

COUNTRY EDUCATION STRATEGY





ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

South Australia is home to more than 30 Aboriginal groups, with distinct beliefs, cultural practices and languages. The story of education in country South Australia includes the traditional knowledge passed down through generations of Aboriginal people. Today, understanding and engagement with diverse Aboriginal histories and cultures forms an essential part of children's learning.

We acknowledge that work undertaken to develop and implement this strategy has taken place on the traditional lands of South Australia's First Peoples and we respect their spiritual relationship with their country.

We also acknowledge the Aboriginal students, parents and caregivers, teachers, leaders and support staff who have contributed their knowledge and experience to support the development of this strategy.



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MINISTER'S FOREWORD

Every child and young person deserves an outstanding education no matter where they live in South Australia.

As someone who grew up in the country and completed my entire schooling in country public schools, I know how important it is for country students to receive an education full of opportunities, and the pivotal role that preschools and schools play in these communities.

The Government of South Australia is making a concerted effort to support regional and rural communities. Our 2024-25 budget included \$686.4 million in new measures prioritising health, housing, roads and education. This investment will help to deliver better services, and drive innovation and jobs – and ultimately the strength of every country community.

Our government has already delivered important education commitments in country South Australia. We have made the country incentive zone allowance for teachers ongoing. We're building brand new technical colleges in Port Augusta and Mt Gambier. We're investing in TAFE SA so they can offer more courses with smaller class sizes in regional communities. And through our 20-year infrastructure plan, we're investing in schools that need it most, many of which are in our country regions.

The first Country Education Strategy was initially launched in 2021. We want country education to go from strength to strength, and I am proud to continue and broaden this work with a \$13.5 million investment over the next 3 years. This funding, and the work of the strategy generally, will continue to support more equitable educational opportunities for country students that are not only comparable to those of their metropolitan counterparts, but exemplary in their own right.

A cornerstone of this investment is our continued focus on attracting and retaining exceptional educators. We will also prioritise supporting country students to have an educational experience that is rich in diversity and opportunity – and ensure their experience is comparable with those who live in the city.

Our continuing efforts will support strong preschools and schools in country South Australia – ones capable of shaping the future of their communities and our great state.

And ones that change lives – just like they did for me.



Hon. Blair Boyer MP
Minister for Education, Training and Skills

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S FOREWORD

We are committed to ensuring that every child and young person across our diverse state receives an education that allows them to grow, learn, and thrive.

Our Strategy for Public Education sets the tone for our commitment to all children. We know the critical role our country schools and preschools play in the fabric of their communities. We are committed to excellence and equity for every learner, which is why country education is important.

Through our deliberate focus on country education over the past 3 years, we have already successfully filled some of the critical gaps that affect our country preschools and schools. Our students are benefiting, but our work is far from over.

We have sharpened our focus for the next phase of the strategy through a detailed evaluation of the impact of our efforts so far, coupled with valuable feedback from country educators, leaders, and students.

Our efforts under this Country Education Strategy will be centred around the experiences of country students. We want country students to have access to a quality education that enables ongoing personal and academic growth. We will continue to explore ways to ensure that country students receive equitable access to learning experiences that preserve their future opportunities. This will include improving access to teachers, improving access to educational experiences, and improving understanding of and access to further education and employment.

Through our ongoing efforts we will enable country students to have more and better learning experiences and more agency in their lives. We want to empower all country students to realise their full potential, ready to live satisfying and fulfilling lives of their choosing.



Professor Martin Westwell
Chief Executive



WHY COUNTRY EDUCATION MATTERS

Country education is important in South Australia. The state's country towns and cities are home to nearly half of all government schools and over 40% of the preschools, educating around 28% of all our students. The diversity of local economies, geographies and demographics in South Australia's country regions are mirrored in the varying needs of the children and young people, and the preschools and schools, they attend.



The country is a brilliant, enriching place where you can make a massive difference for kids. As a teacher or educator, your role in the community really matters.

