is a key organisation in many communities and involving the broader community in school governance in a rural setting may be a key strategy in its future sustainability. The effective use of the community membership category is possible as is the creation of a "Rural Cluster Advisory Board" where a number of schools could gain access to this broader community input and representation.

#### *The move to a corporate style of governance*

The move towards a more corporate model of school governance has been referenced around a move away from what has been termed as the "parent" co-operative model. This is where parents elect the board, vote on the budget and focus primarily on the short term. ( Bassett & Moredock, 2008). This type of review and belief led to the "Carver Model" that delineated exactly the role of the board and the different role of management.

Carver (2000) sets his Policy Governance model within a business type model. In this model, the role of the school board is "to govern the system, rather than run it." The board would focus on educational results rather than on the methods by which they were achieved.

In the United Kingdom "The Strengthening Public Accountability on the School Governing Body" (CfPS, 2006) argues the case for separating the executive actions and role from those of the governing body.

As noted by Payne (2005) the governance discourse shifted to be about "development and efficiency" with emphasis shifting away from parent involvement of the past while schools was to see themselves less as communities and more as businesses.

The 2005 Review of School Governance in Victoria recommended:

- *"That a statement of areas in school management which are outside the functions and powers of school councils is included in the legislation.*
- *That the Department develops clear guidelines on the respective roles and responsibilities of school councils and the role and expectations of principals with respect to school councils..." (p.8)*

The 2006 Reform Act included the separation of responsibilities within the new legislation for Victorian school councils. In so doing it set the school councils on a pathway that created a tension between the original intent of school councils for community participation and involvement and the new legislation that encouraged a move towards a more corporate form of school governance.

#### *Partnerships, community building and democracy*

A body of research exists around building partnerships, communities and being democratic in these processes. A selective examination of some of this work reveals that it has relevance to rural school governance. Schools are key organisations in rural communities and are often the focus of the community. This places the school council and particularly the principal in a situation that can be very different from many urban and regional schools.

In "Developing Collaborative Partnerships: Limits and Possibilities for Schools, Parents and Community Education" (1999) Martin, Tett & Kay drew upon their research conducted in Scotland. They argued that collaborative activity is a prerequisite for educational partnerships within a community education system. Schools were at the heart of community education and needed to facilitate new agendas between the school, parents and the community using collaborative practices.

In their research they found that schools displayed little collaboration around curriculum but the overwhelming link was through the provision of facilities. But most importantly they found that:

*"Overall schools were least likely to encourage members of the community to participate in decision making in the school, even where members of the community were involved in school governance."*

They provide a six point checklist of steps to build effective partnerships (Appendix 2) but warn that:

*"Schools which value community building and regard it as a prime institutional purpose will, ... be more successful in shaping collaborative partnerships" (p.72)*

David Booher (2004) writes about collaborative governance practices and democracy in a much broader setting than education. In building a "Collaborative Network Structure" he highlights that this must go beyond linkages and co-ordination to a position where the participants actively work together to accomplish shared goals where they transform into a new whole. This definition provides a challenge to many clusters, who network, co-ordinate and co-operate at very effective levels, but fail to recognize that the step to collaboration is required to achieve high level outcomes on some more complex processes and tasks.

As a guide to achieving this step he outlines eight conditions to build a successful policy consensus building process. (Appendix 2) This has some appeal for use by school clusters that could be challenged to take the next step to collaboration.

The Country Education Project Inc developed resources for rural schools focused on partnerships and clustering in 2000. This resource provides useful background information relating to the establishment and maintenance of effective partnerships and also provides a valuable resource for organisations interested in developing education clusters.

In 2003, VicHealth also developed a very useful resource that explores the development of effective partnerships and highlights the various steps required to establish and review the effectiveness of such partnerships.

The Catholic Education Office (Archdiocese of Melbourne) published a research paper on "Clusters" (2008). This paper identifies the key benefits of clustering as being co-ordination, co-operation and collaboration. It further argues that these three concepts can be placed on a continuum and further refines this through a David Pollard (2005) framework which identifies the differences between each term. The key being the increased relationship complexities required for collaboration which demands more time and prior experiences, to be achieved. It believes that schools have considerable experience with coordination and co-operation but;

*"limited experience with collaboration even though this approach is more powerful."  
(p.2)*

Collaboration is achieved when members are prepared to resource and power share.

The National College of School Leadership in the United Kingdom has developed a significant body of work around networking, learning communities and strategies and processes that support these concepts. It identifies key foci for groups wanting to work together. They describe steps to be taken and conditions to be established for collaborative groups to be effective. They have a number of published documents that would be very useful for facilitators of clusters electing to create a collaborative structure.

These thoughts, ideas and plans around developing a collaborative community approach would also be advised to read and use the good governance materials developed by the Victorian Council of School Organisations Inc (VICCSO). These materials provide practical ideas and practices in specific areas of governance and would encourage successful outcomes for groups who work together using them. They are an excellent resource from which a collaborative group of school councils could build a culture of sound practice through success.

The research materials around collaboration provide ideas, strategies and practices that have the potential to build on the co-operative culture that already exists in rural communities. It sets out the challenge to move co-operation to another level and gain greater benefits for schools and their students. It is a strategy that resonates with rural values.

#### *"Alternative Models" in Action*

As part of this project exploration of two "alternative" models was undertaken. They included:

- Principals of multi site schools – currently there are two multi-site school governance approaches within rural Victoria – Peranbin and Woody Yaloak
- Principal of a Primary school with an annex

The multi site schools both had a single council and principal. One, situated in a growth area, had flourished and developed very positive attitudes, perceptions and outcomes for each of the merged sites and the school as an entity. The leadership, communication, representation and decision making were all strong and well set in using effective processes. The merged school occurred with some external pressure but the participating schools had basically elected to make this move. It has now been operating successfully for well over ten years.

The other multi site school had experienced continuous enrolment decline and a significant number of challenges and difficulties. One of its sites has closed and others are under threat of closure due to decreasing enrolments. The communities had participated in the merger with mixed commitments and a number of families have chosen to bypass their local school and bus their children to a school in a nearby population centre. These factors have made leadership, governance and co-operative approaches much more problematic.

Schools with hub annex arrangements and operating independent school councils find this structure cumbersome and time consuming. Since the introduction of this approach, many annexes have ceased to exist today. This has often been due to the Annex closing, or being merged into the Hub school. Many of those involved would not be advocates for others to follow this model.

The stories that have emerged through these interviews provide support for a position that a locally owned and developed process, preparation and readiness are the key factors in communities successfully accomplishing governance and structural change. The model used, and in this instance it was the multi site model, can be irrelevant if the other factors are not in evidence. Martin, Tett and Kay(1999) set out four dimensions of values, purposes, tasks and conditions as a framework to understand how and why collaborative activity develops as it does within a community education setting. It would be steps such as these and Booher's(2004) consensus building process that could be utilised in developing strategies and approaches for Victorian schools to use in a governance change process.

c. Development of Possible Models

As a result of the research, interviews and references a number of possible future governance models were developed as a tool to facilitate discussion within the five pilot communities. They were provided to the pilot community groups to stimulate thought and discussion and have been attached in Appendix 3.

The models were not presented as "solutions" but as a starting point to conversations about the now and the future.

In each model it was assumed there were clear sub models and variations that could be developed and considered to accommodate local needs and interests. It is also possible to use elements of each and incorporate these into a single organisational concept that would work in a particular situation.

The models used in the forums were:

- A Partnership Model
- A Collegiate Model
- A Corporate, Federated, Multi Site Model

To enhance the discussion around these models, videos containing interviews with principals in alternative school governance arrangements were produced.

