

CLUSTERS POSITIONAL PAPER

Overview:

In 2019, the former Minister for Education established an Expert Advisory Panel for Rural and Regional Students to undertake a review of rural and regional education and identify ways to improve educational outcomes for rural and regional students.

The Panel advocated for collaborative, place-based approaches to improve educational outcomes: *Each local challenge requires a local approach and a local solution...efforts to improve learning outcomes for students must put local context at the forefront of policy and program design.*

The Panel also recognised that *partnerships help to amplify the impact of individual efforts [and] combine resources...developing networks or clusters of schools are particularly important in rural areas for sharing services, resources and ideas, as well as limiting the sense of professional isolation felt by educators.*

The Panel's recommendations referenced clusters as an important means to foster inclusive communities, enhance curriculum provision, and support workforce attraction and retention.

CEP believes:

Clustering supports rural and remote schools to establish or enhance school partnerships to facilitate sharing of resources, knowledge and support, with the goal of improving learning outcomes for rural and regional students.

Clustering provides all staff with the opportunity to widen their Professional network to positively impact both their teaching practice and their wellbeing. A well-functioning cluster will reduce, not increase, a Principal's workload when appropriate supports are in place.

Opportunities arise for clusters to work in collaboration with educational bodies to effectively implement any initiatives including but not limited to PLCs, Disability Inclusion, small schools facilities program etc. Linking clusters to other CEP initiatives, including RYA, LRYA and Teach Rural also increase opportunity and impact

CEP would like to see:

- Financial incentives for groups of rural schools to initiate and / or formalise a cluster arrangement.
- Support for clusters to deal with ongoing administration costs, staffing opportunities and/or initiative development.
- Support for clusters regarding workforce recruitment and development (staff working across schools has implications including travel costs, administration costs, travel time, multiple work conditions, teacher fatigue etc).
- The Academy of Teaching and Learning and other Professional Learning providers to have a focus on clustering as a key capability of rural school leaders integrated into the curriculum of the leadership programs run by the rural campuses.
- Educational governing bodies to undertake research into local and global clustering best practice and impacts.
- A DE Cluster policy available on the DE's Policy and Advisory Library

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