Principal, Limestone Coast



South Australia has great country schools and preschools. From small schools in remote Aboriginal communities to bustling high schools in major regional centres. The [School of the Air](#) has been connecting geographically remote primary school students with their peers and teachers since 1958. Through [Open Access College](#) students learn online alongside students from right across the state. We also know some country schools share teaching resources across the wider region creating virtual classrooms that blend online and in-person interactions, enabling students to learn with regional peers.

The foundation of our country preschools and schools is its dedicated educators and leaders. They are deeply invested in their students' success and are skilled at leveraging local partnerships to enhance educational opportunities. Their connection to the community enriches their role in nurturing the next generation of leaders.

We know that distance presents specific challenges in country education that must be addressed to ensure every child and young person has access to the necessary resources and support for their learning. Equitable education and outcomes for country students often require different resources and approaches, tailored to bridge these physical gaps.

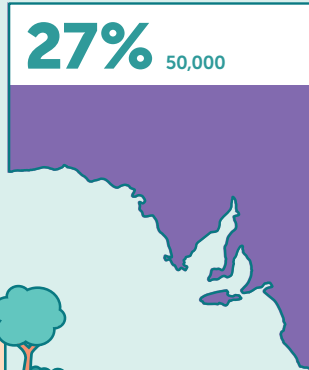
But it is not enough to only remove barriers. We must proactively create opportunities that enable country students to fully grasp and explore the array of possibilities available to them, both locally and beyond. Addressing workforce shortages and ensuring a comprehensive school curriculum are critical steps in achieving positive impacts for country students.

We also know it is essential for country preschools and schools to have the flexibility to be creative and empowered to make decisions that best serve the needs of their students, parents, local communities and wider regions.

This is why country education matters and why this strategy is focussed on ensuring all country students can learn and thrive.

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN SNAPSHOT

Of the almost 174,000 students enrolled in our schools, around 50,000 are enrolled in country schools, representing 27% of all enrolments.



>9500
staff in country schools
34% of school workforce

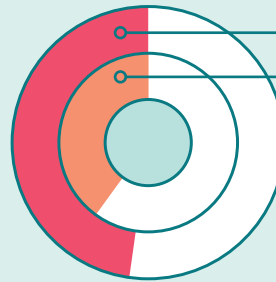


>800
staff in country preschools
34% of preschool workforce



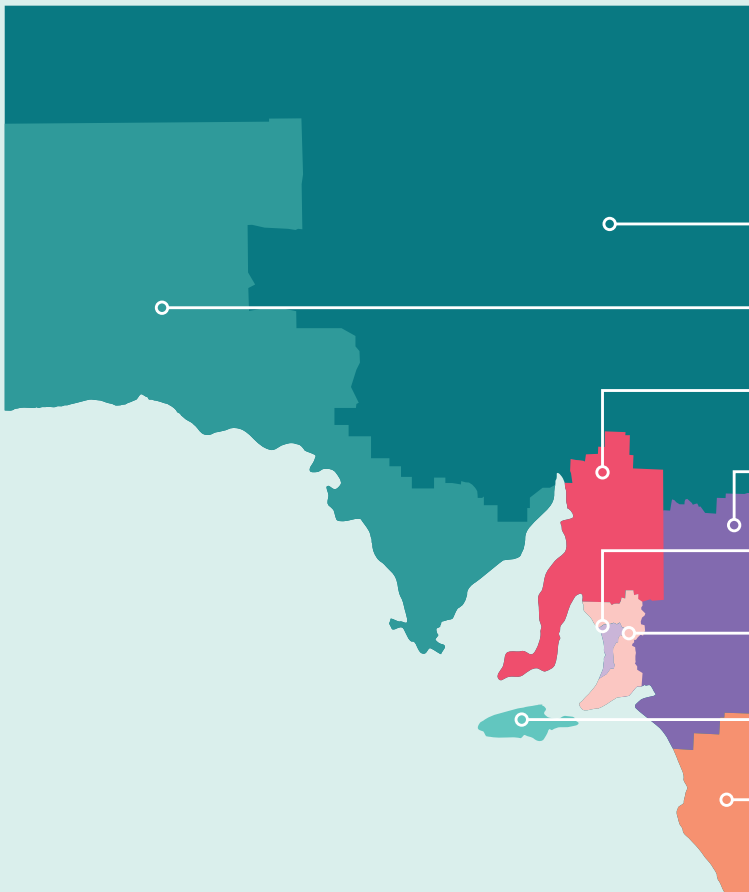
Of the more than 18,500 children enrolled in our preschools, around 5,500 are enrolled in country preschools, representing almost 30% of all enrolments.

