

## **The Regional Campuses of the Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership – a great opportunity for rural educators**

The establishment of seven regional campuses of the Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership is potentially a game-changer for educators in rural and regional Victoria. CEP was a key player in the Expert Panel discussions which led to the development of the regional campuses and has been directly involved in the implementation.

Serving small and geographically dispersed communities means that school structures in rural Victoria can be complex (P-12 & K-12, dual mode specialist schools and small schools with small staff cohorts) and the breadth of skills and knowledge required of these school leaders is greater than in metropolitan Melbourne and the larger regional centres.

Staffing shortages which are now a state-wide issue have been endemic in rural and regional Victoria for many years and its schools have a disproportionate number of early career teachers who stay for short periods of time.

CEP applauds the development of the regional campuses as it will reduce the tyranny of distance which impedes access to high quality professional learning. But not having to 'go to Melbourne' does not completely solve the problem.

The characteristics of rural and regional schools means that principal class officers will likely have very broad portfolios of responsibility with limited internal support, may lead areas of the school in which they have limited experience and are leading schools where teaching positions may be unfilled, or the loss of a single key staff member may significantly impact the school.

Middle leaders are more likely to be inexperienced or new to a school, their portfolios can be very broad, and they are sometimes not in formal leadership classifications.

The narrow remit of the Academy's regional campuses to provide local delivery of the state-wide suite of programs and to focus on supporting the development of exceptional teachers limits the positive impact they can have.

**CEP believes** the mission of the Regional campuses should be broadened to include all, not just exceptional, but all teachers and it should work in partnership with the Departments Area workforce, school principal networks and non-government providers to ensure the following:

- high-quality professional learning is delivered in close proximity to staff in rural and regional schools.
- gaps in the existing professional learning provision for teachers and leaders in rural and regional schools are filled.
- professional learning which is available is sensitive to the local context and can be readily adapted to meet local needs
- expertise which is not available locally is brought to rural and regional areas.
- the development and maintenance of rich professional networks and communities of practice for leaders and teachers is stimulated and supported
- a vibrant local professional culture which supports teacher and leader recruitment and education provision in rural and regional areas is supported and developed.

**CEP would also like to see:**

- The development and provision of specific leadership development programs for teaching principals in small rural schools to ensure a pipeline of aspirant leaders of small rural schools.
- A focus on clustering as a key capability of rural school leaders integrated into the curriculum of the leadership programs run by the regional campuses.
- CEP representation on any reference groups established by the regional campuses to ensure the needs of small rural schools are understood and accommodated in the program offering.

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