

COUNTRY EDUCATION STRATEGY

2024 Progress Report

A MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

I'm pleased to share the progress we made in 2024 under South Australia's Country Education Strategy.

Our investment of more than \$10.4 million from the strategy's launch in September 2021 until June 2024 targeted 3 key focus areas:

- Country workforce - to ensure quality leadership and expert teaching in every preschool and school.
- Site support - to help country schools and preschools access the systems and support they need to be effective.
- Learning and pathways - to provide country children and young people with access to quality learning and pathway opportunities.

Each year, we have reported on our implementation progress and evaluated the strategy's progress to ensure we're achieving impact for country children and young people now and into the future.

In 2024, we sharpened our focus for the next phase of the strategy through a detailed evaluation of the impact of our efforts so far, coupled with a co-design process with country educators, leaders, and students. The strategy for the period of 2021-2024 was formally evaluated by the South Australian Centre for Economic Studies at the University of Adelaide.

The evaluation concluded that the strategy was well designed and has achieved identifiable outcomes for each initiative, with evidence of impact expressed by stakeholders across the system.

The refreshed Country Education Strategy was launched in September 2024, and with it, a commitment to invest \$13.5 million over the next 3 years to address the most pressing challenges country educators, leaders, and students have identified.

This next phase of the strategy focuses on 3 key areas, with students at the centre:

- Improved access to teachers.
- Improved access to educational experiences.
- Improved understanding of and access to post-school pathways.

The department remains committed to working with country learners, teachers and leaders around our shared aspiration of ensuring all children and young people are learning and thriving across our state. While this report provides a snapshot of our achievements through the strategy, it does not encompass the entirety of the department's efforts to improve educational outcomes for country learners. I look forward to continuing to share our progress in implementing the strategy and highlighting the achievements of our country preschools and schools.

Professor Martin Westwell
Chief Executive
Department for Education



EMBEDDING A COUNTRY FOCUS



In 2024 we:

- Continued to embed the influence and voice of the Country Education Reference Group by providing country educators and leaders opportunities to shape our strategy, our policy and to enhance outcomes for country children and young people.
- Continued our investment in the South Australian Rural Youth Ambassadors program to support country students to develop their leadership and advocacy skills.

Key outcomes

The Country Education Reference Group and Rural Youth Ambassadors collaborated in the co-design of the refresh of the Country Education Strategy and its focus areas.

21 students from 13 country schools developed their learning, leadership and advocacy skills through participating in the Rural Youth Ambassador program. Youth Ambassadors met senior leaders including Ministers, the Chief Executive, Department for Education executives and other country education stakeholders to share ideas on opportunities to provide country students with equitable access to high-quality education and resources.



"The Rural Youth Ambassador Program was more than just an opportunity to build skills in leadership. It gave me and so many others an opportunity to find ourselves outside of our small towns and comfort zones."

- Rural Youth Ambassador

"The Rural Youth Ambassador program has positively influenced my career journey and development by providing valuable insights into leadership and advocacy, especially in rural communities."

- Rural Youth Ambassador

"The Country Education Reference Group has provided a valuable voice and representation that hasn't been possible before."

- Country Education Reference Group member



GOAL 1: COUNTRY WORKFORCE

Quality leadership and expert teaching in every school and every preschool

In 2024 we:

- Continued to provide financial and other support for pre-service teachers to undertake a professional experience placement at a country site, which helps them better understand the opportunities available for a career in the country.
- Continued to implement the Teach First in Country program which aims to attract high-quality early career teachers into country regions. The program offers graduate teachers onboarding and mentoring support and financial incentives to start their teaching career in the country.
- Continued to address challenges filling temporary relief teaching through our country relief and capacity program, which supports metropolitan teachers to undertake short-term deployment to country areas.

Key outcomes



58

In 2024, 58 pre-service teachers participated in the professional experience placement program at country sites, enhancing their teaching skills and benefitting local educational environments. Additionally, 19 pre-service teachers joined the Teach First in Country program, receiving extra support for a strong start in the classroom, thus providing high-quality teachers to country students.