These videos could be utilised in other setting to assist rural school governances to explore possible future arrangements.

d. Rural Pilot Community Forums

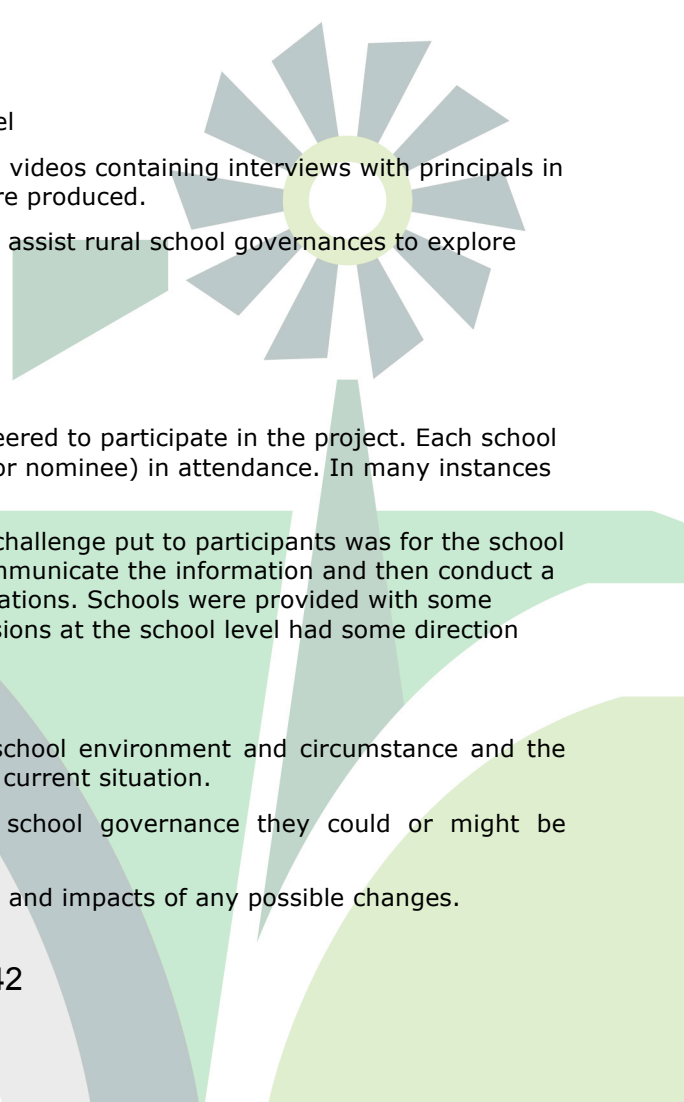
*Forum I*

Forum I was attended by all schools who volunteered to participate in the project. Each school had the Principal and School Council President (or nominee) in attendance. In many instances other councillors also attended the forum.

At the conclusion of this forum the request and challenge put to participants was for the school representatives to return to their school and communicate the information and then conduct a discussion around this information and its implications. Schools were provided with some directed foci and questions to ensure the discussions at the school level had some direction and focus.

These included:

- An assessment of their specific rural school environment and circumstance and the trends and issues that had created this current situation.
- An identification of what aspects of school governance they could or might be prepared to share.
- A future assessment of the implications and impacts of any possible changes.



The forums aimed to create an environment in which discussions could be conducted in each school community with an increased degree of awareness, information and direction.

The forum had three distinct sections which were:

- A report on the online survey results
- An overview of web based research with a particular focus on other countries and the current legislative framework for Victorian school councils
- Three models of school governance

The evaluations of the forum provided a range of opinions - from those who remained fixed on not considering alternatives, to those who believed the materials had opened up new and possible future opportunities. In general there was support for each component of the forum, although most preferred the issues raised by the models. The significant majority indicated they would return to their school community and discuss the materials and their thoughts about rural school governance.

#### *Comments from the Forum 1*

- Across all cluster groups there existed a high level of suspicion around why school governance needed to be discussed. The “vestiges” of quality provision appear to remain key drivers when confronted with thinking about change to key school structures.
- The “if it isn’t broke”, “we’re okay”, “leave us alone and let us get on with it” attitudes were also displayed. Being grounded in the “now” appeared to be the default position.
- Despite strong urging that this discussion presented an opportunity to assess current circumstances and future possibilities few seem to adopt this position. A safety first position was adopted.
- The positivism evident in the online survey responses was not as strong throughout Forum I. The most vocal were the “conspiracy” group, while those who were prepared to consider the future were less vocal. The forum was mainly attended by the leaders of the rural school councils and it seems they felt a need to protect the status quo in open discussion.
- From the initial discussions, there were a small number of participating communities who expressed an interest to further explore a partnership model and were keen to present this to their individual school councils for consideration.

#### *Forum II*

Forum II provided the opportunity for the rural school councils to talk about their ideas, beliefs and actions for school governance into the future within their community.

Participating schools were requested to prepare responses to:

- An assessment of their current situation and draw implications from this perspective
- The potential for governance sharing with other schools and any directions or decisions they may be considering
- The reasons supporting their actions and decisions.

#### *Comments from Forum II*

Forum II was attended by the same representation as Forum I with a number of pilot communities having additional representation as they were keen to contribute to the conversation. The exception to this was the Colac Area Rural Schools cluster who had less representation.

The discussion displayed an open attitude and a willingness to continue the consideration of future governance needs for rural school councils. The discussions at the individual school levels had been varied in both depth and outcome. However, in all pilot communities there was a recognition, and willingness, to developing more collaborative governance into the

future and that this would be beneficial for both individual school and the pilot communities as a whole.

As a result of the discussions after Forum II the following has occurred:

- **Derrinallum and Lismore** have agreed to continue to hold School Council President and Principal meetings to increase co-operation and collaboration around areas of mutual benefit and interest. There is recognition that this structure should move beyond the current informal arrangement to a more defined relationship with potential mutual areas for discussion to be identified. In particular they believe that a combined effort around discussing and implementing DEECD policy and initiatives would be possible. The recent example of the introduction of Netbooks was cited.
- **Colac Area Rural Schools Cluster;** Three schools, in the south west of Colac have commenced discussions around the use of a Collegiate-MoU model. Before the MoU can be planned and activated there is a need in the group to build and develop working relationships. The three schools are planning a School Council President and Principal sharing session before broaching the Collegiate-MoU concept with their full councils. The MoU is being planned around a resource and expertise sharing basis in the initial stages. Other schools in this cluster did not attend Forum II.
- **King Valley Cluster** has recognized that a co-operative group of staff providing planned shared programs for students may be able to be extended to governance and parental input. They are beginning to explore these notions. In particular the vision that a regular meeting of the school councils could be structured through a representative process that not only shares experiences but begins to plan and act collaboratively on defined functions. One initial governance function that was being developed was around a collaborative cluster fund raising event.
- **North Central Cluster** identified a need for the three schools involved to continue to discuss and examine shared governance interests. All schools are involved in a broader cluster of seven schools. The location for the governance discussion and possible action did not have total agreement. The difficulty in getting seven schools to agree on a collaborative action was considered a major hurdle. The need for some shared collaborative action was seen to be a pressing issue for two of the school communities in the pilot consultation.
- **Sale Rural Cluster** will continue formal discussions between the two smaller schools that see benefits at staff, student and governance levels. There is a commitment to commence this process through principals and school council presidents meeting to jointly examine and plan a strategic approach. The Regional Network Leader is to be invited to participate and support. Longford Primary School is supportive of this step and will look in the short term to increasing opportunities for sharing at student and staff levels.

e. Consideration of Current Resource Materials

The information gained from the on line survey in relation to school councillors response on support and resource materials, there was a strong acknowledgement of the content and support materials provided by DEECD through the website and regional workshops.

However, as the pilot community discussions progressed, and the exploration of the Cluster Collaborative Governance model emerged, there was an identified need for the development of resources for rural school councillors and principals focusing on the area of collaborative practices, and partnerships. While there are resources available (through CEP Inc, VicHealth, Catholic Education Office and some of the international research material) there is a need to develop a more comprehensive and responsive resource in this area.

## Key Findings

Throughout the various aspects of the project, there were a number of key findings identified by school councilors. These issues were highlighted through the online survey; in conversation with those rural schools who had developed alternative models (eg multi campus); and through the discussions within the forums with the five pilot communities.

They covered four general areas:

- attitude
- purpose of school council
- role of leadership
- culture and history.

### Attitude

#### *a. Maintaining the Status Quo*

Many actions being taken within rural school councils maintain and perpetuate the status quo. The method of entry onto council is a key example. Many enter council with a limited understanding of the role or responsibilities of school council. They are provided with minimal or no training. Most school councilors learn their role "on the job" and this is a process that usually continues the existing culture and practices. These processes are further entrenched because few school councils conduct rigorous or regular evaluation of their work or outcomes.