5600 Aboriginal students make up 12% of enrolments in country schools, compared to 5% in metropolitan areas.



Schools (244)
Preschools (169)

Almost half of South Australia's government schools (244) as well as more than 40% of government preschools (169) are located in country areas.



- 1 Far North
- 2 Eyre and Western
- 3 Yorke and Mid North
- 4 Riverland
- 5 Adelaide Plains
- 6 Adelaide Hills and Fleurieu
- 7 Kangaroo Island
- 8 South East

OUR VISION FOR COUNTRY EDUCATION

Our vision for country education is a future where country learners thrive, overcoming location-based challenges through equitable access to high-quality education and resources. We aim to remove barriers and create opportunities, ensuring our students have the breadth and depth of opportunities they need to thrive.

Our commitment is to nurture not just opportunities but also the agency of our students, enabling them to articulate and pursue their own dreams. We are dedicated to fostering a culture of lifelong learning, where students are equipped and inspired to craft satisfying lives that reflect their unique perspectives and chosen paths.

The department's [Strategy for Public Education](#) aims to ensure South Australia's public education system can unlock every child's potential now and in the future. Our vision for country education translates what this means for country preschool and school communities.

We recognise that a world-leading, equitable public education system must be sensitive to the unique characteristics of each region. Understanding local circumstances is vital, as the educational strategies that succeed in one community may not be as effective in another.

We want to make sure that we are supporting country preschools and schools to be places where learners of all ages are actively engaged, have a say in their learning and have a strong connection to their community.

We want South Australian country preschools and schools to have the resources they need to make sure every child receives the education they need to achieve great things either where they have grown up or further afield.

OUR WORK SO FAR

Our work to support country students, educators, leaders and staff is wide ranging and we are committed to continually refining it to meet the evolving needs of country education.

Teachers and leaders in country areas can access a variety of financial incentives and allowances. Online professional development training is available to minimise travel, and financial assistance is available for those attending in-person sessions. Aspiring leaders are supported to develop personalised development plans to prepare them for country leadership roles, and new school principals and preschool directors receive guidance from a Leader Adviser in their initial year to navigate their roles effectively.

This strategy was initially launched in September 2021. Each year, we have [shared publicly](#) our implementation progress and stories of impact.

In the first 3 years, the strategy has made significant progress in improving the supports available to country sites. A hub-and-spoke model has been introduced to provide better access to speech pathology and psychology services in areas where these were previously scarce, combining face-to-face and tele-health services. Recent upgrades to ICT infrastructure have led to better internet connectivity, enabling more engaging digital learning experiences. Principals and site leaders have received greater support to access housing for educators moving to the country and managing short-term, unexpected teacher absences through centrally coordinated approaches. We have also developed new approaches to attracting early career teachers to country sites.





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Government of South Australia
Department of Education
and Children's Services



ANANGU EDUCATION SERVICES

WHERE WE WILL FOCUS

This Country Education Strategy sets the strategic direction for improvement to address the most pressing challenges highlighted by country students, teachers, and leaders.

We are focussed on 3 key areas, with students at the centre:



IMPROVED ACCESS TO TEACHERS

Country students have access to teachers who understand their context and needs.