4,228

To meet staffing needs, 4228 relief teaching days were covered across 56 country sites, ensuring continuity and quality teaching for country students.



84

Furthermore, 84 pre-service teachers took part in country tours across 12 areas in 5 regions. These tours provided insights into teaching in country locations, including school visits and interactions with staff, helping participants understand the cultural, career, and lifestyle opportunities in these areas, influencing their career decisions.



"The Teach First in Country program has been great! I have learnt a lot since moving to the country and have grown as a teacher."

- Teach First in Country participant

"The site I completed my professional experience at was extremely supportive and welcomed me into the community like one of their own. I would go back in a heartbeat."

- Country professional experience scholarship recipient

"It's great to be encouraging pre-service teachers to come to country areas to hopefully address the massive difficulty currently faced filling vacancies."

- Site leader




GOAL 2: SITE SUPPORT


Country schools and preschools have access to the systems and support they need to be effective


In 2024 we:

- Continued to improve access to psychology and speech pathology services in country areas by delivering a hybrid service model for psychology and speech pathology. We also expanded the External Providers Panel, streamlining processes and establishing new quality-assurance measures. These services improve accessibility to psychology and speech pathology services in country areas to better meet the needs of children and young people, particularly those who have limited access to face-to-face services in their communities.
- Continued to support teachers and leaders in accessing housing in country locations through the Country Housing Service.
- Rolled out connection to the Starlink Satellite Service for staff residences in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara lands, delivering broadband internet capable of supporting streaming, video calls and more.

Key outcomes

 **300** 300 students across 95 schools were supported by psychologists and speech pathologists from the department's Flexible Services team through a hybrid service model. 47% of these sessions were delivered via tele-practice and 53% via fly-in/fly-out consultations, reducing travel barriers and costs while improving access. 672 cases were allocated to external psychology and speech pathology providers through the External Provider Program, alleviating pressure on the workforce.

 **386** 386 teachers and leaders assisted through the Country Housing Service, representing 139 schools and preschools between July and December 2024 and a 34% increase compared to the same time last year.

 **101** 101 Starlink satellite internet connections were established in staff residences in the APY lands.



"Country principals are very happy with the additional support that the Country Housing team provide. It has been a very positive change and reduced the admin and after hours work that leaders have had to do"

- President, South Australian Area School Leaders Association



GOAL 3: LEARNING AND PATHWAYS

Country children and young people have access to quality learning and pathway opportunities

In 2024 we:

Commenced the Country Student Subject Access and Choice project, aiming to enhance country students' access to a breadth and depth of subject offerings through alternative delivery models. This work will be driven by advocacy and feedback from our system, students and key stakeholders, including the Country Education Reference Group and the Rural Youth Ambassadors.

Statewide consultation with country students, families, leaders and teachers is due to commence in 2025, and will be led by the Principal on Assignment, who brings a wealth of experience through their work implementing an alternative delivery model in their own region.



SPOTLIGHT: STORIES OF SUCCESS AND IMPACT

The Country Professional Experience Scholarships for pre-service teachers continue to leave a lasting impact on aspiring educators, providing transformative experiences in country communities.

Through their own voices, recipients of these scholarships share stories of achievement and growth.



One recipient reflected on a seamless transition from placement to employment:

"Since my placement in Term 2, I was offered a job as the mid-year Reception teacher. Teaching in the country has been a great experience. I have now secured a full-time position in Primary for 2025."

For others, the program opened doors to unexpected opportunities:

"From my placement, I began relief teaching and was offered a contract for the rest of the term and for 2025. I'm so happy I made the decision to do the scholarship—teaching in the country feels like the best setting to begin my career!"

Pre-service teachers also emphasised the strength of the support they received:

"My mentors were phenomenal—it felt like they were not just mentors but family. Their kindness, expertise, and feedback gave me the confidence to thrive in a new environment."

The program has inspired recipients to embrace careers in country areas:

"The most significant lesson I learned is that I want to teach in the country. The experience deepened my understanding of diverse student needs and strengthened my teaching philosophy focused on inclusivity and community engagement."