These actions make change and renewal difficult and create levels of self satisfaction that have no assessment benchmarks and are therefore unchallenged.

#### *b. Opposition to Change*

The ongoing reaction to the "Quality of Provision" process continues to have an impact on the actions taken by rural school councils and their members. Issues and ideas that require change or modification to the status quo are often examined and interpreted through the "perceived" impact they could have on the school's ongoing future. They are considered first as a threat and second as an opportunity.

This belief and attitude influences changes at all levels and generally contributes to maintaining the status quo. It also produces an inward looking approach to issues, a greater emphasis on self reliance and maintaining independence at all costs.

#### *c. Commitment and Openness*

The survey indicates at least half of school council members are willing to look at alternative options for governance approaches. It also shows high levels of commitment to the local school and education in a broader sense. It is this group that may be able to maintain the developmental aspects for rural school councils. They are the group that ensures change at some level continues to occur within rural communities. The structure and operation of rural school council limit the influence of this group but allow change to happen within "small step" processes. The actions described in the Forum II consultations indicate that there is a willingness to take some first steps along a changed approach to governance in rural school councils. In several of the pilot communities, a belief that a cluster could support a governance change process occurred between Forums I and II.

### Purpose of School Council

#### *a. Conflict between Intent and Action*

It is clear from the survey and the forums that rural school councils have members who join to contribute and take action on their school becoming better learning environments for students.

The work of school council has moved towards a more strategic intent with planning for the next four years, guided facility development, planned annual budgets, developing a vision and detailed financial reports. Requirements and advice around these are often centrally directed. This leaves locally determined functions to be around fund raising and maintaining the grounds and buildings. This creates a belief that parental involvement and action in some functions is more important and valued than in others. School Councilors who want to have an active role in the educational processes of the school feel sidelined and comments of "rubber stamping" and "less principal control" are being made by this group.

These two positions can and do create operational tensions within rural school councils.

*b. The Separated Partnership*

Many rural school councilors solve the tension by deferring their planning and strategic responsibility to the Principal and staff. They become less involved in these areas although supportive of the work done by Principals and staff. They continue to play effective roles in the "doing" areas. This enables a satisfaction with school council work to be maintained. There is a "duality" of responsibility and contribution existing in the work of many rural school councils.

The outcome of this approach is that the strategic and planning responsibility of principals is increased and becomes blurred with their operational role. The perception and perhaps reality is that the Principal does it all. School council in this role is an "advisory panel" commenting on the plans and school direction. In several ways the school council is a separated partnership that undertakes its own culturally defined actions with some tension but general feelings of satisfaction.

This is co-operation and co-ordination of principal, staff and parent effort to achieve the school council role. It is not necessarily a partnership with an effective collaborative effort.

*c. Training and Professional Development:*

Through the on line survey, and the forum discussions, a number of rural school councilors did not participate within the provided regional professional development activities – 65% indicating they haven't attended such training. The majority of these professional development activities are provided on an annual basis and normally within a regional centre – thus requiring rural people to travel significant distances to attend.

However, for those people who attended these professional development activities, the response was seen as extremely positive and valuable. A number of rural school councilors indicated that they gained a great deal from these sessions, and valued the opportunity to meet with fellow school councilors to discuss common areas.

The production of resources and materials through a more rural friendly strategy was seen as important.

A number of school councilors also indicated that they were provided with an induction program when they were first elected on the school council, either by their local school or the region. However, consistency across schools and regions varied significantly.

*d. Early Years Involvement*

While not directly a key aspect of this project, a number of rural communities indicated their desire to explore the development of partnerships within their communities between schools and early year's services.

The 0-18 Years Lifecycle approach outlined within the Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development has resulted in a number of these communities expressing a keenness to work in partnership with pre schools to provide local, high quality learning and development activities and programs for children within the early years.

The governance issue surrounding the development of partnerships across these historically different sectors was seen as a critical area for consideration in the very near future.

### Role of Leadership

#### *a. Leadership Context and Trust*

In rural schools the principal's leadership role is diverse. The role includes a significant wider community leadership aspect not as evident in non rural settings. The school is either the major focus for the community or at the very least a dominant feature of community life. In some instances the school is the only continuing formal organisation in the community. This makes change and decision making generally a complex and involved process with implications broader than just the school.

In many cases the principals' role is highly valued in the community and a significant degree of professional autonomy, trust and responsibility is seceded to those in this role.

The practice of principals presenting to school council ideas, proposals and plans that have been developed with limited input outside the professional staff is growing. School Councils therefore develop a belief that this work belongs to the "professionals" and support these actions with little rigorous scrutiny.

#### *b. The Principal as Executive Officer*

The dominant role for the principal is enhanced through the role of the executive officer. Generally the principal prepares the agenda, distributes minutes, provides reports and acts as the communication link with DEECD and its requirements. It is not difficult to comprehend the survey comment; *"Too much is left to the Principal"*. Most of these tasks are completed by the Principal who uses little delegation in achieving these tasks on behalf of school council.

In many rural schools, the community educational leadership role often starts and ends with the Principal. The effect is that key decisions around school vision and direction, strategic plans and financial matters are managed and controlled at council level by the Principal. This frustrates those members who joined council to have an educational impact on the school. It limits school development by excluding the benefits of a real and collaborative partnership with the full school council and community around these key school issues.

Principals do consult around these issues but in general it is a very guided and managed process. It would be rare for school council to be seen as the educational drivers or leaders in the community.

#### *c. The Collaborative Alternative*

The function highlighted in the 2005 Review for school councils to strengthen their community relationships by *"involving the community in the governance of the school..."* has been stifled because of the management style being adopted in the development and discussion of key school council functions, such as the strategic plan.

The partnership designed within the Act and reviewed in 2005 requires school councils to consider a change from the current functional and cooperative approaches to one that involves collaboration between and with all stakeholders in the rural community. This would give schools a far greater access to skills, talents and commitment than currently may be the practice.

## Context and Action

Recent practices are building a culture around the concepts of:

- Networking
- Co-operation
- Coordination

Rural schools network, co-operate and co-ordinate for mutual benefit through the concept of clustering. This is often done without risk to independence or the surrender of individual resources, programs or prior planned directions. School governance often follows this pattern.

Cluster structures and the use of clusters have been part of the rural education culture for a very long time. A review of the recent past indicates their use in various ways by participant schools as well as the departmental system. Many of these actions have been based around co-operation and co-ordination and are used because of efficiency and the desire to provide the best possible education for their students. The terminology usually is around *"it is no good reinventing the wheel"* or *"two heads are better than one"*. The schools have participated in clusters for many very sound reasons and their decision to participate has been around the concept of self or mutual benefit. It has been a very effective process in building a supportive and broader based education community that have similar interests and issues.

In this way some very good educational practices have been developed and used. The sharing of teachers for specialist programs, the delivery of increased services through MARC vans and the use of telematics to deliver higher secondary curriculum programs to students are some key examples.

Any consideration of future possibilities around school governance needs to be receptive of this history and culture within rural education.

## Forced and Self managed Choice

These co-operative activities were delivered at a state-wide level but other examples exist where schools have taken resources and shared them as a response to meeting a need or solving a problem. These are examples that when rural communities go beyond co-operation for self or mutual benefit to a collaborative process that requires them to surrender some of their individuality or resources to gain a benefit then significant program and change emerges. This action is now sporadic in the rural education communities and needs re-generation.

## POSSIBLE FUTURE GOVERNANCE APPROACHES

### The Consultation Models for School Governance

As a key component of the forum discussions within this project a number of possible school governance models were provided for exploration and discussion. These models were developed from the information gained through the online survey; research of other state and countries experiences; conversations with "alternative" models of school governance; and the learning from the research papers.

A detailed outline of these discussion models are outlined in Appendix 3.

Three models were provided for discussion in the Forum process. The summary responses to these models were:

a. *The Multi-campus- Federated Model*

The multi-campus model requires a school and their community to surrender their independence and identity and as such is not acceptable. The key tenet for most rural communities is to retain their identity and independence.

b. *The Partnership Model*

The partnership model while maintaining a school's independence is not viewed as providing enough advantages to drive a change. Schools already see themselves as being partnered in many situations. However, the concept of a shared and co-operative approach around key school council functions (e.g. Resources) cannot be envisaged.

c. *The Collegiate-Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Model*

Many schools recognize they do this already. This is clustering that is used for shared student activities and for staff through shared programs and professional learning. Although this is used for teacher sharing and provision of coordinated student activities it is not seen as being particularly useful for shared governance.