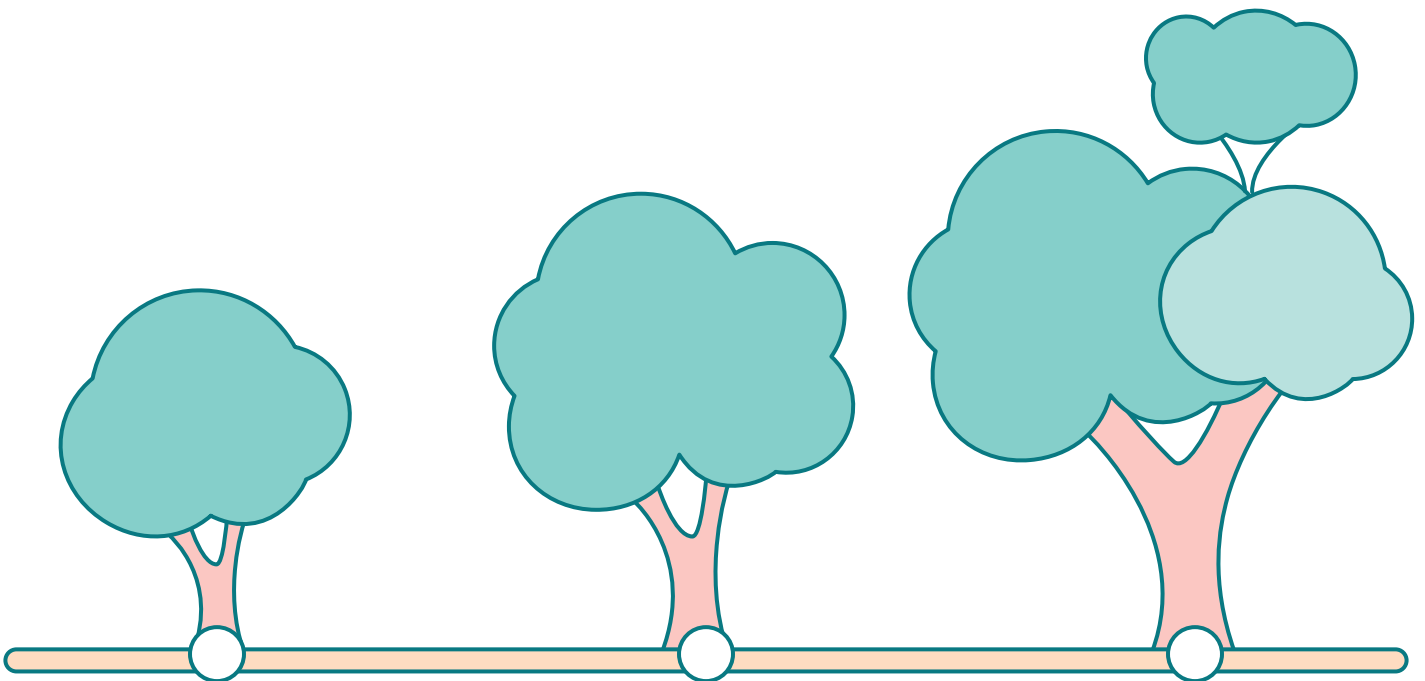
IMPROVED ACCESS TO EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

Country students have access to a breadth and depth of subject choice, both in-person and online, that supports them to engage with their learning and future opportunities.



IMPROVED UNDERSTANDING OF AND ACCESS TO POST-SCHOOL PATHWAYS

Country students can explore a range of both local and broader post-school pathways into further study or employment.



Providing access to quality teachers, learning opportunities and pathways guidance

enables country students to have more and better learning experiences and more agency in their lives,

which empowers them to articulate and pursue a fulfilling life of their choosing.

IMPROVED ACCESS TO TEACHERS



Country students have access to teachers who understand their context and needs.

Access to qualified and dedicated teachers who are attuned to the specific context and needs of country students is crucial. Challenges in attracting and retaining teachers in country locations are not unique to South Australia. The issues around regional workforce shortages are being felt in education systems across Australia.