The discussion in the forums and the proposed actions by clusters to move towards an increased sharing and co-operative process at school council level do reflect rural community action and culture.

The project findings indicate there is a mis-match in the reasons rural councilors join and the way the current models operate. These are communities with a culture of self reliance and willingness to work and share with others through cluster arrangements. At the staff and student level this happens now.

The opportunity this project presents is to use the co-operative culture within a school governance approach through a new approach that encourages rural councils to share, collaborate and support each other.

This process is best achieved in a "*Rural Cluster Collaborative Model*".

## **Development of a Cluster Collaborative Governance Model for Rural communities.**

### *a) Why a Collaborative Model:*

- The model addresses the needs for rural school councils to move to a co-operative arrangement that supports and maintains their identity while gaining benefit and efficiency from a new way for school governance.
- Such a process can begin small and grow as confidence, trust and familiarity with a collaborative model and its processes builds.
- It has the advantage of structuring co-operation and collaboration into school governance through a practical and agreed model. Currently co-operation is informal and often breaks down when key participants move on. Adoption of a collaborative model would embed this as the standard governance practice in rural school communities.

### *b) Support for the Model:*

- There is a history and known outcome for the shared co-operative, clustering approach in rural settings. It has been used extensively for student and staff activities. It is believed to be a very effective way to work and operate in rural school environments.
- Its use in school governance was questioned through this project but through further discussion and example it became a “realistic” option for rural school councils – a number of pilot communities expressed a desire to explore it further.
- Forms and variations of this idea have been suggested in the survey and in the forums by school councilors.
- Actions suggested in Forum II for governance change moved school councils in this direction. The first step change suggested was through shared principal and school council president meetings. This is clearly a relationship and trust building phase.

### *c) Steps to Support a Change:*

- In keeping with the cautious nature of rural school councils the initial steps should be small in nature and focused. In most clusters this will include a focus on building deeper levels of trust and confidence in each other.
- The development of this collaborative approach beyond this initial step must be further defined and developed. Leadership support and professional development is required at a state level to support rural communities to embrace such an approach. Rural school councils and communities will generally respond positively to a model that acknowledges their concerns but provides a pathway to improved practice.
- An option for exploring a newly defined cluster collaborative model would be to establish some action research cluster pilots and use these experiences to further refine the model.
- There will be a need to develop a skill base in using a collaborative process for school councilors but particularly for principals. Training and evaluation must be included in the use of a collaborative model through school community resource materials and leadership programs.

The Cluster Collaborative Governance Model has been given some definition and detail and is attached as Appendix 4.

This model, like all models should not be considered complete but as a starting point for rural school councils and their communities to begin to use their culture, experiences and community building skills to achieve an improved form of school governance for their school.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the research and consultations throughout rural communities, a number of recommendations have been developed to explore how a more effective and responsive approach to school governance could operate within a rural context.

These recommendations consider a number of the education policy initiatives currently occurring within Victoria and attempts to link the learning's from this project into these initiatives.

### 1. Rural School Governance Approaches for the Future

- a) That a Cluster Collaborative Governance model be developed in addition to current school governance models for use by rural school councils aimed at supporting clusters who determine to:
- work collaboratively and voluntarily in a cluster arrangement with an overarching advisory group who does not have formal powers
  - work towards a more formal arrangement where delegation of some powers to a Cluster governing body

*Specific Action:*

*A model to meet these requirements has been outlined in Appendix 4 as a basis for this development*

- b) That DEECD resource a pilot project for rural school communities to research and further develop the Cluster Collaborative Governance model.

*Specific Action:*

*That DEECD provide resources to support three to five rural cluster communities to undertake this pilot project including:*

- *resources provided to these rural clusters to support the involvement of a coach/mentor in developing such a model.*
- *the pilot project be based on an action research model*
- *each pilot would be documented as a case study*
- *the resources and support materials developed through this pilot project be utilised within current school council training materials.*

*NB: There would be interest from a number of the pilot communities involved in this research project to further develop their discussion within the above proposal.*

- c) That support materials be developed that will provide guidance and direction for schools electing to operate as a Cluster Collaborative Governance model.

*Specific Actions:*

- *CEP Inc, in consultation with the School Council unit of DEECD, develop resources focusing on collaboration and clustering that could be utilized within support materials for school councils.*
- *DEECD, in partnership with CEP Inc and the pilot projects, develop a matrix for identifying growth points in collaborative practice. This matrix would be used in establishing future growth directions as well as to benchmark growth and development. The outline of a possible Cluster Collaborative Governance matrix detailed in Appendix 5.*

## 2. Leadership and School Governance

- a) Review and provide greater definition of the executive officer role that rural principals fulfill within their schools councils.
- b) DEECD undertake a review of the current role of leadership within their rural communities and school councils, thus providing greater clarity for both principal and school councilors roles in building their partnership

### *Specific Action:*

- *Review current leadership initiatives provided through the Bastow Institute to ensure that they include areas such as:*
    - *principal - school council relationship and responsibilities*
    - *a total understanding of collaborative processes, especially within a school council context.*
    - *the principal's role in leading community building. This role is particularly relevant for rural principals.*
  - *The location for this training should be within the broad professional development framework of leadership.*
- c) Develop case studies from schools currently practicing alternative forms of governance.

### *Specific Action:*

- *That DEECD undertake the development of case studies of school governance arrangements that include:*
  - *multi site arrangements*
  - *collaborative arrangements*
  - *partnership arrangements.*
- *Such case studies be made available in a variety of forms (eg video, hard copy, etc) and be included within school council resource and support materials – both online and hard copy.*

## 3. Training and Professional Development

- a) Provide local training options for rural school councilors.

### *Specific Actions:*

*DEECD, in consultation with regions and other key stakeholders, review current provision of training and professional development activities and consideration be given to approaches that allow for greater participation by rural school councilors. For example, more professional development located within rural locations, web based support materials and interactive training, the use of coaching/mentoring models, etc.*

- b) As part of the current training materials and resources, that training activities be provided for school councils to develop and implement Cluster Collaborative approaches.

### *Specific Action:*

- *DEECD, in partnership with CEP Inc, develops resource and support materials focusing on collaboration and cluster approaches to school governance.*
- *DEECD include such resources and support materials into the regions school council training programs and resources*
- *DEECD, in partnership with CEP Inc, develop a web based set of tools (eg blogs, twitters, etc) for school councilors to gain resources; exchange ideas and information; provision of interactive resources; etc.*

- c) School councils are supported to undertake evaluation and reflection on their practices and procedures on an annual basis.

*Specific Actions:*

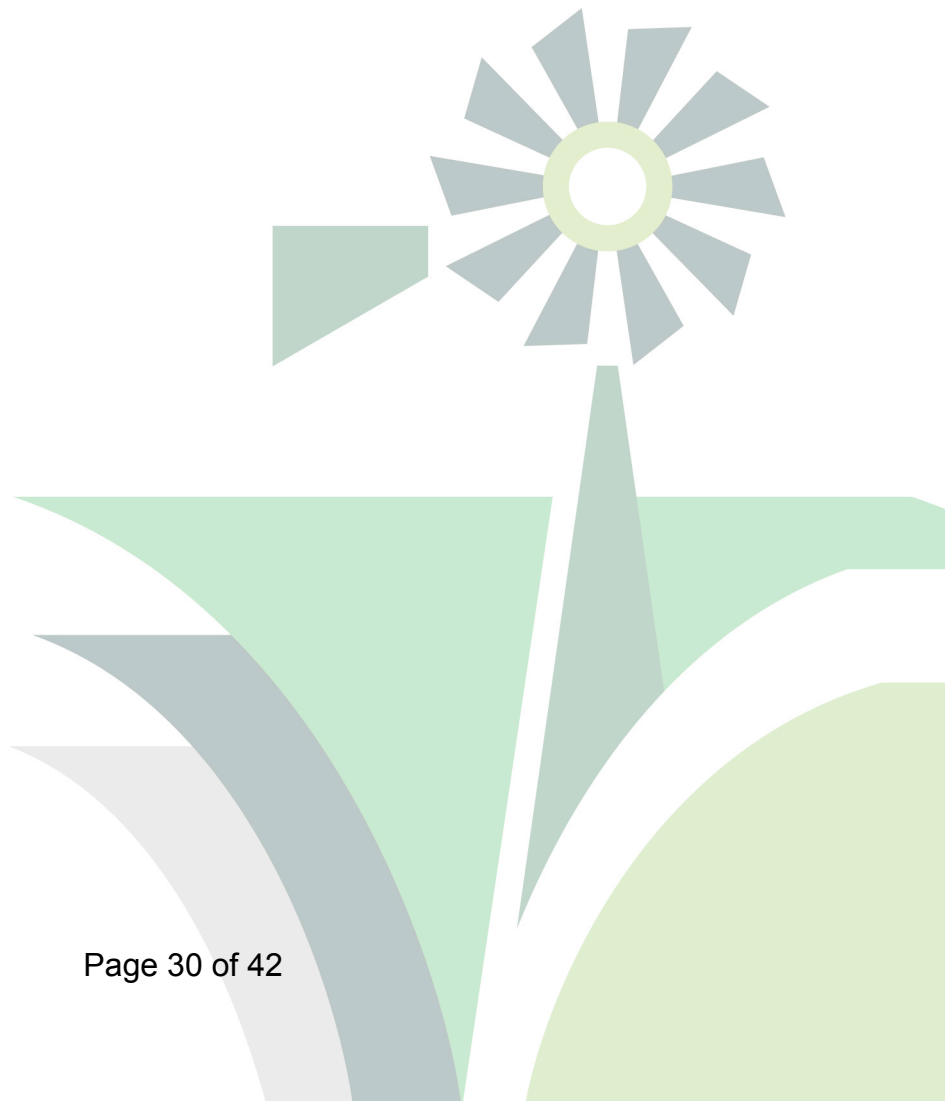
- *DEECD review and evaluative processes, and develop tools that could be utilized by school councils in reviewing and evaluating their processes. The Collaborative Matrix outline in Appendix 3 could be one example of this approach.*
- *DEECD develop "standard instruments" and "reflective actions" to be undertaken by school councils on an annual basis. Such tools could focus on areas such as community consultation, key school council functions, etc.*



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# APPENDIX



## School Council Online Survey

### Introduction

Thank you for participating in this survey. Your input is valued and important. The information gathered will be treated confidentially and no individual person or school will be identified in any use made of this information. The analysis of the survey will be anonymous.

1. School Name
2. Are you a
  - a. Parent member
  - b. DEECD member
  - c. Community member
3. Membership – How many years have you been involved on School, Council?
4. How and why did you become involved with School Council?
5. Are there issues in gaining full membership and representative councilors in your school community?
6. Why?
7. How could we improve participation and involvement in School Councils?
8. Do meetings generally being on time?
9. Is there a set time for meetings?
10. Average length of meetings?
11. The current meeting night?
12. Is a formal written agenda provided?
13. Is the agenda followed?
14. Is the agenda provided for members before meeting?
15. Are meeting papers provided with the agenda?
16. Are agenda items able to added to the agenda at the meeting?
17. Does School Council have an established decision making process understood by all members?
18. Does School Council have a set of current standing orders?
19. Is a motion required to extend the meeting beyond its finishing time?
20. Is an evaluation of School Councils meeting processes conducted annually?
21. Have you been on a sub committee for School Council?
22. How often do the sub committees meet?
23. Please list which sub committees the School Council has?

### Meeting Issues:

24. During 2009 please list five major topics discussed at School Council.

School Council Role:

25. Indicate if you have been involved in any of these as a school council member in the past year. If involved, please rate the importance of these to you.

	Important	Not Involved	Not Important
Establish direction and vision for the School.			
Arrange the supply of goods and services for the conduct of the school.			
Raise funds for school related purposes.			
Regulate and facilitate the after hours use of the school.			
Exercise a general oversight of the school grounds.			
Provide for school cleaning services.			
Ensure school money was expended for proper related purposes.			
Provide school canteen services.			
Inform yourself and take into account school community when making decisions and for school and students.			
Stimulate interest in the school and the wider community.			

26. Number of School Council Meetings you attended in 2009

27. From your perspective, does your School Council meet often enough?

28. If not, Why Not?

Training:

29. Have you attended any school council training programs?

30. Please list any training programs you have attended.

31. Does your School Council have an induction program for members?

32. Has your school conducted any professional development programs for School Councilors?

Governance Issues:

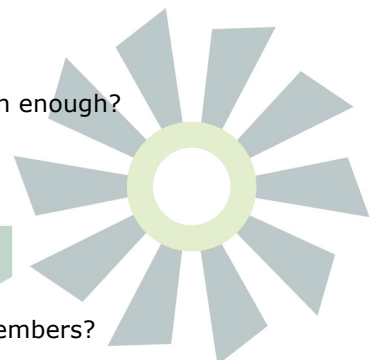
33. From your involvement, what are the strengths of the current School Council structure?

34. From your involvement, what are the concerns, issues or weaknesses in the current School Council structure?

35. How can the concerns, issues, or weaknesses be overcome?

36. Do you favour exploring other models of school governance for rural schools?

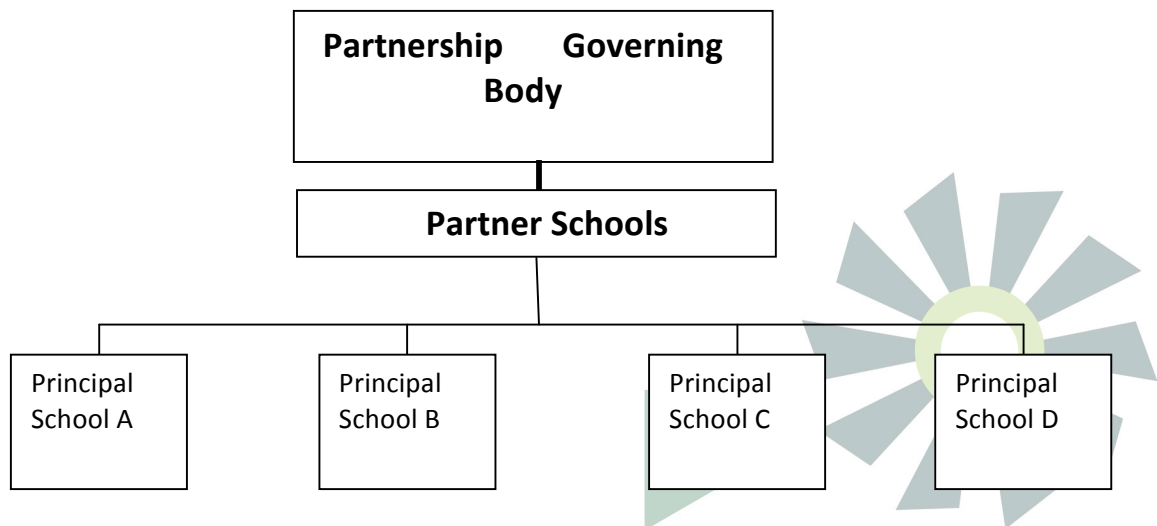
37. Do you have any other suggestions for how these might work?