We will focus on:

- Targeted supports for pre-service teachers – Making it easier for pre-service teachers to experience living and teaching in the country while still studying can help to provide a future pipeline of country teachers. We will continue to test targeted supports for pre-service and early career teachers to transition to country teaching through placements, training and mentorship as a way to grow the future country workforce pipeline.
- Attracting and retaining country teachers – To provide a sustainable country workforce pipeline, it is essential to engage teachers and leaders at various stages in their careers. We will look at ways to promote career longevity for the country workforce by supporting teachers to bring their experience to the country. This includes supporting teachers with their relocation.
- Access to specialist teachers – Attracting new teachers to the country workforce will be part of the longer-term solution, but it will not be sufficient on its own. To manage the ongoing specialist teacher shortages, we need to better understand how to increase the number of teachers who work in, travel to, or deliver curriculum to students in country areas. We will continue to support relief arrangements in country regions, and explore how to support teachers with hybrid or online classrooms to develop the particular skills and abilities needed to make learning experiences relevant and engaging for country students.

IMPROVED ACCESS TO EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES



Country students have access to a breadth and depth of subject choice, both in-person and online, that supports them to engage with their learning and future opportunities.

Country students are more likely to remain engaged in learning when they have a broad range of subjects to choose from that resonate with their interests and aspirations.

Approaches that involve online and hybrid learning are not new in the country. Students have been learning through Open Access College and various forms of partnerships across schools for many years to increase subject choice where specialist teachers are not available on site. These hybrid learning environments can provide a depth and breadth of experiences for students while limiting the need for travel.

These approaches also need to provide opportunities to support in-person connection and engagement for both students and teachers. These social connections inside and outside the classroom are important for building a sense of connection and belonging, which can promote better school attendance and foster an environment of striving for better educational performance overall.



We will focus on:

- Using hybrid learning to support secondary school curriculum – Hybrid learning approaches can provide more equitable access to specialist teachers and resources, allowing students to explore different fields by extending learning experiences beyond geographical limits. We will explore how hybrid learning approaches could be used to expand subject choice for country students, starting with a focus on secondary school subject choices.
- Supporting regional student engagement and peer networks – Social connections are a crucial part of the broader educational experiences provided through schooling, but can be more difficult for country students given physical distance. We will explore how to support schools to remove barriers to providing students with more opportunities to engage with their peers across regions for various educational experiences. This will include providing additional support for excursions for country students to build peer connections and expose students to new experiences.

IMPROVED UNDERSTANDING OF AND ACCESS TO POST-SCHOOL PATHWAYS



Country students can explore a range of both local and broader post-school pathways into further study or employment.

It is vital for country students to have the knowledge and tools to navigate the myriad of post-school pathways available to them. The geographical remoteness of country areas often limits exposure to a broader range of industries and careers, which can inadvertently narrow students' perceptions of their potential.

It is equally important to value and support the choice to pursue a fulfilling career within their local community, as it is to encourage exploration of opportunities in metropolitan areas or elsewhere.

Engagement with education is sustained when students can clearly see its relevance to their future ambitions. Without access to the right educational experiences or a clear understanding of how education can lead to various career paths, students may become disengaged, particularly if they perceive that their schooling is only geared towards university entry, which may not resonate with their personal goals.



We will focus on:

- Regional career education experiences – Understanding the breadth of opportunities, both within their local communities and beyond, is crucial for students to make informed decisions that align with their aspirations. This includes choosing appropriate school subjects and VET programs that pave the way for diverse futures. We will explore how to support country schools to provide opportunities for country students to understand and explore a broad range of career paths using in-person and online methods.
- Expanding subject choice and pathways guidance – It is important to reinforce the connection between school-level education and future career aspirations for country students, preventing disengagement by diversifying subject offerings and educational experiences. We will explore how to ensure country students have access to a wide range of subjects and are receiving guidance on selecting the mix of SACE-level subjects and VET programs that best support their aspirations.