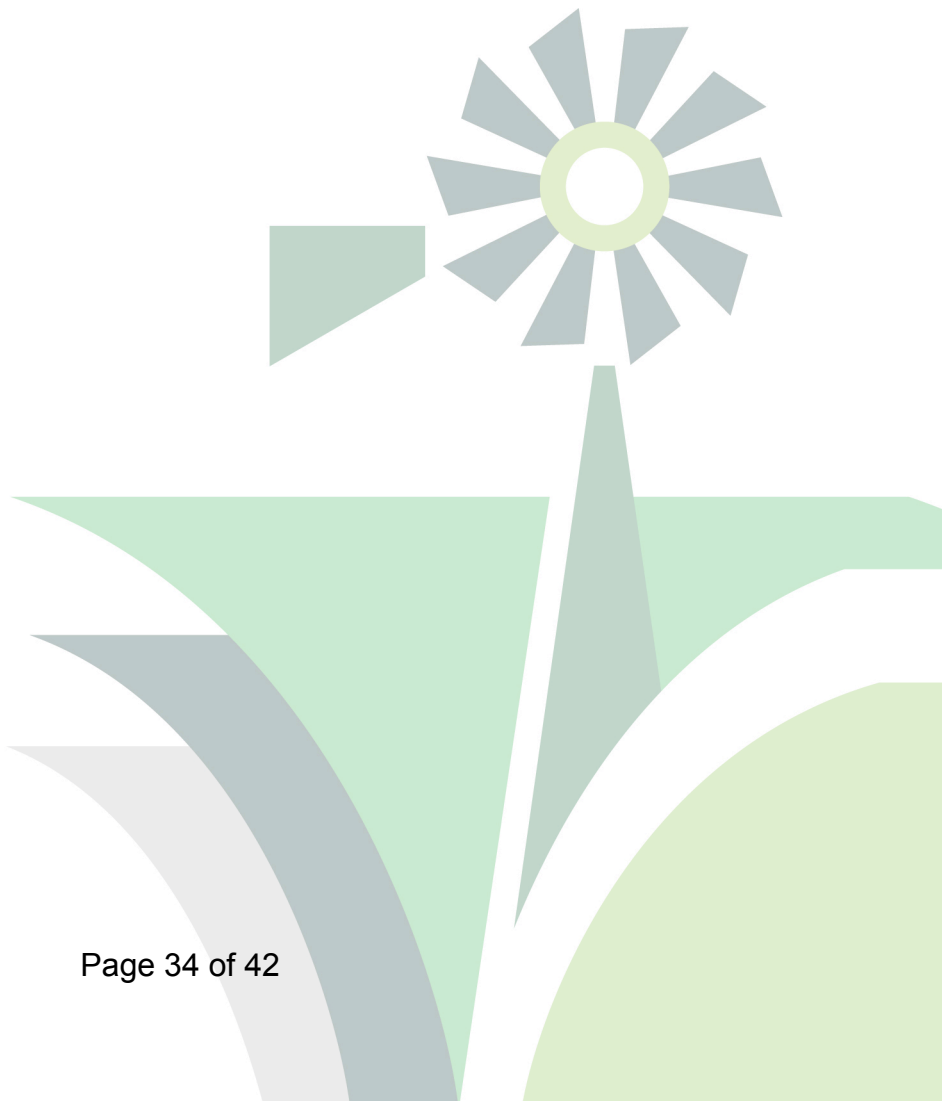
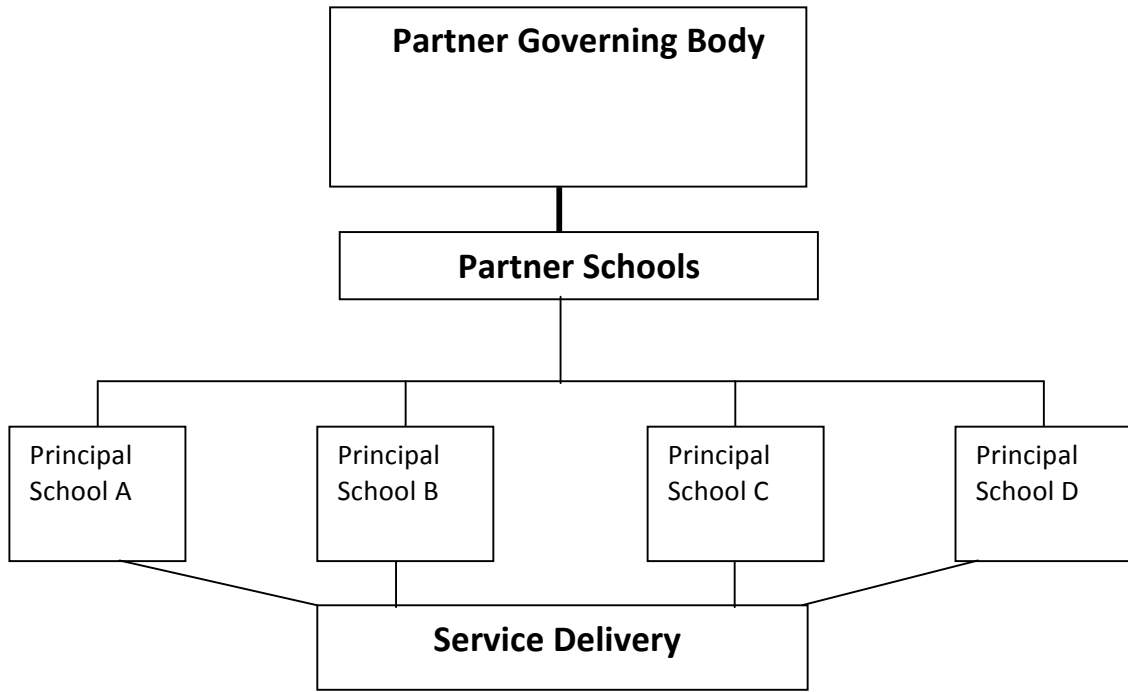


## Partnership Model

The Partnership Model requires those in the partnership to enter into a formal understanding that defined elements would become the responsibility of the "Partnership Governing Body". The individual schools would remain independent and responsible for their overall operation. Decisions made by the "Partnership Governing Body" would still be ratified at the local level. The level and depth of the agreed responsibilities for the Partnership Governing Body could range from limited to extensive.

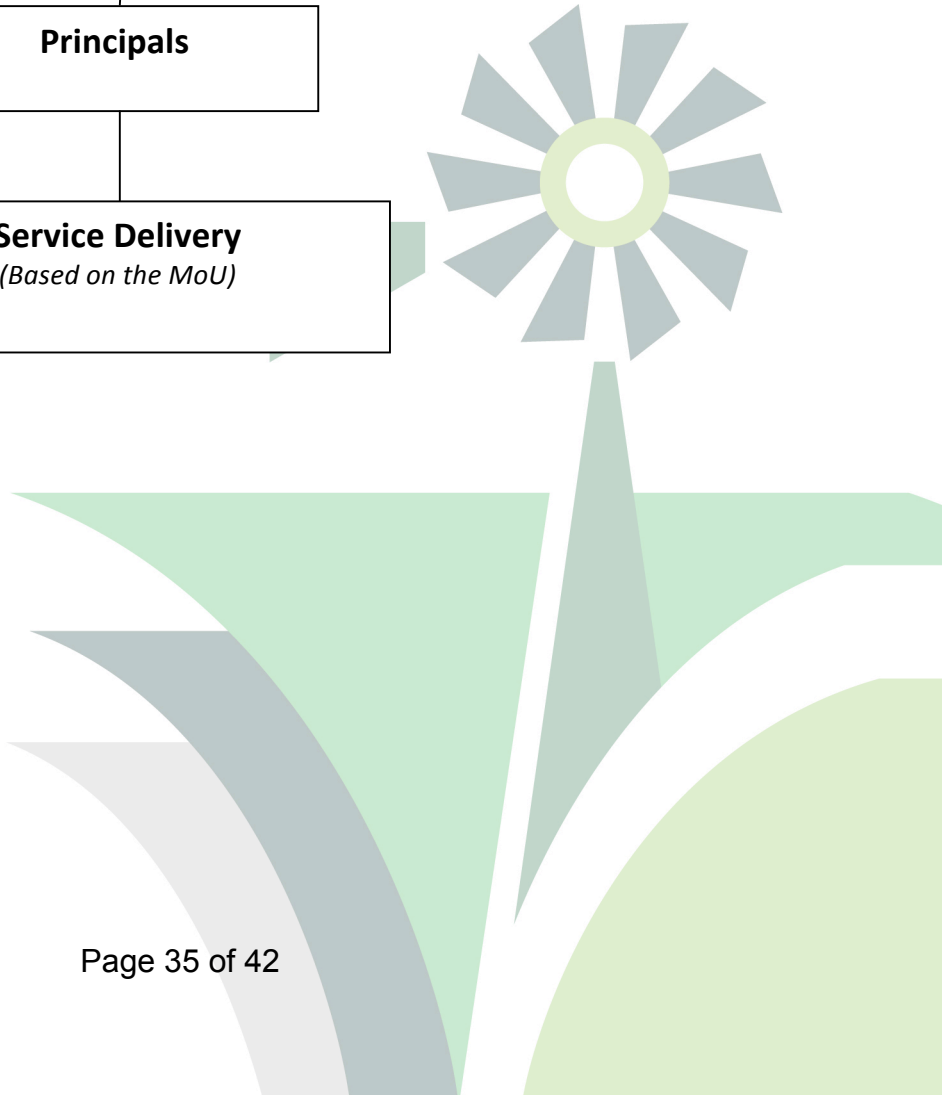
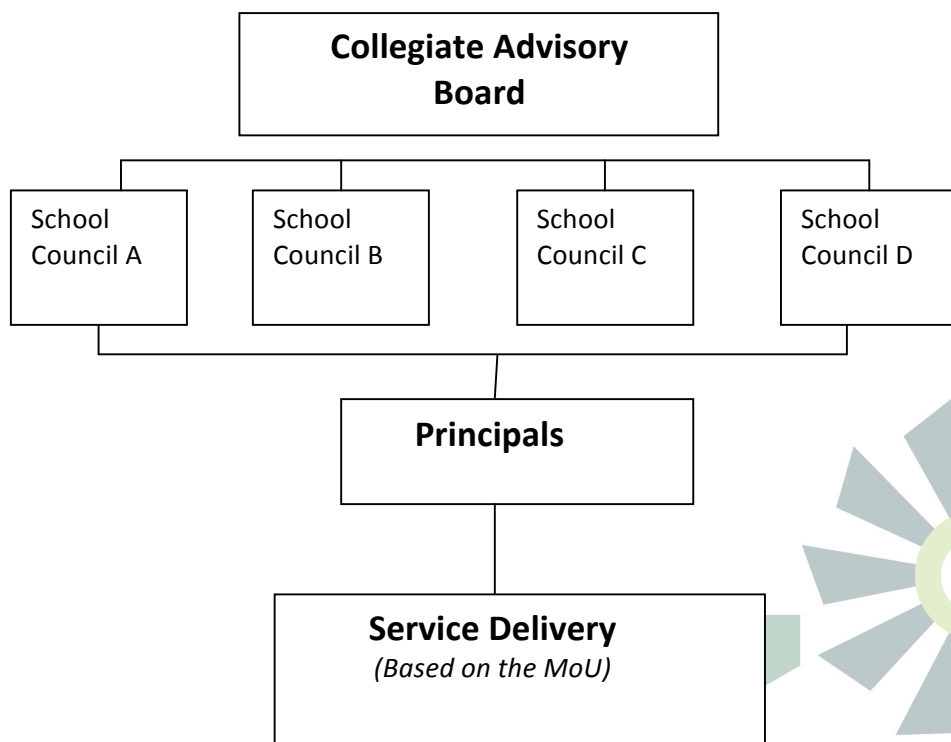
- Each school retains independence but provides representation to the Governing body.
- Governing body oversees a shared and efficient use of resources approach.
- Finance sub-committee would oversee financial arrangements and provide recommendations to the Governing body
- Individual schools would develop financial Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) around resources and finances and levels of accountability.
- Implementation of the Governing Body decisions would be via school councils for implementation by Principals.





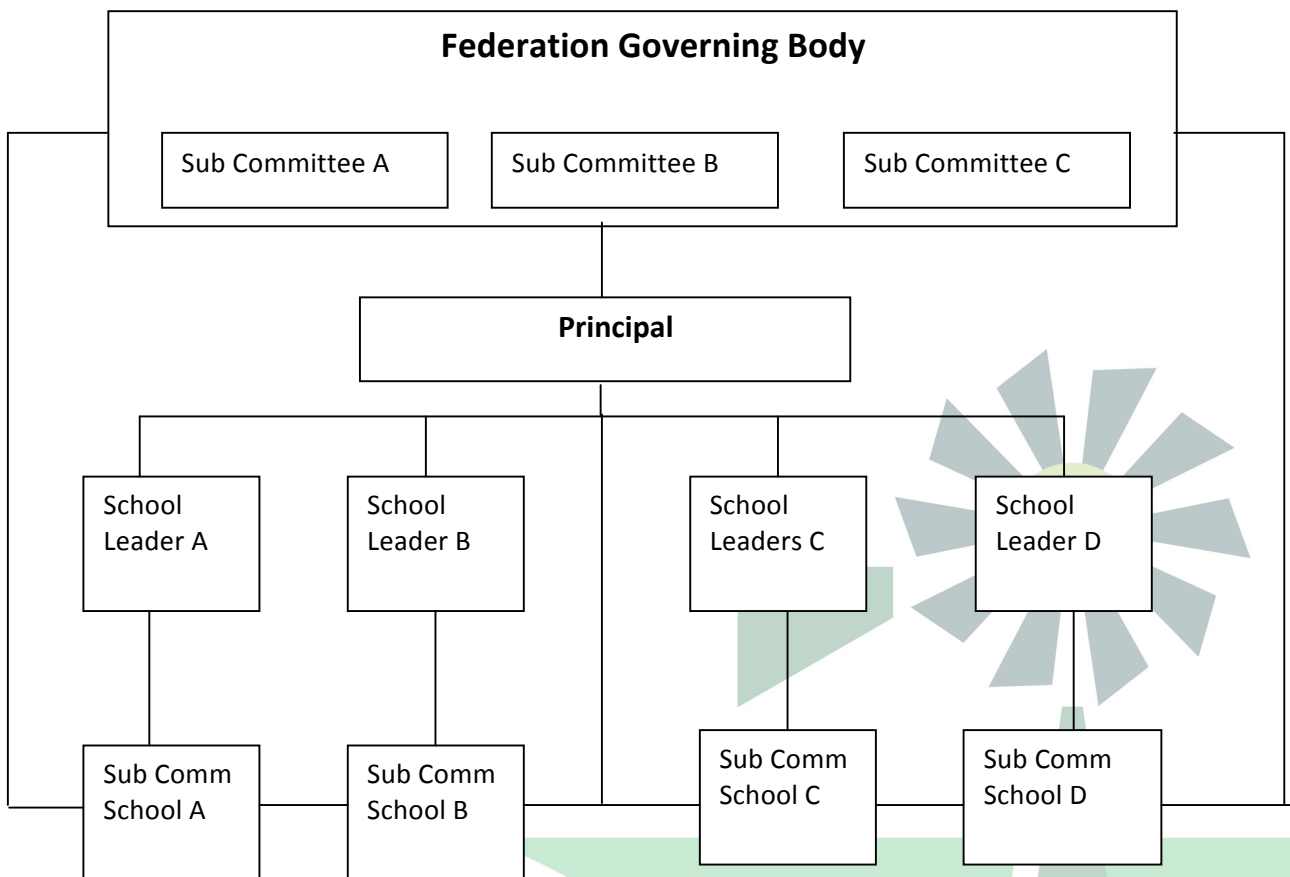
### Collegiate – Memorandum of Understanding Model

- a. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) would determine the sharing aspects between the schools.
- b. Schools would remain independent and define their own independent responsibilities
- c. Accountabilities remain with each school
- d. Schools (through leadership provided by the principals) would work together to ensure all students in all schools have the best access to a high quality education.
- e. Schools could take on “portfolios” or “areas of special responsibility” on behalf of the group for Governance areas. Their expertise would be used for the benefit of all.



### The Federated School Model- One Governing Body

- There would be one school Governing body for several schools
- There would be one Principal
- The Governing body would form and function with sub committees
- The Governing body would be responsible and accountable for all current school council functions
- Representatives from each sub school would be eligible to be elected to the Governing body and be members of sub committees
- Each sub school would have a sub- committee who would meet to develop ideas for the Governing body or organise and oversee the implementation of Board policy and decisions.
- Each sub school would have a school leader



## Appendix 4: Rural Collaborative Governance Model

### Background

The development of the Cluster Collaborative Governance model has resulted from numerous discussions with rural communities across the state that see the importance of:

- maintaining their own identity within their community
- the fear of the school closing and hence losing a valuable community asset

It has also been developed to explore different ways of addressing a number of issues including:

- providing the breadth of learning requested by the communities through working together
- addressing the increasing administrative and management workload of schools – especially smaller rural schools
- addressing the difficulty of attracting quality staff (and especially education leaders) to rural communities.
- The difficulty of gaining the members required to fill the school council membership vacancies.