STRENGTHEN COUNTRY VOICES

The voices of country students, teachers, leaders, parents, caregivers, and communities are crucial in shaping and delivering on our collective priorities for country education.

The Country Education Reference Group has been invaluable in bringing the voices, knowledge and insights of country educators and leaders into strategic discussions and strengthening the decisions we make about country education. With members drawn from key professional associations across the state, the group provides a diversity of experiences and perspectives. Their collective efforts have been instrumental in pinpointing and tackling the unique challenges and opportunities that arise in country education. The group will continue to be a key partner in helping to realise the vision for country education.

The Rural Youth Ambassador program, though primarily focused on developing leadership skills, has also been valuable in providing the perspectives of country students from communities across the state. Recognising the wide-ranging aspirations and needs of country students, we are committed to engaging a more extensive array of student voices in the future.



EMBED A COUNTRY FOCUS



The department considers the specific needs of country education as part of its broader reforms. It is recognised that different approaches and resources may be needed in country areas to achieve the goals and aims of departmental strategies, plans and initiatives. This strategy works alongside the department’s other strategies and plans to bring about positive changes for country education.

STRATEGY OR PLAN	BROAD PURPOSE	COUNTRY FOCUS
<u>20-Year Infrastructure Plan for Public Education and Care</u>	A proactive approach to education infrastructure to enable a better understanding of which schools are in most need and how best to address those needs.	Ensuring the infrastructure needs of country sites are equitably assessed and prioritised.
<u>Career Education and Pathways Strategy</u>	Supports students to get a head start in their career before they complete their secondary education by providing quality career education and guidance in government schools.	Ensuring that a range of experiences are available for country students so that they can understand the available post-school pathways, whether they are local opportunities or options that require relocation.
<u>Digital Strategy</u>	A roadmap to improve how we can use digital technology to empower schools and preschools to deliver world-leading education and help children and students to thrive in a digital world.	Ensuring country students, teachers and leaders have access to digital technologies and are supported to use them to enable engaging learning environments and experiences.
<u>Specialist Teacher Workforce Plan</u>	An approach for recognising, supporting and growing specialist teachers throughout their careers.	Ensuring country students are provided with access to specialist teachers whether in-person or online.
<u>Empowering Educators</u>	Partnering with peak bodies and educators in our system to better understand and deliver improvements to how our educators experience their work in public education and the challenges they face to better support their critical role in supporting effective teaching and learning.	Ensuring administrative burdens and challenges felt more acutely in country schools and preschools are recognised and equitably addressed.

MEASURE GROWTH AND PROGRESS

Our people are the strongest levers for impact, especially those who work alongside learners to support their capacity to thrive.

Each year, we will publicly share a summary of country preschools and schools' achievements. This will help to foster a culture of sharing and collaboration among country preschools and schools. By exchanging success stories and innovative approaches to learning and wellbeing, we can empower each school to tailor solutions that resonate with their unique circumstances, while also drawing inspiration from the collective wisdom of the country education community.

We will measure growth and progress under this strategy by evaluating:

- the extent to which country students are supported by educators who are not only present but also deeply attuned to the local context and student needs. Progress in this area means students feel understood and well-guided in their educational journey.
- the variety and quality of subject choices available to country students, ensuring they have the resources to participate either in-person or online. Progress in this area means improvement in the level of student engagement and the relevance of their learning to future aspirations.
- the opportunities available to country students to pursue further study or enter the workforce. Progress in this area means students feel prepared for and excited about a diverse and accessible range of post-school pathways.

Across all areas, we will rely on evidence, research, and data to inform the assessment of growth and progress, learning from the challenges encountered to continuously enhance the experiences and outcomes for country students.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We acknowledge the many preschool, school and corporate staff that have contributed to the development and implementation of this strategy.

We acknowledge and thank in particular, members of the Country Education Reference Group and their relevant professional associations for their unwavering commitment to improving country education:

Adam Wilson

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