Across the state there are generally two current governance models:

- one school site with one school governance
- multi school site with one school governance.

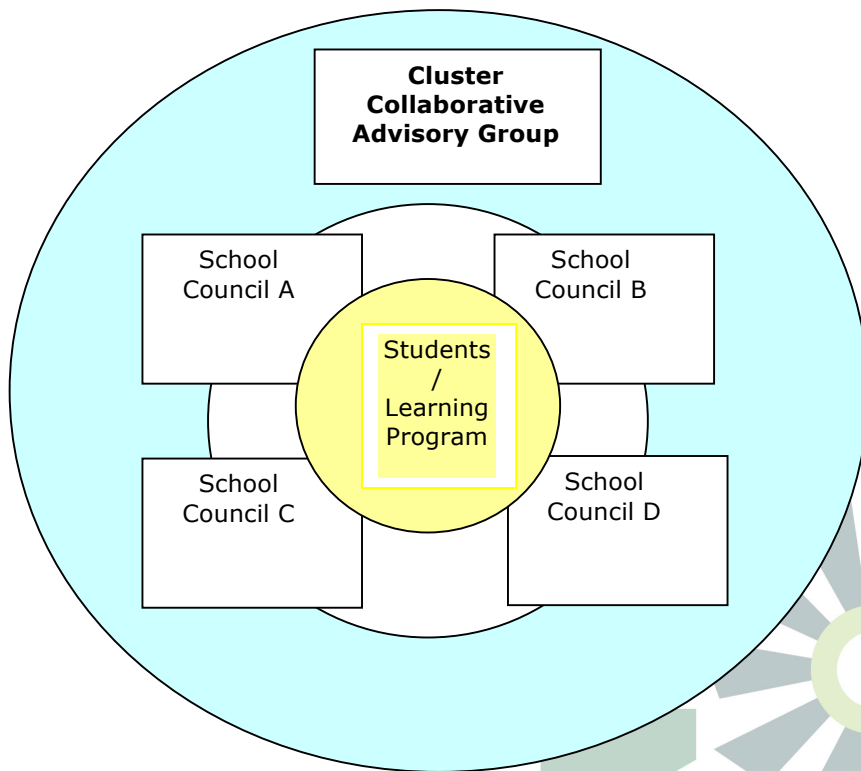
Throughout the Rural School Governance Project there was a real interest to explore alternative models to school governance, however the majority of those involved didn't see these two options as a real choice for their community – the development of a collaborative arrangement within identified communities would reflect how rural communities have historically worked and would address the fears of losing identity and fear of closure. It would also reflect the current arrangements within a number of rural communities where rural school principals work collaboratively to share ideas, programs, workload and the like to ensure students gain the best possible learning available. The extension of this situation into the governance area was seen as a worthwhile one to explore.

It was also seen that as the Cluster Collaborative Governance model developed and evolved, there may be a move to a model which reflects more of a multi site, one school governance model – a Federated model as outlined within Appendix 3.

Within the Cluster Collaborative Governance model there would be a number of elements including:

- Schools would remain independent and define their own independent responsibilities
- Schools within an "identified education community" would work together to ensure all students in all schools have the best access to a high quality education.
- A partnership agreement would determine the sharing aspects between the schools and determine the role, composition, etc. of the Cluster Collaborative Advisory Group.
- Concepts such as individual schools could take on "portfolios" or areas of special responsibility on behalf of the cluster for governance areas could be developed and agreed to. Their expertise would be used for the benefit of all.
- Annually the cluster would determine areas where collaboration, co-operation and co-ordination would occur through a "cluster agreement".
- The number and complexity of the Cluster governance functions would vary and take into account individual community needs and characteristics. Initially it may commence with one area of focus.

- The Cluster Collaborative Governance model is designed to enable the growth of partnerships through collaborative sharing. These can be on a small scale or involve a number of areas and complexities.
- To ensure that the Cluster Collaborative Governance model is developed effectively, a number of key steps have been proposed so that clusters can start small and grow as the trust relationship grows and develops.
- Accountabilities remain with each school through all the steps. The sharing aspects of the model are guided by the delegation clause 30 – 34 of the Reform Act, 2006., This requires the advisory group (or board) to report to each school who still retain overall responsibility and accountability for all matters.



## Potential Phases

### Introduction:

The following outline for the growth and development of a Cluster Collaborative Governance model details some steps that need to be taken in the clusters establishment.

*This project has raised this as a possible future action but the definition and detail of such steps will require further investigation and refinement.*

### *Phase 1: Building the Relationship and Trust*

This may commence with an informal action such as school principals and school council presidents meeting to share their “what’s happening now” stories and actions and how they could move to a collaborative situation where they identify possible areas of shared work. Where no previous history exists then developing some co-operative and co-ordinated actions will be required to build the necessary trust to commence collaboration.

Paralleling these, initial meeting steps should be a training program around effective clustering, the differences and uses of networking, co-operating, co-ordinating and collaboration.

The principals will ideally have accessed professional learning programs where the use of clustering and using the “three Cs” has been explored.

The time a group spends in this phase will vary but it is important for growth and achievement that a maximum one year be devoted to what is essentially a “getting started” process.

### *Phase 2: Commitment*

The step beyond the trust phase is one which requires individual cluster members to commit to working collaboratively at a governance level.

As a starting point, the cluster could target one identified issue to work together on. i.e. in the past year this could have been Student Engagement policy; and Parent Concerns and Complaints Policy. Collaboratively, a Cluster Collaborative Advisory Group could develop a policy suitable for the similar circumstances of their schools. This draft policy could then be tabled at individual school councils where individual nuances would be added if required. Similar processes could be used for strategic plans, sharing of learning programs, etc.

The advantage of having a broad and shared input into these actions reduces individual pressure on each cluster school and enhances the quality of the outcome. This process would require some level of agreement and commitment.

The cluster school council presidents and principals would trial this approach through one or more identified issues. At the conclusion of the issue, or issues, or a set period of time, they would evaluate the effectiveness of this process.

Once gaining a commitment on an issue, or issues, the cluster would move tot the next phase of formalisation.

*Phase 3: Formalisation*

Schools committed to working collaboratively at a governance level would develop this phase through a "partnership agreement" (or MoU). This would entail the creation of a Cluster Collaborative Advisory Group and the development of an agreement that defines:

- Membership and Commitment
- Shared Purpose and Values
- Identified role, functions and responsibilities
- Decision making process
- Reporting and communication (The advisory group will always report back to each school council who will independently determine their actions)
- Resourcing
- Operation and Administration of the Cluster Advisory Group
- Developing identified Cluster Advisory Group tasks.

*David Booher (2004) and Martin, Tait and Kay (1999) have both defined steps and processes that could be used by an advisory group in this set up phase. The National College of School Leadership (NCSL) in the UK, has developed a specific set of steps to be taken by groups wishing to partner. The materials are detailed and provide specific direction that would support clusters wishing to establish a collaborative approach – see Appendix 2.*

*The use of an external facilitator would be advisable throughout this phase.*

*Phase 4: Growth*

The Cluster Collaborative Advisory Group will develop as the commitment and trust in the cluster from each individual school elects to support its operation each year. Growth and acceptance comes from growing trust amongst cluster members and the Advisory Group being responsive to the needs and desires of their cluster community.

This will occur through a planned approach and each year the Advisory Group would undertake a review of their role, and make appropriate changes to their role and function.

The Cluster Collaborative Governance matrix is one tool that could be used to accomplish strategic review of the cluster and its processes. Additional tools could be developed.

The growth of the cluster will need to have:

- (i) All school councils discussing and identifying issues they would request the Advisory Group to develop a draft response for individual school consideration. The Advisory Group would identify the tasks they will undertake for the year and how they will respond to special request from cluster schools during the year.
- (ii) The Advisory Group meets and develops draft positions that would be suitable for all schools. This then goes to individual school councils for discussion and individual school action.

This is a responsive model based on school council need.

***This model fits those described in the 2005 Review report***

- Several school councils working cooperatively and voluntarily in a federated arrangement with an overarching committee which does not have formal powers.

It also allows further growth in a collaborative model of school governance.